

# BEGINNINGS

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[I] Honour first Nārāyaṇa, and Nara, the most excellent of men; honour too Sarasvatī the goddess; then proclaim the Tale of Victory!<sup>1</sup>

Ugraśravas the Sūta, teller of ancient tales, son of Lomaharṣaṇa the Sūta, once approached the Brahmin seers assembled in the Naimiṣa forest to attend the twelve-year sacrifice of Śaunaka their chief, bowing politely to those keepers of keen vows. When he reached their hermitage, he was surrounded by the ascetics who lived in the Naimiṣa, anxious to hear his wonderful stories. He joined his hands together and paid his respects to all the sages, enquiring how their austerities prospered, while those good men greeted him. Then, once all the ascetics were seated, Lomaharṣaṇa's son politely accepted the seat they indicated. Seeing him sitting in comfort and relaxed, one of the seers now asked him, by way of starting the talk, 'Where have you come from, O Sūta? and where have you spent these recent days? Lotus-eyed one, tell all: I wish to know!'

5

The Sūta spoke:

At the snake sacrifice of noble Janamejaya, the royal seer, and in the very presence of that lord among princes, heir of Parikṣit, splendid stories of

<sup>1</sup> See 1.56.19. Nara and Nārāyaṇa are two divine seers with whom the heroes Arjuna and Kṛṣṇa are identified; Sarasvatī is the goddess of learning and eloquence.

every kind, composed by Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, were related in the proper manner by Vaiśampāyana. I heard them there, the wonderful tales of the *Mahābhārata*. Then, visiting a string of sacred bathing-places and other sites, I made my way to the holy region named Samantapañcaka, home to many Brahmins,<sup>1</sup> where, long ago, the war took place of the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas, and of all the world's kings. From there I have come before you here, for I wished to see you: in my eyes, sirs, every one of you is Brahmā's equal! Noble ones, radiant as sun or fire, I see that in this sacrifice of yours you have purified yourselves by bathing, said your prayers, and made the fire-offerings, and now you are sitting at your ease. What shall I tell you, Brahmins? The splendid tales of ancient times? Or stories of religion? Or the deeds of lords of men and noble seers?

The seers spoke:

15 We wish to hear the ancient tale composed by Dvaipāyana, the foremost of seers, which the very gods and holy Brahmins applauded when they heard it! It is a most excellent story, splendid in wording and narration, full of subtle sayings, adorned with Vedic lore. The history of the Bhārata war, Vyāsa's wonderful composition, forms a sacred canon equal to the four Vedas; it is holy in word and sense, elegant, and enriched with a variety of learning. We wish to hear it just as Vaiśampāyana the seer related it on the instructions of Dvaipāyana at King Janamejaya's sacrifice, winning acclaim, for it is full of *dharma*, and dispels evil and fear!

The Sūta spoke:

20 First, I bow to the Lord, the primeval being, invoked and praised by many, the true, one and imperishable, eternal *brahman*, manifest and unmanifest, existent and non-existent, universal and beyond existence Viṣṇu, who confers bliss and is bliss, lovely, pure and immaculate, lord of the senses, preceptor of the moving and the still, Hari Kṛṣṇa. Now I shall proclaim, entire, the thought of noble Vyāsa, great seer of boundless ardour, honoured throughout the earth. Poets have told this history

<sup>1</sup> Samantapañcaka is also and more commonly known as Kurukṣetra.

before; others tell it now; yet others shall tell it on earth in times to come. This great body of knowledge has been set in place in the three worlds. It is maintained by Brahmins in both longer and shorter forms; adorned with fair words and episodes both human and divine, and containing a variety of poetic metres, it is the delight of the learned. 25

Now Ugraśravas tells of the origins of the universe, and of the seer Vyāsa who composed the shorter Bhārata after the events it describes had occurred. He outlines the story that led up to the great war of destruction; then he repeats the lament voiced by Dhṛtarāṣṭra at the disastrous sequence of events, and Sanjaya's rejoinder that Dhṛtarāṣṭra's wicked sons do not merit grief at the fate which led them to their death. The great Mahābhārata is holy; study of it frees one from sin.

### LISTINGS OF THE BOOKS

[2] At the seers' request Ugraśravas tells the history of Samantapañcaka and describes the composition of an army. Then he lists the hundred sub-books (upaparvans) into which the Mahābhārata is divided, and summarizes the contents of each of its eighteen books (parvans). All knowledge derives from the Mahābhārata.

### PAUŚYA

[3] (Now Ugraśravas describes the events leading up to Janamejaya's snake sacrifice, at which he heard the Mahābhārata recited.) — Janamejaya and his brothers are in attendance at a sacrifice when a dog approaches. Janamejaya's brothers hit the dog, which goes and complains to its mother, the divine bitch Saramā. Saramā curses Janamejaya to fall victim to an unseen danger; Janamejaya appoints as his household priest Somaśravas, who is capable of countering the ill effects of his wrongdoing. Meanwhile, Uttanika, pupil of Veda, visits King Pausya to ask for his wife's earrings as a gift for his teacher's wife. On the way back the earrings are seized by Takṣaka, king of the serpents, but he succeeds in recovering them; however, desiring revenge on Takṣaka he goes to Janamejaya

and tells him how his father Parikṣit had died has a result of being bitten by the serpent king. Janamejaya is filled with anger against Taksaka.

## PULOMAN

[4] — Ugraśravas now asks the seers what they wish to hear; they leave the choice to Śaunaka, their chief. [5] Śaunaka chooses to hear about the Brahmin lineage of Bhṛgu, and Ugraśravas narrates. — The Rāksasa Puloman calls on Fire to confirm that Bhṛgu's wife Pulomā had previously been betrothed to him, and determines to abduct her. [6] When Pulomā is seized by Puloman, the baby Cyavana falls from her womb, whereupon Puloman turns to ash. Bhṛgu is furious at the attempted abduction; when he learns of the part played by Fire, he curses it to feed on all things. [7] Angrily, Fire protests: he is the mouth through which the gods and the ancestors receive the oblations offered them; how can their mouth eat all things? He removes himself from the sacrificial rituals. The seers and gods appeal to Brahmā, who assures Fire that only certain of his flames will consume all things, and that his touch will be purificatory; Fire accepts this.

[8] Cyavana has a son, Pramati; he has a son, Ruru. Ruru falls in love with the beautiful Pramadvarā, but she is bitten by a snake and dies before their wedding. [9] Griefstricken, Ruru learns that Pramadvarā can be restored to life if he gives her half his own lifespan. This he does, and she returns to life; they are married. From then on Ruru kills every snake he sees.

One day he sees an old lizard and strikes it with his stick. The lizard remonstrates: he has done Ruru no harm; why did he strike him? [10] When Ruru explains his hatred of snakes, the lizard explains that he is not a snake but a lizard. Ruru agrees not to harm him, and asks who he really is: the lizard replies that he was once a seer named Ruru, but was placed under a curse by a Brahmin. [11] While still a child, he had frightened a Brahmin with a snake made of straw, and was cursed to become a harmless snake. He had pleaded with the Brahmin, who had then mitigated the curse: it would come to an end when he saw Ruru son of Pramati. This has now occurred. As for Ruru, as a Brahmin he should not perform acts of violence. That is the Kṣatriya way, as when Janamejaya sacrificed the snakes and the Brahmin Āstika rescued them.

[12] The lizard-seer vanishes, and Ruru goes home and asks his father to tell him the story of Janamejaya and the snakes.

[13] — Now Śaunaka asks Ugraśravas to tell the story of Janamejaya's snake sacrifice and Āstīka. Ugraśravas does so briefly. [14] Śaunaka requests the full version of the story, and Ugraśravas agrees to relate it. — Kaśyapa the seer grants each of his two wives a boon; Kadrū requests a thousand snakes for sons, and her sister Vinatā requests two sons of equal might. Kadrū produces a thousand eggs, Vinatā two; after five hundred years Kadrū's eggs hatch into snakes, and Vinatā, impatient, breaks open one of her own eggs to reveal an incompletely formed bird: he is *Anuṇa*, bird of dawn. Angrily, he curses her to be a slave to Kadrū for five hundred years; his brother will free her if she waits long enough for him to hatch properly. In the course of time the divine bird *Garuḍa* hatches from the other egg.

[15] Kadrū and Vinatā see the horse *Uccaiḥśravas*, produced from the churning of the ocean. — Śaunaka asks to hear this story, and Ugraśravas narrates it. — The gods wished to obtain amṛta, the nectar of immortality. Viṣṇu advised them to churn the ocean. [16] Having uprooted Mount Mandara to serve as churning rod, and using the serpent king *Vāsuki* as rope, the gods and demons churned the ocean. After much labour, the water turned to milk, then to ghee; then the ocean yielded sun and moon, the goddesses Śrī and Surā, the horse *Uccaiḥśravas*, and Viṣṇu's gem *Kaustubha*. Finally the amṛta appeared; the demons tried to seize it, but Viṣṇu saved it for the gods. [17] The gods drank the amṛta. The demon Rāhu drank too; before he could swallow it, Viṣṇu, alerted by sun and moon, cut off his head; even today Rāhu's head swallows sun and moon at the eclipse. There was a great battle between the gods, supported by Nara and Nārāyaṇa, and the demons; the gods triumphed.

[18] Kadrū and Vinatā now gamble on the colour of the horse *Uccaiḥśravas*, Vinatā maintaining that it is white, Kadrū that it has a black tail: the loser is to become slave to the winner. Kadrū attempts to persuade her snake sons to turn into black tail-hairs; when they refuse she curses them to be burnt in Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. [19] Kadrū and Vinatā now set out to look at *Uccaiḥśravas*. They see the mighty ocean, and cross it. [20] They observe *Uccaiḥśravas*: its tail contains many black hairs,<sup>1</sup> and Vinatā is enslaved. Meanwhile *Garuḍa*

<sup>1</sup> According to a short chapter interpolated between 19 and 20, the snakes changed their minds and carried out Kadrū's wish.

has hatched. The gods are alarmed at his fiery form, and offer him praise; he withdraws his heat.

[21] Garuda visits his mother; she is instructed by Kadrū to take her to the island land of snakes. She does so, and at her bidding Garuda carries Kadrū's snake sons there. He flies close to the sun, and the snakes are overcome. Kadrū appeals to Indra to shed cooling rain. [22] Indra pours down rain in abundance, to the joy of the snakes. [23] When they arrive at the beautiful snake island, the snakes spend some time enjoying themselves; then they demand to be carried elsewhere. When Garuda asks his mother why he is at their beck and call, she explains her state of slavery, and he asks the snakes what he can do to free her. They answer that he should bring them amṛta.

