

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the sixth part of the serial article, continuation from December 2023 newsletter.

Dhrtarashtra's sightless condition meant he could not be the absolute ruler. Pandu was anointed and enthroned on his brother's behalf. In time it was Pandu who discovered in himself the ability to rule, and it was up to him to reestablish the kingdom. Pandu made all the local kings accept Hastinapura as the capital of the empire. Pandu brought back the prosperity and renown that had previously been enjoyed, and Pandu was a very popular king. Due to Pandu the glory returned, and in the meantime Pandu and Dhrtarashtra needed to find wives and be married. Bhishma sent word that Satyavati, Grandmother, had decided the time had come. Bhishma searched for someone who could be married to a blind man. They found Gandhari, a great devotee of Lord Shiva and a woman of great heart and *dharma*. Bhishma thought she would be a suitable bride for Dhrtarashtra. Because of her *dharma*, her religious attitude, the daughter of the *rājā* of Gandhara was chosen by Bhishma.

Of course Bhishma's selection was as much as a mandate, you know. It was not a good idea to anger Bhishma, so what he said tended to be what happened. But Bhishma did not want to commit the same mistake that he had before. He wanted to be really sure that this woman was committed to this marriage. Gandhari's father was himself reluctant to give up his daughter because the Kuru king was blind. But the princess herself was contacted and she said she did not mind at all that Dhrtarashtra was blind. Gandhari said she wanted to be in the family of Kurus, the Lunar dynasty. She felt an affinity for their name and culture, and she saw herself fulfilling her role properly as their queen. She and Dhrtarashtra were married, and in a gesture of compassion, she blindfolded herself. She said, "Let me not see a world which he is not able to see." She wore from then on a silken cloth over her eyes all the time. That was Gandhari. She felt she could give Dhrtarashtra a life, and they had children, a hundred and one children. They had one hundred idiots and one daughter. Basically they were all, what you call, a bunch of criminals. Because of the blindness perhaps. The whole bunch was bad, and Dhrtarashtra was the worst. They picked it up from him, and they grew up in

jealousy.

In the meantime, a girl had to be found for Pandu. A *svayamvara* was held for the princess Madri in Madradesha. Bhishma thought Madri would be a good match for Pandu, and he sent Pandu off to the *svayamvara*. Madri chose Pandu and they were married. There was also another marriage. Prtha, otherwise called Kunti, was also married to Pandu.

The scene shifts now to the clan of Krishna, the Vrshnis. There was a man Vasudeva and his wife Devaki to whom Krishna was born. Vasudeva's sister was Prtha, Krishna's auntie. Because of her, all the Pandus are related to Krishna, just as all the Kauravas are related to Krishna. Krishna is the Lord; who is not related to him? Prtha was a smart, young girl, and she was given the task of caring for the very powerful and angry sage Durvasa.

Somehow these sages were angry people. I do not know why. I think that people were all doing too much *tapas* and did not have anything to do with the world. Therefore they were angry against the world. Some people are angry with the world just because they are born. There may be no reason at all. All these sages had some pent-up problems. They all had anger, and anger meant curse. The two go together. The whole Mahabharata is full of curse; Pandu is going to get one. Everybody curses, none of them realizes that to give a curse in anger is a wrong thing. They give a curse, "Why did you commit a mistake? Take this curse." The blessed thing is the curse comes true. A boon also comes true. Positive, negative, both manage to come true somehow. Some kind of a power, so much power. That shows the emphasis is on control.

Durvasa was famous for his anger. Any little thing would touch him. In fact, in that place the womenfolk said they did not want to serve Durvasa because he may get angry. He may not have gotten angry at young girls, so they would send a child to take care of him. It was a guess, and a vague guess. Blessing he can give, and cursing also he can give. They knew that a child was more likely to win him over than these other women. The women stayed clear of Durvasa. The child they sent was Prtha, who later became Kunti after being adopted by a cousin of the king, by Kuntibhoja. In serving and satisfying Durvasa, Prtha had done an amazing job, and gained his admiration. To do so for this priest was not an easy

thing. Durvasa was so pleased that he gave a *mantra* that, when chanted, would summon whichever *devata* she wanted to come and bless her – Sun, Dharmaraja, Vayu, Varuna, Agni – whichever she might want. All she had to do was chant and think of the *devata* and the *devata* would be there.

