

## Chapter 22. Arjuna's Fight With Gods

Vyasa continued. “O King, your grandfathers were ready to renounce everything to God, if the need arose. They were also prepared to fight with God, if the need arose, for they were only observing warrior (*kshatriya*) *dharma* when they fought so. You must have heard the story of your grandfather fighting against Siva and winning from Him the divine weapon of Siva, the *Pasupatha-astra*.”

The king suddenly raised his head and asked, “Master! What did you say? Did my grandfather fight Siva? I hadn't heard about it so far. Tell me all about it. Satisfy my thirst to know about it.” Parikshith fell at Vyasa's feet, importuning him to narrate the story.

Vyasa cleared his throat. “Son! How many stories do I have to tell you? For its full elaboration, the relationship between the Pandavas and the Gods needs not hours, not even months, but years! Still, since you implore, I'll tell as many as possible within the time available. Listen, King!

“The Pandavas were living in the forest. One day, Dharmaraja was overcome with anxiety. He felt that the wicked Kaurava cousins might not allow him to rest in peace even after the period of exile was over. It was very doubtful if they would give them their share of the empire. Dharmaraja was afraid that war was inevitable and that the great bowmen of the age —Bhishma, Drona, Karna, and Aswathama— would then range themselves on the side of the Kaurava hordes. He thought that the Pandavas might not be able to overcome such a galaxy of strength. He feared that the war might end in defeat and that the Pandavas would have to spend their years in the jungle. Seeing him in the depth of woe, Arjuna approached him, craved his blessings, and asked permission to go forth and win, by asceticism, weapons from the Gods to defeat the foe. Dharmaraja told him to go please the Gods and, through their grace, win weapons to win the war.

### Arjuna seeks divine weapons

“Arjuna went into the Gandhamadana area, which was inaccessible even to the most enterprising ascetic, and did ascetic practices (*tapas*) to propitiate Indra, the sovereign of the gods. Heaven was amazed at the rigors of his ascetic practice and his steady persistence. So, Indra appeared before him, saying, ‘Son, I am pleased by your ascetic practice. But if your desire is to be fulfilled, first win Siva's grace. Thereafter, I'll take you to heaven and arm you with all weapons heaven can confer.’

“In accordance with Indra's advice, Arjuna sat meditating on Siva in order to win His grace.

“Meanwhile, Siva resolved upon a drama of his own. I shall tell you what it was.

### A boar threatens Arjuna

“A huge wild boar, ferociously enraged, ran across the place where Arjuna was observing penance. He saw it, and, though during the penance one had to desist from injuring any living being, he hastily took up his bow and arrows when the boar was about to fall upon him.

Just then, a Bhil of the forest, also armed with bow and arrows, appeared before Arjuna with his wife! Arjuna was amazed that a woman was accompanying the Bhil in that thick forest where no person could safely move about. But when he observed more closely, he found a huge retinue behind the Bhil, consisting of men and women Bhagavatha Vahini.

of fierce appearance, yelling and shouting in strange ways. Arjuna was perplexed and astonished.

“The person who first appeared, the huntsman with the fierce face and the red glowing eyes, spoke to Arjuna. ‘You there! Who are you? Why did you come to this place? You won’t live if you shoot an arrow against that boar, even by mistake. Be warned! I have pursued it and made it run here; what right do you have to take up your bow and arrow against it?’

These words entered Arjuna’s heart like a sheaf of arrows. He felt terribly hurt, for a common huntsman had insulted him. ‘The fellow doesn’t know my name or fame, or else he wouldn’t have challenged me,’ he said to himself. He raised his bow and shot an arrow at the boar. That very moment, the Bhil also shot an arrow at it.

### **Arjuna fights Siva in disguise as a hunter**

“The boar rolled on the ground, dead. The huntsman was angry; he showered abuses on Arjuna. ‘You there, you don’t know the rules of hunting. When I have set my eyes on it, pursued it, and selected it as the prey for my arrows, how dare you aim your arrow at it? You’re a greedy barbarian.’ His eyes cast sparks, so uncontrollable was his rage.

Arjuna was also enraged. He shouted back, ‘Shut up, you scoundrel. Or else I will despatch you to the domain of death. Save yourself by stopping your wagging tongue. Go back the way you came.’

“The Bhil stood up to that threat; he did not quail. ‘Whoever you are, I’m not afraid. You may have three hundred and thirty crores of gods on your side, but I won’t yield. Take care. You’re an interloper. Who gave you permission to come here? Who are you to order me out? This forest is ours; you’re a thief who has sneaked in, and you have the audacity to ask us to get away!’