[24] Garuda prepares to go in search of amṛta, but he is hungry. His mother Vinatā tells him to feed freely on the wild Niṣāda people he will find on his way, but to spare Brahmins. He sets out, and catches and eats thousands of Niṣādas. [25] However, he releases a Brahmin with a Niṣāda wife whom he had inadvertently swallowed; then he travels on and meets his father Kaśyapa. He tells Kaśyapa of his mission, and adds that he is still hungry. Kaśyapa relates the story of two ascetic brothers who had quarrelled and cursed each other: now one of them lives as a colossal elephant, the other as a colossal turtle; Garuda should eat them.

He swoops down and seizes them, flies up to heaven and lands on the branch of an enormous banyan tree, which breaks off under his weight. [26] Garuda observes that the diminutive Vālakhilya ascetics are hanging upside-down from the branch, which he carries carefully to avoid hurting them. He again encounters Kaśyapa, who helps him release them to safety, and tells him where he can drop the great branch without harming any Brahmins. This he does; then he eats the elephant and the turtle. Terrible portents now appear to the gods, and Bṛhaspati warns Indra that through his own fault a mighty bird has come to steal the Soma.<sup>1</sup> Indra instructs the gods to defend the Soma, and a vast armed host

[27] — Śaunaka asks to hear how Indra had been at fault and how Garuda came to be so powerful, and Ugraśravas relates the story. — Kaśyapa had undertaken a sacrifice to acquire a son, and Indra was fetching for it a load of fuel

<sup>1</sup> i.e. the amṛta.

as big as a mountain, when he saw the Vālakhilyas struggling to carry a single leaf, and mocked them. Furious, they sacrificed and invoked their ascetic power to create a new and superior Indra. But after Kaśyapa had urged moderation, they agreed that the new Indra would be a bird, and would also be the son Kaśyapa desired; and so it happened.

[28] Garuḍa now does battle with the gods; he withstands their onslaught and routs them, and then seeks the amṛta. It is guarded by a tremendous fire; Garuḍa assumes a multitude of mouths and fetches water from rivers, with which he extinguishes it. [29] Next, he assumes a tiny form in order to dart between the razor-like spokes of a revolving wheel; then he blinds with dust two snakes that turn to ash anyone they see. Now he takes the amṛta. As he flies away with it he meets Viṣṇu, and the two exchange boons: Garuḍa will be Viṣṇu's mount, but will also remain above Viṣṇu as the emblem on his standard. Then he is attacked by Indra, whose mighty thunderbolt dislodges a single feather of immeasurable size. Seeing this, Indra seeks his friendship.

[30] Indra and Garuḍa become friends. Garuḍa explains to Indra that he needs the Soma for a particular purpose, but he agrees not to allow anyone to drink it: as soon as he puts it down Indra can reclaim it. In return, Indra grants him the boon of feeding on snakes. Garuḍa now takes the amṛta to the snakes, puts it down on some kuśa grass and tells them to take a purificatory bath. Indra takes the amṛta away. The snakes lick the grass where it had been, and their tongues become forked; the grass itself becomes purifying from contact with the amṛta. Garuḍa's mother Vinatā is freed.

[31] — Śaunaka asks to hear the names of the chief snakes, and Ugraśravas gives them. [32] Now Śaunaka asks to hear the further history of the snakes. Ugraśravas begins to narrate. — Śeṣa leaves the other snakes and begins practising austerities in holy places. Questioned by Brahmā, he explains that he is disgusted with his wicked brothers. Brahmā grants him a boon, and he chooses dharma, passionlessness and asceticism. Brahmā is pleased with Śeṣa, and appoints him to support the earth.

[33] Vāsuki discusses with the other snakes how to escape their mother's curse that they will die in Janamejaya's snake sacrifice. Various suggestions are made, some wickeder than others, but Vāsuki rejects them all. [34] The snake Elāpatra reveals that at the time of the curse he overheard Brahmā tell the other gods that the wicked snakes will perish as a result of it, but that virtuous snakes will

survive: an ascetic named Jaratkāru will have a son Āstīka, who will stop the snake sacrifice. This son will be born to a woman also called Jaratkāru. Vāsuki has a sister of that name; she should be given to the ascetic.

[35] Vāsuki visits Brahmā, who confirms that he should give his sister to Jaratkāru the ascetic. Vāsuki gives instructions that he is to be informed at once when Jaratkāru seeks a wife. [36] However, Jaratkāru has no intention of marrying.

Now formerly King Parikṣit had once gone hunting; he had pursued a deer deep into the forest, where he encountered the sage Śamīka. He had asked the sage if he had seen the deer, but Śamīka, under a vow of silence, had said nothing. Angered, Parikṣit had placed a dead snake round his neck and left. Śamīka had a hot-tempered young son named Śrīgīn; he was taunted by a friend that his father had now turned corpse-carrier. [37] When Śrīgīn heard what had happened he instantly cursed Parikṣit to die in seven days' time from the bite of the serpent Takṣaka. Then he told his father what he had done; Śamīka reproved him, [38] but the curse could not be withdrawn. Śamīka sent a messenger to tell Parikṣit about it; Parikṣit took measures to protect himself. On the seventh day, Kāśyapa the Brahmin came to perform a cure if Parikṣit was bitten; Takṣaka approached him. [39] Takṣaka asked Kāśyapa to show his power, and bit a tree, which immediately burnt away to ashes; Kāśyapa was able to restore it to life. Seeing this, Takṣaka offered him great riches to induce him to abandon his mission; Kāśyapa accepted, and went away. Takṣaka now had snakes in the guise of ascetics carry gifts of fruit, leaves and water to Parikṣit. As the day ended, Parikṣit noticed a small worm in a piece of fruit, joked with his ministers that its name might be Takṣaka, and invited it to bite him. The worm became Takṣaka, who entwined him in his coils. [40] Parikṣit died from the snake's venom as if struck by lightning. After the ceremonies had been performed for him, his young son Janamejaya was installed as king. After reigning for some time, he married Vāpuṣṭamā, princess of Kāśi.

[41] Jaratkāru the ascetic wanders the world performing austerities. In a cave he discovers a group of ancestors hanging upside-down from a single strand of grass, at which a rat is slowly gnawing. He offers them his ascetic meat to help them, but they explain that it is asceticism that is the cause of their condition: their one remaining descendant, an ascetic named Jaratkāru, nothing but perform austerities, instead of marrying and continuing the line. [42] Jaratkāru identifies himself and agrees to take a wife, provided she

his own name, is offered to him voluntarily, and does not require his support. The snakes learn of his decision and inform Vāsuki, who offers his sister to the ascetic.

[43] When he learns from Vāsuki that she bears the right name and that he will support her himself, Jaratkāru the ascetic weds Jaratkāru the snake woman; however, he stipulates that he will leave if she ever displeases him in act or word. In the course of time she conceives. Not long afterwards her husband lies sleeping while the sun sinks in the sky; fearing that he will fail to perform the evening rituals she wakes him, after much hesitation. He is angry at being disturbed unnecessarily: the sun does not have sufficient power to set while he is asleep. Despite her pleas he leaves her. [44] She goes to her brother Vāsuki and tells him that her husband has left; he anxiously asks whether she has conceived the child needed to save the snakes, and she tells him that she has. Later she gives birth to Āstīka: he grows up virtuous and learned in the Veda.

[45] Janamejaya asks his ministers about his father's life and death; in reply they first praise Parikṣit highly, and then recount the story of his hunting expedition and the encounter with the silent sage. [46] Janamejaya's ministers tell him of Śrīnīva's curse, the bribing of Kāsyapa, and Parikṣit's death from Takṣaka's venom. Janamejaya determines to take revenge on Takṣaka. [47] He questions his priests as to how he can achieve his aim; they prescribe a snake sacrifice. Preparations are made; a portent appears indicating that the sacrifice will be interrupted by a Brahmin. The sacrifice begins: enormous numbers of snakes perish in the flames.

[48] — Śaunaka asks to hear the names of the officiating priests, and Ugraśravas repeats them. Then he resumes his narrative. — Takṣaka has taken refuge with Indra, who assures him that he is safe. But as the sacrifice continues Vāsuki becomes griefstricken at the death of so many snakes, and he speaks to his sister Jaratkāru: she should tell her son Āstīka to save them. [49] Jaratkāru relates to Āstīka the story of Kadrū's curse on the snakes, and of his own birth to rescue them. Āstīka promises that he will bring the sacrifice to an end; then he travels to where the ritual is taking place.

[50] Āstīka praises the sacrifice and Janamejaya himself at length. [51] Janamejaya proposes to grant Āstīka a boon. The priests tell him to wait until Takṣaka arrives: he has taken refuge with Indra. At Janamejaya's urging the chief priest summons Indra himself, and he arrives with Takṣaka. As the moment approaches when Takṣaka will be sacrificed, the priests tell Janamejaya to offer

*Āstīka his boon; Āstīka chooses the cessation of the ritual. Janamejaya pleads with him to choose something else, but he refuses.*

[52] — Śaunaka asks to hear the names of all the snakes that were sacrificed. They were too many to repeat in full, replies Ugraśravas, but he lists the chief ones. [53] Then he continues his narration. — Āstīka even preserves Taksaka from sacrifice: he calls to him, 'Stay!' and the snake remains suspended in mid-air over the flames. Janamejaya graciously accepts the termination of the sacrifice, and pays his respects to Āstīka, who now returns to his mother and uncle. The snakes are delighted with him and offer him a boon: he chooses that anyone who recites his story shall be invulnerable to snakes. — Now Śaunaka asks Ugraśravas to narrate the tale of the Mahābhārata as told by Vyāsa at Janamejaya's snake sacrifice, and Ugraśravas consents.

## THE EARLIEST LINEAGES

[54] — The great seer Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, grandfather of the Pāṇḍavas and compiler of the Vedas, hears that King Janamejaya is about to undertake a snake sacrifice, and goes to see him. After paying Vyāsa due honour, Janamejaya asks him to tell the story of the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, the events of which he had himself witnessed. Vyāsa instructs his pupil Vaiśampāyana to repeat the tale in full as he had taught it. [55] Vaiśampāyana briefly recounts the story: the hostility of the Kauravas towards the Pāṇḍavas, and Duryodhana's attempts to harm them; their marriage to Draupadī; the division of the kingdom; Arjuna's exile in the forest; and the gambling match that exiled all the Pāṇḍavas for thirteen years and led to the war in which Duryodhana died.

