

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the thirteenth part of the serial article, continuation from August 2024 newsletter.

Kunti had crumpled into her seat, and she drew the attention of the spectators. The combat was delayed for a time. When she was able to get up it was already late. The sun had set, and the fight could not be started on that day. The tournament was over. Arjuna was in the heart of people, but the people were confused. Karna's presence had thrown the place into confusion. On this particular day all the problems in the Mahabharata started. The entry of Karna into the tournament stadium came like a storm, created a dissension and made Duryodhana strong. On that day itself Duryodhana resolved to destroy the Pandavas. With Karna, who knew everything Arjuna knew, who was a student of Bhargava, Duryodhana had solved the dilemma of Arjuna's prowess. Duryodhana was more bold and aggressive because of Karna's advent. This is the background for the war storms to come later.

Drona called together all his disciples, the princes, and told them it was, as was the custom, time to give *gurudakṣiṇa*. The princes were eager and delighted with the opportunity to give their teacher whatever he wanted. They need only hear what he desired. Drona said, "I am not interested in wealth. I just want you all to do one thing for me. I have an unsettled account with King Drupada the Panchalaraja. Drupada insulted me. At one time he was my friend, and I wanted that friendship to continue. But when he became a king he not only completely forgot me, he insulted me. I have taken a vow of revenge. Therefore I want all of you to confront Drupada and to bring him to me alive."

The Kaurava princes were only too happy, "We will do it for you. That is an easy job." Duryodhana and his people gathered a huge army and invaded Drupada's kingdom. When Drupada came to know that the Kauravas were invading, naturally he and his brothers mustered their armed forces and rose to fight. Still, he did not know the reason for war. Certainly, being Kurus, the Pandavas were

there too; they wanted to help their teacher Drona fulfill his desire. But they were not immediately ready to get into the fray. They waited for the Dhartarashtras to initiate the fight. The Pandavas knew their cousins, Duryodhana and his brothers, would soon be in trouble against the Panchala warriors.

As expected, the Kauravas, the Dhartarashtras, were defeated and ran for their lives. Drupada and his brothers fought valiantly and drove them off. Most of the Kauravas did not really have that much reason to fight, and they all ran away rather than be slaughtered. It was then that the Pandavas joined the battle. Arjuna got into his chariot and asked Bhima to go first. Nakula and Sahadeva were supposed to take care of the wheels, as they say. They covered the sides of the chariot. A chariot had to be kept intact, and opponents always aimed at the wheels and tried to disable the chariot and cause the enemy to lose his ride. Down from his chariot, a warrior became an easy target. Keeping the chariot moving was the goal of the charioteers. That was the advantage the charioteers held, though they were not mean fighters under any conditions.

Bhima cleared the way with his *gadā*, his mace, and Nakula and Sahadeva were alongside. As Bhima approached, Drupada became confused because he found that Bhima was not interested in killing anybody. Bhima just swept away those in front of him without killing them. Bhima's maneuver was something very beautiful, and it allowed Arjuna to move forward and to completely envelope Drupada in a shower of arrows. Like honeybees covering the honeycomb Arjuna's arrows swarmed over Drupada until he could not see. Drupada was not hurt, but he was blinded, surrounded by arrows. Arjuna jumped into Drupada's chariot and picked up Drupada. In a flash Arjuna leaped back into his own chariot and sped away before Drupada realized what was happening.

Arjuna dropped Drupada right in front of Drona. Drona received his *gurudakṣiṇa*. For Drona, the day he had been waiting for had come. Drona greatly appreciated Arjuna's performance. Drona turned to Drupada and asked, "Who are you now? Are you a king? You are not a king any more, you are at my mercy."

I can destroy you now. You said to me that only kings can have friendship with kings. You said friends had to be equals. Now you are equal to me. I have nothing and now you have nothing. Can we be friends now?" Drupada could not say anything. Drona continued, "Well, I do not want to kill you, Drupada. I sought only your friendship, and you were drunk with your power. Therefore you lost a good friend. Still, I want to be equal to you. I do not find in myself that I want to destroy you. From now on, the land on that side of Ganga belongs to you. This side, which was yours, now belongs to me. Now we are equal, by dividing your kingdom into halves. I suppose we can be friends." So saying, Drona released Drupada and sent him back to his palace.

Drona's anger was gone. Brahmana anger does not last. According to Mahabharata it goes away. But a Kshatriya did not forget such things. King Drupada was not going to forget this kind of shame. Drupada initiated great *tapas*, performed many rituals, and invoked Shankara, Lord Shiva. Drupada prayed for a son who would be able to defeat Drona. By the way, he asked for a girl child too. By virtue of his great *tapas*, why should he not ask for one more child? He wanted a son and he wanted a daughter. Drupada had marveled at the matchless Arjuna. Drupada's capture at the hands of Arjuna had been effortless and compassionate and had fully satisfied Arjuna's guru's request. Drupada did not blame Arjuna, and he was fascinated by Arjuna's extraordinary talents. Drupada's plan was to give the daughter he asked Lord Shiva for to Arjuna and to make Arjuna his son-in-law. He could not have Arjuna as a son, but he might have him as a son-in-law. The daughter was for Arjuna's sake. Drona was blessed with two children. The girl was Draupadi, and the son was Dhrstadyumna. We will frequently hear these names, the boy's later. Drupada was pleased with these blessed children.

One day Drona praised his student Arjuna as the greatest archer in the world, untouchable and unequalled by any other. Except one. Drona told Arjuna, "You will always be victorious over any enemy, except one." Drona did not often give such praise, and Arjuna knew and appreciated its value. When Drona said something, he meant it and it meant something. Arjuna wanted to know who was

that "except one." Drona advised him, "Do not let this get into your head. Enjoy the blessings of your talents and be content." Still Arjuna wanted to know that one. Drona told him, "That one is Krishna. He does not need even a bow and arrow. With a smile he can turn you to ashes. Do not ever fight with Krishna. If you can, make him your friend. If he is with you nobody on this earth, not even Indra, can defeat you. He is your cousin, after all. Your mother Kunti is Vasudeva's sister; Vasudeva is Krishna's father. Krishna is your auntie's son. Confirm the relationship that you already have. Keep Krishna with you. Arjuna and Krishna together - that's it." This was great advice from a great teacher.

Duryodhana and Bhima were further taught in handling the mace by Krishna's brother Balarama. Balarama was the best at mace. Strange but true, Balarama was very fond of Duryodhana. Balarama always backed the wrong one. If Krishna backed Arjuna, Balarama backed the other one. Always, always wrong, he always backed the wrong person. Arjuna had a difficult time dealing with Balarama. I think Balarama had some kind of rivalry with his own brother. The psychology of Mahabharata is amazing. There is a PH.D. thesis waiting there in the study of the characters. The Mahabharata may call silently, but I see the calling there - Krishna, Krishna, Krishna. All the time, everybody calls Krishna. All the *gopīs*, the girl cowherders, are after Krishna. Nobody seems to notice, but Balarama was equally strong. Balarama was always around, but in some ways he is always lost.

This is what they call a sibling problem. If Krishna was fond of the Pandavas, Balarama liked Duryodhana. It was always like this, purely a sibling rivalry, the problem between brothers and brothers, or brothers and sisters. Mahabharata is perfect in how it talks about it without talking about it. Balarama's problem was that he backed Duryodhana every time. When Bhima eventually killed Duryodhana, Balarama wanted to fight Bhima. Balarama wanted to destroy all the Pandavas, and Krishna had to pacify him. Every time this was a problem. Balarama, master of the mace, taught Duryodhana and Bhima their skills.

To be continued...