

the semdon. Paraśurāma was without weapons and he asked Śiva how he could go and fight the demons without weapons. Śiva said: "Go with my blessings and you will kill your foes." Paraśurāma did not wait for a moment. When Śiva thus assured him of success, on he went straight to fight with the demons. He defeated the asuras and came back to Śiva when the latter gave him many boons and divine weapons. Till that time his name was only Rāma and he became Paraśurāma because among the weapons given to him by Śiva was a weapon named Paraśu (axe). There is a story behind this weapon Paraśu. Once Śiva was not invited for a Yāga conducted by Dakṣa. An angered Śiva threw his spike into the Yāgaśālā (sacrificial hall). The spike spoiled the Yāga and smashed the hall and after that roamed about aimlessly for sometime and then turned towards Badaryāśrama where at that time Naranārāyaṇas were engaged in penance. The spike went straight to the heart of sage Nārāyaṇa. Nārāyaṇa made the defiant sound 'hum' (humkāra) and the spike turned away. Śiva felt angry for thus showing disrespect to his spike and he attacked the sage. At once Naraṁṣi plucked a grass and reciting a mantra threw it at Śiva. The grass became a Paraśu (axe) and it attacked Śiva. Śiva broke it into two. Then Nara-Nārāyaṇas bowed before him and worshipped him. Thereafter the two pieces of the Paraśu remained with Śiva. It was one of these that Śiva gave to Paraśurāma. When Paraśurāma was returning happy and glorious with boons and weapons he got on his way a disciple named Akṛtavraṇa. (See under Akṛtavraṇa). Guru and disciple lived in an āśrama and Paraśurāma became a noted Guru in dhanurveda (archery). (Chapter 34, Kārṇa Parva; Chapter 49, Śānti Parva and Chapter 18, Anuśāsana Parva).

5) *Instruction in archery.* According to Purāṇas Paraśurāmā did not spend his life as an instructor in archery. There are statements, however, mentioning that Kārṇa and Droṇa took instructions from him. Pretending to be a brahmin Kārṇa commenced taking instructions in archery from Paraśurāma. When his education was complete Paraśurāma taught him Brahmāstra. One day tired after a long walk in the forests Paraśurāma took rest placing his head on the lap of Kārṇa and soon fell asleep. At that time a beetle came and started sucking blood from the thigh of Kārṇa. Kārṇa remained still, bearing the pain, lest any movement of his body should disturb the sleep of his Guru. Blood was oozing from his thighs and it slowly made the body of the Guru also wet. Paraśurāma woke up and the sight of the bleeding thigh and the calm demeanour of Kārṇa raised doubts in him. He questioned Kārṇa saying that no brahmin could ever bear such a pain with such calmness and Kārṇa had to tell the truth. Then Paraśurāma cursed him for deceit against his Guru saying that he would never be able to remember the Brahmāstra when the time to use it came.

There is a story behind Alarka, the beetle that bit Kārṇa. This beetle was in his previous birth a demon named Daṁśa. Daṁśa once tried to molest the wife of the sage Bhṛgu. The Maharṣi cursed him and made him into a beetle. On his request for mercy he said he would get release from the curse by Paraśurāma. So the beetle

became the Rākṣasa again and left the place. Kārṇa took leave of Paraśurāma and went to Hastināpura. (Śānti Parva, Chapter 3).

Another famous disciple of Paraśurāma was Droṇa. There is a story behind Droṇa getting Dhanurveda from Paraśurāma. After travelling throughout the world exterminating the Kṣatriya race Paraśurāma gave all his wealth to Kaśyapa. On hearing that Paraśurāma was giving away all his riches as gifts to brahmins Droṇa rushed to Mahendraparvata to see Paraśurāma. By then Paraśurāma had distributed all his wealth excepting Dhanurveda. Paraśurāma called Droṇa to his side and said that only two things remained with him, his body and Dhanurveda. Droṇa, he added, could take anyone of the two and then Droṇa took Dhanurveda from him. After that Paraśurāma went to Mahāranya for the sake of penance. (Chapter 130, Ādi Parva).

There are some apparent inconsistencies in the above stories: It is said Droṇa taught Dhanurveda to Kārṇa. Droṇa was the last person to receive Dhanurveda from Paraśurāma because the latter, surrendering his Dhanurveda in entire, left for the forests for doing penance. Then, when did Kārṇa learn Dhanurveda from Paraśurāma? Could it be before Droṇa went to Paraśurāma? Then it must be accepted that Droṇa had not studied under Paraśurāma when he was teaching the the Pāṇḍavas and Kauravas. He learnt it from somewhere before he became the preceptor of the Pāṇḍavas. Kārṇa after studying under Droṇa for some time went to Paraśurāma for higher studies and Droṇa approached Paraśurāma after Kārṇa had left him.

6) *The destruction of the Kṣatriyas.* The most important event of his life was the total extermination of the Kṣatriya race. The Purāṇic belief is that he went round the world eighteen times to massacre the Kṣatriyas.

In many places in the Purāṇas it is stated that Paraśurāma fought against the Kṣatriyas eighteen times. But in chapter 29 of Aśvamedha Parva it is stated that Paraśurāma fought against the Kṣatriyas twentyone times. So it is to be surmised that Paraśurāma fought eighteen big battles and three minor ones.

There are some old stories to explain this revengeful enmity of Paraśurāma towards the Kṣatriyas.

(1) *Family enmity.* The Hehaya dynasty was the most powerful kingly race then. Paraśurāma was a descendant of Bhṛgu, a brahmin sage. That is why he gets the name Bhārgava also. The Bhārgavas were for generations the family preceptors of the Hehaya kings. Taking advantage of their supreme position in the royal palace the Bhārgavas accumulated great wealth at the cost of the royal riches. Gradually the Bhārgavas rose in prosperity in inverse proportion to the decline of the Hehaya wealth. It was at the time of Rēika, grandfather of Paraśurāma that they touched the rock-bottom of their wealth and they found funds lacking even for the day to day administration of the state. In despair they went and requested the Rēikas to lend them some money. But they hid their money and refused to give them anything. The Kṣatriya kings got angry and killed the brahmins. What stock was left of them went to the base of the Himālayas. The wife of Rēika who was pregnant then kept the child in her womb for twelve years afraid to bring forth the child. After that the