

# MAHĀBHĀRATA

## --the core story--

[This core story of Mahābhārta is presented for the benefit of those readers who may not be aware of the story at all. The original story is very long, spread over six generations, and contains a large number of secondary stories and sub-plots. We earnestly believe that this outline core story will inspire our readers to follow the full story in some good translation, or, perhaps on video. (See the footnote at the end of the story.) We hope that this core outline story will help a new reader to follow the flow of the main story. It certainly is not a substitute for the main story.]

Shāntanu, the king of Hastinapura, had a short-lived marriage with the goddess Ganga who gave him a son, named Devavrata (later to be known as Bhishma). Devavrata was very well educated and a great warrior and became heir apparent.

Many years later, one day, King Shāntanu was walking on the banks of river Yamuna when he saw Satyawati, the beautiful daughter of the chief of fishermen. He asked her father for her hand in marriage. Her father consented on the condition that the son born to her alone would rule the kingdom. Shāntanu, though overpowered by his love for Satyawati, could not accept the condition and returned without her.

Devavrata saw his father unhappy, and on enquiry he came to know his father's desire to marry Satyawati. He went to the fisherman and vowed to relinquish his right to the throne. However, the fisherman expressed the fear that the



Kaurav and Pandav armies at the battlefield of Kurūkshetra

prince's children might not honor the promise. To alleviate his fear, Devavrata further took a vow of lifelong celibacy to guarantee his promise.

Shāntanu had two sons by Satyawati, Chitrāngada and Vichitravīrya. Upon Shantanu's death, Chitrāngada became the king. He lived a very short uneventful life and was killed in a war. Vichitravīrya succeeded him to rule Hastinapura.

Meanwhile, the King of Kāshī arranged a swayamvara (a ceremony in which a girl chooses her own husband) for his three daughters, Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika, but neglected to invite the royal family of Hastinapura. To arrange the marriage of young Vichitravīrya, Bhishma attended

the swayamvara uninvited, and proceeded to abduct the three princesses to be married to Vichitravīrya.

While the younger two princesses, Ambika and Ambalika consented to marry Vichitravīrya, the oldest princess, Amba, told Bhishma that she wished to marry king of Shalva. Bhishma let her leave to marry the king of Shalva. However, the king of Shalva refused to marry her as he had been defeated by Bhishma when the latter was returning from Kāshī with the three princesses. Amba returned to marry Bhishma but he refused due to his vow of celibacy.

Amba was enraged and became Bhishma's bitter enemy, holding him responsible for her plight. Later she was reborn to King Drupada as Shikhandī and, with the help of Arjuna, caused Bhishma's fall in the battle of Kurūkshetra.

### The Pāndava and Kaurava Princes

Vichitravīrya died young without any heir to the throne.





