

The Life and Loves of the Pandava Prince, Arjuna

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Indian mythology abounds with the love stories of its many Gods and Goddesses; Sages and Apsaras; Kings and Queens; and Princes and Princesses. The epic Mahabharata, in particular, features several hundreds of characters, bringing us some wonderful stories of love and passion. One such story is that of Arjuna, the Pandava Prince. In this month's post, we related tales about the life and loves of this valiant warrior prince.

Famed as a great archer, Arjuna also had an eye for fine women. Very handsome and brave, he quite naturally and effortlessly attracted women wherever he went. Let us now learn a little about Arjuna and his life.

Birth and Early Life

Arjuna was the 3rd of the Pandava princes. He was one of the central characters of the Mahabharata and was the reason why with Krishna gave us the Bhagavad Gita. Arjuna had several wives, namely, Draupadi, Subhadra (Krishna's sister), Ulupi and Chitrangada. He had four sons from his wives, namely, Srutakirti, Iravan, Babruvahana and the great warrior prince, Abhimanyu.

Arjuna, which literally means, "bright" or "resplendent", was addressed by several other names, including Phalgun (born on the day of the Uttara Phalguni star), Jishnu (triumphant), Kiritin (one who wears a crown gifted by Indra), Shwetavahana (one who mounts a chariot driven by white horses), Bibhatsu (one who fights fair), Vijaya (the victorious one), Partha (son of Pritha or Kunti), Savyasachin (ambidextrous), Dhananjaya (one who brings prosperity), Gudakesha (one who can control his sleep), Kapidhwaja (one with the flag of a monkey - he had the emblem of Hanuman on his flag), Parantapa (one who destroys enemies with his focus), Gandivadhanvan or Gandivadhara (one who wields the bow named Gandiva, created by Lord Brahma) and Madhyapandava (the third of the five Pandava princes).

Arjuna was referred to as the son of Pandu, by his first wife, Kunti. He was the prince of the royal family of Hastinapura. Actually, though, Arjuna was given to Kunti by Lord Indra. Hence, Indra was Arjuna's divine father. According to a curse, Pandu would die if he tried to have children. Kunti had a boon whereby she could call upon any Deva of her choice and he would

gift her a child. Arjuna was born after Yudhishtira and Bhima. After him came the twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, born of Pandu's second wife, Madri.

Madri committed suicide soon after Pandu died. After that, the Pandavas came to Hastinapura to live along with their cousins, the Kauravas. The 100 Kauravas were born to Dhritarashtra and his wife, Gandhari. There, they were trained in various aspects of science, religion, administration and the art of warfare, by their grandfather, Bhishma.

Arjuna Comes Under Drona's Tutelage

When the time came, Bhishma decided to put all the princes under the tutelage of the able guru, Dronacharya. Under him, they learned archery, weaponry and the martial arts. Arjuna was adept at archery and soon became Drona's favorite disciple. He gave his pupil more attention than his own son, Ashwatthama.

Arjuna had great focus and worked hard at archery. He once saved his teacher from a crocodile attack. What the boy did not know was that Drona had himself orchestrated the attack in order to test his students' skills. Impressed with the boy's devotion to his teacher and the precision with which he attacked the crocodile, Drona promised that he would make him the greatest archer of all time. Drona kept up his word and he stopped at nothing to ensure that he kept his promise. In fact, at a later time, when he saw that Ekalavya had much greater skill than Arjuna, he demanded Ekalavya to cut off his thumb and offer it to him as Gurudakshina (teacher's fee). The boy willingly did so, and in the process, lost his chance to become the greatest archer.

Ashwatthama and the Kauravas always resented the fact that Arjuna was their teacher's most loved pupil. They, however, could do nothing about it and could just watch the teacher-disciple bond becoming stronger by the day.

Arjuna Impresses Drupada

Drona demanded that, as his Gurudakshina, the Pandavas should attack Panchal and capture King Drupada, and that Arjuna should make the arrest himself. Drona had a grudge against Drupada and wanted to teach him a lesson. Drupada secretly admired Arjuna and wished that the boy would marry his foster daughter, Draupadi.

