

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the twelfth part of the serial article, continuation from July 2024 newsletter.

The people were all excited, and then the resounding clang of Arjuna's bow startled them. The release of Gandiva's string would itself chill the hearts of people. At that very time a similarly terrific sound was heard emanating from the entrance gateway. All the contestants jumped up at the sound, and the spectators were goggle-eyed. A man strode forth after the sound and announced, "I can do exactly what Arjuna did. You all think he is great, but he is nobody. I can kill him at any time. I can do all he can and more." Then the challenger began to show off what he could do. Duryodhana sprang up immediately to champion the newcomer, whoever he was. He had been waiting for a fellow like this, someone to challenge Arjuna. While Arjuna had been performing, everybody applauded except Duryodhana's gang. They were simply unmoved, disdainful. At the start of the tournament, when Bhima and Duryodhana had been fighting, the princes had divided into gangs and cheered for their respective champions.

One person shouted, "Bhima is great." Another proclaimed, "No, not Bhima, we want the Kuru king Duryodhana." Like this the partial crowd rooted. Even some women joined in the shouting match. It became a divided house, two houses divided. Among the people there was division already.

It was Karna who had entered, matched the clamor of Arjuna's majestic bow, and caused Duryodhana to jump up. Then Karna with all eyes on him matched all that Arjuna had done. All the weapons and the *astras* and the magic - he did all the same things. Then Karna announced, "I am challenging Arjuna. Let him fight me today." Karna was angry for no known reason. His anger was because he was born. Arjuna did not even know who the guy was. Duryodhana was waiting for a person like Karna. Duryodhana was said to have been very fond of Karna. But he befriended Karna mostly because of his enmity toward Arjuna and because he had been looking for a person to go up against Arjuna. Arjuna was the one who made the difference between the Pandavas and the Dhartarashtras. Without Arjuna it would have been no problem for the Dhartarashtras. They

could be victorious just by outnumbering their foes, but to Arjuna numbers did not mean anything. To Arjuna it was all just a matter of what number of his unlimited arrows were required and any army was gone. He had that kind of destructive power.

Fired up, Arjuna heard the challenge from Karna and entered the arena to fight. He spoke up and said, "I should not fight against one whom I do not know, but you have asked for it. You come from nowhere, and you talk without speaking and you make no sense. All right, if you want to fight I will send you to that place where people go, people who talk when they are not asked to talk. Come on and fight."

Krpa, the original teacher of all the Pandavas, stood up and announced, "This is Arjuna; he is *kaunteya*, born of Kunti, he is a disciple of Drona." The duel was set, the fighters presented, and the rules told - the same customs as are seen today in the boxing ring. Krpa addressed the challenger, "Please, Sir, tell us your *kula*. Where are you from?"

Karna put his head down. He could not say anything. What could he say?" Kunti peered into the arena and saw Karna properly. She saw the *kavaca* and *kuṇḍala* of the sun god. Her words came back to her, "I will meet you one day, dear baby. I will know you by this *kuṇḍala* and *kavaca*." Overcome with her realization, Kunti fell down unconscious.

Duryodhana was up. He roared to the crowd, "This challenger need not be a Kshatriya. He need not be a prince or *rājā*. There are different types of kings, and I say he is a king. By birth in a royal family one may be a king, but by valor too one may be a king. By defeating an army and assuming power one can become a king. This challenger has already proved himself, and I want him to fight Arjuna. I declare him the king of Angadesha." Duryodhana worked to claim the stranger's friendship. He worked to control him. Duryodhana did not know what love was, he only knew what control was. Now, Karna was a naive fellow. I have never seen such a naive person. Karna fell for Duryodhana's gesture, because he was starving for some love, some claim, some name. He fell flat for Duryodhana and went and embraced him and thanked him excessively. "Now he is a king. Now let him fight," said Duryodhana.

To be continued...