

Unnoticed Characters

In Mahabharatha

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project focuses on some of the lesser known or less spoken characters in the epic Mahabharata. Be it an Epic, Incident, Encounter, Movie everyone plays an important role and all the contributions are important. It will be interesting to note the backgrounds and the lives of different people other than the main characters as it provides a better insight into the people's lives besides the popular/royal characters in the Mahabharata.

INTRODUCTION

The Mahabharata is an important source of information on the development of Hinduism. The story begins when the blindness of Dhritarashtra, the elder of two princes, causes him to be passed over in favor of his brother Pandu as king on their father's death. A curse prevents Pandu from fathering children, however, and his wife Kunti asks the gods to father children in Pandu's name. As a result, the god Dharma fathers Yudhishtira, the Wind fathers Bhīma, Indra fathers Arjuna, and the Ashvins (twins) father Nakula and Sahadeva (also twins; born to Pandu's second wife, Madri). The enmity and jealousy that develops between the cousins forces the Pandavas to leave the kingdom when their father dies. During their exile the five jointly marry Draupadi (who is born out of a sacrificial fire and whom Arjuna wins by shooting an arrow through a row of targets) and meet their cousin Krishna, who remains their friend and companion thereafter. Although the Pandavas return to the kingdom, they are again exiled to the forest, this time for 12 years, when Yudhishtira loses everything in a game of dice with Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas. The feud culminates in a series of great battles on the field of Kurukshetra (north of Delhi, in Haryana state). All the Kauravas are annihilated, and, on the victorious side, only the five Pandava brothers and Krishna survive.

BARBARIKA



Barbarika witnessed the battle from far away land of pragjyotishpur. He was a lost grandson and descendant of Bheema, and who became a reason of Sri Krishna's death later on. He was one of the few who had a panoramic view of the battle. He was the son of Ghatotkacha and Ahilyawati. He is the grandson of second pandava, Bheema who married Hidimbi after their escape from Lakshyagriha. Hidimbi was a dimasa kachari princess. Bheema left her after a year after their son Ghatotkacha was born. Ghatotkacha was a powerful warrior, who was a half rakshasa due to his maternal side. Ahilyawati was the daughter of mighty asura Murra, who was killed by Lord Krishna after Murra defeated Indra. That is why Lord Krishna is also called as Murrari, the enemy of Murra. After her father's death, Ahilyawati challenged Krishna to seek revenge. Krishna was about to kill her in a combat, but was protected by timely intervention of Goddess Kamakhya as she was her devotee. Goddess Kamakhya informed Ahilyawati that Krishna was Lord Vishnu's incarnation. Thus, Ahilyawati corrected her ways and pleaded Krishna for forgiveness who forgave her and asked her to marry Ghatotkacha, and blessed her with a child who would be a knowledgeable, powerful, skilled warrior.

As a child, Barbarika was bright and a brave. He was taught on warfare by his mother and mastered the Shastra. He once asked his mother about the goal of a follower of dharma to which she explained to him about the cycles of birth, the path of dharma and what it takes to receive moksha. That was a long path and Barbarika wanted to know if a shorter path existed. She responded that if one gets killed by the almighty himself, one attains Moksha. Barbarika made up his mind to get himself killed by Vasudeva Krishna, but he had to provoke Vasudeva Krishna to kill him, like his maternal grandfather.

Barbarika did penance and lord Ashtadeva gave him three infallible arrows. When he heard about the inevitable war of Kurukshetra, he wanted to witness the Great War. This was the war

between Kaurava and Pandava. All options to avoid the war were lost. Barbarika promised his mother that if he had the need to participate in the war, he will join the losing side. He rode to the war carrying his bow and three arrows.

The war was inevitable and great armies and warriors were getting ready for the war. Lord Krishna went to all the great warriors from both sides to ask how many days they would take to finish the war themselves. Bhishma said he would take 20 days, Drona said he would take 25 days, Karna said he would take 24 days, Arjuna said he would take 28 days. Lord Krishna met and got an answer from all the other warriors.

Lord Krishna, the all-knowing, was worried of the lone warrior riding towards Kurukshetra, Barbarika.