Janamejaya spoke:

[56] Best of Brahmins, you have told me in short form the whole Mahābhārata narrative, the great tale of the Kurus. But as you tell this wonderful story, sinless Brahmin, tremendous curiosity arises in me to hear it at length. So, sir, please tell it again in full, for I am never sated with hearing the great deeds of my forebears. It can have been no trivial cause that led the righteous Pāṇḍavas to slay so many who should not be slain, and to be praised by men for doing so!

Why did those tiger-like heroes, though strong and innocent themselves, tolerate the anguish inflicted on them by their wicked enemies? How was it that wolf-belly Bhīma, mighty of arm and with the vigour of ten thousand elephants, repressed his fury, best of Brahmins, though suffering torment? How was it that Draupadī, though strong and virtuous, did not burn up the sons of Dhṛitarāṣṭra with her terrible gaze when those wicked men molested her? How was it that Kuntī's sons Bhīma and Arjuna, and Mādrī's twins also, obeyed their brother, the tiger-like Yudhiṣṭhīra, and took no notice when his wicked enemies cheated him at dice? How was it that Yudhiṣṭhīra himself, best upholder of *dharma*, expert in *dharma*, son of Dharma, tolerated an extreme affliction that he did not merit? And how was it that Pāṇḍu's son, wealth-winner Arjuna, fighting single-handed with Kṛṣṇa for charioteer, dispatched all the great armies of his foes to the realm of the ancestors? Tell me all as it happened, great ascetic! Tell me everything those mighty chariot-fighters did throughout!

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15

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

I shall proclaim, entire, the thought of noble Vyāsa, great seer of boundless ardour, honoured throughout the three worlds. These hundred thousand verses, composed by Satyavatī's son of boundless power, bring holy rewards: any man of learning who recites them, and any man who hears them, reaches Brahmā's realm and gains equality with the gods. This ancient tale, praised by the seers, is the greatest of compositions: it is equal to the Vedas; it confers supreme purity; in this most sacred history are expounded in full both *dharma* and the proper making of wealth,<sup>1</sup> and in it may be found the ultimate power of reason. That man of learning will gain wealth who recites this Veda of Kṛṣṇa to men of honour, generosity, truth and belief; and even a most dreadful man who hears this history is freed from his sin – even from the sin of abortion.

This history is named the Tale of Victory; it should be heard by him who desires victory, for he will conquer the entire earth and defeat

<sup>1</sup> *Artha*, often mentioned along with *dharma* as two of the three aims of human life. The third is normally *kāma*, pleasure; sometimes *mokṣa*, final release, is added as a fourth. See verses 21 and 33 below.

20 his enemies. This is the best means to secure the birth of a son; this is the greatest road to prosperity; therefore a senior queen and a prince regent should listen to it often. Here is excellent instruction on the proper making of wealth; here is supreme instruction on *dharma*; here is instruction on release, proclaimed by Vyāsa of boundless understanding. People tell this tale now; others shall tell it in times to come; through it sons become obedient and servants well-behaved; the man who hears this is freed at once from every sin of body, speech and mind. Those who hear without complaint the great story of the birth of Bharata's heirs  
25 need have no fear of sickness, much less of the next world, for Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, in his benevolence, composed it to confer wealth, glory, long life, heaven and religious merit by broadcasting throughout the world the fame of the noble Pāṇḍavas and other Kṣatriyas, rich in ardour as well as wealth.

The blessed ocean and Mount Himālaya are both considered treasures of gems, and the *Bhārata* is reckoned so too. The man of learning who recites it to Brahmins at the lunar festivals is washed clean of his sin, conquers the realms of heaven, and becomes one with *brahman*; and the man who recites as much as a quarter-verse to Brahmins at a *śrāddha* 30 ceremony,<sup>1</sup> that man's *śrāddha* unfailingly reaches his ancestors. Any evil that a man may do in error as he goes about his daily tasks melts away as soon as he hears the *Mahābhārata* tale.

It is called *Mahābhārata* because it is the great story of the birth of Bharata's heirs; he who knows this derivation is freed from all his sins. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the unwearying sage, composed this excellent *Mahābhārata* tale in the course of three years. What is found here concerning *dharma*, the proper making of wealth, pleasure and final release,<sup>2</sup> is to be found elsewhere too, O bull-like heir of Bharata; but what is not found here is to be found nowhere.

[57] There was once a king named Vasu Uparicara, a ruler constant in *dharma* and a keen huntsman; a descendant of Pūru, he conquered the rich and lovely region of Cedi at Indra's instruction. He was living in a hermitage, arms laid aside and rejoicing in austerities, when the god

<sup>1</sup> The ceremony in which offerings of food and water are made to deceased relatives.

<sup>2</sup> See verse 16 and note above.

of the thunderbolt approached that lord of the earth in person. Fearful that the king's asceticism might give him a claim to his own rank, Indra himself talked him out of his ascetic practice.

'Lord of the earth,' said Indra, 'dharma ought not to be adulterated here on earth. Protect it, for *dharma* maintains the universe! You should devote yourself constantly and attentively to protecting the *dharma* of this world, for if you adhere to *dharma* you will attain to the eternal blessed realms. You are a mortal, I a god, but you have become my dear friend. Lord of men, take for your home that land which is the milk-rich breast of the earth! It is a land full of cattle, a sacred land, well settled, rich in wealth and grain, precious as heaven, temperate, full of the best enjoyments earth can offer; abounding in wealth and jewels beyond all others, this is the land of riches, the land of Vasu! Take Cedi for your home, O king of Cedi! The people there abide by *dharma*; they are happy and virtuous, and indulge in no false gossip even over trivia, much less over serious matters. The menfolk are devoted to their elders' welfare; they do not split up their fathers' property; they do not put cows to the yoke, but fatten them if they are lean. All classes always follow their own *dharma* in Cedi, bestower of honour; and nothing that befalls in the three worlds will be unknown to you!'

'In the sky there is a mighty flying chariot, a celestial chariot of crystal, fit for a god: it will be yours, a gift from me. Alone among all mortals you will travel aloft in your wonderful flying chariot, like a god in human form. I give you too a victory garland, formed of lotuses that do not fade, to keep you unwounded by weapons in battle. It shall be your symbol, lord of men, blessed, incomparably mighty, and famed as Indra's Garland!'

Then Indra slayer of Vṛtra gave Vasu a bamboo pole, a most cherished gift, intended for the protection of the learned. When a year had passed, the lord of the earth had it planted in the earth in honour of Indra – and from then on, even to the present day, a pole is planted by every true lord of the earth, in the custom he began, O king. On the second day they raise it up, as he did, all decked with baskets, perfumes, garlands and ornaments; they swathe it properly with wreaths and strings, and there they worship the benevolent lord Indra in the mirthful form that the noble god himself assumed in his affection towards Vasu. For when

great Indra saw this fine worship that Vasu, foremost of kings, had performed, the mighty one was pleased, and said, 'All men and kings who shall worship me and joyously observe my festival like King Vasu, lord of Cedi, they and all their folk shall enjoy fortune and victory, and their people shall prosper and be joyful!' Thus, lord of men, the great king Vasu was honoured by mighty Indra, the noble, bountiful god, because he was pleased with him. Men who always observe this festival of Indra with gifts of land and other gifts, with granting of boons and mighty sacrifices, are rendered pure through Indra's festival.

After receiving such honour from bountiful Indra, King Vasu, lord of Cedi, remained then in Cedi, protecting this earth according to *dharma*; and in his love for the god, he instituted Indra's festival. He had five heroic sons of boundless power; and he, as paramount lord, consecrated those sons as kings over different kingdoms. There was Bṛhadratha, celebrated as a mighty chariot-fighter, who became king of Magadha; Pratyagraha; Kuśāmba, whom men call Manivāhana; Macchila; and the 30 undefeated Kṣatriya Yadu. These sons of Vasu, royal seer of mighty ardour, settled lands and cities under their own names, O king; thus there were five Vāsava kings, with five separate dynasties for all time. As for the noble king Vasu, he lived in the sky in the flying palace of crystal that Indra had given him, visited by Gandharvas and Apsarases; and so it was that his name became famous as King Uparicara: he who travels aloft.

The river Śuktimatī flowed by his city. The story goes that Mount Kolāhala, a living mountain, had once blocked her way, full of desire for her; Vasu kicked Mount Kolāhala, and now the river flowed through the gap caused by his kick. But the mountain had already begotten twin children on that river; delighted at her release, the river presented them to the king. One was a son: Vasu, truest of royal seers and bestower of wealth, appointed him his foe-taming general. The other, a daughter named Girikā, or 'Mountain-girl', the king took for his beloved wife.

At the due time Vasu's wife Girikā, full of desire for him, bathed so as to be pure for the conceiving of a son, and told him that her seasonal time had come. But that very day his ancestors urged that truest of kings and best of wise men to kill some deer for their *trāḍḍha*. Unable to

disobey his ancestors' command, King Vasu set off to hunt, full of desire, his mind full of nothing but Girikā, supremely lovely like a second Śrī in bodily form; and as he travelled through the beautiful forest, his seed gushed forth. At once the king caught that seed on a leaf from a tree, for he was anxious that it should not be spilt for nought, and that his wife's seasonal time should not pass vainly by. Struck by these thoughts, King Vasu, truest of kings, now reflected over and over: he understood that his seed must not be wasted, and that it was his queen's time for conceiving; and so, in his knowledge of the subtleties of *dharma* and the proper making of wealth, he consecrated that seed with *mantras*. And he addressed a swift-flying hawk that he saw standing by: 'Good sir, for my beloved's sake take this seed quickly to my house, and give it to Girikā, for it is her seasonal time!'

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Then the swift hawk took it, and flew rapidly up. The bird was rushing on at its highest speed when another hawk saw it coming and instantly attacked it, thinking that it carried a piece of flesh. The two hawks now started a battle of beaks in the sky, and as they fought King Vasu's seed fell into the waters of the river Yamunā. Now in the Yamunā there lived a beautiful Apsaras named Adrikā,<sup>1</sup> who had been cursed by Brahmā to become a fish; and in her fish-form Adrikā swiftly approached the seed of Vasu that the hawk had dropped from its talons, and swallowed it.

45

Nine months passed, and then one day fishermen caught that fish, O truest heir of Bharata; and they drew from her belly two human children, male and female. They thought it a great wonder, and informed King Vasu: 'Lord, these two children were born from the body of a fish!' Then King Vasu Uparicara took the boy: he was to become the righteous king Matsya,<sup>2</sup> true to his vows. The Apsaras was immediately released from her curse, for she had previously been told by blessed Brahmā, 'O fair one, when, in your animal form, you give birth to two human children, the end of your curse will come.' Now she had borne them, and when the fisherman cut her open she quit her fish-form and resumed the form of a celestial; and then that beautiful Apsaras returned to the realm

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<sup>1</sup> Like Girikā, this name also means 'Mountain-girl'.