Drupada set up an arena where all the princes could display their talent. Both the Pandavas and Kauravas impressed all present with their skill. However, Arjuna stole the show, earning the praise of everyone present there. Before he could be crowned as the victor, though, Karna challenged him. However, Karna was denied participation, as he was from a lower caste.

In actuality, Karna was the son of Kunti. He was born to her before her marriage. When Kunti

got her boon, she had wanted to test it and called upon Surya, the Sun God. He immediately manifested before her and gifted her a bonny baby boy, who was blessed with a kavacha (armor) and kundala (pair of earrings), since birth. Utterly dismayed and knowing that she would never be able to raise a son as a single unwed mother, Kunti placed the baby in a casket and set him afloat on a river.

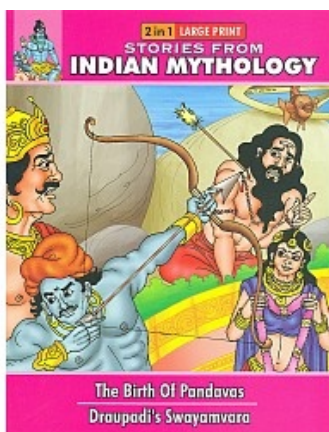
He was found by charioteer Adhiratha, who brought him home. He and his wife, Radha, named him Vasusena and raised him as their own child. Karna grew up to become one of the great warriors, who also had a generous heart and spent most of his life performing great acts of charity.

Karna was a close friend and confidant of Duryodhan, the eldest Kaurava prince. The latter even made him Kind of Anga. However, being a charioteer's son, Karna was considered lower in caste than the princes and therefore, could not participate in Drupada's competition.

The Kauravas resented the fact that Yudhishtira; not Duryodhana; was named the crown prince and heir to the throne of Hastinapura. They planned many ways in which to kill the Pandavas, but failed each time. Finally, Duryodhana, along with his evil uncle Shakuni, plotted to destroy the Pandavas' existence. The Kauravas created a Lakshagraha (House of Wax) and invited the Pandavas to spend their vacation there. They planned to eventually set the house on fire, thereby burning their cousins to ashes.

The Pandavas were alerted about the Kauravas' plan by Vidura, the half-brother of Pandu and Dhritarashtra; also the minister of Hastinapura. They managed to dig a tunnel and escape the Lakshagraha just before their evil cousins set fire to it. Arjuna and Bhima immediately wanted to declare war against the Kauravas, but Yudhishtira asked them to keep calm. They then jointly decided to fake their own death and went into hiding, along with their mother, Kunti.

Arjuna Weds Draupadi



The Birth of Pandavas and Draupadi's Swayamvara - (Stories from Indian Mythology)

While still in hiding, the Pandavas disguised themselves as Brahmins and decided to attend Draupadi's swayamvara (ceremony involving the bride choosing her own husband). Draupadi, actually the Daughter of Fire (she and her brother, Drishtadyumna, had manifested from the Yagna that Drupada had conducted), was an extremely beautiful woman. Her swayamvara ceremony attracted the attention of several kings and princes wanting to win her hand in marriage.

Drupada stipulated a condition for the one seeking to win his

daughter's hand in marriage. The Pinakin, the large Shiva Dhanush (bow belonging to Lord Shiva) was placed in the mandap especially crated to test participants. Those hopeful of wedding Draupadi would have to first lift and string the same and then fire an arrow to pierce the eye of the golden fish circulating from the ceiling, by only looking at its reflection in the artificially created pool below.

Out of all the hopefuls present there, Karna and Arjuna were the only two warriors capable of winning the challenge. Everyone else had already failed at it, when Karna entered the mandap. He effortlessly lifted and strung the Pinakin. He was just about to fire a shot, when Draupadi, prodded by Krishna, asked him to stop. She stated that, since he was a Sutaputra (charioteer's son), and hence from a much lower caste of society, he could not participate in the swayamvara.