Krishna disguised as a Brahmin, met Barbarika on his way. Barbarika could see through the disguise of Krishna too, and found it as an opportunity to provoke the Lord. The Brahmin asked why he was riding alone and without an army. Barbarika responded that he had come to see the Great War, and that he alone is enough for an outcome and does not need an army. The Brahmin asked how many days he would take to finish the war alone. Barbarika answered that he could finish it in one minute. The Brahmin then asked Barbarika how he'd finish the great battle with just three arrows in his arsenal. Barbarika replied that a single arrow was enough to destroy all his opponents in the war, and it would then return to his quiver. He stated that, the first arrow is used to mark all the things that he wanted to identify. The second arrow would destroy all the things that were marked. He did not have to use his third arrow, as it would destroy all things that are not marked. After their work, all the arrows would return to his quiver. The Brahmin asked him that he wanted to examine his strength, to which Barbarika readily agreed.

The Brahmin pointed him to a banyan tree, and asked if he could mark all the leaves of the tree with one arrow. Barbarika, agreed to the challenge, pulled out an arrow from his quiver and closed his eyes to call out a mantra. The Brahmin quietly plucked a leaf from the tree and hid it under his foot. When Barbarika releases his arrow, it marked all the leaves of the tree and finally started hovering around the leg of the Brahmin. The Brahmin asked Barbarika why the arrow was hovering over his foot. Barbarika replied that there must be a leaf under his foot and the arrow was targeting his foot to mark the leaf that is hidden underneath. The Brahmin lifted his leg, and the leaf he had hidden had been marked. Barbarika explained to the Brahmin that

his arrows were so powerful and infallible, that even if Barbarika was unaware of the whereabouts of his targets, his arrows would find their targets.

This incident of the hovering arrow of Barbarika, was the cause of Krishna's death later. The foot below which he hid the leaf became a weak spot of Krishna. Much later after the Great War, a hunter by name Jara, hit Krishna's foot with arrows, mistaking him for a deer thus leading to the death of Krishna.

After seeing the work of Barbarika's arrow, the Brahmin asked whom he would favour in the war if he must participate. Barbarika revealed that he had promised his mother to fight for the side whichever was weak. Now the Brahmin said that if he chose one side and started fighting for that side the other side would become weak and then Barbarika would have to go to the losing side this process will repeat till only Barbarika will remain to which Barbarika did not agree. In time he also revealed that he wanted to attain moksha and was there for Krishna.

The Brahmin, disclosed his identity that he was Krishna himself. Krishna then explained to him that before a battle, the head of the bravest Kshatriya is required to be sacrificed, to worship the battlefield. Krishna said that he considered Barbarika to be the bravest among Kshatriyas, and was hence asked for his head in charity. Barbarika agreed but he wished to see the battle therefore Krishna kept his head in the centre of Kurukshetra. On the first day of the battle, the head started to laugh loudly and scare the soldiers away from both sides. Krishna then had the head placed on top of a hill overlooking the battlefield. From the hill, the head of Barbarika watched the entire battle of Kurukshetra.

YUYUTSU



After the great war of Kurukshetra, Pandavas ruled Hastinapur for 36 years. Around that time, Shrikrishna left earth, for heavenly abode. Pandavas started sensing beginning of Kaliyug. So, they decided, it was time for them, to renounce the world.

They handed over reins of Hastinapur to Yuyutsu and made

Parikshit the king of Hastinapur. He is a rare warrior from Mahabharata, who is revered as the one on a high pedestal of righteousness. Though he was born and brought up in Kauravas clan, he could seclude himself from embracing their evil ethos. With Sage Vyas's boon Gandhari became pregnant. She was pregnant for more than one year, and still the delivery was not in sight. On the other hand Kunti gave birth to Yudhishtira, which made Dhritarashtra impatient. He decided to have a son through Gandhari's dasi Sugadha. She was not Kshatriya, but belonged to Vaishya Varna. Son of Dhritarashtra and Sugadha was Yuyutsu. He was Kuru from father's side and Vaishya from mother's side. He was born on the same day as Duryodhan. To that extent, he was younger than Yudhishtira and of the same age of Duryodhan. But, he was elder to other ninety nine step brothers and sister Dushala.

In the name Yu means 'to fight' and utsu means 'curiosity'. As a whole it meant 'the one who is curious to fight'. It turned out that, his name was contrary to his personality. All his life he tried to bring peace between Kauravas and Pandavas.

Though he was son of Dhritarashtra, Kauravas never accepted him as one of them, since his mother Sugadha was a dasi. While growing up, he was ill treated by Kauravas. There are not many records of his upbringing, except that, Yuyutsu alerted Bhīma about Duryodhan's plan to kill him by poisoning his water. It was Duryodhan's second attempt of killing Bhīma. After

Duryodhan's first attempt of poisoning Bhīma, in fact Bhīma had gained strength of thousand elephants. Hence, in spite of alert from Yuyutsu, Bhīma drank the water and nothing happened to him.

