

Mahabharath

Introduction



The two great epic works of the Hindus are Ramayan and Mahabharat. In modern terms the Mahabharat may be said to be realistic and the Ramayan idealistic, in their respective handling of human characters.

Sita in Ramayan is all that a woman could or should be. And is impressive by her sweetness and devotion. Draupadi in Mahabharat, on the other hand maybe any of the high spirited modern women with her anger and brooding for revenge and for that reason more human.

There is greater realistic truth in the full blooded characters of Mahabharat, higher passion, nobler resolve, fierce jealousy and more biting scorn and greater grandeur in many of it's scenes. Yet it is greater spiritual beauty, greater softness and tenderness of emotions in Ramayan. The subject of Mahabharat is men and war, while the subject of Ramayan is women and home.

These epics are regarded as the Vedas of the masses. People in sorrow, in joy and in daily toil turn to these epics for solace and inspiration. In Indian context norms of Epic are set by Ramayan and Mahabharat.

Many more topics were treated in great length by number of line verses or chapters but none equals these two. Interestingly, these two epics have provided canvas or theme for many forms of art, like paintings, sculpture, poems, plays and stories. This epic is written by Krishnadvaipayana Vyas. It

was claimed that whatever that can exist in human life is all dealt with by Vyas in Mahabharat and conversely. Whatever that does not exist in Mahabharat can not exist in the world.

It is a story of a dynasty of Kuru that is Kaurav. Later on lineage assigned to Pandu that is dynasty of Pandava. And finally war between the two related families, which involved many small kingdoms throughout the nation. The final version of the epic was formed in the fourth century A.D. There are many Parvas having lacks of Shlokas. The most authentic version of Mahabharat was prepared in 20th century by many researchers under the guidance of Mr. Vaidya in Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.

The story of Mahabharat has many substories, many plots and subplots hence by spread it is very wide. The epic has also inspired many artists like that by Ramayan. Many plays such as Abhidnyan Shakuntala, by Kallidasa, plays by Bhasa such as Venisamhara, Urubhanga etc. are based on the themes or plots from Mahabharat. The story is believed to have taken place around 1500 years BC.

Interestingly it was mentioned as history while the Ramayan was mentioned as a part of Purana. It was originally written as 'Jay'. It was later on revised as 'Bharata' and it was further expanded as 'Mahabharat'. It consists of story of Dushyant a king and Shakuntala a daughter of heavenly dancer Menaka. Her son was named as Bharat. He later on ascended the throne of Dushyant.

The name of the nation designated by foreigners as India bears his name to the subcontinent as Bharat. Hence the name of the nation is Bharat alias India. If Ramayan is symbolised as ideality and for setting up the norms and standards of ideality, Mahabharat can be considered as depiction of reality.

Ramayan has taught what it should be, whereas Mahabharat has bravely depicted what it generally is. It is story of lust, and renunciation, pious as well as crooks. It speaks of fearless warriors and cowardly behavior of some of them. Of obedience as well as rebels.

Though it is mainly a story of dynasties a character coming as a shepherd brought up as foster son of a chief in a village Mathura is raised to the height of God in the Indian minds. He is the one who is responsible for the final war between the two kingdoms to assert for righteous claim and only he

is credited with the outcome of the war, the victory of Pandavs.

Mahabharat as a pool of information mirrors society at that time, customs, rites and rituals, value system and ethics of the time. It also speaks of political variation in the form of local democratic government to rural form of governance to kings and kingdom. It also reflects racial as well as cultural struggles amongst the different people of India. It has forged the Indian identity as unity in variety of races, languages, religious beliefs etc.

Story of Shakuntala

Once, nobody knows when, sage Vishwamitra was engaged in great austerities and penance that would give him almost absolute power over kingdom of Earth and Heaven. He had successfully completed requisite sacrificial rituals and now was engaged in meditation and Yogic practices.

The king of Heaven, God Indra, was shaken to know this effort of Vishwamitra that could pose danger to his throne! Therefore, Indra decided to put obstacles in his austerities and thereby break his sadhana - spiritual discipline. Indra thought of using weapon of lust to this end.

Accordingly, the most beautiful and ever youthful Apsara, Menaka, was sent from heaven to distract and seduce Vishwamitra, who was gaining alarming levels of yogic power through his concentrated meditation. (Apsara in Hindu mythology, heavenly nymph of great beauty, is often represented as a dancer at the court of the Hindu god Indra in his heavenly kingdom.) She descended down to earth from heaven and tried to tempt Vishwamitra by various charming dances and songs. After some efforts Vishwamitra fell to the lure of her beauty and youthful attraction. They were married and the tapas of Vishwamitra was broken. A beautiful daughter was born to them whom they named Shakuntala.

Her assignment completed, Menaka left back to the kingdom of heaven, and

Vishvamitra, his tapas broken, left for forest retreat after handing over the new born baby to the sage Kanva, head of a forest ashrama. Under his

Her voice was sweet and her manners sober and graceful.

Story of Dushyanta and Shakuntala

Once, the great king of the region, King Dushyanta, happened to come near the ashrama of Shakuntala by way of hunting. He caught sight of Shakuntala and lost his heart to her beauty and grace. The king proposed to Shakuntala and they were married secretly. Dushyanta stayed overnight and left for his capital city promising Shakuntala that he would soon send for her. He gave his precious ring to his wife cautioning her not to lose it.

As the destiny had it, in his busy schedule of affairs of the kingdom, the king Dushyanta forgot all about his love -- Shakuntala.

Here, in the ashrama, Shakuntala was worried as news of her husband did not reach her, nor did he send anyone to take her to his palace. The worry almost turned into panic because of the fact that she was pregnant, and soon her condition was sure to reveal this truth. And indeed, sage Kanva and ladies of the ashrama noticed the change in Shakuntala. On inquiry, the truth became known to all. Sage Kanva had brought up Shakuntala as her daughter and hence he decided to send her to her husband, king Dushyanta, where she should be accepted as his queen.

The day was fixed for Shakuntala to leave. She was dressed in most beautiful silk attire and left for the kingdom of her husband in a ferry boat. The cool and balmy breeze put her to sleep and the royal ring slipped out of her finger. Soon it was swallowed by a fish. Shakuntala was not even aware of this fact.

She reached the court of Dushyanta, and a message was sent to the king of the arrival of 'a woman who claimed to be his wife'. Dushyanta had lost his memory about Shakuntala and all about their stay together. He refused to accept Shakuntala as his wife. The pitiful Shakuntala tried to remind her

husband about the night they had stayed together in the forest ashrama of Kanva, etc.; but of no avail. The king had forgotten that part of his life. As a last resort, the pleading Shakuntala told him about the ring and tried to show the same, but instead there was tragic dismay on her face when she did not find the ring on her finger!

Dejected and disappointed, Shakuntala left for the forest all alone and decided to give birth to the child. Gradually her self confidence returned, her fear vanished, and in due course of time she gave birth to a most beautiful and well developed son. She named him Bharata.

Bharata grew without any human company other than her mother. All around in the jungle he encountered wild animals, plants and trees. He developed into a fearless, healthy, and active child. Lions and tigers were his friends, and he used to ride them as we ride horses! The mother taught him, as a prince should be taught, skills in archery, and use of other weapons; as also acquainted him with Scriptures: Veda, and Upanishad. Bharata soon grew up as handsome, intelligent and fearless youth - a prince in exile!

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There in the kingdom of Dushyanta, one fisherman caught the fish that had swallowed the royal ring that had slipped from the finger of Shakuntala. When he cut open the fish, he found the ring. He rushed to the royal court, and narrated the story to the king. On seeing his ring, the king remembered everything about Shakuntala and his love for her. He was sorry to send her pregnant wife away with such rudeness. He sent his men all around the kingdom in search of Shakuntala.

And one day the good news reached him when his minister told him about Shakuntala and her handsome son safe in the heart of the forest. The king went to fetch his wife and son, begged their pardon and with due honour and festivity brought them to the palace.

Later, Bharata became the king of ancient India. His rule extended over vast area, almost all over India. Righteousness and justice prevailed everywhere. There was no want, no misery, nor any disease in his kingdom. Since then India is also known as Bharatavarsha - the Land of Bharata. After Bharata, his descendants flourished as mighty Kurus. Their kingdom extended in north India, the capital city of which was Hastinapur. The successive great kings

ruled from here; great not only in material prosperity but also in their strength of character. Their whole life and activity was centered around upholding the rule of Dharma -righteousness. To these noble rulers, life was meaningless if not lived according to the Dharma. For this, they even went as far as sacrificing their own lives.

The story of one such great king will illustrate this point better.

Story of Shibi Rana

The king Shibi was famous for his truthfulness, justice, and keeping his word. The king of righteousness, Dharmaraj, himself decided to test the strength of character of Shibi Rana.

Once when the king was alone on the terrace of his palace, he saw one dove coming towards him with great speed. An eagle was after him, and to escape from the clutches of the chasing eagle the dove made frantic effort to hide some where. Seeing the king on the terrace, the frightened dove took shelter in his lap. The dove said, "O king, save my life, I have come under your shelter."

The king had vowed to protect anyone who took his shelter. Thus the weak and deprived could not be exploited by the rich and strong. However, this was a new experience for Shibi Rana. Was he in any way obliged to protect a bird who seeks his refuge? Contemplating for a while, the king decided that even tress, animals, and birds require protection and help as do human beings.

Therefore, the king said, "Have no fear my son. That eagle would not be able to touch even your feather. Relax in peace, have no worries." So saying the king readied himself to face the rapidly approaching eagle. The eagle landed in front of the king and said, "O king, you have hidden my prey. Please release him so that I can appease my hunger."

The righteous king saw the point in eagle's demand. He faced a peculiar dilemma of protecting the dove, and at the same time not to deprive the eagle of his rightful prey! He decided to resolve the issue by offering the eagle

equal amount of meat from his kitchen. But the eagle insisted on having his prey -the dove - as his food. After some discussion the eagle agreed to set the dove free on two conditions.

The eagle said, "O King, I shall let the dove go, if equal weight of flesh from your body is offered to me as food."

Shibi Rana was quite pleased with the adjustment. He thought that a pound (or two) of flesh from his body would not kill him and the life of the dove in his shelter would also be saved.

Thus he was happy that he was saved from a great sin of 'inability to protect the weak'.

The eagle then put his second condition, saying, "O king, if a single tear drops from your eye I shall be constrained to accept you flesh as my food."

The king agreed and called for the knives and the balance. In one pan of the balance the dove was kept and on the other side a large chunk of flesh from the right thigh of Shibi Rana. But strange as it might seem, the pan with the dove always weighed more even as additional flesh was added! Thus almost whole of the right half of the king's body was cut. Still the weight could not be equaled.

At this juncture a drop of tear appeared in the left eye of the king. The eagle objected to this saying, "O king, I cannot accept the food given in distress. The tear in your eye shows that you are unhappy. So give me my prey back and you shall regain your normal health."

With a faint smile on his lips, Shibi Rana said, "Behold, O eagle, the left eye is not crying out of grief; this is a tear of joy. Now my left half of the body will also be used to honour the word I have given to you. Otherwise, if only right had satisfied you, the left half of the body would have been denied this great opportunity of sacrifice! Therefore, my dear friend, the left eye cries out of joy!"

This ultimate sacrifice of Shibi Rana was unparalleled in the history. The eagle and the dove disappeared and in their places stood the King of

righteousness -Dharmaraj and the king of heavens --the Indra. Gods from the heavens showered flowers, perfumes, and praise on the king. They granted many boons to this noble king.

The king Shibi had passed the ultimate test to uphold Dharma, a true duty of every king. It is said that this king ruled for many years and after his death went directly to heaven to enjoy the fruits of his righteous karma.

Story of king Shantanu

Under such ethos and culture, the kingdom of Kuru king Shantanu prospered around Hastinapur. Business and commerce, peace and prosperity, art and literature flourished all around. People both inside the palace and out side were happy. High standard of education, both secular and spiritual, was maintained through the system of Gurukula (students staying with their teacher in an ashrama during their studentship.) Hard work, honesty, and sincerity made these students better citizens. The teacher -Guru- was well versed in all aspects of arts and science related with politics, statesmanship, warfare and economics. Yoga and meditation were routinely included in the curricula.

Once king Shantanu went for hunting. He reached deep into the forest across a river. After many hours of horse ride and laborious chase the tired king instructed his attendants to carry his horse and other possessions, and himself decided to return to his palace in a ferry boat.

The boatman, fisherman by caste, recognized the king and felt honored to have such a distinguished guest on his boat. Such occasions did not come in his life very often. He decided to make most of it. Therefore, he requested the king to accept his hospitality in his humble hut.