Arjuna then stepped into the mandap and, with extreme concentration and focus, looked at the reflection of the fish and fired one single shot that pierced its eye through and through. A pleased Draupadi was brought to the mandap and placed the Varmala (the garland) around Arjuna's neck. This way, Arjuna wedded Draupadi, the princess of Panchal.

In some versions, Arjuna was the only one among the Pandavas to meet Draupadi earlier. When he was trying to attack and kidnap Drupada, Draupadi, who was trained in the martial arts, gave him a fierce fight. The fight went on for some time, after which Arjuna moved away, saying that it was not right to attack a woman. That episode, though, had made them realize that they were irrevocably attracted to each other.

Draupadi Weds All the Pandavas

After wedding Draupadi, the Pandavas returned home along with Draupadi. Kunti was in the kitchen, preparing food for everyone. While entering their humble little home, Arjuna joked to his mother that he had brought them alms. Preoccupied with her work and not looking to check, Kunti asked him to share it with his brothers. Dismayed by his mother's order and unable to defy her, he requested all his brothers to accept Draupadi as their wife as well. In this way, Draupadi had to marry all of the 5 Pandavas.

Draupadi was shocked at the turn of events and requested sage Narada to help her out. Accordingly, the Divine Sage made an arrangement with regard to how the Pandavas would share her. Each of the brothers would have exclusive right over her for a year, after which she would go to the next brother for another year. Any brother who violated the other brother's right to privacy at that time



Kathakali Dancers as Arjuna and Draupadi

would have to go away on a 12-year tirtha-yatra (pilgrimage to temples) in order to atone for that sin.

Draupadi had 5 sons, one from each of the Pandavas. They were known as the Upapandavas. Srutakirti was the name of son born to Arjuna and Draupadi.

Arjuna Impresses Indra

According to some legends, Arjuna first met Krishna at Khandavaprastha or Khandava Vana, a forest, which lay on the west of the Yamuna river. At a later time, the Pandavas cleared out this territory and constructed their capital, Indraprastha, right here. Arjuna and Krishna immediately formed a friendship, which was to continue for a lifetime.

The Khandava Vana was inhabited by Naga (snake) tribes, headed by the serpent-king Takshaka. While working on clearing up this area, its inhabitants were displaced. Takshaka resented this and he held this against the entire Kuru clan, who ruled Indraprastha and Hastinapura.



Agni - Lord of Fire

Takshaka was a close friend of Lord Indra, who was the protecting deity of the Khandava forest. When he saw this region being burned to the ground with the help of Agni (the God of Fire), he flew into a rage and attacked Arjuna with his Vajra (Lightning), injuring him. He then created heavy rains, in order to thwart Agni's plans to burn down the forest. Agni went to Krishna and requested him to help him with his work.

Agni, Krishna and Arjuna then invoked Varuna, the God of the Oceans. The latter gifted Arjuna his Gandiva (a moon-bow, created by Brahma). From that time on, Arjuna always carried that bow. Agni too blessed him with an incandescent chariot, driven by 4 horses; bearing a flag, which later had Hanuman's image on it. He additionally received his famous conch as well, which he blew while entering the battlefield.

Krishna too fully supported Arjuna during the ensuing battle. He used his Sudarshana Chakra whenever necessary and eventually, the latter won the war. Agni then burned down the entire Khandava Vana, including all the evil spirits and demons residing within it. Witnessing his son, Arjuna's valor, Indra too was left feeling very proud and happy.

During the incident, Krishna and Arjuna saved one demon, Mayasura, the architect of the Asuras. In return, he promised them that he would build the palace at Indraprastha. Keeping up his word, he constructed Maya, the imposing and impressive assembly hall, also known as the Hall of Illusions. Once that was done, he also finished building the rest of the palace for

the Pandavas to live in.

Arjuna Leaves on a Tirtha-Yatra

Takshaka, still angered at losing at the hands of Arjuna, once stole cows from the Brahmins in that area. The latter had to discuss the matter with the eldest Pandava, Yudhishtira. Yudhishtira happened to be playing a game of dice with Draupadi at the time and that meant that Arjuna had violated the privacy clause.