Kunti decided to test the boon she had received. She thought of the sun and asked for a child, and a child was on her lap, the blessing of the sun god. The child had bright *kunḍala*, earrings in both ears, and *kavaca*, golden armor - born just like the sun, brilliant and fully adorned. Having a baby was all right for a few minutes, but the poor girl did not know what to do next. She panicked. She wanted the child to grow up safe, but she did not want anybody to know how it had been born. She made a box and put some silken cloth inside. She put the baby on top of the cloth. She prayed to the Sun that he take care of the child. She went to Ganga and, placing the box on the river, praying to Ganga to take care of the child, she floated the child.

A charioteer, a *sūta* named Adhiratha, had gone to the river for a bath. He and his wife Radha were childless. He was attracted to a shining object floating downstream. He swam to the middle of the river and retrieved the box. He looked into the box, thinking he would find something ordinary, and he saw the resplendent, effulgent baby born with the gleaming jewelry. He ran home in all excitement and announced to his wife that he had brought her a gift, “Hey, I have brought you Bhagavan’s gift. You will not believe. Gangaji gave it to me. It was floating down the river. You have been praying for a child, and you have got the best one here. Look at this boy. This is your son; let us call him Radheya.” That shining baby boy was Radheya, otherwise known as Karna.

Radheya grew up in this charioteer’s house. When he came of age, Adiratha, who had become a father to the boy, told him, “Son, now you can drive your own chariot, just like me. I have brought a new chariot for you.” But Radheya had no interest in driving the chariot, he wanted to be inside of the chariot. His heart was elsewhere. The son of the Sun, he was a different guy. He was not going to drive a chariot. Radheya himself knew he was not interested, but he was also curious to know why he was not interested. He went to his mother and asked why.

Krishna's Vrshni lineage, the *vṛṣṇivamśa*, was his father's side. Krishna's other *vamśa*, Yashoda *vamśa*, is *yaduvamśa*. That is why Krishna is called Yadava. Kunti is Prtha, and that is why Arjuna is called Partha. Prtha, Kunti, was responsible for Karna's advent. After having given up her first baby, Prtha grew into a young woman and was to get married. Ambalika's son, Pandu, was chosen to be her husband. The Vrsni family was very happy that they had an alliance with the family of Kurus. The Kuru family was happy too. Pandu was, of course, already married to Madri, so Kunti was his second queen. In those days, *kṣatriyas*, especially kings, used to have more than one wife. That was their *dharma*.

Vicitravirya was ill, and his older brother had died, and Bhishma had played both the role of father and king. Bhishma did not have time to really look into all the changes throughout the kingdom. But Pandu grew up to take the reins of the empire. With Pandu at the head, the family proved to be noble and valiant rulers. They gained back the name they had before. There had been damage to the empire, and it had all been repaired.

Pandu went to the forest as was common. He went there with his wives and a retinue to live for time. One day he happened to see two playful deer, a male and a female. He was a good hunter, and it was an easy target for him. As, you know, fate, they say, destiny would have it, Pandu shot and killed the male deer. These were, in fact, not really deer. They looked like deer all right, but were really a *ṛṣi* and his wife. Understand that all the *ṛṣis* were married. That is why we have *gotra*, the traditional extended family legacies of the major *ṛṣis*. On that day, one *ṛṣi* had transformed himself and his wife into the form of deer, and they were having fun. When Pandu shot the deer the deer fell down, and the deer was still alive. Then Pandu heard a human voice come from the deer, the *ṛṣi* talking, "Oh, Pandu, you are the king of the great Lunar race, a race that is famous for *dharma*. What you have done is an act of *adharma*. Animals cannot be separated when they are together, male-female. You have made an act of *adharma*." The same things happens at the start of Ramayana –*mā niṣāda pratiṣṭhām* – the first verse by Valmiki. "Yours is an act of *adharma* for which you will pay," said the dying deer to Pandu. "You too will die when you go to your wife. You will die." The *sāpa* was given. This is all curse, all curse, you know. *To be continued...*