<sup>2</sup> The name means 'fish'.

of the Siddhas, seers and Cāraṇas. As for the daughter born of that fish, she smelt of fish, and the king gave her to the fisherman to be his own daughter. Beautiful, mettlesome and full of every virtue, she was named Satyavatī. Because she mixed with fishermen, the sweet-smiling girl continued for some time to smell of fish.

55 Obedient to her father, she used to ferry a boat across the river, and so one day the seer Parāśara saw her as he toured the sacred bathing-places. She was supremely lovely, an object of longing even for Siddhas, and as soon as the wise and learned seer saw Vasu's daughter he desired her for her beauty. The bull-like sage then made his purpose plain. Satyavatī said to him, 'See, blessed sir, on both banks of the river seers are standing; how can we lie together under their gaze?' When she spoke so, blessed Parāśara used his power to create a mist which obscured the entire land.

60 The girl was amazed to see the mighty seer create that mist, but she was modest and spirited, and so she said, 'Blessed sir, you should know that I am a virgin and obedient to my father. If I lie with you, sinless one, my virginity will be destroyed; and if my virginity is destroyed, O best of Brahmans, how shall I be able to return home? I should not dare to live at home! Blessed sir, you are wise: give thought to this, and do what you think fit; but do it now!'

In reply, Parāśara, truest of seers, told her affectionately, 'When you have pleased me you shall remain an intact virgin. And choose a boon, timid lady! Lovely one, choose whatever you wish! No favour granted by me has ever failed, sweet-smiling girl!' When Satyavatī heard this, she chose as her boon that her body should have the finest fragrance, and the blessed Parāśara used his power to grant her heart's desire. Then, pleased by the boon she had obtained, and decked only with the charms of womanhood, she lay with that seer of wonderful deeds. And that is how she became famous on earth by the name Gandhavatī, or 'Fragrant one'; men could smell her fragrance at a league's distance, and so she was also well-known as Yojanagandhā, 'Fragrant at a league'.

70 Blessed Parāśara now returned to his own home, and Satyavatī, delighted at the unequalled boon she had obtained by lying with him, gave birth that very day. Parāśara's heroic son was born on an island in the Yamunā: his mind fixed on asceticism, he approached his mother

and said, 'Think of me at times of need; I shall appear to you.' Thus Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa was born of Satyavatī and Parāśara; the child was named Dvaipāyana, 'Island-born', because of his place of birth. Knowing that *dharma* retreats by one quarter in every age, and seeing too that the lifespan and strength of mortals diminish according to the sequence of the ages, he wished to benefit both *brahman* and Brahmins, and so he compiled the Vedas, and hence is known as Vyāsa, the Compiler. The mighty seer, best granter of boons, now taught the four Vedas, together with the fifth, the *Mahābhārata*, to Sumantu, Jaimini, Paila, and his own son Śuka; he taught them too to Vaiśampāyana. It was these pupils of his who separately made public the various compilations of the *Bhārata*. 75

— After this account of the origin of Vyāsa, Vaiśampāyana goes on to supply brief details of the births of many of the other heroes who figure in the *Mahābhārata* story.

Janamejaya spoke:

[58] O Brahmin, I wish to hear in full of all those heroes, both those that you have mentioned and those that you have not, as well as all the other radiant kings. Please tell me fully, blessed sir, the reason why those godlike chariot-fighters were born on earth!

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

This is truly a mystery even to the gods, or so I have heard; yet, after honouring the self-born Brahmā, I shall relate it to you. Long ago Rāma, Jamadagni's son, wiped out all Kṣatriyas on earth twenty-one times, and then retired to Mount Mahendra to perform austerities. Now since that heir of Bhṛgu had wiped out all the world's Kṣatriyas, the Kṣatriya women approached Brahmins to give them children, O king. Those Brahmins of keen vows lay with the women, tiger-like hero, each at her due time; not from desire, and never out of season. Thanks to them, the Kṣatriya women conceived in their thousands, and then gave birth to Kṣatriyas renowned for their valour, both boys and girls, to rebuild the Kṣatriya order, O king. Thus that order was fathered on Kṣatriya women by ascetic Brahmins, and it flourished, possessed of

*dharma* and a very long lifespan; so once again four classes existed,<sup>1</sup> with the Brahmins at their head.

Men then approached a woman at her due time, not from desire, and never out of season; and other creatures too, even animals, only approached their mates at the due time, O bull-like heir of Bharata.

10 They thrived in *dharma*, living hundreds of thousands of years. At that time people were devoted to *dharma* and performance of vows, protector of the earth, and all men were free of care and disease; the Kṣatriya order once more governed this whole earth, bordered by the ocean, covered with mountains and forests and woods, O lord with the tread of an elephant; and with the return of righteous Kṣatriya rule over this earth, Brahmins and other classes experienced the greatest joy. Kings cast aside the vices that arise from desire and anger, and protected their people, punishing the wicked according to *dharma*; and since the Kṣatriya order was devoted to *dharma*, Indra of a thousand eyes and a hundred sacrifices granted sweet rain where and when it was needed, so that the people flourished. At that time no one ever died in childhood, lord of men, and no one ever knew a woman before he came of age.

Thus this ocean-bounded earth was filled with long-lived people, O bull-like heir of Bharata. Kṣatriyas performed great sacrifices at which many gifts were given to Brahmins, and Brahmins studied the Vedas with their branches and Upaniṣads. At that time, king, no Brahmin sold his *brahman*, or recited the Vedas in the presence of Śūdras. As for the Vaiśyas, they used oxen for their ploughing; they did not put cows to the yoke, but fattened them if they were lean. Men did not milk cows until their calves were weaned. At that time no merchant sold his goods by false measure; people performed their tasks, tiger-like hero, in keeping with *dharma*, for they observed *dharma* and were devoted to *dharma*. Members of every class, O lord of men, busied themselves with their own tasks, so that at that time there was no diminution of *dharma*. Cows gave birth at their due time, O bull-like heir of Bharata, and so did women; trees likewise bore their flowers and fruit in season. Such was life during that excellent Kṛta Age, O king, and the whole earth was completely filled with many living creatures.

<sup>1</sup> Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas (farmers and merchants) and Śūdras (serfs).

Then, when the human world had reached such heights, O bull-like hero, demons were born in royal lineages. At that time they had suffered many defeats in battle against the gods, and so, stripped of their sovereignty, they took birth here on earth. Desiring lordship, the proud demons were born among men, and among many other creatures on earth, O lord of kings: cattle and horses, asses, camels and buffalo, carrion creatures, elephants and deer. As they continued to take birth here, lord of the earth, the earth herself could not support herself. 25

Some of them, sons of Diti and of Dānu,<sup>1</sup> fallen from heaven, were born as mighty lords of the earth: full of valour but also full of arrogance, able to change their shapes at will, those foe-crushers overwhelmed this ocean-bounded earth. They oppressed Brahmins, Kṣatriyas, Vaiśyas and Śūdras too, and they oppressed other creatures also in their might; terrifying and slaying many creatures of every kind, they roamed the whole earth in their hundreds and thousands. Sometimes those sacrilegious beings, drunk with their power and with strong drink, even assailed the great seers in their hermitages. 30

When Earth found herself oppressed in this way by those mighty demons, arrogant in their valour and strength, lord of the earth, she approached Brahmā for help. Now that she was overwhelmed by demons, O king, neither wind, nor elephants, nor mountains could support her, and so, afflicted by the burden she bore and troubled for her safety, she sought refuge with that god, the grandfather of all beings. She saw Lord Brahmā, the undying creator of the worlds, surrounded by blessed gods, Brahmins and mighty seers, and lauded joyfully by Gandharvas and Apsarases, expert bards all; so she approached, and added her praise to theirs. Then in her longing for protection, and in the presence of all the world-guardian gods, O heir of Bharata, Earth told him what had happened. But Earth's purpose was already known to the self-born supreme lord, O king; how could the creator of the universe not know all the thoughts of those who inhabit the realms of the gods and demons, heir of Bharata? 35 40

Then, great king, Lord Brahmā Prajāpati, the benevolent, the mighty, origin of all beings, the lord of Earth, replied to Earth: 'The problem

<sup>1</sup> The mothers of two major demon races, the Daityas and Dānavas.

45 that has brought you to my presence, Lady Earth, is one on which I shall employ all those who live in heaven!' With these words, O king, the god Brahmā gave Earth leave to depart. Then the creator of creatures himself addressed all the gods; and he said to them, 'To cast off this burden from Earth, all of you must use portions of yourselves to take birth separately on earth to counteract it!' And in just the same way the blessed one convened the hosts of Gandharvas and Apsarases, and spoke these excellent words to all of them: 'Use portions of yourselves to take birth as you please among mortals!' Now Indra and all the other gods heard what Brahmā, their senior, had said, and they accepted his words as right, appropriate and beneficial. All of them were impatient to use portions of themselves to go to earth, and so they approached 50 the foe-slayer Nārāyaṇa in his heaven, Vaikunṭha. To that highest lord, whose hands bear discus and club, whose garments are yellow and whose complexion is dark, from whose navel sprang a lotus,<sup>1</sup> the slayer of the enemies of the gods, whose eyes are wide and slanted and lovely, Indra spoke, in order to cleanse Earth: 'Use a portion of yourself to descend to earth!' And Hari replied 'I shall do so.'

[59] Indra now made an agreement with Nārāyaṇa to descend with the other gods from heaven to earth in partial form. He gave his command in person to every one of those who live in heaven, and then he left Nārāyaṇa's dwelling. So it was that the celestials, to destroy the enemies of the gods and for the benefit of all the worlds, descended successively from heaven to this earth, and took birth as they pleased, tiger-like king, some in the families of Brahmin seers, some in the lines of royal seers; and they slew demons and Rākṣasas, Gandharvas<sup>2</sup> and serpents, and other man-eating creatures in great numbers. And the demons and Rākṣasas, Gandharvas and serpents did not slay them, for they were mighty even as children.

—Janamejaya now asks to hear the origins of all creatures. Vaiśampāyana lists the classes of beings descended from Dakṣa's thirteen daughters. [60] Next he

<sup>1</sup> The lotus from which Brahmā emerged.