“At this, Arjuna guessed that he was no ordinary huntsman. He spoke in a calmer tone. ‘The forest is the property of all. You came to hunt; I came to do penance to please Siva. I shot the boar only to save myself from its rage.’

“However, the huntsman was not softened. ‘I don’t care whom you adore, whom you want to please. Accept the wrong that you have done. Why did you shoot the animal I was stalking? Accept and apologise, make amends,’ he insisted.

“Arjuna lost all patience. This fellow’s life is to end like the boar’s, he told himself. He is not to be cured by soft words, he felt. So, he selected a sharp arrow and shot it at him. It hit him, but, like a thorn on rock, it fell on the ground, bent by the impact! So the astonished Arjuna had to shoot a crescent headed arrow, which would sever his head. But this was brushed aside by the huntsman with his left hand, like a blade of grass.

“At last, Arjuna let go an unending shower of arrows from his ever-full shoulder bag. This too had no effect. Arjuna became desperate, like a man robbed of all his possessions and deprived of all means of resistance. He stood helpless, filled with rage. He was like a bird with clipped wings, a tiger whose teeth have been pulled and whose claws have been cut, a ship without sails and rudder.

“He made an effort to beat the huntsman with the bow itself; it broke into fragments at the impact. Startled, Arjuna decided to use his fists, for they were the only weapons left. Girding up his loins, he fell upon the Bhil and wrestled furiously, for sheer victory. The huntsman welcomed this new move with a hearty laugh. They struggled to overpower each other with such terrific holds and blows that it appeared as if two mountains were in mortal

conflict. The birds of the forest were so frightened at the unusual din that they flew in terror far up into the sky. The animals of the jungle stood and stared, sensing some great calamity hovering over them. The earth shook, unable to bear the burden of the encounter.

“Despite everything, the Bhil showed no trace of exhaustion. He was laughing in absolute unconcern and was as active as when the fight first began. Arjuna, however, was bathed in perspiration. He was gasping for breath, and his fist was jammed and bleeding! The Bhil was unhurt and not in the least affected! Besides, when the Bhil once caught Arjuna in a light hold, Arjuna vomited blood. The Bhil burst into a cruel laugh, and exulted before his consort with a look that meant, ‘Did you notice that?’

### **Arjuna wins a divine weapon from Siva**

“Arjuna reeled and was in great confusion. He lost his moorings. He whispered to himself, ‘Krishna! Why have you humiliated me thus? Ah, is this also a scene in your drama? Truly, this Bhil is no ordinary mortal. Perhaps you yourself came in this form to trample on my pride. Alas! To be overwhelmed by a forest-dwelling huntsman! No, this is your stratagem, your play. This Bhil is no ordinary fellow. Save me, for I believe this is you yourself.’

“When he said this and turned to the couple in front of him, he saw not the Bhil and his wife but Siva and His consort, Gauri. They were blessing him with a captivating smile. Their hand was raised, with the palm toward him in the have-no-fear (*abhaya*) pose, assuring him that he had no reason to fear.

“Arjuna was overcome with delight. He ran toward them, exclaiming, ‘O Sankara, Mother Gauri!’ and fell at their feet. He prayed that They should pardon him for his rashness and ignorance.

“Gauri and Sankara, the embodiments of grace, lifted him lovingly by the shoulders and stroked his head affectionately. ‘Son,’ they said, ‘You have attained the fruition of your life; you did your duty as you were bound to do. That is not wrong at all. Now, take this; here is the sign of our grace’. And he got from the hand of Siva Himself the divine weapon (*Pasupatha-astra*).

“O, *Maharaja!* How can I extol the prowess of your grandfather, who fought with Siva, armed with the invincible trident. The source of that courage and daring lay in the grace that the Lord Krishna showered on him. Your grandfathers never thought of even the slightest activity without His specific order. Indeed, in the *Mahabharatha* battle, His grace was bestowed unasked, every moment, in ample measure. The depth of love that prompted that grace was known only to them; others cannot gauge it.” Remembering this, Vyasa shed tears of joy at the good fortune of the Pandava brothers —and not he alone.

The person who listened, namely Parikshith, was even more overcome with admiration and thankfulness. He shed tears of joy; his lips quivered with emotion; his voice was broken by excitement. He couldn’t contain himself. He exclaimed, “Ah, how fortunate I am to be born in this lineage! How brave, how devoted, how redoubtable my forefathers were! And imagine my luck, that I am able to hear their glories from the lips of divine sages like you! Oh, I am indeed thrice-blessed. When I listen to the exploits of my grandfathers and the glories of Lord Krishna, I can never say I have heard enough. I long to hear more.

“Pray, tell how the Lord saved and guarded my grandfathers in battle. It will be some source of contentment for my hunger, some quench for my thirst.”