

MAHABHARATHA

The Meaning and Significance of the Mahabharatha

The Mahabharata is the world's longest epic and it contains elements of Indian history, mythology and philosophy. This great epic was scripted by Lord Ganesha, as narrated by the great sage Veda Vyasa. Veda Vyasa is famous for being responsible for the re-cataloguing the Vedas into four parts. The Mahabharatha is one of the two great 'Itihasas' or recorded history that explains the importance and values of family and friends. The word 'itihasa' in Sanskrit means 'it happened thus'. Thus, by definition it is recorded history.

The story is told as a narration by Veda Vyasa's disciple Vaisampayana to King Janamejaya, the great-grandson of Arjuna, one of the key characters in the epic.

Here is the story of the Mahabharata, in short, for children.

The Mahabharatha Story:

King Shantanu was a descendant of King Bharatha who once ruled over all of India. He was a descendant in the lunar race. Shantanu was the king of Hastinapura, and he married the beautiful river goddess Ganga. Ganga gave birth to eight children, all of whom died except the last one who was called Devavrata (who later came to be called Bhishma). Devavrata became a wise and a strong prince.

After goddess Ganga left him, Shantanu fell in love with a fisherwoman called Satyawati and wanted to marry her, (Satyawati was earlier called Matsyagandhi and through sage Parasara, she became the mother of Vyasa). In exchange for offering Satyawati's hand in marriage, Satyawati's father extracted from Shantanu couple of promises, one that she would be the queen and secondly that only her (future) son(s) would be the rulers of the kingdom.

To avoid being an obstacle to his father's desires, the crown prince Devavrata took a great vow that he would remain a bachelor all his life. He was thus called Bhishma. Shantanu had two sons with Satyawati, but both were short-lived.

Satyawati asked her elder son Vyasa to father children with Ambika and Ambalika, the widows of her dead son Vichitravirya. Ambika gave birth to a blind child, named Dhritrashtra and her sister Ambalika to a pale skinned child, who was called Pandu.

Dhritrashtra, because of his blindness, became ineligible to take the throne, and his younger brother Pandu became the king. Once while hunting Pandu shot and killed a male deer that was mating a female deer. The female deer put a curse on Pandu that he would die when he has a sexual relationship.

Pandu's first wife Kunti, even before her marriage to Pandu, received a boon from sage Durvasa whom she pleased by her devoted service. The boon gave Kunti the ability to invoke the gods and bear their children. Kunti tried to test her boon and prayed to Surya the Sun god. Through Surya, Kunti gave birth to a boy child. She abandoned the baby in a basket in the river, in fear of ignominy, as she was unmarried at the time. The boy was discovered in the river by a Charioteer,

and called Karna because he was found with golden ear rings and golden armor plate, which were gifts from Lord Surya.

After marriage to Pandu, Kunti gave birth to a very virtuous son based on the blessings of Lord Yama; she named him Yudhishthira or Dharmaputra. Lord Vayu blessed her with the enormously strong Bhima and Indra with the great warrior Arjuna. King Pandu died after mating with his second wife Maduri, Maduri borrowed Kunti's secret gift and gave birth to the twins Nakula and Sahadeva, with the blessings of the Ashwini Devas. These five brothers were called the Pandavas and they are the heroes of the story.

Pandu died while mating with his second wife Maduri as per the curse put on him. His older brother Dritharashtra then became the king. As the King was blind, Bhishma, as the elder statesman, virtually ran the entire kingdom. Dritharashtra and his wife Gandhari have a hundred children, the Kauravas. Duryodhana was the oldest of the Kauravas. He had brothers Dusshasana and Vikarna and many others

One day in the garden, while playing the princes accidentally dropped a ball in the well. There appeared a Brahmin sage, who brought out a ball they had dropped into a well. The sage brought out the ball by shooting blades of grass in succession, forming a rope to lift the ball. The awestruck princes asked the sage, Drona by name, to be their guru and teach them archery and other arts. The aged Bhishma was overjoyed that the children could find such a great and talented man to teach their children.