The king agreed. Together they reached the boatman's house for refreshments. The boatman tried to make the king as comfortable as he could by offering the king soft cushioned seat, fruits and milk. He called his

daughter to serve the honoured guest. And as the fate had it, the king fell in love with the fisherman's daughter (Satyavati) at first sight! Their eyes met and love was exchanged.

King Shantanu made hasty departure and returned to his palace. But the love bug had made his nights sleepless. The constant thought of beautiful daughter of fisherman made him restless and love-sick.

The king started making secret visits to the fisherman's house. Fisherman did not object, why should he! The love between the king and Satyavati blossomed into the dreams of conjugal bliss. The king wanted to marry her.

Shantanu already had one son, named Bhishma, the most powerful, intelligent, and glorious of all the Kurus. His personality was unique and impressive in many ways. His truthfulness, bravery, and righteousness were beyond reproach. If once he decided anything, he was sure to stick to his word at any cost.

The Great Bhishma

As already said, the king wanted to marry the daughter of fisherman - Satyavati. The father was accordingly informed. Here the fisherman became greedy! He thought, "As the tradition goes, Bhishma is elder and will succeed the throne of Hastinapur. My daughter's son will be younger and hence will be denied the chance to become the king. Moreover, when Bhishma marries, his son will succeed to the throne and not my daughter's son."

Hence, the greedy fisherman told her daughter to marry the king only on the condition that (1) Bhishma should never aspire for the throne of Hastinapur, and (2) secondly, he should never marry.

The two conditions were too harsh for king Shantanu to accept. This was clearly a great injustice towards his beloved son Bhishma. Therefore, the king did not accept the conditions immediately. He bought some time to give his final decision.

The days passed by. The king could not forget Satyawati, nor could he do injustice to Bhishma. This dilemma told on his health and performance of royal duties. He lost his appetite and took no interest in the affairs of his kingdom. These changes did not remain unknown to the intelligent eyes of Bhishma.

Bhishma decided to go to the root cause of the unhappiness of his father. He soon came to know all about his father's love for Satyawati and his desire to marry her. Bhishma decided to bring cheer in the life of his father. He went to Satyawati and, after introducing himself, requested her (would be step mother) to marry his father.

Satyawati repeated her two conditions to Bhishma now: that (1) Bhishma should never aspire for the throne of Hastinapur, and (2) secondly, he should never marry.

The firm-minded Bhishma vowed in front of her saying, "O mother, I, upon my word and in presence of this river Ganges, pledge never to marry and never to aspire for the throne of Hastinapur. In addition, till my last breath, I promise that I shall be loyal to the throne of Hastinapur whosoever occupies it." Thus indirectly Bhishma assured the fisher-woman that her son would be accepted as the future king of Hastinapur.

Happy days returned as the king Shantanu married Satyawati. The queen gave birth to two sons named Chitrangad and Vichitravirya.

[The Kingdom Of Hastinapur](#)

Days passed by. King Shantanu died natural death of old age. His elder son Chitrangad also died in young age. Hastinapur came under the rule of Vichitravirya and continued to flourish under his rule. Vichitravirya was married to three princesses, but as the fate had it, could not become father. Soon Vichitravirya also was killed in a battle without any issue. His queens were offered a child each from a great sage as a blessing and through his Yogic Power (without physical contact). The two queens followed the

instructions and gave birth to Dhritarashtra and Pandu respectively; but the third queen sent her maid to the sage, and Vidura was born of the maid as the third son.

Dhritarashtra was blind from the birth, and therefore Pandu succeeded the throne of Hastinapur. Pandu, Dhritarashtra, and Bhishma grew up as friends and conducted the affairs of the state with great foresight. They all respected each other. Vidura was most righteous of all and was chosen as the Prime Minister of Hastinapur. Pandu married Kunti (aunt of Sri Krishna) and princess Madri; while Dhritarashtra was married to Gandhari, the princess of Gandhar. This noble lady also kept her eyes folded throughout her life as a mark of respect to her blind husband Dhritarashtra.

Story of Bhishma

Bhishma was son of Shantanu and the river goddess Ganges. His mother Ganges had left Shantanu after giving birth to Bhishma. That is different story which would be included in appendix.

Having given his word of honour to his step mother, Satyawati, Bhishma remained celibate all through his life. Marriage was never thought of, nor any sensual desire ever arose in his mind. This great Yogi was adept in many Yogas and practice of meditation.

His truthfulness was such that whatever he spoke came true. He knew every martial art and war tricks. He was the most respected person in the kingdom of Hastinapur. Reverentially he was called Bhishma Pitamaha - Grandsire Bhishma.

He served his step mother, then her son Vichitravirya, later his sons Pandu and Dhritarashtra as a mark of loyalty to the throne of Hastinapur. He was well aware of the weaknesses and ethical decline in the character of his grandsons, and could foresee the cumulative tragedy that was sure to befall the kingdom of Hastinapur. Bhishma was well aware of jealousy of Duryodhana towards Pandavas which he at times openly disapproved. But even this

righteous behavior of Bhishma was taken as tilt towards Pandavas and dislike for Kauravas. But, lest his reproach be seen as his disloyalty to Hastinapur, he kept quiet as a silent suffering head of the clan. As a silent and helpless witness Bhishma tolerated all this with melancholy. He never made any attempt to become king of Hastinapur, or to dislodge the weak and morally selfish successor to the throne. Vidura as his best friend understood the peculiar predicament and mental state of Bhishma.

Bhishma, Dronacharya, Vidura, Kripacharya, all righteous in their own way, were still at fault because, though helpless, they served and sided with the non-righteous Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra.

Story of Arjuna

The Princes Grow

Childhood

The princes grew into wonderful children. After thread ceremony, they all went for studies to the ashrama of their Guru Acharya Drona (also called Dronacharya) - Teacher of the Royal family. Dronacharya was well versed in ancient scriptures -- Vedas and Upanishads, as well as in practices of Yogas and Meditation. Besides he was adept in various martial and other arts useful in war time, useful in defence and attack. In particular, Acharya Drona was the supreme authority on training his disciples in the art of archery.

Story of Arjuna 1

Out of all Pandavas and Kauravas, Arjuna had immense liking for the sport of bow and arrow. He practiced this art with great concentration and perseverance. Soon he became numero uno in this art. Acharya Drona was very much pleased with Arjuna and showed preferential love and favour towards him. This caused a natural adolescence jealousy in the heart of Duryodhana and his brother Dushasana. Duryodhana, in particular, did not like Arjuna and other Pandavas and silently ill feelings like hatred towards Pandavas took birth in his heart.

One day they openly criticized their Guru for favour shown towards Arjuna, telling him they also were not less skillful in archery. As a reply to their criticism, Acharya Drona arranged a test to decide the best archer amongst all.

Accordingly, a wooden bird was put on a branch of a distant tree. It was partly hidden by the foliage. A prominent artificial eye was painted on the wooden bird. The teacher called all his disciples and said, "Look my children, a bird is sitting on that far off tree. You have to hit the arrow exactly in its eye. Are you ready?"

Everyone nodded. First the eldest Yudhisthira was invited to try his skill. He stretched his bow-string and was about to release the arrow when Dronacharya asked him a question, "O eldest son of Kunti, may I know what is visible to you at this point of time?"

Yudhisthira replied innocently, "Why, O Gurudev, I am seeing you, the tree, people around me, and the bird!"

Similar questions were put to Duryodhana, Bhima, Nakul, Sahadeva and others, and Acharya Drona got the similar answers as those given by Yudhisthira. Acharya told them to step aside as it was obvious that with such poor concentration they were sure to miss the target!

Lastly, it was the turn of Arjuna. He readied himself, his bow and arrow in

perfect graceful harmony! When the Guru asked him, "O Arjuna, will you tell me what is being observed by you?"

And Arjuna replied, "Sir, at this point of time only the eye of the bird is visible to me." When asked by the teacher whether he was able to see the bird, the tree, and people around, Arjuna replied in negative maintaining that he saw the eye of the bird only.

Dronacharya was pleased with Arjuna's immense concentration and correct approach towards the art of archery. He then explained to others how due to such peculiar yogic qualities and powers he preferred Arjuna as his best disciple.

Everyone saw the point, including Duryodhana; but the seed of jealousy was sown in his heart. In his attempt to equal Arjuna and other Pandavas, Duryodhana fell victim to anger and similar base emotions the effect of which would sure to show later in our story.

Story of Karna

From Adolescence To Adulthood

All the princes returned to Hastinapur after completing their studies at Drona's ashrama. They grew into healthy and powerful adults. All were trained in various branches of knowledge including statesmanship, diplomacy, economics, sociology, and so on. Moreover, everyone excelled in one particular skill of war-game. Yudhisthira was expert in swordsman-ship and throwing javelin, while Bhima and Duryodhana excelled in fighting with mace - heavy metal club. Excellence of Arjuna in archery is already mentioned.

* Story of Karna 1

Before marriage, Kunti, wife of Pandu, was immersed in god worship, meditation and Yoga. She undertook arduous austere practices to please God. In fact, out of curiosity she was experimenting with the power of Yoga and concentration associated with intense devotion to God. Her prayers and spiritual practices were rewarded with the blessings of Sun God, who granted her a boon by which she, if and when desired, would get a son from luminous deity without physical contact!

To test her newly acquired power, still unmarried, Kunti decided to have a son from Sun God Himself. She prayed and wished as told to her. And wonder of wonders, a most beautiful and powerful son was born to her. He had inborn protective armour over his chest and in his ears - the kavacha and kundalas. This was "Karna", Kunti's eldest son and the most important and controversial character of our future story.

In India, as today, in those days also, teenage pregnancy and unwedded motherhood were great taboo. Kunti, the unwedded mother, became apprehensive to receive Karna as her son. 'What to do with such a lovely child', was a great problem for her. She could not kill the newborn, nor could she keep him. What would the people say? How would the society react to her shameful act, she would shudder to think.

A great blot on her character would be put, blot of premarital sex and promiscuity. Nobody would believe her story that she has received the child from the Sun God out of her power of Yoga.

Kunti, therefore, decided to desert the child Karna. She prepared a wooden basket, provided cushions inside, and put the little Karna in it. She left the basket afloat in the river currents to run off to the unknown destination, away from her life!

After a few days, a couple in a far off town sighted the basket. Both husband and wife were curious to see the basket floating in the river. The man swam down the river and fetched the basket to the bank. They were

surprised to find a healthy new-born baby in it! This childless couple was immensely pleased to find a new born in their custody. As if merciful God had gracefully granted them their desired prayer! With tenderness Radha took Karna to her chest. The motherly love produced enough milk in her breast to satisfy the hunger of the starving baby.

Karna, the powerful and radiant as his father - Sun God, protected by the armour of kavacha and kundalas, grew into his childhood. Away from the real mother Kunti, he accepted Radha as her real mother.

Karna's foster parents were charioteers by caste: Adhiratha and Radha by name. (Radha brought up Karna as her son and hence Karna is also known as Radheya. As he was brought up by these low caste parents, Karna is also known as Sut-Putra. Later we shall see how this caste factor plays an important role in his adult life.)

After marriage with Pandu, Kunti wished for three very powerful sons: Yudhishthira, Bhima, and Arjuna. Moreover, Madri had two issues: Nakul and Sahadeva. But the king Pandu and Madri died when all the five children were very young. Kunti promised Madri to look after her Nakul and Sahadeva as her own children without any discrimination. Thus the five brothers came to be known as sons of Pandu -the Pandavas. Their love and affection for each other was (is) set as an example for others, till today also! Thus the five Pandavas grew under the loving care of Mother Kunti. No one knew about their elder brother, Karna - the first son of Kunti born before her marriage.

Dhritarashtra now became the king of Hastinapur. Dhritarashtra and Gandhari had one hundred sons and daughters. These were called as Kauravas. The eldest amongst them was Duryodhana. The second eldest was Dushasana Dushala was their only sister. As cousins they played and grew with Pandavas without any ill feeling or discrimination. Kunti and Gandhari lived like sisters, and each one thought she had 105 sons and daughters!

* Story of Karna 2

The great Karna, away from Hastinapur, also grew up as a very powerful and generous adult. Our interest at present is to know about Karna's boyhood and education etc. For his studies, Karna went to the ashrama of Parashurama, the Guru of Brahmins. Parashurama had decided to take only Brahmin boys as his disciples. Therefore, Karna went there in disguise of a Brahmin boy and learnt old scriptures, Vedas, Upanishads, and became exceedingly expert in the art of bow and arrow, archery. It was said that nobody, not even Arjuna, could equal Karna in archery. The Guru was pleased with Karna's sincerity, hard-work, devotion and similar noble qualities.