<sup>2</sup> Just a few verses above, at 1.58.47, Gandharvas are included among the celestials whom Brahmā requests to come to Earth's aid.

lists other classes: Brahmā's six sons and their descendants, Sthānu's eleven sons the Rudras, Dakṣa's fifty daughters, Prajāpati's eight sons the Vasus and their descendants, and various others.

[61] — Now Janamejaya asks Vaiśampāyana to detail the births and deeds among men of the gods and demons. Vaiśampāyana lists the many incarnations of the demons, before moving on to those of the gods.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

O heir of Bharata, you should know that Bharadvāja's son Drona — he whose birth was not from a womb<sup>1</sup> — came into being from a portion of Bṛhaspati, most celebrated seer of the gods. He was born here among mortals, tiger-like king, to hold unrivalled knowledge of weaponry, a most celebrated hero of great ardour, the glory of his line, with deeds to match Indra's, regarded by experts in the Veda as the foremost among them, both in the Veda itself and in archery.

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From a fusion of the great god Śiva and Death, Desire and Anger, O heir of Bharata, there was born Drona's son Aśvatthāman, the brave afflicter of his enemies; that mighty hero appeared on earth, lord of men, as a lotus-eyed destroyer of enemy forces.

The eight Vasus were born to Gaṅgā as the sons of Śamtanu through Vasiṣṭha's curse and at Indra's command. The youngest of them was Bhīṣma, who brought freedom from fear to the Kurus; wise and eloquent, he was expert in the Veda and a destroyer of enemy forces, a hero of great ardour, foremost among the omniscient, who fought against the noble heir of Bhṛgu, Rāma son of Jamadagni.

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As for the Brahmin seer who was known on earth as Kṛpa, O king, you should know that that most manly hero was born from the eleven Rudras. And you should know that the foe-crusher Śakuni, who was a king and a mighty chariot-fighter on earth, was an incarnation of Dvāpara.<sup>2</sup>

The Vṛṣṇi foe-crusher Sātyaki, keeper of his word, was born from the group of gods named Maruts, as indeed was the royal seer Drupada, best of all those who bear arms in this mortal world, O king. You should

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<sup>1</sup> See 1.121.

<sup>2</sup> The name of the second-worst throw in dice, and of the second-worst of the four ages of the world, personified as a powerful evil being.

know that King Kṛtavarman also shared this origin, that unmatched hero, truest of bull-like Kṣatriyas; and the foe-crusher Virāṭa too was born from the group of Maruts, a royal seer who brought affliction to the realms of his enemies.

The Gandharva lord well known as Hamsa son of Arīṣṭā was born in the Kuru line to increase its glory: he is renowned as Dhṛtarāṣṭra, son of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, a long-armed king of great ardour who saw through his wisdom; he was born blind through his mother's fault and the anger of his father the seer.

You should know that the blessed Vidura, foremost of fathers and foremost of the wise, was born in this world as Atri's son.

80 King Duryodhana, the foolish, wicked bringer of disgrace to the Kurus, was born on earth from a portion of Kali;<sup>1</sup> he was the man of ill omen, hated throughout the entire universe, who slew the whole world, the base man who sparked off the terrible enmity which led to the deaths of so many. All his brothers were Rāksasas born here among men. All hundred of them were cruel, Duhsasana and the rest: Durmukha, Duhsaha and the others I have not named. These companions of Duryodhana were Rāksasas.

85 You should know, O king, that King Yudhiṣṭhira was born as a portion of Dharma, Bhīma of the Wind, and Arjuna of Indra, king of the gods; and Nakula and Sahadeva, who captured the hearts of the whole world with their incomparable beauty, were likewise born as portions of the Aśvins.

The son of the Moon, known as Suvarcas of great energy, became Arjuna's most celebrated son Abhimanyu. You should know that the mighty chariot-fighter Dhṛṣṭadyumna was a portion of Fire, and the man-woman Śikhaṇḍin, O king, was a Rāksasa; know, too, that the five sons of Draupadī were the group of the All-gods.<sup>2</sup>

90 You should know that Karna, the mighty chariot-fighter who was born wearing armour, was a matchless portion of the Sun god. As for the

<sup>1</sup> The name of the worst throw in dice, and of the worst of the four ages of the world, personified as a powerful evil being.

<sup>2</sup> A group of Vedic deities that notionally encompassed all the gods, but in fact had quite specific membership.

eternal god of gods, Nārāyaṇa, a portion of him came among mortals as Kṛṣṇa Vāsudeva, full of energy. Balarāma of great strength was a portion of the serpent Śeṣa, and you should know that Pradyumna of mighty power was Sanatkumāra.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way, prince of men, many other portions of celestials were born in Vasudeva's line to increase its glory. I have spoken before, O king, of the host of Apsarases: a part of them was born on earth at the command of Indra, and in the world of mortals they became Nārāyaṇa's harem of sixteen thousand queens, O lord of men. A portion of Śrī was born on earth for men to love: she was the blameless girl Draupadī, born into Drupada's line from the midst of the sacrificial altar. She was neither too short nor too tall; fragrant as a blue lotus, she had long lotus-eyes, fine hips and long, black hair. She possessed the five auspicious marks, and her skin was like beryl; secretly she stirred the hearts of five princes among men. The goddesses Success and Steadfastness were born as the mothers of those five, Kuntī and Mādrī, and Wisdom as Subala's daughter Gāndhārī.

Now, O king, I have told you the partial incarnations of gods and demons, Gandharvas, Apsarases and Rākṣasas, who were born on earth as kings mad for battle and as nobles in the great line of the Yadus. This account of the partial incarnations, which should be heard without complaint, confers wealth, fame, sons, long life and victory. He who hears of the partial incarnations of the gods, Gandharvas and Rākṣasas comes to understand the beginnings and ends of things; he becomes wise, and does not sink down in times of trouble.

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## ORIGINS

### ŚAKUNTALĀ

[62] — Janamejaya requests Vaiśampāyana to recount the origin of the Kuru lineage, and Vaiśampāyana begins to narrate. — Duḥṣanta the

<sup>1</sup> A son of Brahmā.

descendant of Pūru is a mighty king whose reign brings virtue and well-being to the whole world. [63] One day he goes out hunting: he kills thousands of creatures in the forest. [64] Then, in a most beautiful part of the wood, he comes upon a lovely hermitage: it belongs to Kanva the seer. Duḥṣanta instructs his companions to wait for him and enters, hoping to meet Kanva; inside he sees many Brahmins performing their holy tasks.

[65] Unable to find Kanva, Duḥṣanta calls out, and is greeted by a beautiful girl who welcomes him in the proper manner. She introduces herself as Kanva's daughter Śakuntalā. When Duḥṣanta expresses astonishment that the celibate Kanva should have a daughter, she tells the story of her birth.

— The great seer Viśvāmitra had performed such fierce austerities that Indra feared for his sovereignty, and sent the Apsaras Menakā to seduce him. Menakā reminded Indra of the power of Viśvāmitra's anger, and asked the Wind to blow her skirt apart in his presence. [66] Menakā appeared before Viśvāmitra, and the Wind did as asked; Viśvāmitra was overcome by desire, and the two of them made love many times. After some time a baby girl was born to Menakā; Menakā now returned to Indra's world, leaving the child under the protection of birds (śakunta). Kanva saw the child and adopted her, naming her Śakuntalā.

[67] — Having heard Śakuntalā's story, Duḥṣanta proposes marriage to her by the rite of the Gandharvas, which requires only her own consent. She agrees on condition that the son she bears him shall become prince regent. Duḥṣanta accepts this stipulation, and they make love; then Duḥṣanta sets out homeward, promising to send an escort to fetch her. Kanva returns home, and is pleased at her choice; he predicts that her son will be a great ruler.

[68] Śakuntalā gives birth to a son; he is brought up in the hermitage till the age of six, and is known as Sarvadamana ('All-tamer') for his fearlessness. Kanva decides that it is time for the family to be reunited, and for Sarvadamana to become prince regent, and he instructs his followers to take Śakuntalā and the child to Hāstīnapura. But when Duḥṣanta sees them he claims to have no recollection of Śakuntalā, and tells her to leave. Śakuntalā upbraids him, emphasizes the joy brought to a man by a wife and son, and reminds him of the story of their meeting; but still he rejects her with harsh words.

[69] Again Śakuntalā remonstrates with Duḥṣanta and insists that he must keep his word. She leaves, and now a heavenly voice urges Duḥṣanta not to reject his wife and son. Joyfully he accepts them both, explaining that his earlier rejection was to clear them of the suspicions his people would otherwise have harboured of them. Now the child is installed as prince regent under the name Bharata. He becomes a great monarch, and from him the lineage of the Bhāratas is descended.

[70] — Now Vaiśampāyana announces that he will recite the genealogy of the Yādava, Paurava and Bhārata lineages. — Kaśyapa marries thirteen of Dakṣa's adopted daughters: of these, Dākṣāyanī gives birth to the Ādityas and Vivasvat. Vivasvat's son is Yama, his son Mārtanda, and his son Manu, the first man. Manu has a child Ilā, who is both male and female, and who gives birth to King Purūravas. Purūravas has six sons by the Apsaras Urvaśī, including Āyus. Āyus too has six sons, including Nahuṣa, and Nahuṣa has six sons including Yayāti. Yayāti has two wives, Devayānī and Śarmiṣṭhā, from whom he gets five sons: Yadu, Pūru, Turvasu, Druhyu and Anu. After a long and virtuous reign he is smitten by old age, and asks for one of his sons to assume his aged body and the kingship, so that he may regain youth and pleasure. All refuse but for Pūru, who takes on the burden while his father enjoys a second youth. After a thousand years, Yayāti installs Pūru as king.

[71] — Janamejaya asks to hear how Yayāti came to marry Devayānī, and Vaiśampāyana begins to narrate. — During the war between the gods and demons, the demons' household priest Śukra is able to bring fallen demons back to life, but Bṛhaspati, household priest to the gods, does not have this power. In alarm, the gods send Bṛhaspati's son Kaca to pay court to Śukra's daughter Devayānī: this will enable him to acquire the necessary knowledge. Kaca does as he is asked, but after five hundred years of paying court he is killed by demons who discover his identity; they cut his body into tiny pieces and feed them to jackals. Devayānī is distraught, and Śukra revives Kaca, but again he is killed by demons who burn his body and mix the ashes in Śukra's liquor. At Devayānī's urging Śukra again summons

Kaca back, but Kaca answers from within his belly. Knowing how dear he is to Devayānī, Śukra gives Kaca his revivifying power, and Kaca bursts out of his belly, then brings him back to life. Śukra proscribes the drinking of liquor by Brahmins, and allows Kaca to return to the gods.