Drona was actually a disciple of Parasurama. He was friends with Drupada, the crown prince of Panchala, at Parasurama's school. After completing his education, Drona once has a need and he went to meet his old friend Drupada now king of Panchala. He wanted a cow so he could feed his new born son Ashwatthama with milk. Drupada did not like people to know that his classmate was a poor Brahmin, and pretended that he did not know him at all. Enraged by Drupada's vanity and actions, Drona vowed that he would bring Drupada to his knees and make him beg for forgiveness.

Both the Pandavas and Kauravas grew up being suspicious of and with dislike towards each other. The Pandavas, with their valor and physical strength, positive attitude and good deeds, became popular among the subjects of the country. On the other hand, the Kauravas, who were outshone in every field by the Pandavas, were jealous and wicked.

Among the Pandavas, Bhima was known for his immense strength. Even as a boy he would defeat all the kauravas in wrestling. Arjuna was known for his valor and archery skills. He was the favorite disciple of Drona and he focused all attentions on teaching Arjuna all his skills.

After he completed their education, the boys asked what they could do for their teacher as guru dakshina. Drona asked that Arjuna should go with him and defeat Drupada in battle. Arjuna promptly did this and Drupada surrendered being unable to face Arjuna's great archery and skills. Drona asked Drupada to cede half the kingdom to him (Drona), so that he would be equal to Drupada now, as punishment for his pretending to not know Drona.

In a contest for testing bravery and valor, Arjuna, the favorite student of Drona, amazed everyone with his brilliance. Just then, another young man stepped forward and claimed that he could better Arjuna in all his feats. He was none other than Karna, the son discarded by Kunti.

Karna, who was thought of as a charioteer's son, was ridiculed and not allowed to enter the contest as he was not a Kshatriya prince. But Duryodhana recognized the valor and prowess of Karna and made him the king of Anga, one of the areas under him. Karna was very grateful for Duryodhana's support and promised to be his ally under all circumstances.

Arjuna won the hand of Draupadi the daughter of the King of Panchala, in an archery contest and a swayamvara for his daughter, who was renowned for her beauty. But when Arjuna brought Draupadi home, his mother even without seeing what the prize he had won, asked him to share the prize with his brothers. Thus the Pandavas had to share Draupadi, as a common wife, each spending a year with her as her husband.

Yudhishtira had one big weakness- gambling, knowing this, the Kauravas challenged the Pandavas to a game of dice, with a plan to defeat them with treachery. Gandhari's brother Shakuni, was a master of the game of dice. Yudhishtira who was a relative novice was taken in by Shakuni's sleight of hand. The Pandavas lost first their wealth, their kingdom and themselves. His weakness for gambling drove Yudhishtira to recklessness. Finally Yudhishtira even gambled their wife Draupadi and lost that wager also.

Duryodhana sent his younger brother Dusshasana to bring Draupadi to the court to humiliate her in public. Dusshasana dragged her by the hair to the court and tried to disrobe her in the court in full view of all present. Draupadi beseeched all her husbands and the elders in the court to save her, but no one responded. Finally, Draupadi stopped trying to protect herself, threw up both of her hands and prayed to Lord Krishna to save her.

By Lord Krishna's grace, Dusshasana was unable to disrobe Draupadi. The sari kept growing and growing and Dusshasana finally fell down exhausted, unable to exhaust the sari. Stung by the humiliation meted out to her, Draupadi vowed to have all the Kauravas killed and smear their blood on her hair. She vowed to never tie or braid her hair till this happened.



A compromise was reached finally and instead of losing their kingdom and all their possessions completely, the Kauravas imposed a 12-year exile followed by a year of incognito or anonymity on the Pandavas. During this period, the Kauravas made several attempts to kill their cousins but Pandavas escaped with the support of their maternal uncle Lord Sri Krishna.