One day sage Parashurama was resting with his head in the lap of Karna. Soon he fell asleep. Meanwhile a big insect started to bite the thigh of Karna. He felt agonizing pain and blood started to ooze from the wound. But he endured lest the sound sleep of his revered Guru should be disturbed. But the stream of hot blood reached the Guru due to which he was awakened from his sleep. He was amazed at the degree of tolerance and endurance of Karna who did not even stir or move his body at such a great pain. But a thought crossed Parashurama's mind: how could a Brahmin boy tolerate such great pain! Brahmins are not known to show such grit in enduring physical suffering, rather warrior caste is known for such a feat. Thence, Parashurama asked Karna his real name and identity.

Karna could not tell a lie now. He told his story to his Guru and begged his pardon to have come in the disguise of a Brahmin. Parashurama was angry that he was deceived to accept a low caste fellow as his disciple. Therefore, he cursed Karna saying: "O Karna, even though you are great in bravery, art of archery, and in service to me, still as you have deceived your Guru, I send a curse to you that at a crucial time on the battle-field the wheels of your chariot will get stuck in the earth. The consequences would be grave."

The disappointed Karna returned to his parents. His restless heart wanted some change and, therefore, he requested his parents to permit him to visit Hastinapur.

The Show of Skills

At that time a great festival of competitive sports was held in Hastinapur. Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Duryodhana and others exhibited their skills in various arts like archery, mace-fight, javelin and sword warfare, etc. the Royal bench was graced by such dignitaries as Bhishma, Dhritarashtra, Kunti, Gandhari and Dronacharya. Everyone was praising the great expertise of the princes.

In particular, the skills of Arjuna in archery like bringing rains after hitting the clouds and building a bridge of arrow, etc. surprised and immensely impressed the spectators. Karna was also present in the crowd. He could not resist his desire to compete with Arjuna in the skills of bow and arrow, where he was sure he was superior to Arjuna. Therefore, Karna got up in the crowd and challenged Arjuna to compete with him. The people were jubilant as they were sure to see their favourite Arjuna to win. But Guru Drona was doubtful. He suspected that this little known archer might pose problem for his beloved disciple Arjuna and therefore, Dronacharya decided to stall this show of skill between the two. He objected to Karna's demand to compete with Arjuna saying:

"O young man, who are you? Please identify yourself and let us know your credentials. Of what state are you a king or a prince? Arjuna will be pleased to compete with you only if you are one from a royal family."

The sut-putra Karna (i.e. of low caste) understood the trick Dronacharya played on him, but could do nothing. Therefore Karna kept silent.

At this, the jealous Duryodhana saw a great opportunity to humiliate Arjuna. He immediately stood up and went to Karna. Covering him with the royal cloth from his own attire, Duryodhana declared, "Listen, dignitaries and people of Hastinapur, I accept Karna as my best friend and make him the king of Anga Province. At present that province is under my rule and I have full authority to nominate anyone as the king of that land. So be it Karna. Henceforth Karna is not a low caste ordinary citizen of Hastinapur, but should be

respected as Angraja - King of Anga Province."

Thus Karna was put under the obligation of Duryodhana forever. He accepted the friendship of Duryodhana for which he gave his life, about which later.

Story of Ekalavya

Near the ashrama of Drona, where Arjuna and his brothers used to take lessons in various arts, there lived a small bright boy, shudra by caste (lower caste). His name was Eklavya. He had great desire to learn the art of archery from Dronacharya. But his mother had told him that as a shudra, Acharya Drona would not accept Eklavya as his disciple. It was futile to dream of such a privilege.

But the boy was not be put off, his determination knew no bounds. Near his house, under a tree Eklavya installed a clay idol of Dronacharya that he worshiped as his Guru! Daily, morning and evening, this devotee put flower and natural perfumes in front of this image and took Self-Lessons in the art of bow and arrow. The talented young Eklavya soon acquired high knowledge in archery. He attributed his success to his Guru Dronacharya.

One day, as it happened, Acharya Drona and Arjuna were passing near the hut of Eklavya. It was pleasant and peaceful afternoon and people were taking rest. But the tranquility and silence was broken by constant barking of a dog. Eklavya did not like this, and therefore, he shut the mouth of the dog with an arrow! Dronacharya and Arjuna were surprised to see the dog with his mouth sealed with an arrow!

Naturally the curious Arjuna asked his Gurudev as to who could have done this delicate job. Even Dronacharya was amazed and knew the archer must be exceptionally skilled artist. They decided to trace this skillful fellow and reached the spot where Eklavya was practicing wonders with his bow and arrow in front of the clay image of Drona. It took no time for Dronacharya to

understand the situation. He realized that Eklavya was superior to Arjuna in some respects. Dronacharya loved Arjuna very much and had declared him to be the best archer on the earth. Hence the Guru thought for awhile and came to a decision to remove Eklavya as a competitor to Arjuna.

Dronacharya went to Eklavya and said, "O young man, who has taught you such wonderful skills in archery! Who is your Guru?"

Seeing the Guru in front of him, the boy Eklavya was more than overjoyed and said, "Why, O Gurudev, this all is your grace! I worship you as my Guru. Look you are there in that image!"

Dronacharya was pleased with the dedication of Eklavya, and said, "I bless you my son. But as is customary, won't you give me my fees - Guru-Dakshina!"

[It is customary in India to give to the Guru whatever he demands as his fees - Guru-Dakshina for the knowledge the Guru has given to the disciple.]

Eklavya was overwhelmed to see Dronacharya had accepted him as his disciple! Out he said, "O Honourable Teacher, whatever you ask, this humble disciple of yours will try his utmost to offer you as Guru-Dakshina! I am blessed."

And now comes a very touching and pathetic incidence in Mahabharata.

Guru Drona said, "O Eklavya, I am pleased with your respect for Guru. I want the thumb of your right hand as my fees- Guru-Dakshina."

The trees and atmosphere around stood still for a minute! Even Arjuna was stunned on listening to the unusual and almost cruel demand of his Guru. To ask for the thumb of an archer was equivalent to almost kill him! How could Dronacharya demand such a heavy prize from one disciple to protect the honour of the other!

But Eklavya had no such remorse. Unruffled and with due humility, cheerfully and without protest, he cut his right thumb and placed it at the feet of Dronacharya. Gods in the heaven silently praised the greatness of Eklavya's sacrifice.

Marriage of Bhima

The narrow escape put Kunti in a state of shock and apprehension. She could not put her sons at the mercy of Duryodhana and Shakuni. She was afraid they would again make attempt on their lives. Therefore, she pleaded with her sons to live incognito for time being. Accordingly they stayed in the forest for a few days.

Bhima Marries Hidimbi

This forest was under the rule of demon Hidimba and his sister Hidimbi. When the demons smelled the flesh of humans Hidimba decided to kill them and eat them as his food. He sent his sister to assess the situation.

But as the fate had it, Hidimbi fell in love with huge and powerfully built Bhima! She transformed herself into a beautiful woman and approached Bhima with desire to marry him. She told the evil designs of her brother to kill them. Bhima was not afraid, and decided to fight it out with Hidimba.

He all alone, without disturbing his brothers and mother, challenged the demon chieftain. The ensuing fight was very terrible, to say the least. Both of them fought with great gusto, uprooting huge trees and using them as their weapons. The noise and din created by the two fighting giants awoke remaining Pandavas and Kunti. They rushed to the scene of fight and found Bhima engaged in very unusual battle. In the end Hidimba was killed and Bhima was victorious.

This pleased Kunti very much and was also proud of his son Bhima. But presence of an unknown but beautiful lady by the side of Bhima puzzled her. When she inquired about the same, Hidimbi herself told everyone about her real identity and her desire to marry Bhima. Kunti realized that not only Hidimbi was in true love with her son, but also she was instrumental in saving their lives. Therefore, she asked Bhima to fulfill the desire of Hidimbi. Bhima agreed on one condition, that he would leave her after they had one son.

Hidimbi agreed and they were married.

They were blessed with the most powerful and obedient son - Ghatotkacha. This son of Bhima stayed with her mother, and promised his father to appear before him as soon as he remembered him. *Later in the war of Mahabharata, we shall see how Ghatotkacha played very important role in saving lives of his father and Pandavas at the cost of his own life.*

Sri Krishna and Pandavas

Kunti and Pandavas decided to leave the forest and go to nearby city. Accordingly, in guise of a Brahmin family, they decided to stay in the city of Ekchakra begging for their food from door to door. It was decided that they would equally share whatever they get amongst themselves.

The days passed by, one day they came to know about the announcement of the marriage of the beautiful princess of Panchal - Draupadi. Arjuna knew about the bravery and beauty of Draupadi and in fact was desirous of marrying her.

Sri Krishna, King of Dwaraka, had meanwhile become friend and saviour of Pandavas.

Sri Krishna

Numerous legends describe Krishna's miracles and heroic exploits. He slew and defeated scores of evil demons and monsters. He appears prominently in the epic poem Mahabharata, in which he sides with the Pandavas and acts as the charioteer of the hero Arjuna. It is to Arjuna, troubled on the eve of the decisive battle (more about which later), that Krishna delivers the celebrated discourse on duty and life known as the Bhagavad-Gita.

Marriage With Draupadi

Marriage of Draupadi

In particular, Arjuna was the best friend and disciple of Sri Krishna. Arjuna respected Sri Krishna as his chosen ideal and guide. On the other hand, princess Draupadi had accepted Sri Krishna as her brother and guide. Therefore, Sri Krishna was interested in the marriage of Draupadi with Arjuna.

Draupadi was very brave and beautiful. She was equally intelligent. She put a condition for her marriage. She would wed the prince who would pierce the eye of the rotating wooden fish by looking at its reflection.

Accordingly, a pole was erected in the courtyard at the tip of which a rotating device was fixed. On the top this device was mounted a wooden fish and at the bottom was kept a tub of water where reflection of the fish could be seen. The competing prince had to look at this reflection and hit the eye of the fish above with an arrow. Only one chance would be given to each desirous prince.

Many princes from all over India had come to try their luck in getting her as bride. Duryodhana, Karna, Arjuna and other Pandavas were a few amongst these. But as was obvious, the difficult test could allow only the best archer to succeed. Arjuna, in the disguise of a Brahmin, was one such fellow! Draupadi was waiting for Arjuna to succeed. Sri Krishna present as an observer also felt likewise.

Soon the competition began. One after another, great archers tried their skills, but in vain. Then arose Karna, the expert. Saluting the king and others present in the court, he approached to undertake the difficult but possible test that would give him Draupadi as his bride. Sri Krishna, always alert to rescue his devotees from the difficult situations, pointed Draupadi to object as it was likely that this great archer could win.

Karna Insulted

Draupadi got up and raised the objection saying, "O noble one, please let me know your credentials. Of what state you are the prince or the king? who are your parents? As far I know you a lowly sut-putra, and such I have no desire to marry you. You do not qualify to take this test."

The insult made Karna red with anger, but he could do nothing. What Draupadi said was true and everyone in the hall agreed. Duryodhana got up and protested saying, "O proud princess, you have insulted my friend who is the king of Anga province. I command you to apologize." But Draupadi was not be intimidated. She replied, "O prince of Hastinapur, I agree with what you say, but that still does not alter the status of your friend Karna. Out of charity and your mercy he had become the king, and not of his own. I cannot marry him."

The duo of Duryodhana and Karna left the court of king Drupad, father of Draupadi, and vowed to avenge the insult at some later time.

Arjuna Triumphs

Next it was the turn of Arjuna to try his skills to win over the hand of his prospective bride. He saluted Sri Krishna and in one go pierced the eye of the fish. Draupadi was pleased and put the garland in the neck of Arjuna. Thus they were married.

Half of the court shouted 'victory to the Brahmin, but the other half objected to the participation of a Brahmin in the marriage meant for warrior caste only.

Draupadi becomes Wife to all five brothers

Taking advantage of the confusion and chaos, Sri Krishna made quick arrangements to send the newly married couple off to the city of Ekchakra! Reaching their small hut, Pandavas announced their arrival and told the mother Kunti to guess what they have brought that day. Innocently, Kunti, thinking that her children must be talking about the food they had received, said, "O

my dear sons, I know you bring wonderful things; as usual divide the gift amongst yourself and enjoy."

This terrible command applied to Draupadi now. As the custom went they had to obey every word of their mother as final order. Kunti also became worried about the difficult predicament. Can a wife ever divided amongst five brothers!

Sri Krishna came to know all about and he advised the Pandavas to accept Draupadi as common wife of all the five brothers. Thus Draupadi, also known as Panchali, became wife of five brothers.

Sage Narada advised the Pandavas to honour the privacy of Draupadi when she was alone with any other brother. Whosoever entered the room of Draupadi when she was with other brother would be forced to self exile as the punishment. All the brothers agreed. Thus the problem of one wife and five husbands was solved!

Arjuna marries Subhadra, sister of Sri Krishna

As it happened, once there was an attack on some local Brahmins and robbers were forcibly taking away their cows. They asked Arjuna's help. Therefore, to bring his bow and arrow he had to enter and pass through the room of Draupadi when she was alone with Yudhisthira. Arjuna saved the lives of Brahmins and the sacred cows but had to leave for exile all alone.

