



The Mahabharata: A Shortened Modern Prose Version of the Indian Epic

By R. K. Narayan

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The Mahabharata tells a story of such violence and tragedy that many people in India refuse to keep the full text in their homes, fearing that if they do, they will invite a disastrous fate upon their house. Covering everything from creation to destruction, this ancient poem remains an indelible part of Hindu culture and a landmark in ancient literature.

Centuries of listeners and readers have been drawn to *The Mahabharata*, which began as disparate oral ballads and grew into a sprawling epic. The modern version is famously long, and at more than 1.8 million words—seven times the combined lengths of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*—it can be incredibly daunting.

Contemporary readers have a much more accessible entry point to this important work, thanks to R. K. Narayan's masterful translation and abridgement of the poem. Now with a new foreword by Wendy Doniger, as well as a concise character and place guide and a family tree, *The Mahabharata* is ready for a new generation of readers. As Wendy Doniger explains in the foreword, “Narayan tells the stories so well because they’re all his stories.” He grew up hearing them, internalizing their mythology, which gave him an innate ability to choose the right passages and their best translations.

In this elegant translation, Narayan ably distills a tale that is both traditional and constantly changing. He draws from both scholarly analysis and creative interpretation and vividly fuses the spiritual with the secular. Through this balance he has produced a translation that is not only clear, but graceful, one that stands as its own story as much as an adaptation of a larger work.

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Editorial Review

Review

“Narayan makes this treasury of Indian folklore and mythology readily accessible to the general reader. It is an easy and pleasant introduction to a heterogeneous and complicated work. The language of Narayan’s translation is clear and direct; he captures the spirit of the narrative.”

(Library Journal)

“Narayan is a trustworthy guide to the heart and mind of India.”

(Sunday Times)

From the Inside Flap

The *Mahabharata*, together with the other great Sanskrit epic, the *Ramayana*, embodies much of the cultural and religious heritage of India. Based on the narrative of the great war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, it tells of warriors, kings, saints, and goddesses caught up in the romance and drama of family intrigue. With its diversity of plots and themes—including the philosophical teachings of the *Bhagavada Gita*—the *Mahabharata* has entertained and influenced Indian audiences for nearly two thousand years. R. K. Narayan’s abbreviated prose version provides a superb and elegant rendition of this great epic.

About the Author

R. K. Narayan (1906–2001) was one of the most prominent Indian novelists of the twentieth century. His works include *Mr. Sampath—The Printer of Malgudi*, *Swami and Friends*, *Waiting for Mahatma*, and *Gods, Demons, and Others*, all published by the University of Chicago Press.

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