

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the tenth part of the serial article, continuation from May 2024 newsletter.

Drona went to his old friend Drupada, who was now a king, thinking that now that he had learned archery everything would be all right between them. He thought he could be an archery teacher in the palace in Panchaladesha. He went to Drupada and reminded the king of their days together and the offer the king had made as a prince. King Drupada laughed at him, “Hey, poor Brahmana, how can you seek friendship with me? Do you think you can talk to a *rājā* as an equal? Only other kings can be my friends. You have to find another *brāhmaṇa*, one who is equal to you to be your friend.” Drupada had changed, and his thinking was different.

Drona walked out of Drupada’s palace furious. He said to himself, “Revenge. I will teach Drupada a lesson.” He went straightaway to Hastinapura. He knew what he had to do and what he had to offer. That is how he came to be standing there when the boys were playing ball. By reclaiming the ball from the well Drona made his introduction to the Pandavas. The boys all ran to Bhishma and told him of the Brahmana who was an amazing archer. Bhishma smiled, for his boys had found a teacher, the teacher he had been waiting for, a teacher who had been taught by Parashurama, his own teacher. He had heard about this Drona, and he would ask him to teach archery to the Kaurava princes and the Pandavas.

Drona told Bhishma exactly what had happened at Drupada’s court, about how obnoxious Drupada had been. Bhishma assured Drona that eventually he would fulfill his desires and avenge his anger. Drona thought the best way to take his revenge was to train a *kṣatriya*, and through him to finish with the insulting *rājā*. The princes of Hastinapura thought they had learned archery from Krpa. But with Drona there, they found they did not know much of anything. Drona started a school of the arts of warfare – javelin, mace, hand-to-hand combat, all that – for

all the princes and for other boys from Dvaraka and from other places. Among all Drona's students, Arjuna was the most devoted and dedicated and well-behaved. Drona's son Ashvatthama attended the school also, and he was equally a good archer. But still Drona had a special corner for Arjuna due to the boy's remarkable capacity.

One day Drona went to the forest with the princes. He wanted to test what kind of person Arjuna was. Drona saw a bird and he asked Arjuna, "What do you see there? Do you see a tree? Do you see a branch?"

Arjuna said, "Yes, I see a bird."

After a few minutes Drona asked, "What kind of bird is it?"

Arjuna said, "I see only the neck. I do not know the bird's type. I know only the neck."

Drona knew then what kind of archer Arjuna was.

Once Drona fell into a pond and was held down by a crocodile. Drona had enough weapons that he could escape the creature, but he wanted to test his students. He shouted for them to come and free him from the crocodile. The princes all heard their teacher's voice and hurried to help. But before any other help came, five arrows came from Arjuna's bow and finished the crocodile. Drona was further impressed with Arjuna, and he gave him a special *astra* at this time. Each *astra* was a special missile, and there was a *mantra* for it. A *brahmāstra* was given to Arjuna. Arjuna was told not to use this *astra* on an ordinary person. The missile was to be saved for a *rākṣasa*, a demon, or a perverted *deva*. Arjuna was told that if the weapon were used against a dharmic person or against a weakling, it would destroy the world. The target for this *brahmāstra* had to be carefully chosen. Every *astra* had some conditions to fulfill. Some *astras* would come back at the shooter if they were used by an *adhārmika* person. The awarding of the *brahmāstra* was Drona's statement that Arjuna was the best archer of the time. Bhishma was the greatest fighter, and he had many *astras*. Drona had *astras*. Many warriors held

astras, but Arjuna had answers for all of them. Therefore he was the best. He continued to collect *astras* throughout his life.

Now remember Karna, who asked his mother why he did not want to be a chariot driver even though his father was. Even the new chariot his father brought did not interest him. He told his mother of a dream he continued to have, "I see a woman coming, appearing with all sadness. She always covers her face. I want to know who she is and I ask her and she goes away. Her face haunts me and I want to see her face, but it always goes away. She dresses like a princess, but I have never seen a person like that." Karna was already sixteen.

Karna's mother told him, "Listen to me carefully, Radheya. One fine morning when he went to Ganga, your father Adhiratha saw a box floating by, a shining box that attracted his attention. He picked up the box and inside was a child who wore the brightest armor and earrings. The child was shining like the sun and was in fact the blessing of the sun. Adhiratha picked up this child and he gave this child to me. I brought you up, and I think you are a *kṣatriya* not a *sūta*. As a baby you had the marks of a *kṣatriya* and that is what you should be. You are not a *sūta*, as some think you are." A *sūta* is one born of a union of a Brahmana and a Kshatriya. His mother went on, "Now it is time for you to go. You can go and do whatever you want to do. You should go and find your real mother, then you will be happy. That woman you have seen in your dream is your mother." With tears in her eyes she told him this. She gave him the freedom to do what he wanted to do.

Karna replied, "You say that I had a first mother who just dropped me. I know you as my mother, and I do not want to lose you too. All that I have is just you. It may be true that my mother is in this dream, but I do not want that mother anymore. She abandoned me, and I do not want to go back to her. You are my mother and you will always be. I am your Radheya, son of Radha.

To be continued...