Though they understood Arjuna's actions and forgave him for it, he was insistent that he should suffer punishment for his actions. He hence left on a 12-year tirtha-yatra. This long journey had a purpose to it - Arjuna met his next wife during this pilgrimage.

Arjuna Marries Ulupi

Ulupi or Uloopi was a Naga princess and the daughter of the serpent-king, Kauravya, who was the ruler of the underwater kingdom of snakes in the Ganga. Arjuna started his tirtha-yatra from the banks of the river Ganga. There, Ulupi saw him and immediately fell in love with him. She was an expert at the martial arts. She captured him and forcefully took him to Naga Loka (the land of the snake-people).

She told him that she would set him free only if he married her and that otherwise, she would keep him captive for life. Arjuna was impressed with Ulupi's skills. This way, Arjuna wedded Ulupi and they had a son by name Iravan. Ulupi also gave him the boon that he would forever be invincible underwater and that all animals living in the water would always obey him.



Naga Kanya Uloopi

Ulupi Saves Arjuna's Life

At a much later time, Ulupi taught the art of warfare to Babruvahana, Arjuna's son by another wife, Chitrangada. Babruvahana, a powerful warrior, attacked Arjuna during a fight. At that time, the Pandavas performed the Ashwamedha Yagna and released the sacrificial horse to roam freely. The ones performing this Yagna would automatically own all the territories the horse covered, until the time someone else captured it.

The horse entered Babruvahana's territory - he did not want his land to be seized by the Pandavas. He did not know that Arjuna was his father and proceeded to fight him. During the course of the battle, Babruvahana's arrow hit Arjuna and rendered him unconscious. Ulupi

came to know of the battle and realized that Arjuna would die if she did not intervene in time. She rushed to the spot and, using the knowledge that only her Naga clan had, brought him back to life. Later, she united Babruvahana and Arjuna.

There is an interesting side-story to this legend. It is believed that Devi Ganga once cursed Arjuna that he would be killed by his own son. During the Great War of Kurukshetra, Arjuna had cheated while killing Bhishma. Knowing that he would not be able to defeat the stalwart by fair means, he had placed Shikhandi (a eunuch) in front of himself and had attacked Bhishma, using Shikhandi as a shield, knowing that the Grandmaster would never attack a woman.

Ulupi begged Ganga for forgiveness. Relenting, Ganga told her that the curse had to take effect and that Babruvahana would kill her. However, she also promised that Ulupi would be able to bring him back to life with the help of the Mritasanjivani (a herb that can bring alive the dead). Ulupi then returned to her underwater world once the Pandavas started on their final journey.

Arjuna Weds Chitrangada

During the course of his self-imposed tirtha-yatra, Arjuna visited several pilgrimages in India, including Kalinga and the ashrams of the Saptarishis (Seven Sages). Travelling far and wide, he finally reached the palace of Manipur, situated in the Northeast region of India. The entire region of Manipur was famed for its natural beauty and peaceful people. The region was fiercely guarded by Chitrangada, the daughter of king Chitravahana.

Chitrangada was the oldest of the king's children and was brought up as a "prince". She was an ace archer and was an expert in warfare and all aspects of governance as well. Being powerful and so good at managing the kingdom, she also preferred to dress up as a prince and not as a princess.

Arjuna met her and was impressed with her fighting abilities, but mistook her to be a prince. Chitrangada took one look at him and immediately fell for him. She then went to her father and requested him to get this handsome ascetic married to her (Arjuna had disguised himself as an ascetic at the time of his tirtha-yatra).

Once the king realized Arjuna's true identity, he was only too willing to make him his son-in-law. The latter, however, was not willing to marry his daughter. Rejected so suddenly and sharply; Chitrangada went into deep despair. She, however, decided that she would recover

from this and would not take "no" for an answer.