The Pandavas made full use of their years of exile. They became wiser stronger and better equipped. Arjuna prayed to Lord Siva and got the Pasupata astra from him as a boon. Bhima

discovered Hanuman who was still alive (being a chiranjeevi) to be his brother, another son of Lord Vayu, the wind god. Hanuman promised to be on the Pandavas flag always and bless them to ensure their victory in any war.

Arjuna was married to Subhadra who was the sister of Balarama and Krishna. Thus Krishna became a part of the Pandava family. Arjuna and Subhadra had a son by name Abhimanyu. Even as a child, Abhimanyu showed great prowess and he promised to be his father's equal when he grew older.

After completing their 13-year exile, the Pandavas came back to seek their kingdom rightfully as per their agreement. Lord Krishna went as the emissary of the Pandavas to persuade them to keep up their bargain. But Duryodhana refused to give their kingdom back. Elders such as Bhishma and Drona tried to persuade Duryodhana to be reasonable, but due to arrogance and greed, he was adamant. He refused to even give 5 villages, not even 5 houses to the Pandavas. Enraged by the treachery of the Kauravas, the Pandavas had no other option but to declare war on the Kauravas to reclaim their kingdom.

Virtually all the kings in India joined in the war or sent some portion of their armies in support of one side or the other in the battle between brothers. The King of Panchala, who was also the father of Draupadi, sent his entire army and his son Drishtadyumna to support the Pandavas. His son Drishtadyumna was appointed as the commander in chief of the Pandava army.

Both Duryodhana and Arjuna came to visit Lord Krishna to seek his support and blessings. Lord Krishna gave the option to the warring factions that they could choose between him and his army. One would get the entire army to fight for him and the other would get only Lord Krishna's personal assistance. Not only that, but Lord Krishna refused to take up arms in the battle and fight. Realising Krishna was God in human form, Arjuna representing the Pandavas, chose Lord Krishna's personal assistance and moral support, while Duryodhana was happy with the help of the Yadava army.

Kunti was told by Lord Krishna that Karna was the son she had discarded on the banks of the Ganga. Krishna asked her to implore Karna to leave Duryodhana and join the Pandavas as his rightful place. Kunti, one night, went into Karna's house. There she told him how he was born to her and that she was forced to give him up out of fear from ridicule by society. Karna, although happy to have finally discovered his real mother, refused to accept Kunti's proposal. He would not forsake the one man who had supported and stood by him during all his trials and tribulations. He promised to Kunti, however, he would only kill Arjuna and not any of her other sons. This way, even after the war for Kunti, no matter who lived, Karna or Arjuna, she would still have 5 sons.



At the start of the war, seeing the opposing army of the Kauravas with all his relatives armed and ready to do battle with him, a disheartened Arjuna was ready to throw down his weapons and give up. How could he fight against and kill his own brothers, guru and grandfather who were arrayed on the opposing side? Lord Krishna who had agreed to be Arjuna's charioteer during the war, counseled Arjuna not give up, but to do his duty as a Kshatriya warrior. Lord Krishna also showed Arjuna his visvaroopam as he engulfed the entire universe before Arjuna's eyes. Lord Krishna told Arjuna that he was only the instrument and that He, Krishna, as the master of the universe, was the one doing all the actions.

These words of Lord Krishna exhorting Arjuna to do his duty, comprise the Bhagavad Gita, which is a sacred book of all Sanatana Dharma followers. It is actually addressed not only to Arjuna, but to all human beings to do their duty. This is called Karma Yoga.