Arjuna visited many places of pilgrimage and princely states from North to South and East to West. At last he reached the kingdom of Dwaraka which was ruled by his friend and mentor Sri Krishna. The two friends had very nice time, but there was a problem. Elder brother of Sri Krishna, Balarama (who was the Teacher of Duryodhana in his war skills), had decided to give the hand of their sister Subhadra to Duryodhana in the marriage. Sri Krishna did not approve of this marriage and wanted Subhadra to wed Arjuna. Therefore, he asked Arjuna to secretly run away with his sister and marry her. Subhadra had also decided to marry Arjuna and therefore, with the consent of Sri Krishna she eloped with Arjuna and they were married. Balarama later relented.

The couple is then blessed with a son - Abhimanyu -- who becomes very handsome, energetic and expert in war games. He was endowed with a special gift to penetrate any format of enemy line. He later plays very important role in the war of Kurukshetra -- the war of Mahabharata.

The Indraprastha Kingdom

Formation of Indraprastha Kingdom for Pandavas

Sri Krishna, Bhishma, Dronacharya and others persuaded Dhritarashtra to recall Pandavas back and give them their rightful half of the kingdom with due honour. Dhritarashtra acceded to their wishes, though somewhat reluctantly. Duryodhana and Uncle Shakuni opposed the idea and Karna maintained that war would be better recourse to settle the issue. dispute should be settled by war. But better sense prevailed, and according to the dictate of king Dhritarashtra part of the kingdom was given to Yudhisthira and his brothers.

Khandavavana, a sparsely populated area with meager facilities for trade and agriculture came to Pandava's lot. However, they did not grumble and developed Indraprastha as their capital city. All five brothers worked hard to bring prosperity to Indraprastha. People joined their labour and soon Indraprastha became as glorious as Hastinapur.

Saints and sages, gods and angels all preferred Indraprastha to Hastinapur for touring and pilgrimage. Even plant and animal life prospered due to righteous behavior of Pandavas. Gods in the heaven showered continuous blessings on them.

Yudhisthira performed a great sacrificial ceremony - Rajasuya Yagna - wherein many kings participated and pledged unflinching support to Yudhisthira and many accepted his sovereignty as well. Thus over a period of many years, gradually but surely Pandavas were recognized and accepted as powerful, noble, and better rulers than Kauravas. Sri Krishna visited them off and on, and Arjuna became his friend and best disciple.

Infuriated Duryodhana Plans To End Pandava's Glory

All this infuriated Duryodhana and uncle Shakuni. They were not happy with

the glorious progress and prosperity of their cousins and Indraprastha. Jealousy and hatred, as is well known, create conditions for revenge and meanness. Somehow or the other they wanted to see an end to the well being of Pandavas.

Duryodhana and Shakuni started to analyze the strength and weaknesses of their counterparts. Duryodhana knew that it was futile to attack them or engage the Pandavas in war as that was sure to cause downfall of Hastinapur. It was also sensed that Sri Krishna, Bhishma, and Dronacharya would oppose any such move.

At last, uncle Shakuni, the great schemer, found the weak point he was looking for. He knew that Yudhisthira as a king would unlikely to refuse to play game of dice if royal invitation was sent to him.

Here Shakuni was adept in this game of dice. He had specially prepared dice that followed his command! He could very easily fix the game where victory of Kauravas was assured. Thus after proper persuasion, Dhritarashtra sent invitation to Yudhisthira to participate in the game of dice. At Indraprastha, mother Kunti protested and warned them not to engage in gambling game as it might lead to disaster. But determined Yudhisthira decided to accept the invitation.

Accordingly, the five brothers and their wife Draupadi reached Hastinapur. A warm welcome awaited them. Pandavas saluted Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Vidura and sought their blessings. These elders and well-wishers of Pandavas also cautioned Yudhisthira to be careful of the ill designs of Shakuni and Duryodhana.

Jealous Duryodhana

Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Vidura called a meeting to designate the next king, in place of Dhritarashtra. Two options were discussed. First, Yudhisthira being the eldest of the Kuru princes was considered for nomination. Second view,

supported by Dhritarashtra and his brother-in-law Shakuni (brother of his wife queen Gandhari and maternal uncle of Duryodhana) was to select Duryodhana as the future king. But the opinion of Bhishma, Dronacharya, Kripacharya (Guru of the Royal House), and Vidura of nominating Yudhishthira as the heir-apparent prevailed.

Jealous Duryodhana Plans to Kill Pandavas

This naturally caused huge disappointment in Duryodhana's camp. Uncle Shakuni was well known for his villainous nature and cunning. He was displeased with the fact that his nephew Duryodhana was denied the chance to become the king. For this purpose in particular, he had come to stay at Hastinapur. He was well aware of the value and power of a king. Therefore, he lost no opportunity to humiliate and even to attempt to kill the Pandavas.

Soon the desired opportunity came to the evil minded Duryodhana and Shakuni to put an end to Pandavas.

Palace of Lac (combustible material)

In nearby town of Varnavata, a grand exhibition used to be arranged every year. The organizers always sent an invitation to the King of Hastinapur to send some members of Royal Family to grace the occasion. This time, Duryodhana and Shakuni persuaded Dhritarashtra to send Pandavas to Varnavata. The king agreed, and accordingly Pandavas were informed. Yudhishthira and brothers were also happy to get the opportunity to mix with the people of their kingdom and get first hand information about their problems or wellbeing.

Therefore, accompanied by their mother, Kunti, Pandavas decided to attend the exhibition at Varnavata.

As was customary, the organizers decided to build a temporary palatial house for their stay. The job was entrusted to one expert contractor whom Shakuni knew very well. Bribing the fellow, Duryodhana and Shakuni deliberated a secret plan to put an end to the life of Pandavas. It was decided that the palace that would house the Pandavas should be constructed out of highly inflammable material like Lac, resins, hemp, oil, fat, etc. the contractor

completed his job very meticulously and it was not possible to detect any foul play from cursory outward examination of the house.

Duryodhana and uncle Shakuni arranged to send their secret agent in guise of a servant who was instructed to put the house on fire when Pandavas would be fast asleep. Death due to burns would appear as an accident.

Thus plan was sure to succeed had the spies of Vidura, the Prime Minister and well wisher of Pandavas, had not told Vidura about the same. Vidura, on his part, alerted the Pandavas about the 'death trap' and a solution was offered in the form of digging an underground tunnel in advance to fool the Kauravas. The tunnel opened in far off forest.

The house was torched as planned and it burnt to ashes within no time. Pandavas had already left through the tunnel, but five workers and servants were charred to death. Everyone, including the Karna, took Pandavas to be dead.

The narrow escape put Kunti in a state of shock and apprehension. She could not put her sons at the mercy of Duryodhana and Shakuni. She was afraid they would again make attempt on their lives. Therefore, she pleaded with her sons to live incognito for time being.

Accordingly they stayed in the forest for a few days.

Game Of Dice

The day was fixed for the game of dice.

On one side sat Duryodhana, uncle Shakuni, and Dushasana while other side was occupied by Yudhisthira and his four brothers. Shakuni would throw dice for Kauravas while Yudhisthira would do the job for Pandavas.

Initially a small amount of money and jewelry was put at stake. The dice was rolled and Shakuni won the throw. Thus the game progressed on and on, every

time Shakuni came up with requisite number with his magical dice. Yudhisthira was bound to lose as the game was already corrupted by Shakuni.

But as a losing gambler, Yudhisthira lost reason and discrimination. He put Indraprastha at stake!, and as expected lost that turn too. The king Yudhisthira was stripped off his kingdom and he became an ordinary citizen! Mocking him further, uncle Shakuni challenged Yudhisthira, "You have lost your kingdom and all money. It is better you say quits and leave this palace. We shall allow you to lead a life of ordinary lay person in Hastinapur."

The insulting words, in stead of dissuading Yudhisthira, further stimulated him to play and regain the lost kingdom. Hope never dies for a gambler! Yudhisthira asked Shakuni to continue the game. When asked as to what he would put at stake, Yudhisthira replied: "Bhima"!

Yudhisthira lost the count and Bhima became the servant - slave - of Duryodhana. On the similar lines Yudhisthira lost Arjuna, Nakul, Sahadeva, and at last himself to the evil designs of Shakuni. Pandavas were bereft of all rights, even those of ordinary citizens!

The whole court was stunned to see this unusual betting from so righteous a person as Yudhisthira. Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Vidura could foresee the approaching catastrophe, but could do nothing. Their appeal for restrain and reason kept hitting on the deaf ears of Kauravas. After all it was a game, a sport, which was played according to set rules; both the parties willingly participating.

Ordeal of Draupadi

At last, the desperate gambler in Yudhisthira put Draupadi at stake! Everyone, almost everyone, in court protested, but in vain. The destiny of this great Bharatavarsha -India as was called in those days - could not be changed, as if it had the tacit sanction of Almighty! Male chauvinism put a helpless lady at the mercy of crooks.

As was destined, Yudhisthira lost the dice, and with it started the dark period of Indian downfall.

Draupadi became the serving maid of Duryodhana and Kauravas. Victorious and lustful Duryodhana asked his brother Dushasana to bring Draupadi to the court. He obeyed his elder brother and brought helpless Draupadi dragging by her hair. Her protest that Yudhishthira had no right to put her at stake was not heard in the agonizing cries of the ladies in the court. Heads drooped with shame. Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Vidura could do nothing. King Dhritarashtra was silent.

Cries of "shame, shame" were mingled with terrifying laughter of Duryodhana, Shakuni, and Dushasana.

Duryodhana ordered Dushasana to disrobe the lady. Bhishma objected, Dhritarashtra trembled, but the lust, pride, and blind power of victory was not prepared to listen or see sense.

Lord Krishna Comes to the Rescue

Helpless Draupadi had but one hope, one last hope to save her grace. Sri Krishna could alone, and would, save her from disgrace! She started repeating and praying for his grace, a saviour of his devotees, the Master of the Universe.

And the Lord does not wait when his devotee is in such a grave crisis. Sri Krishna provided unending lengths of cloth on the body of Draupadi.

Here, Dushasana pulled one yard of her robe -sari - and there two yards were added by the grace of Sri Krishna! The evil Dushasana went on and on, his hands aching and paralyzed with fatigue, but there was no end to the covering of Draupadi's body. At last Dushasana collapsed, completely exhausted.

"Victory to Lord Krishna", exclaimed Draupadi and fell down unconscious tears rolling down her eyes.

But still, Shakuni and Duryodhana were not to be put off. Duryodhana baring his thigh invited Draupadi to sit on it. This was the last straw on camel's back. The infuriated Bhima rose to kill Duryodhana but was prevented by Yudhishthira to act. "O brothers, we have no right to protest or fight against

our master. We are all slaves of Duryodhana", said he.

At this Bhima vowed, "Listen everyone, listen O Dhritarashtra, I will kill Duryodhana by breaking open his thigh and would drink blood from the same. And moreover, O evil Dushasana, remember and tremble in the heart, for I will break open your chest and dress the hair of Draupadi with that blood." (Draupadi later vowed to keep her hair loose till Bhima fulfilled his pledge.)

Second Game Of Dice!

Cultural shock

The scene in the royal court of immense anger, frustration, and grief. All these emotions combined together to take the form of protest against Shakuni and Duryodhana. Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Vidura all objected to this shameless humiliation of a lady of their own family, that too the queen! They appealed to Duryodhana to see sense and act with some restraint and ethics. They objected to the fixing of dice game and appealed to Dhritarashtra to restore status quo ante.

Dhritarashtra accepted their plea and declared the results of the dice game as null and void. He was also not totally in agreement with the obnoxious behavior of his son and brother-in-law. The kingdom of Indraprastha was duly returned to Yudhishthira and his brothers and wife Draupadi were declared free from the bondage.

Uncle Shakuni and Duryodhana were, however, silently grumbling for the "lost opportunity" of putting an end to the prosperity of Pandavas. Shakuni continued to plan for the final kill. He persuaded Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra to invite Yudhishthira again for the last and final game of dice. He impressed upon the king that Yudhishthira, Bhima, and Arjuna, otherwise, were sure take revenge for their ill treatment.

In those days although, gambling was seen as sinful act by many, including Yudhishthira, a warrior and king was declared unmanly to refuse the invitation for such a game. Shakuni knew the mentality of a king gambler. He was sure

Yudhisthira would still have to play the game if royal invitation is sent and proper conditions were laid.

Yudhisthira Invited Again!