He was one of the eleven maharathis in Kauravas, who could fight 7, 20,000 warriors simultaneously. Dhrutarashtra had appointed Yuyutsu as the viceroy of the Varnavrata region. Once, a coalition of powerful kings attacked Varnavrata. Yuyutsu resisted them and defended the kingdom for six months straight. During all this time, neither Duryodhan nor Hastinapur sent him any help. Soon, after six months, the defeated kings gave up and left. So, it looks like that along with Kauravas, throne of Hastinapur, didn't care much for Yuyutsu. Kurukshetra war was considered to be righteous war, which is regarded as Dharmakshetra Kurukshetra. Warriors from either side were given freedom to choose, which side to fight for. On the eve of war, the conscientious Yuyutsu selected Pandav side to fight for and he fought against his step brothers Kaurav. During the war, he escorted all the ladies of Kuru clan, back to Hastinapur and returned to battle ground. On the twelfth day, he fought Bhagadatta and his elephant Supratika. He also fought Uluka, the son of Shakuni. He was the only Kaurav survivor among the twelve survivors of the great war of Kurukshetra. After the war, Pandav made him King of Indraprasth. He also took care of Dhrutarashtra and Gandhari. Later, when Pandav decided to leave the world, they handed over the reins of Hastinapur to Yuyutsu and left.

BHAGADATTA



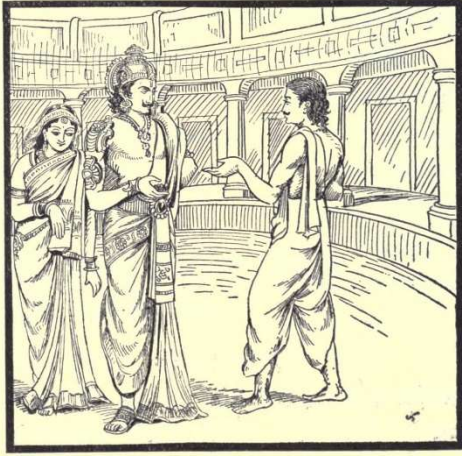
In the story of the war of Kurukshetra, one is left to wonder which was the greatest of the fights, who was the best among the warriors, who was feared the most. There is no one answer, nevertheless, there were many legendary warriors and many bloody fights. One of them was king Bhagadatta, the warrior from east. Bhagadatta was the Pragjyotishadhipati, king of Pragjyotishpur.

Vajradatta and Pushpadatta are his sons and the former succeeded the kinship after Bhagadatta's death. In the war of Kurukshetra, he sided with the Kauravas. He had long history of enmity with the Pandavas side. His father was Narakasura who was killed in the hands of Krishna. During Rajasuya yagya, Arjuna fought against Bhagadatta for 8 days and after a defeat was made to acknowledge Yudhishtira as a fellow king. Again during Ashvamedha yagya, Arjuna fought against Vajradatta, his son. Bhagadatta was the oldest of all warriors in the battlefield, much older than Bheeshma and Drona. He was all wrinkled up, golden white long hair that gave him a look of a lion. He had to tie a silk cloth on his forehead so that the flap of his eyebrow skin is held in place and do not fall over to obstruct his vision. He rode a huge elephant, Supratika. It was also said that the sight of the monarch resembled Indra himself in prowess and was Indra's good friend. During the war, he contributed 1 akshouhini army. He was acknowledged as one of the Maharathas from Kauravas side along with great warriors like Drona, Aswathaman, Vrishasena, Satyavan, Alambhusha and Karna. Supratika, Bhagadatta's elephant was a warring machine. He was an almost undefeatable elephant and has been decked up with golden armour. He carried the seat for the king and his royal flag staff. He was the most dreaded of all animals in the battlefield. Ghatotkacha, the mighty son of Hidimba and