The war lasted 18 days. Hundreds of thousands of soldiers were killed. Bhishma the great warrior and grandfather of the entire clan, was appointed as the general of the kaurava army. On the eighth day of the war Bhishma, was felled. Drona, then, took his place as the commander of the Kaurava army. Drona was killed by Drishtadyumna, under false pretenses. Krishna had earlier circulated a rumor that Drona's son Ashwathama, was killed in the fighting. Drona asked for confirmation from Yudhishtira, who is known for his truthfulness, whether the rumor is true. Yudhishtira replies in the affirmative. He said 'Ashwathama hathah, Kunjarah', meaning Yes Ashwathama was killed, (an elephant) but the last word he muttered under his breath, so Drona did not hear it. At this point, Drona who adored his son, was devastated and stopped fighting and threw down his weapons. This enabled Drishtadyumna to kill him when he was unarmed.

Abhimanyu made a great display of his valor during the war. He broke the Kaurava battle formation and entered inside. But once he entered, the army closed around him. Many of the Kauravas ganged up on Abhimanyu and killed him even before Arjuna could come to his assistance.

After Drona, Karna becomes the general. He had an opportunity to kill Bhima and Yudhishtira, but stopped himself from doing so owing to the promise he had made to his mother Kunti. Bhima's son Gadothkaja, who was born to him through the Rakshasi Hidimbi, caused great losses to the Kaurava army. Gadothkaja used magic and flight to confuse the Kauravas and killed

them by the thousands. Karna was forced to use his sole brahmastra, which he had kept reserved for killing Arjuna on Gadothkaja.

Karna's chariot got stuck in the mud, and Krishna urged Arjuna not to waste time and kill Karna even as he was trying to pull out the chariot from the mud. Lord Krishna said that to ensure that Dharma prevailed in the end; it was alright to make a few compromises along the way.

On the eighteenth day, almost all of the great warriors of the Kaurava army were vanquished. Bhima encountered Duryodhana in a battle of maces. Finally Bhima on a signal from Lord Krishna, struck Duryodhana on the thigh, even though it was hitting below the belt and not worthy of a warrior. Duryodhana was killed and the war came to an end.

The Pandavas won the war only with the support of Lord Krishna. Yudhishtira was made the king of the entire country. But the victory came at a very heavy price - the lives of countless relatives and loved ones.



What is the significance of the Mahabharata?

Mahabharata is one of the most valuable works that has been enlightening people since ancient times. It contains several great and significant lessons. It teaches people to learn and keep up with human and ethical values. Man is a social animal and should abide by the rules of society. The Mahabharata teaches us how to behave as responsible members of society

The Mahabharata is a treasure trove of knowledge and a guide to a good way of living. It revolves around showcasing the relentless hatred and vengeance among cousins and how it leads to tragedy, and how it finally lead to the greatest battle in Indian history at Kurukshetra.

Most importantly, the Mahabharata contains the Bhagavad Gita, which is a distillation of all the teachings of the Vedas and the Upanishads.

Lessons For children From the Mahabharata:

Mahabharata can be regarded as the most valuable treasure for today's generation. It has got everything that is required for a better living. It teaches the basic ethics a human should have to lead a proper life. Its teachings can be attractive to kids as they can be told as stories.

Here is something interesting and relevant from Mahabharata, which every child should know.

- Dharma will always prevail over Adharma. Lord Vishnu took the avatar as Krishna to help vanquish those on the side of Adharma.
- Jealousy is the primary cause of misery. This can be understood from the example of Dhritrashtra and Gandhari, the parents of Kauravas. Out of jealousy for the Pandavas, they did not give wise counsel to their children, but let them follow the path of Adharma. Advise your kids to share and spread love without any negative feelings.
- Envy is the main reason behind budding rivalry, and it can cause maximum damage to an individual. This can be understood from the relationship of Kauravas and Pandavas, which finally lead to the destruction of the Kuru clan. Advise your kids against developing hard feelings or prejudice against anyone.
- Bad company can ruin your life in spite of all the good deeds that you do. This can be understood from the life of the great Karna. Though he was a great warrior, incredibly talented and a humble human, his friendship with Duryodhana led to his downfall. All the charity he had done in his life still could not save him. Teach your children to choose their company carefully.
- Do have faith in the Lord Almighty, irrespective of your abilities. This can be clearly understood from the way the mighty Arjuna believed in Lord Krishna and not on his army.
- A wrong step taken during any stage of life can show its effects for a lifetime. This can be understood from the life of Kunti, who hid the fact about the birth of her eldest son Karna.
- Teach your child to lead a fair life and explain them the need of speaking the truth irrespective of the consequences.
- Never ill-treat a woman, because it may cause devastation and a total downfall. This is evident from the life of Duryodhana and his brother Dussasana. Parents, teach your little children from a young age to respect women.
- Do not get addicted to dangerous and addictive habits, because it can make you lose your worth and downgrade your growth. This is clear from the story of Yudhishtira, who though he had everything one could want, lost everything for his craving towards the game of dice. Teach your children to have control of their self and make them know their limits.