Next day, as Yudhisthira and his brothers were about to leave for Indraprastha, uncle Shakuni put into effect his last hope. He invited Yudhisthira for the final game on behalf of Duryodhana and consented by Dhritarashtra. He himself put the condition for the game as, "O Yudhisthira, in this only game whosoever loses will relinquish his kingdom and go to forest exile for twelve years with additional one year of living incognito. If detected in the last year, again exile of twelve years will ensue." Yudhisthira agreed and lost the final game as well.

The Defeat and Banishment to Forest

All the five Pandavas and Draupadi put on simple dress and left for the forest. Mother Kunti being weak and old stayed back with Vidura.

The Dilemma of the Wise

Duryodhana became the de facto ruler of both Hastinapur and Indraprastha.

The agony of Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Vidura can only be imagined at the outrageous treatment meted out to Pandavas in general and Draupadi in particular. The disgrace of their own daughter-in-law left them speechless and hurt to the core. But their protests and appeals for sanity fell on the deaf ears of Duryodhana and Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra was too weak a father whose heart went out for the 'love' for his Duryodhana. He always looked in the narrow confines of comforts and material pleasures for his son, Duryodhana. He could not think beyond. That Duryodhana was treading the path of self-destruction by setting such an example of ignoble behaviour towards women that was sure to lead to the downfall of Bharatavarsha (Ancient name for India) in coming centuries.

The question would be asked: "Why did Bhishma, Dronacharya, and Vidura not

desert the evil company of king Dhritarashtra and join the Pandavas?"

The answer to this query is being searched for all these centuries, in India and elsewhere! In part, the answer is given by Bhishma himself. He had vowed to remain loyal to the throne of Hastinapur irrespective of who occupied it. This pledge was more than anything to him. His life, non-righteous behavior of Kauravas, and sufferings of Pandavas had no value in face of his pledge.

As to Dronacharya and Vidura, they were the paid servants of king Dhritarashtra. It was essential for them to serve their master who gave them name, fame, and position. To oppose the king or to find faults with him (or his sons) was not the culture of that time. Probably, they had no say in such matters; and to revolt was to show disloyalty to the throne 'whose salt they had eaten'.

Relevance Today!

Today also we see many officers, secretaries, and servants loyal to corrupt rulers and head of the states! We see many 'righteous persons' keeping mum over irregularities and misconduct of their 'bosses'. This even includes President of America, the most prosperous, progressive, democratic and free nation state. Watergate, and ... How many of the righteous officers and secretaries resign? Almost none! If this is the case of USA, it is better not to talk about less developed countries of Latin America, Africa, and Asia.

The question of Bhishma, Dronacharya, Vidura, etc. remaining silent at the great injustice meted out to Draupadi and Pandavas will always remain unanswered.

Such incidences are not uncommon in any era or epoch. Some are dramatized, others are forgotten in the flow of time. However, they expose weakness of human nature -character. Individually, we may learn from them to rise above uncivilized behavior, but any attempt to totally 'eliminate such tendencies from the society' is bound to come to naught!

Very slowly, indeed after many centuries, the effect will show in more civilized state of human existence, I agree.

Pandavas Exiled to Forest

Life in Exile 1

Thus losers in the deceitful act of gambling, and insulted by Kauravas, the Pandavas started for their exile in forest. Vidura told Yudhishthira to allow mother Kunti to stay back as she was old and weak. Yudhishthira agreed. Draupadi, however, accompanied her husbands to the forest. A few Brahmins and sage Dhaumya also went with them.

The Pandavas reached Kamyak Forest and decided to rest there for a while.

The news of their exile reached Sri Krishna, the ruler of Dwaraka. He was related to Pandavas as a cousin brother and was their friend, saviour, and guide. Moreover, Draupadi always treated him as her elder brother.

Sri Krishna reached Kamyak forest to Pandavas and Draupadi. After inquiring about their well being, he advised Pandavas to be vigilant and not lose heart. The ordeal they had to face was for their good, as "experience is the only source of knowledge". Good and bad experiences are essential to get correct perspective and fulfillment of life. Suffering and sorrows bring requisite feeling of renunciation essential to seek higher goal in life.

Draupadi Questions Krishna About Dharma

But the recent insult at the hands of Duryodhana and Karna was fresh in the mind of Draupadi. She had also not forgotten scornful laughter of Dhritarashtra and Shakuni. All these memories made Draupadi emotional and angry. Opening her heart to the Lord, she said in anguish:

"O Krishna, how is it that this Draupadi, sister of the Lord of Universe and wife of five brave, powerful and invincible Pandavas has to go through such horrible time? Was that not their duty to protect me and punish the miscreants? Was that fair on the part of Dhritarashtra to allow Dushasana to drag me by hair and attempt to remove my only clothing? Does Yudhishthira has right to put me at stake when he himself had become slave of Duryodhana?"

And even if the husband becomes slave does he lose right to come to the rescue of his wife; does he lose the right to protect the honour of his wife?"

The barrage of questions affected Sri Krishna Intensely. With due seriousness he proclaimed, "O dear sister, do not grieve. I promise you that every Kaurava woman would shed more tears than what you have shed; for the non-righteous Kauravas and their supporters in this shameful act are sure to perish at the hands of Pandavas very soon."

Thus we see the shadow of impending great war of Kurukshetra in the speech of Lord Krishna.

One more thing of interest was told by Sri Krishna. He said that had he been there in the court of Dhritarashtra during the game of dice, he would not have allowed the game in the first place. He would have impressed upon everyone, including Bhishma and Dhritarashtra, how gambling leads to total corruption and degeneration of the race. He would have forcefully prohibited Duryodhana from engaging in such vice. Gambling, smoking, drinking, hunting, and prostitution are the curse on humanity which every righteous person should labour to avoid. The persons who engage in these acts are doomed to destruction and moral death.

Life in Forest 2

From Kamyak forest, the Pandavas moved to Dvaita Forest.

The question of daily food was solved by the gift from Sun God of a "special vessel" given to Draupadi. The vessel would be filled by desired food once a day. However, after it was used one time in a day, it could be filled only the next day.

Story of Sage Durvasa

Once while passing through the forest the sage Durvasa, accompanied by his many disciples, reached the hut of Pandavas. Sage Durvasa was known for his short temper and throwing curse whosoever did not obey his commands.

Draupadi welcomed the sage and after proper salutations inquired about their needs. Durvasa told her that they were all hungry and would be happy to receive proper meals. Draupadi was at her wits end as there was nothing in her kitchen to offer to these hundred pious guests! Unfortunately the vessel that could have solved her problem was already used for the day and washed clean. Now it would yield the food the next only. It was, at the same time essential for her to make some arrangements as per the command of Durvasa lest his curse might prove disastrous for her and Pandavas.

To buy time, she requested the sage and his disciples to take bath in the nearby river, and in the meantime she could prepare meals for them. The sage agreed and left for the river with his associates.

Krishna Comes to Help Again

Perturbed and helpless, Draupadi started praying Sri Krishna for help. She sat in front of the image of the Lord and with wet eyes prayed to Him to rush to her assistance. Sri Krishna, in his palace in Dwaraka, heard the cry of despair of his devotee and rushed to her forest dwelling. With a sweet musical voice he consoled her not to worry and asked her for some food for himself. He said he was hungry.

Draupadi did not understand this unusual demand. On the one hand she had called Sri Krishna for help, and on the other, Sri Krishna himself appeared to trouble her. This paradox confused her.

She said, "O Krishna this is not time for joking. Durvasa has demanded food for himself and hundred of his disciples. There is not a single grain in my kitchen. What should I do? How can I resolve this crisis."

Hearing this, Sri Krishna said, "O sister, that is why I am asking you to give me something to eat! Bring that vessel that gives you your daily food, there must be something in it."

Reluctantly Draupadi did as was asked. And there attached to the back of the vessel was a grain of rice! Sri Krishna put it in his mouth. His hunger was satisfied. Then a miracle occurred. The Lord of Universe had eaten enough; and with this was satisfied the appetite of whole world!

Here on the bank of river, Durvasa and his disciples suddenly felt their stomach were full! They had no appetite left even for a single bolus of food. How could they now eat the meals prepared by Draupadi? Therefore, the sage with his party, beat a hasty retreat without ever bothering Draupadi any more.

Life in Exile 3

Days passed by. Many sages and saints reached the dwelling place of Pandavas for talks and discussion on various aspects of Yoga and Scriptures. Topics like duties of householders, aim in life, and spiritual practices were also brought up. Group chanting of verses from Vedas and Upanishads were organized.

It was getting obvious to the five brothers and Sri Krishna that Duryodhana and Shakuni would never return them their share of land and kingdom. It was futile to expect change of heart. War would be the last solution; prepared they must be for such eventuality.

Story of Arjuna 3

Therefore, to increase their power and capabilities, it was decided to send Arjuna to the kingdom of Himalayas and heaven to bring special divine missiles from gods. Moreover, Arjuna could learn a few more skills from them.

On one auspicious day, Arjuna left for his mission. His first destination was Mount Kailash in the heights of Himalayas, abode of Lord Shiva. One day he encountered a beautiful deer freely jumping here and there. He shot an arrow at the deer to hunt it down. At the same time another arrow from opposite direction hit the deer. Arjuna saw a local tribesman opposite him with bow and arrow in his hand. The deer lay dead with two arrows in his chest. It was undecided as to whose arrow had killed the deer. It was essential to establish one's right over the kill. Both Arjuna and the tribesman staked their claim.

A bitter fight ensued. After their arrows were exhausted, they were engaged in wrestling. The apparently weak tribesman brought Arjuna to his wit's end. No one was willing to relent. Arjuna was surprised to find his inability to defeat even a simple tribesman. He, therefore, requested the tribesman to reveal his true identity. Arjuna said, "O brave fighter, you must not be what you appear, for it impossible for any one to compete with me in the game of archery."

And, yes, indeed, the tribesman was none other than Lord Shiva himself! Pleased with Arjuna. Shiva appeared before him in Divine form and as an act of blessing gave Arjuna his most powerful divine missile Pashupat that was to prove very useful to Pandavas in the war of Mahabharata.

From there Arjuna went to Indra-loka, kingdom of Indra, Heaven, through beautiful provinces of Moon, Stars, and Planets. In fact, the king of god Indra was his father, as Mother Kunti had obtained Arjuna from Indra through her yogic powers.

After welcoming Arjuna to that beautiful place, Indra asked him the purpose of his visit. Arjuna narrated about the evil designs of Duryodhana and Shakuni and requested him to teach him special skills in warfare. Indra was pleased with Arjuna and requested him to stay in the heaven for a few days more.

Besides archery and other martial arts, here Arjuna learnt music and dance from Urvashi, the most beautiful celestial nymph. She fell in love with Arjuna, but Arjuna had no such feelings towards her, his teacher she was. Thus, disappointed in her love, Urvashi sent a curse to Arjuna that he would become eunuch for one year. This curse later was to prove beneficial to Arjuna during his exile to stay incognito for one year.

[More Suffering for Draupadi](#)

From Dvaita forest Pandavas returned to Kamyak forest. Arjuna returned from heaven to stay with his brothers.

One day when all the five Pandavas had gone for hunting and Draupadi was alone in the cottage, King Jayadratha of Sindhu province (brother-in-law of

Duryodhana) happened to pass by that side. He saw beautiful and attractive Draupadi all alone. Lust made him blind and he forcefully tried to abduct her. Draupadi cried for help. Pandavas were returning from the forest and heard her cry of help. They saw the evil Jayadratha attempting to abduct Draupadi away in his chariot.

Soon Pandavas overpowered this mean person, and the angry Bhima was about to kill him for his misdemeanor. However, Yudhishthira intervened and said, "O Bhima, I understand your rage at this lowly Jayadratha, but still I would pardon him for he is our brother in law. If you kill him our cousin sister Dushala (sister of Duryodhana) will become widow."

One wonders at the righteousness (or foolishness!) of Yudhishthira when even a person related to Duryodhana and engaged in ungainly act is granted pardon. Bhima let Jayadratha go, but Arjuna vowed to kill him in the battle-field.

Story of Yudhishthira

Second episode depicting the soft - righteous or peculiar - nature of Yudhishthira:

Once Duryodhana and his army men reached Kamyak forest to see for themselves the ill fated life and hardships of Pandavas. They halted at a nearby lake where a group of Gandharvas - musicians from heaven - and their consorts were taking bath. Chitrasen was their leader. Duryodhana started misbehaving with them on the false euphoria of having many army personnel with him. But the Gandharvas used his divine powers to render Duryodhana and his army helpless. Duryodhana was defeated and was intensely ashamed of his poor defeat.

Chitrasen wanted to teach Duryodhana a lesson so he fastened him was about to beat him up when Pandavas happened to pas by that side. Seeing the poor condition of his brother, Yudhishthira advised Arjuna and Bhima to free Duryodhana who was in the clutches of the Gandharvas. Both the brothers protested that Yudhishthira should be more practical and use his common sense; how and why could they help the tormentor of Draupadi?

