

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the eighteenth part of the serial article, continuation from Jan 2025 edition.

Bakasura could not believe his eyes as he watched from the hillside. He hopped down the hill and charged at this upstart who was eating the food meant for him. He then thought, "It won't matter if this fellow eats something; I will eat him and it will all end up inside of me. It is all the same thing. If this guy wants to taste something I will just taste him." This was Bakasura's thinking.

Bakasura bounded up and caught sight of Bhima, "He is not just eating something, he is eating the cart. This guy is already huge." Then Bakasura started to make all these *rākṣasa* sounds and he said to Bhima, "Hey, what are you doing? I am going to eat you up now."

"Please, just a minute," said Bhima, "let me finish this snack. Please stop shouting, I am not done yet. Just wait. You can try to eat me up when I'm completely finished." Bakasura charged with his mace, and Bhima got up with a groan, "Oh, I ate too much. I do not feel much like fighting. My, that was good. Do you really want to fight?"

Nobody had ever talked to Bakasura like this, and this human certainly did not understand the consequences of his cavalier attitude. "Don't you know I am Bakasura? I will eat you."

"Oh, you are that Baka. You will eat me? Okay, try it," replied Bhima calmly. Looking about, Bhima reached over and uprooted a medium size tree. When Baka saw this human handle a tree like it was a matchstick he had to stop and think. But he was not concerned, he was a *rākṣasa* and he was made to fight. So he fought, and Bhima beat him to a pulp. With the tree Bhima turned Bakasura into a pile of flesh. Bhima put the dead body on the cart, harnessed the bullocks, and drove the cart back to the village. The village was in turmoil when they saw the cart. Usually they went and picked up the empty cart. The cart coming back now meant the *rākṣasa* would soon follow. But Bhima showed them that the pile in the cart was not leftover food, it was the leftovers of Bakasura. Bakasura was dead.

The villagers were incredulous. They thought Bhima had killed somebody else. Bhima lifted the pile and showed them the face of the *rākṣasa*, which he had saved, to convince them. The people looked at the gruesome pile and they looked at Bhima.

Bhima could not give his name because he was a survivor of the waxhouse fire. He said, "I am just a *gandharva*. This is not a big thing." The demons who lived and traveled with Bakasura heard what had happened, and they all came and confronted Bhima. They could not believe their leader was gone. Bhima showed them the remains and warned them that they would suffer the same fate if they did not wise up. He told them, "I don't want to see your faces in this forest. Don't show your face here." That was the last anyone saw of the demons who had terrorized the area.

Someone from the town said, "Hey, our hero looks like Bhima." He did indeed. Some of the suppressed ideas about the missing and presumed dead Pandavas surfaced in the village for some time. But the Pandavas just lived a simple life in Ekachakra until it was obvious it was time to get out. What happened was a Brahmana came and told a story. There were no newspapers. Some Brahmanas were wayfarers who would come to a village and be asked to share whatever news they had of things they had seen and heard as they traveled. That was how people in the villages and towns got their news.

The Brahmana informed them, "Do you know what? There is going to be a *svayamvara* in the Panchala kingdom. The princess Draupadi, who was born as a result of the great *yajña* that her father King Drupada performed, will choose a husband. She will garland one of those eligibles sitting there in hopeful rows." Did Draupadi hope Arjuna would be her husband? Just as in the Ramayana, for Sita's *svayamvara*, there was to be an archery contest to help the princess make up her mind. To win Sita, the great bow had to be lifted and strung. Here in the Mahabharata, the Panchala contest looked as though it was directed right at Arjuna. High on the ceiling of the royal auditorium in the Panchala palace a revolving target fish would be hung. A Kshatriya would have to hit the center of the eye of that spinning fish if he wanted to win Draupadi's hand. The archer had to aim at the

fish-eye by looking at the reflection in a container of water situated on the floor of the auditorium. It seems this test was set up in a way that only Arjuna could accomplish it. Who else could do it? It was not a surprise. Drupada's intention for performing the *yajña* that gave birth to his children had been to get Draupadi and give her to Arjuna. Drupada wanted Arjuna as a son-in-law so that Arjuna could teach Drona a lesson. That was all. It was all planned out. Therefore Drupada set up this test that only Arjuna could accomplish.