[72] Before Kaca leaves, Devayānī proposes that they should marry, but Kaca is adamant in his refusal. Devayānī now tells him that the knowledge he has acquired will not work for him; he replies that she will not marry any seer's son, and returns to the gods.

[73] The gods receive Kaca's knowledge from him. Now one day Indra sees some women bathing: he becomes a breeze and mixes up their clothes. When they emerge, Śarmiṣṭhā, daughter of Vṛṣaparvan the king of the demons, puts on Devayānī's dress, and a quarrel breaks out between them; finally Śarmiṣṭhā hurls Devayānī into a well and leaves her for dead. Yayāti passes by and sees her; he takes her hand and lifts her out. Devayānī goes to her father Śukra and furiously tells him of Śarmiṣṭhā's insults. [74] Śukra tries to persuade his daughter to calm her anger, but Devayānī insists he take action. [75] He now goes to Vṛṣaparvan and threatens to abandon the demons; Vṛṣaparvan offers him and Devayānī whatever they want, and Devayānī claims Śarmiṣṭhā as her slave.

[76] Later, Yayāti is out hunting when he encounters Devayānī and Śarmiṣṭhā. Devayānī proposes that they marry, pointing out that he has once previously taken her hand. He is fearful of the consequences of a Kṣatriya marrying a Brahmin woman. She sends for her father Śukra, who gives the match his blessing, but warns Yayāti not to sleep with Śarmiṣṭhā. Yayāti and Devayānī become man and wife. [77] In time, Devayānī gives birth to a son. Śarmiṣṭhā, realizing that her youth is passing away, determines that Yayāti must father a child on her too, and asks him to do so. He refuses, reminding her of Śukra's words, but she overcomes his objections. Now Śarmiṣṭhā too gives birth to a son.

[78] Questioned by Devayānī, Śarmiṣṭhā tells her that the father of her child is an unnamed seer. Devayānī bears Yayāti two sons, Yadu and Turvasu; Śarmiṣṭhā bears him three: Druhyu, Anu and Pūru. One day Devayānī sees Śarmiṣṭhā's three boys: they resemble Yayāti and seem to know him. She learns the truth from Śarmiṣṭhā, and at once announces that she will leave Yayāti. Her father Śukra further curses him to be smitten by old age, but agrees that he may pass the curse on to a son; that son

will become a great king. [79] Yayāti approaches his five sons one by one, asking them to take on the burden of his old age and wrongdoing for a thousand years. Each in turn refuses, save for the last, Pūru, who agrees. Yayāti tells Pūru that his lineage will inherit the kingship.

[80] The rejuvenated Yayāti rules happily and virtuously for a thousand years. Then he restores Pūru's youth to him and proposes to make him king. His subjects query the propriety of passing over the four older sons, but acquiesce when they hear of Pūru's filial devotion. The Yādavas are descended from Yadu, the Yavanas from Turvasu, the Bhojas from Druhyu and the barbarian Mlecchas from Anu; from Pūru are descended the Pauravas, the dynasty of which Janamejaya himself forms a part.

## THE LATER STORY OF YAYĀTI

[81] — Vaiśampāyana now briefly tells the rest of Yayāti's story. Janamejaya asks to hear it in full, and Vaiśampāyana agrees to narrate it. — After installing Pūru as king and banishing his other sons, Yayāti lives for many years in the forest, sacrificing and performing austerities. Then he goes to heaven, [82] where he is honoured by the gods. Indra asks him what advice he had given Pūru when he assumed the kingship: Yayāti replies that he had stressed the need to avoid hurtful words.

[83] Indra now asks him to name his equal in asceticism, and Yayāti answers that he has none among mortals or immortals. To punish him for his pride Indra now casts him out of heaven, but grants his wish that he should fall among good people. As he falls blazing through the sky he is seen by the seer Aṣṭaka, who asks him who he is and assures him that he has arrived among the good. [84] Yayāti identifies himself and explains his situation. He tells Aṣṭaka that fate brings whatever it brings: the wise person accepts this with equanimity.

[85] Aṣṭaka questions Yayāti about rebirth, and Yayāti describes the processes by which human beings are reborn as higher or lower creatures, according to the merit of their actions. Only through good deeds may one attain heaven, and pride will undermine even these. [86] Aṣṭaka asks about the behaviour that is fitting for people in the different stages of life, and about the different kinds of holy sage. Yayāti explains.

[87] Aṣṭaka now asks whether he possesses any realms within heaven; when Yayāti tells him that he does, he offers them to Yayāti to avert his fall, but Yayāti refuses. Pratardana asks the same question and makes the same offer; again Yayāti declines it. [88] Vasumanas and Śibi in turn offer Yayāti their heavenly realms, but he continues to refuse their offers. But at this point five gold chariots appear to carry all five of them to heaven. As they go, Yayāti tells Aṣṭaka, Pratardana, Vasumanas and Śibi that he is their mother's father.

[89] — Janamejaya asks to hear about the kings who succeeded Pūru, and Vaiśampāyana begins to relate their history. — In the genealogy of the Paurava dynasty there are six generations from Pūru himself to Duḥṣanta; Duḥṣanta's son by Śakuntalā is Bharata, founder of the Bhārata line. In the fifth generation after Bharata, Saṃvaraṇa becomes king. In his reign there is famine and pestilence, and he is attacked by his Pāñcāla cousins, but after a period spent in exile he wins the favour of the seer Vasiṣṭha and regains his kingdom. Saṃvaraṇa's son is Kuru; in the third or fourth generation<sup>1</sup> after Kuru comes Pratīpa, father of Śaṃtanu. [90] — Janamejaya requests a fuller account of the genealogy, and Vaiśampāyana responds with a complete list from Dakṣa down to Janamejaya himself.

[91] — (Now Vaiśampāyana begins to narrate the beginning of the central story, starting with Pratīpa.) — King Mahābhiṣa is virtuous and a great sacrifice, and so enters heaven. One day the wind chances to lift the dress of Gaṅgā; Mahābhiṣa does not avert his gaze, and is cursed by Brahmā to birth as a mortal before he regains heaven. He chooses to be the son of King Pratīpa. Meanwhile the eight Vasus too have been cursed by Vasiṣṭha to birth as mortals. They request Gaṅgā to become a woman to give birth to them as her sons: their father should be Pratīpa's as yet unborn son Śaṃtanu, and Gaṅgā should drown each child as it is born. She consents on condition that Śaṃtanu is allowed to keep one son.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[92] Now King Pratīpa was devoted to the welfare of all beings: he

<sup>1</sup> Between verses 51 and 52 of 1.89, notes the editor Sukthankar, 'there appears to have been a palpable lacuna in the original which was filled up, independently, in different ways in the two recensions'.

settled himself for many years on the bank of the Gaṅgā, where he engaged in constant prayer. One day as the royal seer sat deep in study, Gaṅgā herself, lovely as Śrī, full of beauty and virtue, heavenly in form and fair of face, a spirited goddess and supremely desirable, arose from the water and sat upon his right thigh, strong as the trunk of a *śāla* tree. King Pratīpa said to the spirited girl, 'O fair one, what favour may I do that you desire?' She answered, 'O king, I love you! Make love to me, best of Kurus! Rejection of loving women is frowned on by the virtuous.'

5

Pratīpa now replied, 'Beautiful one, you should know my holy vow: I will not lie with another man's woman, or with a woman of a different class.'

Gaṅgā said, 'I am not ill-favoured! I am not a forbidden woman! I am not an object of any kind of censure! Make love to me, O king, a virgin and a beautiful woman who loves you!'

10

Pratīpa answered, 'I have refused the favour you are urging me to do you; were I to promise otherwise, my violation of *dharma* would destroy me. You have come to my right thigh to embrace me, timid beauty, but you should know that this is where children and daughters-in-law sit. Lovers sit on the left. But you avoided that, and so I will not lie with you, beautiful lady. Be my daughter-in-law, O fair one! On my son's behalf I accept you, since you came to me on the daughter-in-law's side, girl with fine thighs!'

Gaṅgā replied, 'Be it just so, O king, for you know *dharma*: I shall be united with your son. But understand it is for love of you that I shall give my love to the celebrated line of Bharata! You Bhāratas are the final appeal for all princes upon earth, and I could not complete the story of your virtues, even in hundreds of years, for those who spring from this line of yours show goodness beyond comparison. But your son is not to know my antecedents, nor under any circumstances to enquire into anything that I may do. On these terms I shall live with your son and grant him growing happiness, till, rich in sons, merit and pleasure, he shall attain to heaven.'

15

After giving her agreement she disappeared before his eyes, O king. But King Pratīpa remembered, and awaited the birth of his son. And so at this time that bull-like Kṣatriya practised austerities with his wife

in order to get a son, O heir of Kuru. And when they were both old, their son, Mahābhiṣa, was born; since he was born of a father whose passions were stilled, he was known as Śaṁtanu.<sup>1</sup> Śaṁtanu, aware that the imperishable realms are conquered by means of one's own actions, was a man of strictly virtuous acts, O truest of the Kurus.

20 When Śaṁtanu had come of age, Pratīpa then informed his son: 'Once, long ago, O Śaṁtanu, a woman approached me for your sake. My son, if that beautiful celestial woman should come to you secretly, full of desire and longing to bear a son, you should not ask her, as is usual, "Lady, who are you, or whose are you?" You should not question her about anything she does, sinless one, but at my command make love to her who loves you!' When King Pratīpa had thus instructed his son Śaṁtanu, he consecrated him as king over his own kingdom and then entered the forest as an ascetic.

25 Wise King Śaṁtanu was famous throughout the earth as a bowman; in his fondness for the hunt he was always travelling the forests. Alone that truest of kings followed the course of the Gaṅgā, frequented as it is by Siddhas and Cāraṇas, slaying both deer and buffalo. Then one day, great king, he saw a supremely lovely woman blazing with beauty, like Śrī herself in person. She was flawless, with gleaming teeth and decked in heavenly ornaments; she stood alone clad in fine garments, her complexion like the inner petals of a red lotus. When the king saw her, he was astonished by her beauty and felt the hair rise on his body; he drank her in with both eyes, but could not get his fill of her. And as soon as she saw him, a radiant king out travelling, her sensuous heart went out to him in love; she too could not get her fill of him.

30 Now the king asked her, speaking in soft tones to encourage her, 'Slender-waisted one, are you a goddess, or a demoness, or a Gandharva girl, or an Apsaras? Are you a Yakṣī, or a snake girl? Or are you a mortal woman? Whoever you are, splendid godlike lady, become my wife!'