But Yudhishthira pacified them and said, "Our differences should not come in our duty to protect and our brothers in difficulty." Then Pandavas defeated Gandharvas and Duryodhana was set free. He ran away ashamed of himself.

Story of Jarasangha

Jarasangha was the cruel king of Maghadha State. He had planned a sacrificial ritual where he was to sacrifice one hundred and eight human beings from royal families. Thus far he had conquered and jailed one hundred such kings and princes.

Sri Krishna knew about this cruelty and inhuman tendencies of king Jarasangha. Many a message was sent to him through the wives of such imprisoned princes and kings. Sri Krishna planned to release these jailed inmates. During the period of forest exile he took Bhima to the kingdom of Jarasangha and asked Bhima to challenge Jarasangha for a wrestling duet. As was customary, Jarasangha accepted the challenge.

The powerful Jarasangha was not to die easily. He had a Tantric power obtained through rigorous sadhana to heal himself even if any part of his body was detached! But there was one flaw; the detached part must remain on the same side of the body. For instance, if right hand is broken it will get attached to his body again if it lies on the same side! Sri Krishna knew this.

The fight between Jarasangha and Bhima was intense, and nobody seemed to come victorious. Bhima was puzzled, what should he do now! He looked at Sri Krishna for advice, and Sri Krishna at that moment took a small twig and broke it into two. BUT he threw the two broken parts in opposite direction, crossed. Bhima understood. In one peculiar position, Bhima caught hold of the leg of Jarasangha and tore him into two. Quickly he threw two parts of Jarasangha's body in opposite direction. Thus came the end of demon king.

The kings and princes in his captivity were released and as an act of gratitude promised Sri Krishna to fight or support him and Pandavas in case of necessity. That necessity arose later, and all these kings decided to side with Pandavas in that war of Mahabharata.

Life In Exile 4

Days passed by, Pandavas were almost coming to the end of their twelve year period of exile. One more year of exile incognito remained. Once sage Dhaumya proceeded to tell them the story of Savitri that represented power of chaste and loyal wife.

Story of Satyavan and Savitri

Savitri was the beautiful and intelligent daughter of the king Ashwamati. When she attained her youth, the princess decided to select husband for herself. The king gave his permission. Savitri frequented many states and interviewed many princes, but a youth from pious family and meager means caught her attention and she gave him her heart. His name was Satyavan. The father did not object, but sage Narada warned the king and Savitri not to marry Satyavan as he was to die a premature death on such and such day. But the princess was firm in her resolve. "Come what may, I have decide to marry him, and I won't change my decision now", she said.

It was improper for an Aryan lady to think of somebody else once she had made up her mind to wed someone. They were soon married, and lived happily for some time. Savitri had left her father's palace to live with her in-law's in the forest house. Satyavan worked and Savitri looked after his needs.

On the fateful day when sage Narada had indicated Satyavan's death, Savitri performed special worship and meditated for some extra period of time. the couple went o forest as usual, Satyavan was not aware of his impending death.

After the morning labour they together took afternoon meals and Satyavan dozed off in the lap of her wife Savitri. Soon she saw the cruel hand of Death approaching her husband. Yamaraj - God of Death - himself had come to take away Satyavan's life-force!

Savitri protested and pleaded, but in vain. Death said, "O Savitri, your pleas do not affect me. You know everyone has to die at the destined hour. That time has come for Satyavan. Do not obstruct my way for I cannot change the

hour and mode of death of anyone. Let me do my duty."

But Savitri was not to be put off. She followed Death and told him about her love for Satyavan. She told Yamaraj about the duty of Aryan lady to follow her husband in joy and sorrow, life and death. She would follow her husband in heaven or hell!

Thus all efforts of Yamaraj were futile to dissuade Savitri to follow him and turn back. Without any food or water, she continued to follow her husband for miles together. Yamaraj told her about the meaning of death and purpose of life and found Savitri intelligent and loyal to her husband. She was indeed Sati! Her love and devotion to Satyavan was pure, selfless, and true.

Yamaraj was pleased and offered Savitri two boons and return back to her home. Savitri first asked for the health and prosperity of her father-in-law. For the second boon, cleverly Savitri asked that she be blessed with hundred sons! When Yamaraj unwittingly granted the boon, Savitri was pleased and insisted that Death should release her husband now for without him how could she bear even one son! Even in dream she could not think of marrying other man. Yamaraj was trapped in his own words, and liberated the soul of Satyavan. Thus even Death is defeated by the chaste and noble wife.

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Many more stories were told, of Nala and Damayanti, Rama and Sita, and the Sati. All these pious and noble ladies suffered innumerable hardships but their love for the husband was never diminished. The emphasis on chaste and pure life was always seen in Indian epics from ancient times. Sita, Sati, Savitri, and Damayanti are household names in India that bring out adoration, respect, and noble thoughts due to purity of their character.

The Last Year In Exile

Living Incognito

Thus twelve year period of exile was about to end. Pandavas decided to pass the last additional (thirteenth) year incognito, as decreed, in the capital city of the King Virata. For this purpose, lest they should be detected, Pandavas

disguised themselves as follows:

Yudhisthira -- As he was well versed with both the scriptures and skills of dice, rules and functioning of royal court, Yudhisthira decided to serve the king in the capacity of his adviser and priest. He assumed the name as Kankanbhata.

Bhima - His mighty and huge body required much food to satisfy his appetite. Therefore, Bhima decided to work in the Royal kitchen as the chief cook assuming the name of Ballava.

Arjuna - Arjuna was destined to pass one year as eunuch (thanks to the curse of Urvashi of Heaven). Therefore, it was decided that he teach dance and music to the princess Uttara in the guise of eunuch assuming the name Brihnnala.

Nakul became Granthic, the caretaker and guard to the horse stable as he was expert in the training and treatment of horses.

Sahadeva was in charge of cow-sheds and was called as Tantipal.

Draupadi was appointed as the chief maid-servant to the queen. She was to be known as Sairandhri.

Thus, separately, without letting others know that they were related, all the Pandavas entered into the service of the King Virata in the hope that the agents of Kauravas would not be able to spot them and inform Duryodhana about their hide out.

Story of Keechaka

Keechaka was the brother-in-law of King Virata and he was also the commandar of the King's army. [The son of the King was Utar and his daughter's name was Uttara. Arjuna in the disguise of Brihanala was teaching the king's daughter Uttara. And when the Kauravas attack King Virata, later, it is Brihanala and the coward Prince Utar who save the Kingdom.] Keechaka was powerful and lustful. He was attracted towards the beauty and youthfulness of Draupadi ('Sairandhri'), the maid-servant of his mother.

He started making passes at her and instructed his attendants to tell Draupadi to bring food and drinks to his room.

Draupadi was aware of his evil nature. Secretly she told the powerful Bhima about Keechaka and his overtures. The angered Bhima told her to accept Keechaka's invitation to go his room that night. Keechaka was blinded with lust and drinks. He waited that night for Draupadi to come to his room. But instead Bhima went with the glass of milk for Keechaka dressed in lady's attire like Draupadi!

The ensuing fight between Bhima and Keechaka was very intense as both were equally powerful. Bhima in the end prevailed and Keechaka was killed.

King Virata came to know all about the sad end to his ignoble brother-in-law. He was particularly displeased with him because he tried to take undue advantage of a maid. Death of such a disgraceful person, in fact, did not hurt the king in any way. He kept the matter within himself by announcing that his Keechaka would be away from the capital for a few months. In fact, King Virata fought on the side of Pandavas in the war.

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and Damayanti are household names in India that bring out adoration, respect, and noble thoughts due to purity of their character.

War Of Kurukshetra

Preparation of War

The inevitability of war left both Kauravas and Pandavas to chalk out their respective strategies and assess the strength and weaknesses of their opponents. While Arjuna was the best archer on Pandavas side Karna was no less a warrior on Kauravas side. To the extent some one rated him greater than even Arjuna! This particular fact caused a great concern in the heart of mother Kunti.

The story of Karna 3

To find a way out Indra foster father of Arjuna, and king of heaven, decided to rob Karna of his protective kavacha and kundalas given to him by his father, the Sun God. It was a very well known fact that Karna was the most generous person on the earth, he would not disappoint any one who begged anything of him.

Indra disguised as a Brahmin beggar, therefore, came to Karna and requested him for a favour. Without a moment's hesitation, Karna said, "O respectful Brahmin, you have come at the opportune time. I have just finished my worship and whosoever asks me any thing at this hour his wish is granted."

"Give me, O generous Karna, your *kavacha and kundala*, if you can!," said the Indra. Karna without any hesitation tore out the his natural protective armour and handed over to the God Indra. This rendered Karna essentially weak.

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So also, Mother Kunti approached her eldest son Karna. Karna was till now unaware that Kunti was his real mother. With a heavy heart, Kunti begged and pleaded for Arjuna's life dissuading Karna from fighting the war. During this encounter, which is very touching in the original text, Karna comes to know about his birth, how Kunti deserted him at the mercy of river waters. And

Sun God was in fact his father.

Kunti was willing to announce him as her son now, and offered him the throne of Hastinapur if he decided to fight on the side of his brothers, Pandavas! But Karna had declared his loyalty to Duryodhana. He politely declined mother Kunti's offer and said, "O mother, I promise you one thing; in any event you shall have your five sons alive. If Arjuna dies I shall be the fifth, otherwise there would be no change in your life."

The War of Mahabharata

Rules and regulations were laid down for this Dharma-Yuddha, war of righteousness. War would be fought from dawn to dusk. Injured and helpless who has lost his weapon would not be attacked. Fight would be between equals, a charioteer would engage the other charioteer only and not pedestrian soldier. No one should attack anyone from behind. At sunset everyone would return to his respective camp. The injured would be treated by the physicians. The fellow from one camp would be allowed to visit other camp without hesitation.

On the side of Kauravas Bhishma was to lead the front. Besides, Dronacharya, Duryodhana, Jayadratha, and many more would fight against Pandavas. Karna would be out of picture till Bhishma was alive and leading the Kauravas.

On Pandavas side Sri Krishna became the charioteer of Arjuna. Besides five brothers, king Virata, Abhimanyu - son of Arjuna --, Ghatotkacha - son of Bhima from Hidambi, brother of Draupadi, and many more joined the forces.

Eighteen Days of Devastation

The First Day

The fateful day, probably the month of December, dawned. Battle lines were drawn. The two sides were arrayed against each other. Sri Krishna was the

charioteer of Arjuna. He had decided not to fight or lift any weapon, but he would guide Arjuna and Pandavas with his wisdom and useful tips and hints.

Conches and trumpets were blown. The horses and chariots were ready, elephants decorated. Arrows and javelins were sharpened, clubs and maces flashed with terrifying power.

Duryodhana reached near the chariot of Bhishma and told him about the powerful generals on his side. Bhishma appealed to all the warriors to fight to the end, for death in this great war, on the battlefield, guaranteed liberation and attainment to the joys of Heaven.

Preparation For War?

Exile Comes To The End

Thus ended the exile of Pandavas. They could successfully fulfill all the conditions of banishment. Duryodhana and Shakuni had no excuse now, but to offer Pandavas their due portion of kingdom. But greed and hatred ruled the heart of Kauravas. Their rule extended almost all over north India, a vast expanse of power and possession. To part with a part of land and wealth was not acceptable to Duryodhana, as is the case with almost every ruler! Therefore, Shakuni insisted and Duryodhana concurred not to anything to Pandavas.

As such Kauravas were least afraid of five Pandavas, there was no army to support them in war. Kauravas were sure to win even if Arjuna and Bhima convinced Yudhisthira for war. Here Bhima and Arjuna knew how ungrateful Duryodhana and Shakuni could be, they had anticipated that Duryodhana would never agree to give Pandavas their rightful kingdom. They told Yudhisthira to prepare for war, indeed it was the only option left to regain their glory and wealth.

Accordingly Arjuna was sent to Dwaraka to seek advice and help from Sri Krishna. Moreover, there were one hundred kings who were obliged by Sri Krishna in their release from the jail of demon king Jarasangha.

Preparation For War?

When Arjuna reached Dwaraka, he found to his surprise Duryodhana was also camping to seek help from Sri Krishna. His purpose was to ask for Sri Krishna's army to fight on his side. Next day, Duryodhana reached the palace of Sri Krishna and was told to wait for a while as Sri Krishna was asleep. Soon Arjuna also went. Duryodhana took his seat at the head of the Lord, while Arjuna sat at the holy feet. In a while Sri Krishna opened his eyes to see his dear friend and disciple at his feet. Said the lord, "O Arjuna, what brings you here so early in the morning?"

But Duryodhana could not wait, he intervened and said, "O Krishna, I have come before Arjuna. Therefore, please speak to me first."