Kama Deva - God of Love

She sought the grace of Kamadeva (the God of Love), who transformed her into the most beautiful and feminine woman anyone had ever seen. She then went back to meet Arjuna, who could not resist her feminine charms this time. He, though, had no idea that this woman that he had fallen in love with was actually Chitrangada. She was ecstatic at receiving his love, but somewhere deep down, she was still restless, as she knew that Arjuna was not in love with her true self.

In the next few weeks, Manipur came under attack from intruders. The villagers approached Arjuna with the news of the attack, also lamenting that their princess, who was once known for her bravery, was suddenly nowhere to be found. Arjuna was interested to know more about the woman, who he learned, could equal his own valiance on the battlefield. At this juncture, Chitrangada had no other option but to reveal her true self. A stunned Arjuna realized that he loved her, not just for her beauty, but for the actual wholesome person that she actually was. He then happily agreed to take her hand in marriage.

Before the wedding, Chitravahana stipulated conditions that Chitrangada would stay on in Manipur even after the marriage and that the children they would have out of their marriage would remain in Manipur, as heirs to Chitravahana's throne. Arjuna thought about this condition and then agreed.

In due course of time, they had a son, called Babruvahana. After a few months, Arjuna left Chitrangada behind and continued his travels. Her love for Arjuna was true and she bitterly missed him. However, she was happy to serve her father and rule the kingdom. Babruvahana grew up to be a strapping, handsome prince. He too was an accomplished warrior, who survived the Great War of Kurukshetra and then went on to rule the small kingdom.

Rabindranath Tagore's Portrayal of Chitrangada

Rabindranath Tagore adapted the story of Arjuna and Chitrangada and made it into a famous dance drama. Tagore's portrayal of Chitrangada is a lyrical expression of love, power and conquest. This central female character embodied the sort of strength that few other women did, in the literature of that era. In his work, the story had a happy ending and they lived on together, happily for ever after.



Rabindranath Tagore

Arjuna Weds Subhadra

Arjuna continued on with his tirtha-yatra, traveling to many, many more places in India, including parts of South India. He then reached Dwaraka, the place where his cousin and close friend, Krishna, resided. Krishna decided to make his visit comfortable and got on with all the arrangements. Arjuna disguised himself as a "Yati" or a nomadic monk. Krishna, however, understood his true identity and invited him to stay in his palace.



Jagannath, Balaram and Subhadra

Arjuna had heard much about Krishna's beautiful sister, Subhadra, and was eager to meet her. Balarama, in the meantime, had already promised his favorite disciple, Duryodhana, that he would give his sister in marriage to him. Sensing Arjuna's interest as well, Krishna advised him to kidnap Subhadra, before Duryodhana could make her his own. Balarama was furious when he learned about his sister's abduction, but he was pacified after Krishna convinced him that Subhadra had wanted it that way and that she was happy with Arjuna.

The couple lived happily in Dwaraka for a year and then moved to Pushkar for another year. In the meantime, Draupadi was adamant that no other Pandava wife should stay in her city. So, when Arjuna wanted to bring Subhadra back with him, he asked her to disguise herself as a milkmaid. Draupadi was angry when she realized that she had been tricked. However, knowing that this was her beloved friend, Krishna's sister, she forgave her and let her live with Arjuna for the 4 years that she lived with each of the other Pandavas. Arjuna and Subhadra had a son, by name Abhimanyu.

Arjuna's Life Post His Tirtha-Yatra

After the tenure of his tirtha-yatra, Arjuna was sent by Yudhishtira to seize kingdoms for their upcoming Rajasuya Yagna, so that he could be crowned Emperor of Indraprastha. Accordingly, the former conquered several kingdoms, most of them, situated to the east of Indraprastha. Many of these kingdoms willingly gave into his authority and so, he did not have much trouble taking over reign of these territories.

The Pandavas' Exile

Soon after Yudhishtira lost to Duryodhana's crafty uncle, Shakuni, in the Game of Dice, he along with the Pandavas were forced to go into exile for the next 13 years, including one year of Agyaatavaasa (anonymity).

