

This was really an austere¹ vow which left the fisherman amazed and bewildered. It was from this day that his name changed from Devavrata to Bhishma.

Soon afterwards, the fisher chief married his daughter to Shantanu. The king had two sons from her, Chitrangada and Vichitravirya. Chitrangada died young. After him Vichitravirya ascended the throne. He had two queens Ambika and Ambalika. Dhritarastra, who was blind from birth, was Ambika's son, whereas Pandu, who looked pale because of consumption², was Ambalika's son.

After the death of Vichitravirya, Pandu became the king of Hastinapur as his elder brother Dhritarastra was blind. Pandu had five sons called the Pandavas and Dhritarastra had one hundred sons called the Kauravas. The five Pandavas were : Yudhisthir, Bheem, Arjuna, Nakul and Sahdeo. Pandu had two queens — Kunti and Madri.

Gandhari was the mother of the Kauravas among whom Duryodhan was the eldest brother. Being a highly devoted wife, she used to keep a bandage over her eyes to give up voluntarily³ the privilege⁴ of sight which was denied to her husband.

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1. severely strict and moral.
 2. tuberculosis.
 3. willingly; with a person's own desire.
 4. advantage.

After the death of his younger brother, Dhritarastra began to look after the affairs of the state. All the princes received education at the feet of their reputed teacher, Dronacharya. They were trained in archery¹ and warfare. Arjuna was the best archer among them. Bheem and Duryodhana specialised in club fighting. Drona was highly impressed by Arjuna's feats² in archery. So the Kauravas became jealous of the Pandavas and started making plans to kill them.

For this they built a house made of Lac at the site of a fair. They sent out the Pandavas along with their mother, Kunti, to see the fair and stay at night in that house. The plan was to burn them to death at night by setting fire to the house.

The Pandavas got the secret of the plot through a well-wisher and escaped through a tunnel. Soon after they left the house, a tribal family of five brothers along with their mother came to stay there at night and were burnt to ashes. Thus Duryodhana was sure that the Pandavas along with their mother were killed and so he felt jubilant³.

The five Pandavas, on the other hand, began to live in the forest along with their mother, Kunti, in the guise of Brahmins. During this period Drupada, the king of Panchala, arranged the marriage of his princess, Draupadi. But there was a condition for marrying the princess. It was to

1. art of shooting with a bow and arrows.

2. difficult and wonderful exercises.

3. showing joy.

pierce the eye of a fish revolving overhead with an arrow by looking at its reflection in water on the ground. Arjuna being an expert archer, pierced the target with his arrow in a flash, while all the other aspirants for marriage failed.

Thus he got Draupadi in marriage. After the marriage the five brothers returned to their hut in the forest with the new bride and shouted from the door to their mother who was working inside, "Mother, today we have brought a very beautiful thing."

"All right, distribute the same among yourselves," replied the mother from inside. It was in this way that Draupadi came to be the wife of all the five Pandavas.

Shortly after, king Drupada after much argument with Duryodhana succeeded in obtaining the Pandavas half of the kingdom. They expanded their kingdom in all directions and thus their fame spread far and wide. They also performed *Rajsuya Yagna* which was in those days a symbol of an empire's growing power. So Duryodhana grew jealous of them and thought out another plan to destroy them.

The Kaurava's maternal uncle, Shakuni, was adept at gambling which was very popular in those days in the society of big people. Duryodhana invited Yudhisthir to play the game. The latter being a pure-hearted and simple person was quite inexperienced in it. Dice after dice was cast with the result that Yudhisthir lost his entire kingdom and later lost Draupadi as well. At this the evil-hearted Duhshashana, a younger brother of Duryodhana, dragged

her to the assembly hall and began to pull off her sari in the presence of her husbands and the large number of courtiers. At this hour of peril¹ Draupadi closed her eyes and stood praying to Lord Krishna with folded hands to protect her modesty. Lord Krishna at once came to her rescue². Duhshashana went on pulling off the sari for hours and still he was not able to come to the end of Draupadi's sari.

At last one more dice was cast and again Yudhishthir lost the game. This time according to the terms of the gamble, the Pandavas had to live in the forest for twelve years and live in disguise for one more year.

After passing twelve years in the forest, the Pandavas lived in disguise for one year in the court of the king of Viratnagar. In this way after completing thirteen years, the Pandavas demanded their kingdom. When it was refused, they demanded only five villages. Lord Krishna went to the Kauravas to mediate and bring about peace. But Duryodhana was not prepared to return even a needle-point of land.

At last a great war broke out between the Kauravas and the Pandavas. It is known as the Mahabharata war. On Kaurava's side, there were great heroes like Bhishma Pitamah, Karna, Drona, Jayadratha and others, besides a huge army of soldiers with horses and elephants. The Pandavas had only the blessings and support of Lord Krishna, who

1. danger.

2. help.