Bheema, was a dreaded rakshasas prince on the side of Pandavas. Ghatotkatcha instilled fear in the heart of the Kauravas camp and so did Bhagadatta with his army of caused havoc in the Pandavas camp. They were both of great strength and skill. They both came from the eastern frontiers, but were on opposite sides of the war. On the fourth day of Kurukshera war, there was a raid on Bheema by Bhagadatta's division. Bheema was stuck in his chest by a shaft by Bhagadatta. Bheema swooned, sat on the chariot holding the flag shaft. Rakshasa Ghatotkatcha, who was the son of Bheema, was outraged and there and then disappeared from the view. He reappeared in a moment creating a terrible illusion of a fierce form riding on a four trunk Airavata created by his powers of illusion. He created illusion other heavenly elephants, viz., Anjana, Vamana, and Mahapadma, followed him on a wild procession ridden by rakshasas. Then Ghatotkatcha urged his own elephant to battle, desirous of slaying Bhagadatta with his elephant. And those other elephants, excited with fury and each endued with four tusks, urged by rakshasas of great strength, fell from all sides upon Bhagadatta's elephant and afflicted him with their tusks. And the elephant of Bhagadatta, thus in pain, uttered loud cries that resembled the thunder of Indra. And hearing those terrible and loud cries of that roaring elephant, Bheeshma, the commander of Kauravas asked all the kings, to retreat for the day. This was a victorious day for the Pandavas. On the seventh day, there was another confrontation between them. Ghatotkatcha attacked Bhagadatta and showered him with shafts and arrows. Huge weapons were hurled at each other and at last the king struck Ghatotkatcha in all his four limbs. He stood still for a while and then mustered all strength and threw a magical golden shaft towards the elephant Supratika. Bhagadatta with a swift action broke the shaft in three, instilling fear to Ghatotkatcha. Ghatotkatcha fled away from the encounter that day in retreat to fight again another day. On the twelfth day of the Kurukshetra War, Duryodhana sent a large army of elephants against Bheema. Bheema killed all the elephants with his mace. This news spread fast, and reached Bhagadatta. Bhagadatta, charged against Bheema on his elephant and crushed his chariot killing his horse and charioteer under the feet of the Supratika. Bheema escaped by jumping off his chariot and got underneath the elephant between its legs. He injured the elephant by severing its organs causing pain. Enraged Supratika caught Bheema with its trunk around his neck but Bheema managed to escape from its hold and again got underneath the elephant. He also tried to hurt the elephant further but was waiting for other elephant from his side come to his rescue. The Kauravas army thought Bheema had been slain by the beast, and started to celebrate. Yudhishtira, Bheema's elder brother, was struck in grief and asked king of Dasarna to charge on Bhagadatta with his division of Elephants. A battle that took place between Supratika and Dasarna's elephant, Supratika crushed Dasarna's elephants to death. In

this melee Bheema ran away to safety, to the relief of the Pandavas. Many warriors Abhimanyu and Satyaki tried to stop Bhagadatta but in vain and he was towards Yudhishtira's position charging. Bhagadatta with his elephant began to crush down the troops of the Pandavas like a wild elephant. Krishna rode Arjuna to confront Bhagadatta and Supratika. A fight started with Arjuna on his chariot and Bhagadatta on his elephant, both equipped with arsenal. Bhagadatta tried to smash Arjun's chariot with his elephant. But he could not succeed before Krishna's skills. Bhagadatta tried all his astras and javelins, which were cut to pieces by Arjun. Arjun cut the bow of Bhagadatta and all the javelins thrown by him. Arjuna was able to destroy the flag staff mounted on the elephant seat. Bhagadatta was raging like a madman, he threw the Vaishnavastra. Arjuna would have been killed that day but Krishna stood up and took the hit of the weapon on his chest, where on impact it became Vijayanti-mala garland around his neck. As this was against the rule of war for the charioteer to participate in active war, Arjuna asked for the reason. Krishna explained that Vishnu gave this Astra to the mother of Narakasura and in his deathbed he gave it to his son Bhagadatta. The Astra is sure to kill the person at whom it is aimed. Nothing could stop him, not even Indra himself. Since Arjuna was his loved one, he had to come shield him. And since the Vaishnavastra is back with Krishna, who is Vishnu in his full incarnation, Bhagadatta is no longer immune from all the astras and weapons. His dreaded elephant too has become like any ordinary elephant. Do not lose time. As advised by Krishna, Arjuna sent out a fine arrow to the head of Supratika, splitting the head. He then sends another arrow to cut the cloth tied around Bhagadatta's forehead holding his eyelids in place. This momentarily blinded him. He took a crescent tip arrow and stuck Bhagadatta in the chest, killing him. The king fell from his seat to the ground dead. Arjuna stepped down from his chariot and went around the fallen Bhagadatta by way of pradakshina to pay his last respect to one of the greatest warriors, his father's friend. Arjuna was Indra's son.

CHITRANGADA



Muchukunda, son of King Mandhata, and brother of equally illustrious Ambarisha, was born in the Ikshvaku dynasty also known as Suryavansha. The important kings of this dynasty are Harish Chandra, Dileepa, Raghu and Rama.

