

unscathed with added siddhis (acquired power). This annoyed the Kauravas.

It was at this time that Droṇa a renowned preceptor in archery, came to Hastināpura. Bhīṣma enrolled the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas as disciples of Droṇa. Arjuna became an extraordinarily brilliant bow-man. This came off as another reason for the Kauravas to drift away from the Pāṇḍavas. After the end of their course of education a contest was held in which Arjuna ranked first. The time came for Gurudakṣiṇā (fees paid in bulk at the end of the studies to a preceptor). Droṇa asked his disciples to bring king Drupada bound hand and foot before him. The Kauravas failed in that mission and the Pāṇḍavas under the leadership of Arjuna fulfilled the demand of their Guru.

When the training and Gurudakṣiṇā were over, Dhṛtarāṣṭra crowned Yudhiṣṭhira as the heir-apparent and this increased the power and status of the Pāṇḍavas in Hastināpura. The jealousy of Duryodhana knew no bounds when he found the Pāṇḍavas in the pinnacle of power and popularity. He decided to kill them. He therefore, built a new palace in a place called Vāraṇāvata and with the permission of Dhṛtarāṣṭra made them change their residence to the new building. The new building was cunningly built of lac and other combustible material. The wise and intelligent Vidura knew this deceit beforehand and so he had warned the Pāṇḍavas of the danger through a messenger named Khanaka. The Pāṇḍavas had, therefore, made ready a secret passage by underground to escape from the building when an emergency arose. The passage was to lead them from the palace to the forest nearby. One night Purocana, a minister of Duryodhana, came stealthily and set fire to the palace. The Pāṇḍavas with their mother Kuntī escaped from the palace to the forest nearby. That night a huntress and her five sons were sleeping in a part of the building and they were burnt to death. They were all sleeping fully drunk and so could not escape from the building. Purocana also was burnt to death. Thus the Pāṇḍavas had to go away from Hastināpura for a brief period.

3) *The Exile and its end.* The Kauravas thought that Pāṇḍavas died in the fire and in that belief conducted the funeral rites of their brothers. The Pāṇḍavas after their escape from the fire walked a long distance through the forests and came to the banks of the river Gaṅgā. On their way a demon named Hidimba attacked them and Bhīma killed him but at the request of Dharmaputra married his sister Hidimbā. After that while they were continuing their journey crossing the river a Gandharva of name Citraratha attacked them. Citraratha was defeated in a battle and he later became friendly with the Pāṇḍavas. He gave them many valuable presents and also narrated to them the story of Tapatī-saṁvaraṇa. Then they went and stayed in the house of a brahmin in the village of Ekacakrā. It was at that time that the Svayamvara of Pāṇḍālī was held. The Pāṇḍavas went for the Svayamvara and married Pāṇḍālī. The news then spread that Pāṇḍavas were not dead but still alive. Dhṛtarāṣṭra then sent for them and the Pāṇḍavas returned to their palace in Hastināpura. Yudhiṣṭhira was crowned as King of half of the country and he built his palace in a place known as Khāṇḍava-prastha. The palace was designed and built by a demon named Maya with beautiful Crystals and costly diamonds.

When the Pāṇḍavas were living there Nārada went to them once. He suggested that Pāṇḍālī should remain as wife to the Pāṇḍavas in turn, one year each to one of them. They accepted the suggestion and started living like that. Yudhiṣṭhira married Devikā, daughter of King Śibi, also. (Śloka 70, Chapter 95, Ādi Parva). Bhīmasena and Arjuna with the help of Śrī Kṛṣṇa slew Jarāsandha. After that they conducted a victory march over the country and established their overlordship by conducting successfully a Rājasūya yajña. Duryodhana and his brothers once visited Indraprastha, the palace of the Pāṇḍavas. They were fooled at the palace and this enraged them. Duryodhana invited Dharmaputra for a game of dice and the latter lost everything. Yet Dhṛtarāṣṭra gave them back everything and sent them to Indraprastha again. Before Dharmaputra reached the palace Duryodhana once again challenged him for a game of dice. Despite protests from all sides Dharmaputra went and played and lost again everything. To fulfil the conditions of the game Yudhiṣṭhira went to the forests with his brothers and wife to spend twelve years in exile and a year incognito. At that time Kuntī lived with Vidura.

It was during this period of exile that the Pāṇḍavas got the Akṣayapātra (never-empty pot) from the Sun. They dwelt first in Dvaitavana and then in Kāmyakavana. Then they went to the mountain of Gandhamādana and from there to Badarikāśrama. From there they came back again to Kāmyakavana and while they were living there Duryodhana and his men went to that forest to see the sufferings of the Pāṇḍavas and gloat on their sad plight. But Citrasena, a Gandharva, captured Duryodhana and Arjuna got him released. Duryodhana sent Durvāsas to tease Dharmaputra but the sage was sent back after being received duly and well-attended to earn his blessings. During their stay in that forest Jayadratha kidnapped Pāṇḍālī but the Pāṇḍavas rescued her immediately. They went from there again to Dvaitavana. Dharmadeva tested them once while they were there. The twelve years of exile came to an end and as per directions from Dharmadeva they spent their incognito period of one year in the court of the King of Virāṭa. After the end of their incognito life the King of Virāṭa gave in marriage his daughter Uttarā to Abhimanyu son of Arjuna.

Even after the return of the Pāṇḍavas from the forests after successfully fulfilling the conditions of the game, Duryodhana showed obstinate reluctance to part with even five pin-points of land in favour of the Pāṇḍavas. A peace mission of Śrī Kṛṣṇa from the Pāṇḍavas to avoid a war and settle matters amicably to Dhṛtarāṣṭra failed and the stage was set for a great battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas.

4) *Ascension to Heaven.* A great and grim battle was fought at Kurukṣetra between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas lasting for eighteen days. Śrī Kṛṣṇa neither fought nor took arms even once against the Kauravas but acted as the charioteer of Arjuna. When the war came to an end the Kauravas were completely annihilated.

Yudhiṣṭhira became King. He performed an Aśvamedha Yāga. After a few years of reign the Pāṇḍavas crowned Parīkṣit, son of Abhimanyu, as the King and started for their Mahāprasthāna (departing this life). They walked in a line in the order of their age,