The time had come for the Pandavas to leave Ekachakra. Bhima had killed a dangerous *rākṣasa*, and the word would get around. It was not much of a stretch to guess that it was Bhima who had slain Baka and that the five fellows and an older woman might be the Pandavas. The Pandavas were Kshatriyas, they had *yajñopavīta*. They decided they would disappear into the Panchaladesha disguised as Brahmanas and then attend Draupadi's *svayamvara*. All they had to do was to put down their bows and arrows and other signs of military and to change their hairstyle to that worn by Brahmanas.

On the way to Panchaladesha they had to cross Ganga, and when they got to her banks they met a *gandharva*. The *gandharva* Chitraratha told them not to cross the river. He said, "This is my river. Do not come anywhere near. I will fight with you. I will use violence." Then the *gandharva* backed up his words with arrows.

Arjuna said, "The river and the mountainslopes and the ponds do not belong to anyone, they belong to all. This is not your river. Who do you think you are talking to? We can take care of ourselves. You have no right to say these things or to do anything to us. You may want to think twice about those arrows." Arjuna was ready. He fended off the *gandharva's* shots, proclaiming them as soft as cottonwool. "Do you want to see something?" teased Arjuna.

"What could a mortal show me?" asked Chitraratha. Arjuna picked out one of his *agni astras* and drew it and fired. The arrow, charged by its *mantra*, struck the chariot of the *gandharva* and turned it to ashes. The *gandharva* jumped out of the chariot just in time to avoid going up in flames along with it. Seeing the *agni*

astra and the unerring aim, Chitraratha knew Arjuna was no ordinary person.

When Arjuna asked, Chitraratha said, "I was called Angaraparna, the one the color of fire. Now I am Chitraratha. I am very pleased with you and your skills. Now I ask you one thing. I want you to teach me the *mantra* for the use of this *agni astra*. God Agni is the deity for that missile, and I want to know the secret of that. If you teach me, I have something to give you in return."

Chitraratha then fell at the feet of Yudhisthira. He knew how to get things done. He prostrated to the Pandavas and asked them to save him and his family, who were there with him on the banks of Ganga. Yudhisthira forgave Citraratha for his aggressiveness. Then Arjuna agreed to let them be, and he taught Chitraratha the *mantra* for the fire missile. In return Chitraratha's fellow *gandharvas* gave Arjuna a foursome of special celestial horses. They also gave Arjuna the special power to see in his mind all that was going on anywhere in all the three worlds. Arjuna gratefully accepted these gifts, and he asked Chitraratha to keep the distinctive horses until the time when he would call for them. The Pandavas would not need them now because the family members were intent on the *svayamvara*. Once they had slipped into Panchaladesha, Kunti was given a place to stay in a potter's house, and the five brothers headed for King Drupada's palace.

The Mahabharata talks of Dhrstadyumna's birth and Draupadi's birth from the fire burning at the ritual done by their father. Dhrstadyumna appeared first from the sacred flames, in a chariot, at his father's *putrakāmeṣṭi*, and Draupadi followed. She was Drupada's daughter, at first called Kṛṣṇā, and her father intended to marry her to Arjuna. When Drupada came to know that the Pandavas had died in the house of fire, he wondered what would happen to Draupadi. His guru had advised him that the Pandavas were going to be in the picture and that Draupadi would be with Arjuna. Drupada had conflicting information. Because of his faith in his guru, Drupada arranged the archery test to see if Arjuna would surface. The *svayamvara* was announced, the news went around and the Pandavas were indeed there in Panchaladesha.

To be continued...