After the Khandava Vana incident, Indra had already promised Arjuna all his weapons, including his Vajra, as a boon for matching his own skills while in battle with him. Sage Vyasa, sensing an impending war with the Kauravas, advised him to additionally obtain the Pashupatastra from Lord Shiva. In accordance with his wishes, Arjuna left his brothers, to appease Shiva. Shiva appeared as an ordinary hunter and challenged him for a fight. He then easily dominated over Arjuna and won against him almost effortlessly.



Shiva and Parvati in Hunter's Disguise

Arjuna was perplexed as to how an ordinary hunter could subdue him so easily. He prayed to Shiva for strength and then saw the garlands he had offered to Shiva, hanging around the hunter's neck. Instantly realizing that the hunter was none other than Shiva, he bowed down to his Lord. Pleased, Shiva gave him the Pashupatastra, also telling him how to use it.

After Shiva left, all the Lokapalas appeared before him. Kubera, Yama and Varuna blessed Arjuna with their weapons as well. Indra then took him to his own palace at Amravati, asked his divine apsaras to entertain his son and asked the Gandharva, Chitrasena, to teach him to sing and dance. He additionally taught him the uses of all the divine weapons and told him under what circumstances he could use each one of them.

Urvashi Curses Arjuna



Urvashi

While teaching him the arts, Urvashi fell in love with Arjuna and made amorous advances toward him. Arjuna, however, made it very clear that he was not interested in having a relationship with her. He said that, since Urvashi had had a relationship with his ancestor Pururava, she would attain the status of his mother and therefore, he respected her as he respected his mother, Kunti. The apsara got angry at this and cursed him that he would become a eunuch and would have to live among women, singing and dancing to entertain them. On Indra's request, she relented and reduced her curse to a period of one year of Arjuna's choice.

Urvashi's curse proved to be a blessing in disguise and served Arjuna's purpose at a later time, when the Pandavas had to spend time, during the period of Agyaatavasa, in the kingdom of Virata. Here, Arjuna chose to take the form of a eunuch, called Brihannala. During the year he spent here, he taught song and dance to King Virata's daughter, Uttara. Much later, he arranged Uttara's marriage with his own son, Abhimanyu.

On hearing about Kuchaka's death, Duryodhana suspected the Pandavas' hand behind it. Wanting to blow the lid off their agyaatavasa, he decided to attack the Matsya kingdom, where the 5 princes were in hiding. Uttar tried to fight off the mighty army, but failed miserably and wanted to flee. Arjuna, posing as Brihannala, was his charioteer. He decided to switch places with Uttar and singlehandedly defeated a bevy of stalwarts including Bhishma, Drona, Kripacharya, Karna, Ashwatthama and a whole host of other greats. He then fired the Sammohana astra to put his enemies to sleep. Once they fell asleep on the battleground, he took away all of the Kauravas' clothing, except those of Bhishma and Drona and left the site.

Arjuna is Subdued by Hanuman

Arjuna continued to travel, learn more and gather more divine weapons and powers to use them. He visited Rama Setu in Dhanushkodi. There, he met Hanuman, who challenged him to build a similar bridge of arrows that would be able to bear his weight. Filled with great false pride, Arjuna started using all his divine weapons to build his bridge. He even went to the extent of telling Hanuman that he would end his own life if he could not meet the challenge.



Hanuman

Eventually, he failed in his tries and called to Krishna for help. Krishna appeared before them and chided both Arjuna and Hanuman for having crossed the boundaries of decency and discipline. While the former realized his folly and was humbled, Hanuman promised him that he would forever reside in Arjuna's flag during the time of the Kurukshetra war.

The Great War of Kurukshetra

Towards the very end of the battle, Arjuna was overcome with doubt and guilt regarding fighting and killing his own kin and his wonderful teachers. Krishna, who was his charioteer, then took on the reins of his life as well, preaching the Bhagavad Gita to him. This went on to become one of the greatest ever holy scriptures of Hinduism. Enthused by Krishna's timely advice, Arjuna went ahead to contribute a great deal to the Great War of Kurukshetra.