The faultless girl listened with a soft and lovely smile to the king's words; then, recalling her agreement with the Vasus, she went up to him, and spoke a speech to gladden his heart: 'Lord of the earth, I shall

<sup>1</sup> This statement is a *nirvacana*, seeking to explain Śaṁtanu's name through an appeal to the similar word *sānta*, 'stilled'.

become your queen, obedient to your will. But whatever I do, O king, be it for good or ill, you must not stop me or chide me for it. I shall remain with you as long as you follow this course, O king; but if I am stopped or chided I shall leave you, make no doubt!

35

King Śamtanu assented, and so she was filled with the highest delight, O truest heir of Bharata, at gaining such an incomparable prince. And Śamtanu too, having gained her, enjoyed her, giving his desire full rein; but recalling that she was never to be questioned, he took care not to say anything to displease her. The king was delighted with her disposition and her deeds, with her beauty and nobility, and with the services she did him in private. And the goddess Gaṅgā, the divinely lovely river that flows through the three worlds, now in a glorious human form, acted the compliant wife to the lion-like king Śamtanu, resplendent as Indra king of the gods, whose good fortune had granted his desire. Skilful at love and its enjoyment, entrancing him with her alluring movements, she made love to her king; and he made love to her.

40

So rapt was he in love, so taken by her matchless womanly charms, that he had no notion how many years, seasons and months had passed. But as King Śamtanu made love with her to his heart's content, he fathered on her eight godlike sons; and one by one, as each was born, O heir of Bharata, she cast them in the water, drowning them in the Gaṅgā's stream while telling them, 'I do this to please you!' It did not please King Śamtanu; but he said nothing to her, fearful that she would leave him.

45

When the eighth was born she seemed full of mirth, and the grieving king, longing for his own son, said to her, 'Do not kill him! Who are you, or whose are you? Why do you harm your sons? Stay, wicked child-killer: do not incur this dreadful sin!'

She answered, 'Best of fathers, longing for a son, I shall not kill your son! But now my time with you has run out, in accordance with the agreement that we made. I am Gaṅgā, daughter of Jahnu, honoured by great seers in their hosts! It was to achieve the purpose of the gods that I lived here with you. These eight sons were the Vasus, blessed gods of mighty power who, through the fault of Vasiṣṭha's curse, took on human form. There is no one on earth but you fit to be their father, and no mortal woman here as fit as I am to give birth to them. Therefore I too

50

took human form to become their mother; and you fathered the eight Vasus, and in doing so conquered the imperishable realms. But this was the promise that I made to those gods, the Vasus: "I shall free each of you from your human birth as soon as you are born!" And so they were freed from the curse of the noble Vasiṣṭha Āpava. Now fare you well, for I shall go. Look after your son, who will be a keeper of mighty vows. 55 One by one I have brought the Vasus here into your dwelling; know that this my last-born is your son, the gift of Gaṅgā!"

[93] Śamtanu asks her what caused Vasiṣṭha to curse the Vasus, and she tells him the story. — Dyaus and the other Vasus were enjoying themselves in the forest near Vasiṣṭha's hermitage. Dyaus's wife persuaded her husband to steal Vasiṣṭha's wish-granting cow in order to confer permanent youth upon a mortal friend of hers; when he came to know this, Vasiṣṭha cursed the Vasus to birth as men. When they pleaded with him, he limited the term of the curse to one year for all but Dyaus himself: he would have a long, virtuous but celibate life as a mortal. — After completing this story, Gaṅgā disappears, taking her child Devavrata with her. [94] Śamtanu now reigns virtuously in Hāstinapura for many years.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

Once, as he followed the course of the Gaṅgā after wounding a deer in the hunt, King Śamtanu noticed that the river contained little water; and, seeing this, that bull-like hero reflected: 'Why is it that today this best of rivers is not flowing as before?' So the high-minded king sought out the cause, and saw a good-looking boy, handsome and strong, standing wielding a celestial weapon as if he were Indra himself, and damming the entire Gaṅgā with sharp arrows. 25

When he saw the river Gaṅgā dammed by arrows before his eyes, the king was astonished at such a superhuman feat. Now the wise Śamtanu had formerly seen his son as a newborn child, and so he could not recognize the boy from memory; but the boy knew Śamtanu for his father, and used his magic skill to baffle him by vanishing on the spot. And when King Śamtanu saw that marvel happen there he felt sure it was his son, and addressed the Gaṅgā: 'Appear to me!' Then Gaṅgā appeared to him in a supremely lovely form, holding that boy, adorned

with ornaments, by the right hand; and she herself was decked with ornaments and wearing spotless garments. Though he had known her formerly, Śamtanu did not recognize her. 30

Now Gaṅgā spoke to him. 'Tiger-like king, this is that eighth son whom you fathered on me long ago. Take him home with you! He has studied the Vedas with their branches under Vasistha himself; he has courage, and has acquired expertise in arms; he is an excellent Bowman, equal in battle to Indra king of the gods; indeed he has won the approval of the gods, and of the demons too, O heir of Bharata. Whatever learning is known to Śukra Uśanas, the demons' household priest, is known to him; and likewise your noble, strong-armed son has all the learning, complete in every detail, of Angiras's son Brhaspati, household priest of the gods and honoured by gods and demons alike. As for arms, he knows as much as Jamadagni's son Rāma, the unassailable seer of mighty energy. He is a great Bowman, and understands both the *dharma* of kings and the proper making of wealth. Heroic king, he is your own heroic son, my gift to you. Take him home!' 35

So at her bidding Śamtanu took his son, blazing like the sun, and returned to his own city. And when he reached his own city, which was like the city of Indra, believing that his fortunes were now prospering in every way he could desire, the Paurava king installed his son as prince regent over the Pauravas.

Śamtanu's son won great renown, and delighted the Pauravas, his own father and the whole land with his conduct, O bull-like heir of Bharata; and so the king of immeasurable valour passed four years very happily with his son. Then one day, as he visited a forest near to the river Yamunā, King Śamtanu smelt a wonderful fragrance, beyond the power of words to describe; and when he searched in every direction for its source, he saw a divinely lovely, dark-eyed fisher girl. At once he asked her, 'Whose are you, and who are you, timid one? And how do you like to spend your time?' She answered, 'Bless you, sir, I am a fisher girl, and it is my duty to ferry a boat across the river, as my father, the king of the fishermen, has instructed me!' 40

King Śamtanu perceived that this fisher girl was divinely lovely, full of beauty, sweetness and fragrance, and he desired her. He therefore went straight to her father to ask for her as his wife. But the fisher king 45

replied to Śamtanu lord of the earth, 'My lovely daughter was destined for a husband from the moment of her birth. However, you must know what is my heart's desire, lord of men. If you will ask me for her as your wife, you must give me your word to keep an agreement with me; and you are true to your word, sinless king! By that agreement I shall give you this girl, for I will surely never find another husband for her to match you.'

50 Śamtanu answered, 'Fisherman, I shall hear the boon that you request and then determine my answer, yes or no. If it can be granted, I shall grant it; if it cannot be granted, I shall refuse.' Then the fisherman spoke again. 'O king, the son she bears is to be consecrated as king after you; he and no other is to rule the earth!'

Śamtanu would not grant this boon to the fisherman, consumed though he was by his fierce desire, O heir of Bharata; and so, still thinking of the fisher girl, the king returned to Hāstinapura, nearly out of his mind with grief. Some time afterwards, as he continued to grieve and mope, his son Devavrata approached and said to him, 'Father, you are safe on every side, and all the princes are obedient to you; so why are you so sad? Why are you always grieving? Why do you seem to mope, O king, and never speak a word?'

When he heard his son's words, Śamtanu replied, 'What you say is true: I feel despondent. And the reason for my grief, my son, is this: you are the sole heir in this great line of Bharata, and mortals do not live for ever. If disaster should somehow befall you, son of Gaṅgā, that is the end of our line. Now it is true that as my sole son you mean more to me than a hundred other sons; and I have no desire to marry again without good reason. But, bless you, I want to prevent the destruction of our lineage, and those who expound *dharma* equate a single child with sonlessness. The *agnihotra* fire ritual, the three Vedas, sacrifices at which gifts are given to Brahmins: all of these together are not worth one sixteenth of a son. So it is among men, and so it is among all creatures. I have no doubt, wise son, that a son contains within himself even the eternal triple Veda, ancient and excellent as it is. But you, heir of Bharata, are a hero, ever unforbearing, always armed, and so, my sinless son, it is through nothing else but arms that you will meet your death. That is why I am cast into doubt. How will it be when you are

no more? There: I have told you in full the reason for my grief, my son.'

When he learnt that this was the reason, whole and in full, Devavrata, who was an intelligent man, set forth, thinking the matter over. He went straight to an old minister who was well disposed towards his father, and asked him the reason for his father's grief; and he, when questioned by the Kuru leader, told him truthfully about the boon requested for that girl, O bull-like heir of Bharata. Then Devavrata, accompanied by senior Kṣatriyas, went to the fisher king and asked him in person for his daughter as wife for his father Śamtanu.

The fisherman received him with all proper respect, and, once he was seated in the royal assembly, he addressed him thus, O heir of Bharata: 'Bull-like hero, you are yourself a lord to match Śamtanu: a son who outranks all fathers! What should I say to you? Who would not suffer torment in rejecting such a desirable, praiseworthy marriage alliance? Not even Indra himself! The noble from whose seed this child, Satyavatī of high repute, has sprung, a man equal in virtues to you Bhāratas, has often praised your father to me, young man, as being the one amongst all kings worthy to marry her. Once I even turned down the divine seer Asita, for that truest of seers too was a keen suitor for Satyavatī. But I am the girl's father, and I have something to say, O bull-like heir of Bharata. I can see a single, powerful drawback to this match, and that is rivalry. Anyone who has you for his rival, be he Gandharva or demon, could never live at ease because of your anger, afflicter of your enemies. This and this alone is the drawback to such a marriage-contract, O prince; good sir, please understand it!'

In reply, Gaṅga's son Devavrata spoke fittingly on his father's behalf, O heir of Bharata, in the hearing of the Kṣatriyas: 'Accept my words as truth, truest of men! No other man, born or unborn, would dare to speak such words. I shall do as you have said; the son born to this girl shall be our king!'