This list can be very long because Mahabharata is not just a tale narrated in the past but is a storehouse of knowledge. It explains the way to lead an exemplary life in the present world. Every instance of it speaks volumes for a constructive living and so is important for our kids to know about this incredible epic.

Quiz

1. Who wrote the Mahabharata?
 - a. Sage Valmiki
 - b. Bhishma
 - c. Veda Vyasa
 - d. Lord Krishna
2. What were the names of the two women whom King Santanu married?
 - a. Ganga and Satyawati
 - b. Ganga and Jamuna

- c. Kunti and Mathiri
 - d. Draupadi and Kunti
3. What was Bhishma's original name?
- a. Santanu
 - b. Bheema
 - c. Arjuna
 - d. Devavrata
4. Who was Kunti's first son?
- a. Yudhishtira
 - b. Karna
 - c. Arjuna
 - d. Duryodhana
5. Who among the following was NOT a son of Dhrtarastra
- a. Karna
 - b. Vikarna
 - c. Duryodhana
 - d. Dussasana
6. Who was the teacher who taught martial arts to the princes of Hastinapura?
- a. Bhishma
 - b. Drona
 - c. Parasurama
 - d. Krishna
7. What game did Duryodhana invite Yudhishtira to come and play?
- a. Archery
 - b. Dice
 - c. Arm wrestling
 - d. None of the above
8. Who was Shakuni?
- a. He was a brother of Duryodhana
 - b. He was Gandhari's brother
 - c. He was Karna's father
 - d. None of the above
9. What were the terms under which the Pandavas were exiled to the forest?

- a. 13 years in the forest of which the last year they should be incognito
- b. 14 years
- c. 12 years incognito out of the total 13 years
- d. 13 years

10. At the end of the exile in the forest why did Duryodhana not return the kingdom to the Pandavas?

- a. The Pandavas did not meet the incognito terms of their agreement
- b. The Pandavas did not come personally to claim their kingdom
- c. They hated the fact that the Pandavas sent Lord Krishna to represent them
- d. Duryodhana's arrogance and greed prevented him from returning the land to them

11. Who was the commander of the Pandava army?

- a. Arjuna
- b. Dhrshtadyumna
- c. Lord Krishna
- d. Yudhishtira

12. Who was Abhimanyu?

- a. Son of Arjuna and Subhadra
- b. Son of Arjuna and Draupadi
- c. Grandson of Bhima
- d. Son of Kunti and Pandu

13. Why did Arjuna choose Lord Krishna to be on his side even without his army?

- a. Krishna was a great warrior
- b. Krishna was a great strategist even without fighting he would help them win the war
- c. Arjuna realized Lord Krishna was God in human form
- d. None of the above

14. How was Karna killed?

- a. He was killed by Gadothkaja
- b. He was killed by Arjuna with help from Lord Krishna
- c. He was killed by Parasurama
- d. He died from old age

15. Of the following which one was NOT one of the main learning from the Mahabharatha ?

- a. Jealousy is the primary cause of misery
- b. Do not get addicted to dangerous and addictive habits
- c. Have faith in the Lord Almighty, irrespective of your abilities
- d. Love thy neighbor as thyself