The lord jested, "But I saw Arjuna first. Let him talk to me first."

But the sober Arjuna himself told the lord, "No, Duryodhana is right. He has come before me. Let him put forward his purpose of visit."

Thus given chance, Duryodhana asked of Sri Krishna to fight on his side. Sri Krishna said, "But Duryodhana I have vowed not to pick up arms in this war. But army can be on your side. Decide what do you want, me or my army."

The foolish Duryodhana thought : "There is no use of Sri Krishna if he is not fighting, I will ask for his huge army." Thus all army of Sri Krishna went to the side of Kauravas. Arjuna was pleased for all Pandavas wanted was gracious lord on their side. He thanked Duryodhana for his choice.

Diplomacy fails

Yudhisthira sent message to Dhritarashtra to give them half of the kingdom which was their right. Dhritarashtra asked Duryodhana to consider the demand, but proud and indiscreet Duryodhana refused to part with any portion of his kingdom.

Yudhisthira then requested to grant to give them five villages, one each to five Pandavas. But still Duryodhana refused.

Thus the clouds of war loomed large as Bhima and Arjuna wanted to take their due even by force.

Sri Krishna was informed and requested to settle the matter. As a last appeal Sri Krishna accepted to act as their ambassador. He went to the court of Dhritarashtra and pleaded with the king to see reason. "Be just, O king", said Sri Krishna, "Save the kingdom from annihilation. Your and Duryodhana's irresponsible behavior would bring calamity to whole race. Pandavas must be given their right. Where has your sense of justice gone? Control your foolish son, otherwise this kingdom will see only widows as its inhabitants!"

But the helpless king was overpowered with his love for his son. he left the decision to Duryodhana. Duryodhana replied, "O Krishna, why are you wasting your time. what to talk of half kingdom, I will not part with even that much of land that a needle could hold on its tip!"

Sri Krishna Tells The Gita

Birth of the Gita

To everyone's surprise, in this war for righteousness, in the beginning Arjuna, the great and brave warrior, finds himself suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling of mental depression, grief, and fear when he realizes that he has to fight with his close relatives - brothers, uncles, and Teachers - present as his enemies. Arjuna is greatly disturbed about the outcome of the war; destruction and death that was sure to follow. He thought it 'prudent' to retire to forest rather than kill his own near and dear ones.

It is such a dramatic setting that we get the start to Bhagavad-Gita. The brave warrior Arjuna, with Lord Krishna as his charioteer, is standing between the two arrayed armies ready to start the battle, and then Arjuna lays down his arms to retire at the back of his chariot! Trembling with nervousness and anxiety, unable to lift his mighty bow -Gandiva - he pleads to escape from the consequences of the war. His emotions of love for the near ones, his concepts of duty and Dharma, all appear to be confusing to himself. He is

unable to determine the correct approach in this piquant situation of grave urgency and emergency.

Therefore he turns to Sri Krishna, his friend, his teacher, and his all: "How can I kill them? Will it not be proper to give up this whole kingdom, smacking of blood of my own relatives, and retire to forest in peace? O Krishna, I am unable to decide my further plan of action. I surrender myself at your holy feet. O Lord, please guide me through this difficult uncertainty as I am your disciple and you are my Teacher."

Sri Krishna Tells The Gita

Thus, when Arjuna surrenders himself at the feet of the Lord, Sri Krishna says, "O Brave one, why this infatuation at this hour! Why have you given yourself to this unmanliness and cowardice? Do not think that by your high talk of 'renunciation and retiring to forest' people would adore you and call you noble and intelligent. On the contrary, for centuries to come, blame would be put on you for running away from the battle field. Generation after generation, people would laugh at you and make fun of your unmanly flight."

Srimad Bhagavad-Gita, Chapter II, verse 2 and 3:

"In such a crisis, whence comes upon thee, O Arjuna, this dejection, un-Aryan-like, disgraceful, and contrary to the attainment of heaven?"

"Yield not to unmanliness, O son of Kunti! Ill doth it become thee. Cast off this mean faint-heartedness and arise, O scorcher of thine enemies."

On listening to this rebuke, Arjuna steadies himself, and further dialogue between Lord Krishna and Arjuna follows in subsequent chapters. Thus the Gita consists of eighteen - 18 - chapters and a total of 700 verses contained in them. (In fact, Gita consists of a dialogue between our lower self and the Higher Self.)

Arjuna puts many question about the goal in life, aim of human birth, about the nature of Duty and Work, about the Self - Atman - and about the four Yogas viz. Jnana-Yoga, Raja-Yoga, Karma-Yoga, and Bhakti-Yoga.

Chapters II through IX deal with Karma-Yoga - Yoga of selfless action - vis-a-vis Jnana-Yoga. Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna to fight the war without thinking of the consequences. "Your duty is, and you have right only, to fight; you do not have control over the outcome", says the Lord. The duty of a person as a Karma Yogi is to do the allotted work as worship without expecting any definite fruits thereof. Selfless work done with full heart and perfection is the best way for the worldly person to realize his inner Self. In fact efficiency in work itself is a Yoga!

Those persons should embrace the life of renunciation (monasticism) in whom impressions of the past lives have created such attraction. But other persons who have no such tendency, persons in whom the past impressions of sense enjoyment persist, such aspirants - sadhakas - are not yet fit to take to life of sanyasins. Such persons actually, after some progress on the path of total renunciation -sanyasa, may get entangled in a tamasic inactivity - lazy life of hypocrisy. Such people do more harm than good to the cause of spirituality, religion, and social progress.

For such people, which are in majority at a given point of time, Sri Krishna advocates Nishkam Karma Yoga - Yoga of selfless action - as the ideal path to realize the Truth. Allotted work done without motives, the work done without expecting or thinking about its result, purifies the mind that makes the person gradually fit to see the value of reason and benefit of renouncing the work itself!. Unless all mental desires and tendencies to enjoy sense pleasures are controlled and rooted out, a person does not become fit for final stage of Liberation. Yoga makes the person fit through action, devotion, contemplation, meditation , and discrimination to sharpen his reason, develop intuitive power of acquiring knowledge, and to transcend the mind itself!

Theory of Incarnation

In chapter IV, verse 7 and 8, Sri Krishna says:

"Arjuna, whenever there is decline of righteousness, and unrighteousness is in the ascendant, then I body Myself forth,"

"For the protection of the virtuous, for the destruction of evil-doers, and for establishing Dharma (righteousness) on a firm footing, I am born from age to age."

This concept of Divine Incarnation - Avatar - is at the very root of religiosity prevalent all over India. This hope that the Lord will come to the help and rescue of His devotees, and corrupt and greedy would be punished; that the Truth alone would prevail in the end and not the untruth, has had kept the flame of spirituality burning through the dark ages of foreign aggression and servitude. One should understand that Dharma here means attempting to seek our own higher self. From animal tendencies to Divine plane through human growth, this is the journey. Materialism, excessive involvement in sense enjoyment, and identification of ourselves as body-mind complex means 'unrighteousness is in the ascendant'. This excess involvement in senses means evil, greed, and corruption. Sri Krishna shows us the path: How to rise above these senses and transcend them to realize our higher state of consciousness - Atman.

Gradually the discussion centres around the real nature of man and paths to seek the same. Says Sri Krishna, "O Arjuna, you are not this body, you are not this mind; you are ever pure, unchanging eternal Self, Atman. This Atman is covered with delusion/illusion of ignorance and comes to identify itself as body-mind complex. Therefore, when you say 'you will kill them, or get killed by them, you are actually telling a lie. The Atman is never killed, nor does it kill anybody."

This body is like worn out clothes which the Atman changes as we change our old garments!

Then Sri Krishna goes on elaborating the ways to realize self as Self by undertaking various spiritual disciplines. By proper control of senses, by way of renunciation and discrimination, and by constant practice it is possible to steady and control the mind and realize the higher Reality. The same end can be reached by Yoga of action and Yoga of devotion.

In chapter XI there is a wonderful description of Lord Krishna revealing Himself to Arjuna as "Virat" - all pervading Reality. This Universal or Cosmic Form of Sri Krishna relates to three aspects of 1) shristi - creation, 2) sthiti - maintenance, and 3) vinash - destruction of all the worlds. The terrifying aspect of this Self makes Arjuna shudder with fear, and hence the Lord also reveals His most beautiful form that is full of bliss, beatitude, and serenity.

Chapter XII lays stress on the path of devotion - Bhakti Yoga - and emphasizes qualifications and virtues of a Bhakta.

Thus the Gita is a summary of all knowledge contained in the Vedas and Upanishads. The Gita is translated in many languages including the English. Many learned scholars and spiritually illumined souls have written commentaries on this Universal Gospel of Perennial Philosophy. Depending upon the priority and emphasis, some advocate Jnana-Yoga as the essence of Gita, while majority of the people thinks that the Gita expounds doctrine of Karma Yoga at its best.

In recent times Swami Vivekananda has commented that the Gita exhorts everyone of us to arise, awake, and fight our unmanliness so that we emerge as active and strong Karma Yogis. We become true spiritual seekers to realize our true nature as Atman and thereby do immense good to the world.

In the last chapter XVIII, Sri Krishna asks Arjuna, "Are your doubts cleared? O Arjuna are you freed from the delusory ideas regarding your true nature?"

And the grateful Arjuna, full of bliss with recent realization of the true knowledge declares:

"Yes, my lord. My ignorance has vanished. Destroyed is my delusion, and I have gained my memory through Thy Grace. O steadfast, I am firm; my doubts are gone. Thy will be done."

The War Continues

On the second day Arjuna took command of his army and arranged his men in a special format which gave little scope to Kauravas army to advance and attack the Pandavas. Bhisma had killed Uttar son of king Virata. Shalya had managed to kill Shweta. Pandavas saw great loss of their men. Multitudes of soldiers on both sides were killed.

Sri Krishna Breaks His Vow

Third day.

Bhishma arranged his army in Eagle's format and Pandavas opted for semi-lunar style to counter Kauravas offensive. Bhima attacked Duryodhana with an arrow that made him unconscious, but he was quickly shifted to a safer place. Dronacharya and others came to his rescue. Duryodhana was not happy with Bhishma's way of commanding his army and he was seen to insult old grandsire now and then. Bhishma threatened to quit as the chief, but others persuaded him to remain in the lead.

Now, the ferocious Bhishma attacked Pandavas with force unheard of. Pandavas army was torn apart at tens and hundreds places. Soldiers started running here and there. Scores of them died on the battle-field in their futile attempt to attack or escape the mighty Bhishma.

Sri Krishna told Arjuna to protect his men by attacking the leader Bhishma. There was no other way but to remove Bhishma if Pandavas had to win the war. Everyone intently watched this terrifying battle between the old and the young great warrior.

Arjuna was faltering, many a arrow from Bhishma hit Arjuna. He was bleeding profusely. Sri Krishna thought, "If this continues defeat of Pandavas is not far away." Therefore, in a bid to thwart the onslaught of Bhishma, Sri Krishna lifted the nearby wheel of a broken chariot and ran towards Bhishma as if to put an end to his life! The vow that Sri Krishna would not take to arms was thus broken!

Seeing the Lord Himself rushing towards him, Bhishma dropped his weapons. With tears flowing from his eyes Bhishma spoke thus, "O Keshava, O Merciful, how lucky am I that the Lord of Universe Himself has decided to liberate this ordinary Bhishma from the snares of worldliness. O Madhava, come, be quick, let me die at your hands. Who can be happier and lucky than me to get such an wonderful and rare opportunity."

Sri Krishna was reminded of his vow. He threw away the wheel and retreated back to his chariot. For his Bhakta - devotee - the Lord had broken his vow!

Soon the sunset was in sight. The battle for the day ended. The soldiers returned to their camp.

Fourth day to Tenth Day

The fourth day of the war saw Bhishma in great mood of valour and bravery. The Pandava army was in great disarray due to unimaginable destruction inflicted by the Kaurava Army under the leadership of Bhishma. Even Bhima was hurt at the hands of Duryodhana. This continued for five days more with no victory in sight for either army. And hence the 'think-tank' of Pandavas met and decided to put an end to Bhishma's supremacy somehow. Bhishma although old, was proving a great hurdle in the victory of Pandavas. Arjuna was not ready to fight with him with full vigour. Therefore, it was suggested to bring Shikhandi in picture. As Bhishma had vowed not fight with that eunuch, Arjuna could hit the old man under the cover. It was so decided.