Once, in a battle, the Devas were defeated by the Asuras. Tormented by arrows, they sought help from king Muchukunda. King Muchukunda agreed to help them and fought against the asuras for a long time. Since the Devas did not have an able commander, king Muchukunda protected them against the onslaught by asuras, until the Devas got an able commander like Karthikeya, the son of Lord Shiva. Then Indra said to the king Muchukunda, "O king, we, the Devas are indebted to you for the help and protection which you have given us, by sacrificing your own family life. Here in heaven, one day equals one year of the earth and you had fought with asuras for one year of heaven. Since it has been a long time, there is no sign of your kingdom and family because it has been destroyed with the passage of time. We are happy and pleased with you, so ask for any boon except Moksha (liberation) because Moksha (liberation) is beyond our capacities". Muchukunda asks Indra for a boon to sleep. While fighting on the side of the Devas, King Muchukunda did not get an opportunity to sleep even for a moment. Now, since his responsibilities were over, overcome by tiredness, he was feeling very sleepy. So, he said, "O King of the Devas, I want to sleep. Anyone who dares to disturb my sleep should get burnt to ashes immediately". Indra said, "So be it, go to the earth and enjoy your sleep, one who awakens you would be reduced to ashes". After this, King Muchukunda descended to earth and selected a cave on a hill, where he could sleep undisturbed. The hills and the cave where Muchukunda rested is located to Mount Guttikonda. Kalayavan, the great Yavana warrior king, was killed by Muchukunda's gaze in the Indian epic Mahabharata. Kalayavan was undefeated and unmatched in battle due to a boon, but he was also merciless and cruel. He learns that Krishna is the only person who can defeat him in battle and accepting this challenge sets out to invade Krishna's kingdom, Mathura. When the two armies faced each other in battle, Krishna dismounts from his chariot and starts walking away, followed by Kalayavan. After a long time Krishna, followed by Kalayavan, enters a dark cave. In this cave, Muchukunda was sleeping

since the time he was blessed by the king of deities. The person on whom Muchukunda's gaze falls is doomed to instantaneous death. Kalayavan in a fit of anger and unable to see in the dark attacks Muchukunda mistaking him to be Krishna. When Muchukunda opens his eyes, his gaze falls on Kalayavan who is immediately burnt to death. According to Hindu mythology, Muchukunda was an ancestor of Sri Rama, who belonged to Treta Yuga. Sri Krishna appears towards the end of Dvapara Yuga. So, Muchukunda is asleep for a long time. When he finally woke up, he was delighted to see Lord Sri Krishna. Sri Krishna advised him to perform Tapas to cleanse the accumulated sins, to attain Moksha (liberation). After meeting with Lord, Muchukunda set out of the cave. And the story narrates that he was astonished to see all creatures had shrunken in size over time while he rested in the cave, indicating long ages gone by. Muchukunda then went to Gandamadana Mountain and from there to Badrika Ashrama for doing penance.

VRISHAKETU

Vrishaketu is a figure in the Sanskrit epic Mahabharata. He was the son of Anga Raja Karna and his wife and also the youngest of Karna's sons. In Kashidasi Mahabharata, a regional version, Padmavati is described to be his mother. He was the only surviving son of Karna as he didn't participated because of his young age. After Arjuna got to know that




Karna was his brother, he trained Vrishaketu. Later he went to the kingdom of Manipura with Arjuna and was killed by Babruvahana but was revived by Krishna. Vrishaketu was the youngest son of Karna with his wife Padmavati (Supriya) and the only son of Karna to survive the Mahabharata war. Once Karna's identity was revealed, he was taken under the patronage of the Pandavas. He was the last mortal who had the knowledge of divyastras like brahmastra and varunastra. It is said that all the Pandavas especially Arjuna had great affection towards him. So Arjun taught him all the skills of archery. Krishna asked Vrishaketu for something; Vrishaketu told him he will give him whatever he asks for; and Krishna asked him to not teach anybody the knowledge of divine and celestial weapons.

He was an active participant in Yudhishtira's Ashvamedha yajnas. During the campaign he married the daughter of King Yavanata. Later in the conquest both Vrishaketu and Arjuna were killed by Babruvahana, Arjun was revived by Nagmani.

LEARNING OUTCOME

This project enabled me to learn that there are more than just a meagre number of people in Mahabharata. Inspire the overwhelming number of people in Mahabharata we only talk about the more known or prominent characters. Looking into these lesser known characters was fun as it was informative and also covered a lot of unknown tales from some even belonging to different era.

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