The fisherman now answered him. 'Bull-like heir of Bharata, you have undertaken a difficult deed for the kingdom's sake! You are yourself a lord to match Śamtanu of immeasurable splendour, and your *dharma* and might confer on you the power to bring about my daughter's marriage. But, good sir, hear what I say and what else must be done: I

have to speak, O foe-tamer, as the girl's father. The promise you have sworn for Satyavatī's sake in the midst of all the Kṣatriyas is typical of you, for you are dedicated to truth and *dharma*. You will not break it, strong-armed hero: I have no doubt at all of this. But you might have a child, and here the doubts I have are great!'

85 Then, having heard the fisherman's thoughts, and being dedicated to truth and *dharma*, Devavrata spoke his promise, O king, seeking his father's good. 'Hear, O mighty fisher king, these words I speak for my father's sake in the hearing of these Kṣatriyas! I had already renounced the kingship, lord of men; now I make this further resolve concerning children. From today forward, fisherman, I shall practise holy celibacy; and though I shall be sonless, I shall gain imperishable realms in heaven!'

When the fisherman heard Devavrata's words, he felt the hair rise on his body; then, in accord with *dharma*, he made his reply to him: 'I give her!' And now the gods in heaven, with the Apsarases and all the hosts of seers, showered Devavrata with flowers, and proclaimed, 'He is Bhīṣma!'<sup>1</sup> Then Bhīṣma addressed Satyavatī of high repute on his father's behalf, and said, 'Mother, mount my chariot, and we shall go home.' With these words he helped the lovely girl into the chariot; and then, returning to Hāstīnapura, he presented her to Śamtanu. The Kṣatriya lords praised the difficult deed he had done; separately and together, they proclaimed, 'He is Bhīṣma!' And his father Śamtanu too, when he learnt of Bhīṣma's mighty deed, was pleased with him, and granted him the boon that he might choose the hour of his death.

[95] Satyavatī bears Śamtanu two sons, Citrāṅgada and Vicitravīrya. After Śamtanu's death, Bhīṣma installs Citrāṅgada as king, but he perishes in battle with a Gandharva. Bhīṣma now installs Vicitravīrya, who is still a child and acts under Bhīṣma's own instruction. [96] When the time comes for Vicitravīrya to be married, Bhīṣma attends the svayamvara<sup>2</sup> of the three daughters of the king of Kāśi. He announces that he is abducting all three, and challenges the

<sup>1</sup> 'The awesome one'. The name Devavrata too in fact reflects this aspect of Bhīṣma's character, for it means 'the one of godlike vows'.

<sup>2</sup> A ceremony at which a girl chooses her husband from among suitors who come to contend for her.

*Kṣatriyas who are present to try to stop him: they attack him, but he defeats them all and sets off for Hāstīnapura. As he goes he is challenged by Śālva, king of Saubha, but after a fierce fight he defeats him too. Preparations are under way for Vicitravīrya's wedding to the three girls when the eldest of them, Ambā, informs Bhīṣma that at the time of her abduction she had already chosen Śālva for her husband; he allows her to leave. The two younger sisters, Ambikā and Ambālikā, are now married to Vicitravīrya, who lives in marital bliss for seven years before dying of consumption. [97] Satyavatī implores Bhīṣma to carry out his duty to continue the line by fathering children on Ambikā and Ambālikā, but he refuses to break his vow of celibacy: he will tell her the proper Kṣatriya course of action.*

[98] Bhīṣma now tells Satyavatī of the Bhārgava Brahmin Rāma Jāmadagnya, who annihilated the Kṣatriyas: afterwards, Brahmins fathered a new race of Kṣatriyas on Kṣatriya women. Then he relates the story of the seer Dīrghatamas, who was cast out by his own sons but rescued by King Balin, and who at Balin's request fathered the royal seer Arīga on Queen Sudeṣṇā. [99] Satyavatī should similarly ask a Brahmin to father children on Ambikā and Ambālikā. She assents, and tells Bhīṣma how, when she was a ferry-woman, the seer Parāśara had seduced her: she gave birth to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa. Bhīṣma agrees that he should be approached to save the line from extinction. Vyāsa is summoned and the task explained to him. He is willing to carry it out, but says that the two young queens must perform an observance for a year to prepare them. Satyavatī urges speed: without a king, the kingdom will fail. Vyāsa agrees to her plea, but warns that in this case the young women's observance must be to tolerate his ugliness and his smell. Satyavatī now informs Ambikā what she must do.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[100] Then when the girl's due time came, Satyavatī told her to bathe and lie in her bed; and quietly she said, 'Ambikā, you have a brother-in-law, and today he is to come into you. Wait for him; do not fall asleep! He will come during the night.' When she heard her mother-in-law say this, she lay in her fine bed, thinking of Bhīṣma and the other bull-like Kurus. Now Vyāsa the seer had been commissioned to go first to Ambikā. True to his word, he came into her bed while the lamps shone bright; and when the princess saw his matted red hair, his blazing eyes and his dark brown beard, she shut her eyes. That night he lay with

Kṣatriyas who are present to try to stop him: they attack him, but he defeats them all and sets off for Hāstinapura. As he goes he is challenged by Śālva, king of Saubha, but after a fierce fight he defeats him too. Preparations are under way for Vicitravīrya's wedding to the three girls when the eldest of them, Ambā, informs Bhīṣma that at the time of her abduction she had already chosen Śālva for her husband; he allows her to leave. The two younger sisters, Ambikā and Ambālikā, are now married to Vicitravīrya, who lives in marital bliss for seven years before dying of consumption. [97] Satyavatī implores Bhīṣma to carry out his duty to continue the line by fathering children on Ambikā and Ambālikā, but he refuses to break his vow of celibacy: he will tell her the proper Kṣatriya course of action.

[98] Bhīṣma now tells Satyavatī of the Bhārgava Brahmin Rāma Jāmadagnya, who annihilated the Kṣatriyas: afterwards, Brahmins fathered a new race of Kṣatriyas on Kṣatriya women. Then he relates the story of the seer Dīrghatamas, who was cast out by his own sons but rescued by King Balin, and who at Balin's request fathered the royal seer Aṅga on Queen Sudeṣṇā. [99] Satyavatī should similarly ask a Brahmin to father children on Ambikā and Ambālikā. She assents, and tells Bhīṣma how, when she was a ferry-woman, the seer Parāśara had seduced her: she gave birth to Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa. Bhīṣma agrees that he should be approached to save the line from extinction. Vyāsa is summoned and the task explained to him. He is willing to carry it out, but says that the two young queens must perform an observance for a year to prepare them. Satyavatī urges speed: without a king, the kingdom will fail. Vyāsa agrees to her plea, but warns that in this case the young women's observance must be to tolerate his ugliness and his smell. Satyavatī now informs Ambikā what she must do.

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her, to please his mother, but the Kāśi princess was too frightened to look at him.

When he left her, his mother came to him and said, 'My son, will she bear a son with princely qualities?' Hearing his mother's words, Vyāsa of unequalled wisdom and extrasensory knowledge was led by fate to pronounce: 'He will have the vigour of ten thousand elephants; he will be learned, a true royal seer; he will be a man of great fortune, great courage and great wisdom; he will have a hundred mighty sons. 10 But because of his mother's fault, he will be completely blind.' When she heard this, his mother replied, 'Great ascetic, a blind man is not a proper king for the Kurus. Please give the Kuru race a second king, to protect our kinsmen and bring glory to the ancestral line!' The mighty ascetic promised to do so, and left. In the course of time, Ambikā gave birth to a blind son.

Now blameless Queen Satyavatī instructed her younger daughter-in-law, and brought the seer to her as she had done before. Vyāsa approached Ambālikā in the selfsame manner and lay with her; but when she saw him she turned pale with distress, O heir of Bharata. Seeing her fearful, pale and distressed, O prince, Satyavatī's son Vyāsa spoke these words: 'Since you have turned pale on seeing my hideous appearance, the son you bear will himself be pale; and Pāṇḍu – the pale one – shall be his name, beautiful lady.' With these words the blessed Vyāsa, truest of seers, left her.

20 Seeing that he had left her, Satyavatī spoke to her son, and he told her that the child would be born pale. Then his mother once again requested one further son from him, and the great seer gave her his assent. When her time came, the princess gave birth to a boy, pale but bearing auspicious marks, and blazing with good fortune; from him in turn were born those mighty bowmen, the five Pāṇḍavas.

When her elder daughter-in-law's due time came, Satyavatī told her to go to Vyāsa; but, thinking about the appearance and smell of the great seer, the divinely lovely lady was afraid, and did not obey the queen's instruction: the Kāśi princess decked out her maid-servant, a girl fair as an Apsaras, with her own ornaments, and sent her to Vyāsa. 25 When the seer came, the maid-servant rose and greeted him; she sought his agreement, then lay with him and served him with honour. Vyāsa

was delighted by the sexual pleasure she gave him, and the great seer stayed the whole night with her as she made love to him. When he arose, he said to her, 'You shall be a servant no longer! And, fair lady, a glorious child has come into your womb; he will be righteous, foremost of all the world's wise men.' So was the son of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa born, Vidura by name, brother to Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Pāṇḍu, boundless in understanding. Wise in the ways of men, free from desire and anger, he was the god Dharma born in Vidura's form because of the curse of the noble Māṇḍavya.

Vyāsa, having discharged his duty, met his mother once again and told her of the forthcoming birth; then he vanished. Thus, to bring glory to the Kuru line, godlike sons were born of Vyāsa to Vicitravīrya's womenfolk.

30

[101] — *Janamejaya asks to hear how Dharma came to be cursed, and Vaiśampāyana narrates the story.* — The seer Māṇḍavya was once performing austerities when fleeing thieves concealed themselves in his hermitage. Pursuing them there, the king's men suspected Māṇḍavya of complicity in their crime, and on the king's order he was impaled on a stake along with them; however, he did not die. Learning that he was a seer, the king freed him, but it proved impossible to pull out the stake, which was cut off and left within him. Māṇḍavya now approached Dharma and asked what sin he had committed to merit such a punishment, and Dharma replied that as a child he had speared insects with reeds. Māṇḍavya decreed that thenceforth guilt should not attach to children younger than fourteen, and cursed Dharma to be born from a Śūdra womb.

Vaiśampāyana spoke:

[102] After the birth of the three princes, the Kurus and their lands, both wild and cultivated, prospered. Corn stood tall on the earth, and the crops were plentiful; rain fell in season, and the trees were rich in flowers and fruit; beasts of burden were happy, birds and wild creatures full of joy; garlands were fragrant, and fruit tasted delicious. Cities were thronged with merchants and craftsmen, and people were brave and learned and virtuous and happy. There were no barbarians, no one took delight in wrongdoing; the Kṛta Age continued in every region of every realm.

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