The Great Bhishma Collapses

The battle of tenth day began. Shikhandi was in the front attacking Bhishma. Bhishma however, said, "Get away, O Shikhandi, I do not want to fight with you." Thus the mighty and powerful Bhishma laid down his arms. The arrows from Arjuna's Gandiva penetrated his body. Bhishma fell down. There were so many arrows in his body that when he fell down he was as if lying on the bed of arrows! His head was hanging, which Arjuna supported by three arrows under the head and neck. As is well known Bhishma had the boon to give up his body as and when he decided. The sun was in southern hemisphere, this time. and it was not very auspicious to give up body in this phase of sun movement. Therefore, Bhishma said to Sri Krishna, "O Vallabha, Please take me far off corner of the battle ground after about a fortnight when enters to move in northern hemisphere I would give up the body." Thus was arranged a safe and peaceful shelter for this grand old Kuru.

Sri Krishna suggested Yudhisthira to take lessons on politics, diplomacy, duties of a king, economics, and many other related subjects from dying Bhishma. Accordingly every day after the day's battle was over, Yudhisthira and others would visit Bhishma and take lessons on various topics of art and culture at his holy feet. This is a very thought provoking chapter of Mahabharata.

Then enters the character of mighty and skillful Karna as Bhishma is no more in the lead. Dronacharya next becomes the commander of Kauravas army. The Teacher of Pandavas and Kauravas was equally difficult to dislodge as was Bhishma.

Yudhishthira Tells a Lie!

After the fall of Bhishma, the Kauravas felt great void in their heart, and felt that their strength would be inadequate to face and defeat Arjuna and Sri Krishna combine unless Karna takes up the reigns of leading the Army. However, when approached, Karna declined to take the responsibility saying, "Guru Drona will be the ideal choice as the Chief Leader for Kaurava Army." Thus from 11th to 15th day Acharya Drona took the command in his hand and caused great destruction to Pandava Army. Sri Krishna and Arjuna became nervous and were worried about the outcome. Drona was a great warrior with supreme expertise in the game of war and all the instruments of war. It was not possible for anyone to defeat him.

Meanwhile Sri Krishna reminded Bhima about his powerful son Ghatotkacha born of demon wife Hidimbi! Ghatotkacha had special supernatural powers of getting invisible, smaller or larger in size, etc. at will. Sri Krishna suggested Pandavas to call this son of Bhima who would wreck havoc in Kaurava army and Karna would be forced to use his Special Vaasavi Astra on him instead of Arjuna.

Accordingly Bhima wished Ghatotkacha to come to Kurukshetra and indeed, as soon as his father wished, as promised by him, this great and powerful warrior was there in front of Bhima and Sri Krishna. He was told to fight and annihilate the Kauravas army next day to which he gladly agreed. Next day the battle began. Karna was in search of Arjuna, but Ghatotkacha obstructed his path. Moreover, Ghatotkacha vomited fire and threw large quantity of boulders and sand on Kauravas. There was total chaos in Kauravas camp. Soldiers were running here and there. Scores of their army men were killed.

Duryodhana now requested Karna to kill this demon otherwise, he said, "Nobody will be alive." Reluctantly Karna had to use 'his one time use' Vaasavi

Astra on Ghatotkacha instead of Arjuna. Thus, Ghatotkacha died but saved the life of Arjuna.

Death of Abhimanyu

The death of many stalwarts put Duryodhana in a fix. Next day he arranged his army in an impregnable wheel format known as "Chakra Formation". On the side of Pandavas only Abhimanyu, son of Arjuna was capable of penetrating this format; but he did not know how to come out of it. This teenage lad, however, pleaded with his father and uncles to allow him to enter the enemy ranks and then all of Pandavas would come to help him inside.

Accordingly, seeking blessings of Sri Krishna, Abhimanyu led small army and entered the Chakra formation. Kauravas allowed him to enter but soon sealed off the entry of Arjuna and company. Duryodhana, Dushasana, Jayadratha, and many more Kauravas warriors attacked the lone but brave Abhimanyu who fought gallantly all alone against them all.

Arjuna and others were anxious to reach near him but were obstructed by a large force of Kauravas army men. Sri Krishna was also worried.

Soon inside the circle, Abhimanyu lost his bow, his chariot was broken, and he was without any weapon to defend himself. Standing on the ground without losing his courage, this brave man continued to fight with whatever makeshift weapon he could lay hands on. His whole body was inflicted with wounds from sharp arrows and javelins. Bleeding and dazed at last he fell on the ground.

Kripacharya advised other Kauravas to halt further attacks on the boy as he was helpless and without any weapon. But Jayadratha neglected this sane advice. Without mercy and consideration for the helpless state of Abhimanyu Jayadratha kicked him with his foot and killed him with his sword.

The news of brave Abhimanyu's death spread all over. Kauravas were shouting like victors and Pandavas were angered like cornered lions. Arjuna was deeply grieved and tears rolled down his eyes. His heart however was filled with anger and revenge. He decided to kill Jayadratha in the next chance. The

evening halted the battle for the day. Arjuna vowed to kill Jayadratha by evening next day or else give his body up in the burning flames.

End of Jayadratha

Next day the terrified Jayadratha sought protection from Duryodhana pleading, "O Duryodhana, Arjuna and Pandavas would apply all their skills and power to succeed in killing me. How should I protect myself against his sharp lethal arrows? I am afraid I would not live beyond sunset today." Reassuring him Duryodhana said, "O my brother-in-law, how can you think that we would leave any stone unturned to protect you. We would all see that Arjuna does not succeed in his pledge and would himself as vowed will die in flames. Rest assured, O Jayadratha, nothing bad will come to your fate."

All the warriors on Kaurava side surrounded Jayadratha's chariot and prevented anyone approaching him. Jayadratha was almost invisible! Arjuna and Bhima, Yudhisthira and others tried to reach near him but were obstructed by one and all. Exchange of arrows filled the sky. Many soldiers lost their lives. It was almost impossible to attack Jayadratha.

Morning turned to noon, noon into afternoon. There was a faint pal of gloom in Pandavas heart while Kauravas appeared to rejoice.

And at that time, in the hours of approaching dusk, the sky became dark; stars were visible on the horizon. Shouts of victory to Duryodhana were heard while everyone on the side of Pandavas thought that Arjuna would have to keep his vow and die! For everyone thought that sun had set.

Jayadratha dancing with joy lifted himself up to see the darkness of evening sky. He thought he had now no fear from Arjuna. But the wonder of wonder was in stores! The skies were dark because of total eclipse of the sun on that day at that hour and not because it was evening! As Jayadratha was looking in merriment, the eclipse ended and the sun came out. The sun light was bright and then said Lord Sri Krishna:

"O Arjuna, look there is the sun and here this Jayadratha, What are you waiting for. It is still daytime, evening has not yet fallen. Kill Jayadratha."

And the sharp penetrating arrow left the Gandiva of Arjuna to take the head of Jayadratha far off in jungle into the lap of his father!

End of War

Death of Dronacharya: Yudhisthira tells a Lie

To defeat Dronacharya Sri Krishna plans a new gimmick. On the side of Pandavas there was an elephant by the name Ashwathama. This was the name of the son of Dronacharya also. Sri Krishna tells Yudhisthira to spread the rumour that Ashwathama is dead! In effect the elephant is killed and everyone shouts, "Ashwathama is dead, Ashwathama is dead!"

Dronacharya also hears these words and suspects his lone son is killed in the battle. Gloomy at the loss of his son he approaches Yudhisthira and asks, "O Yudhisthira, I know you never speak untruth, please tell me what has happened. Is Ashwathama really dead?"

With great effort Yudhisthira says, "Yes, Ashwathama is dead"; but adds in whisper, "I do not know whether he is a man or an elephant." Dronacharya in the din and bustle fails to hear the second half of the sentence and thinking that his loving son has died gives up the fight and is then killed.

Here Ashwathama, son of Dronacharya, learnt about the trick played by Sri Krishna and Yudhisthira in killing his father. He was furious and decided to kill Arjuna. Ashwathama after great austerities and tapas had procured the most effective 'Astra' weapon known as Brahmastra that never failed. When it was aimed at a particular person that person was sure to die. But it was useful only once! Ashwathama had decided to use this Astra on Arjuna. However, Ashwathama could not do anything because by that time his father had already died and Karna had already killed Ghatotkacha.

The Great Karna Dies

After Drona, Karna took over the charge of the Karna army, and soon declared either he would survive or Arjuna. The ferocious battle left more than half the soldiers dead. The destruction was raging its death-dance everywhere. Karna with his bow and arrow was sending men after men to the Death Valley. Pandavas were terrified. Sri Krishna was also worried and decided to put an end to this mighty eldest son of Kunti.

Next day he took the chariot of Arjuna to combat Karna's onslaught. Arrow after arrows tried to find weakness in each other's skill, but no; both Arjuna and Karna were found to be equal. Then a superior arrow hit Arjuna making him lose his poise. Other arrow followed when Sri Krishna showed his might and skill to avoid damage to Arjuna. The arrow missed Arjuna by four fingers because Sri Krishna had pushed the chariot four fingers in the ground!

Now comes the crucial factor of that curse of the Guru Parashurama to Karna. As is told previously, the sage Parashurama was displeased with Karna because he had become his disciple and learnt the archery in a disguise of a Brahmin boy. At that time the Guru had cursed him that at the crucial moment he would face difficulty on the battle field which put his life in jeopardy. That moment comes.

The wheel of Karna's chariot was jammed and his chariot tilts to one side. All the efforts were of no avail to bring it on the ground level. Karna could not fight the war with ease. Sri Krishna told Arjuna to take advantage of the situation and kill Karna. But Arjuna refuses to attack the enemy in distress. He sees Karna pleading to let him remove his jammed wheel. But Sri Krishna reminds Arjuna of the laughter of Karna at the pathetic condition of Draupadi in the royal court. 'Where had Karna's modesty and sense of justice gone then?' asks Sri Krishna. Thus reminded of the insult of Draupadi Arjuna sees no point to show leniency and kills Karna also.

A very great warrior, the greatest archer, and eldest son of Kunti dies thus siding towards Kauravas for the lost love of mother in the childhood. Sri Krishna respectfully performed the last rites on the body of Karna.

At last Duryodhana Dies

Thus one after the other all Kauravas were being killed. But Bhima was still not satisfied. He had vowed to kill Dushasana and Duryodhana. He had promised Draupadi that he would drink blood from the chest of Dushasana and would dress her hair with the blood from the thigh of Duryodhana. To that end, Bhima took permission of Yudhisthira and Sri Krishna and killed Dushasana in a brief fight.

But with Duryodhana the mace or club fight went on and on. It was fierce and terrifying. Both Bhima and Duryodhana were well built and adept in the skills of fighting. Bhima hit his opponent below the belt! Duryodhana thigh was broken and he was left there to die a slow and undignified death.

As already written, I do not want to justify Bhima's action of hitting on the prohibited area of the body. But I feel the misbehavior of Duryodhana with Draupadi could not have any other outcome.

EPILOGUE

In all, on Kauravas's side there were 1.1 million soldiers and 0.7 million on the side of Pandavas; total 1.8 million. The war lasted for 18 days. Except for Sri Krishna, five Pandavas, Draupadi and a few others everyone was killed in this Great War of Mahabharata. It was the worst human carnage ever witnessed on the earth. A race was almost totally annihilated. The story can go on, and indeed it goes on. But that I would tell you some other time.

After reigning supreme for many years the five brothers accompanied by Draupadi started for Hialayas renouncing kingdom and all luxuries. A dog also accompanied Yudhisthira. On the way first Draupadi falls down dead. In response to the question of his brothers Yudhisthira said she fell victim to her special preference for Arjuna!

Next Nakul and Sahadeva died on the way. Yudhisthira said, "They were very proud of their looks and knowledge."

Next Arjuna fell down. He had succumbed to his pride about his mastery in archery.

Then Bhima also left the mortal body. Yudhisthira said to himself; "Bhima was excessively infatuated with his eating."

But the dog remained with Yudhisthira.

Soon they reached at the doors of Heaven. The lord of Heaven Indra appeared before Yudhisthira and said: "O noble one, welcome to the kingdom of Heavens. You are most righteous person ever lived on the earth, therefore we are pleased to welcome you. But there is one condition. This dog cannot be admitted to this holy place of heavens. You come alone and leave the dog behind."

To this Yudhisthira objected saying: "O Lord, I cannot leave this holy creature who has accompanied me in all trials and tribulations. Either you admit us both or else I do not need the safety and luxury of your Heaven."

On hearing Yudhisthira speak thus, the dog changed himself in the form of Dharma Itself and said: "O Yudhisthira the people in coming generations for time immemorial will praise and remember you as the most righteous person ever born. Come let us enjoy the heavenly bliss."

Finale

The Great epic which has come to a conclusion today, reflects our ups and down of emotion in public life, society and day to day life. Ultimately the virtues win over the evil. As an evil thought always tries to pervade, this epic clearly sends a signal, as how one should not behave in public life. The whole epic is so beautifully interwoven. This epic has given birth to Gitopadesh , an Internationally accepted philosophy of life on which still research is going on. This chapter just gives synopsis of interlinked episodes.

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