Here are details of his contributions, in brief:

Killing Bhagaddata

On the 13th day of battle, Arjuna's son Abhimanyu was slain. At the time, he was busy fighting Bhagaddata, the king of Pragjyotisha. He later decapitated Bhagaddata by firing an arrow at him.

Felling Bhishma



Arjuna Fights Bhishma in the Battle of Kurukshetra

Unable to defeat the great warrior Bhishma, Arjuna, on Krishna's advice, fought standing behind Shikhandi. He knew that his grandfather would never attack a woman and that it was the only way he could ever hope to defeat the mighty doyen. It was on the 10th day of battle that Bhishma fell to the ground, pierced by Arjuna's multiple arrows. These arrows acted as a bed (Sharashaiya) on which the great warrior lay for the rest of the war. Inconsolable and reduced to tears, Arjuna shot yet another arrow. This acted as a pillow for the grievously wounded Bhishma to rest his head on. He shot one more arrow piercing the earth, allowing Ganga to spurt forth and provide water to nourish her son.

Killing the Trigartas

On the 12th and 13th days of battle, Arjuna fought and killed the Trigarthas. On the 18th day, he also killed Susharma, who had also caused him much agony in the battlefield.

Killing Jayadratha

Jayadratha was one of the main people responsible for Abhimanyu's death. Knowing that Arjuna would kill him, the Kauravas protected him in the battlefield. Arjuna had vowed to kill him before sunset that very day, failing which he would jump into a pyre he had created for himself. The Kauravas decided to keep Jayadratha hidden till sunset, after which Arjuna would have to kill himself for having failed. As it neared the time for sunset, Krishna created an artificial eclipse by hiding the sun with his Sudarshana Chakra. Jubilant that Arjuna had lost the wager, Jayadratha came out to mock Arjuna. At that very moment, Krishna brought back his Discus and Arjuna fired an arrow to decapitate him.

Killing Karna

Karna was Arjuna's sworn rival - each had taken a vow to kill the other in battle. Karna was an equal and hence, Arjuna could not defeat him with ease. Karna caused much damage to the Pandava army and used several divine weapons to subdue his enemy. In one particular incident, Krishna saved Arjuna from Karna's wrath, by lowering their chariot wheel into the earth. This way, the latter's lethal arrow missed him by mere centimeters. On the 17th day of battle, the 2 warriors fought on bravely. Karna tried to fire the deadly Brahmastra at Arjuna. However, Parasurama had cursed him that he would forget important mantras just when he needed them the most. Forgetting the actual mantra, he failed to invoke the astra, thus giving Arjuna further lease of life. At one point during the battle, Karna's chariot wheel got stuck in the mud. He jumped off the chariot to free the wheel, asking Arjuna to pause and consider the most important etiquette of war - never to attack one who is unarmed. At Krishna's signal, Arjuna went against the rules and used the Anjalika weapon on him, while he was still trying to lift the chariot wheel off the ground. In this way, Arjuna slayed the great Karna.



Karna Trying to Lift the Wheel of the Chariot in the Battlefield of Kurkshetra

Arjuna's Death

Around the onset of the Kali Yuga, Krishna departed from this earth. Arjuna and the other Pandavas too retired from their positions, leaving the throne to the only surviving heir and Arjuna's grandson, Parikshit. Giving up all their material ties, the Pandavas, accompanied by a dog, proceeded to take their final pilgrimage to the Himalayas.

On the way, Agni manifested before Arjuna and asked him to surrender his Gandiva and the quivers, which the former had obtained from Varuna. Arjuna obeyed as directed, offered his obeisance to the Gandiva and returned it to Agni.

During the course of that journey, all of them, except for the eldest Pandava, Yudhishtira, grew weak and fell dead. Arjuna died after Draupadi, Sahadeva and Nakula. Thus ended the life of the valiant warrior prince; Arjuna.

Only Yudhishtira was permitted to keep his mortal body. Such was the level of his righteousness. Except for telling one lie, he had otherwise led a sinful life. Hence, he was asked to enter heaven only after taking a short tour of hell. All the rest of them had to spend some time in hell in order to atone for their sins.

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