



CU Hindu Cultural Society

Information Sheet



The Story of Karna

The legend of Karna is a tragic story. He is one of the most famous and interesting characters in the Mahabharata, one of the great Hindu epics.

The Birth of Karna

Karna was the son of Kunti and the Sun God. Kunti, while still very young, had served Durvasa Rishi. She looked after him with great dedication. Durvasa was highly pleased. He gave Kunti a mantra and said that whichever God she would think of after reciting the mantra, would appear before her and bless her with a son endowed with his own godly qualities. Kunti, out of curiosity, once tried the mantra and remembered Suryadeva, the Sun God. The ordained happened. Suryadeva appeared in his resplendent glory.

Kunti got scared and wanted the Sun God to go away, but he pleaded his helplessness against the power of the mantra. Kunti was nevertheless afraid of social stigma and therefore she abandoned the child. She put Karna in a basket and placed him in the River Ganga. The basket floated downstream and was eventually seen by the King's charioteer. He picked up the baby and took him home, raising Karna as his own son.

Karna's Curse

For his studies, Karna went to the ashrama of the great Parashurama. Parashurama had decided to take only Brahmin boys as his disciples. Therefore, Karna went there in disguise of a Brahmin boy and became unparalleled in the art of archery. Parashurama was angry that he was deceived into accepting a low caste fellow as his disciple. Therefore, he cursed Karna saying: "O Karna, even though you are great in bravery, the art of archery, and in service to me, still as you have deceived your Guru, I curse you that at a crucial time on the battle-field you will forget much that I have taught you and the wheels of your chariot will get stuck in the earth. The consequences will be grave."

Krishna's Revelation

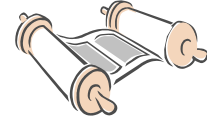
As time went on, the Pandavas and Kauravas declared war against each other. Krishna, trying to avoid the war, went to Hastinapur with a proposal for peace. After having his peace proposal rejected, Krishna was to return to where the Pandavas were staying. Karna offered to be his charioteer and Krishna duly accepted. During the journey Krishna and Karna stopped and started to talk. Krishna revealed to Karna the identity of his real mother, Kunti. On hearing this Karna was torn apart. The thought of having to kill his brothers in the war made his blood run cold. However, he felt his debt to Duryodhana, who had raised him to the status of a Prince from the lowly son of a charioteer, had to be repaid, leaving him with no option but to fight against his own brothers. Karna returned to Hastinapur, but kept Krishna's revelation to himself. He would later repay his debt with his life.

First published for Chill 'n' Chat, 6th May 2005

www.cuhcs.org.uk



CV Hindu Cultural Society Information Sheet



The Death of Karna

Parashurama's curse was to prove Karna's undoing. At the Kurukshetra battle, when face to face with Arjuna, Karna forgot all that was taught to him by Parashurama. The wheels of his chariot sank into soft earth and he was immobilised. At that time, Arjuna defeated him. While Karna was on his deathbed, Lord Indra and Suryadeva had a dispute regarding Karna's generosity and to settle the same they came disguised as beggars. Karna responded to the beggars by saying that he had nothing left to give, to which the beggars replied that he still had some gold in his tooth which would be valuable to them. On realizing that fact, Karna took a stone and broke the tooth with the gold and gave it to the beggars, epitomising the "way of life" he led.



That was the end of Karna, one of the greatest warriors of Mahabharata who was also the greatest *daanveer* - a man who would never refuse the request for any gift or donation, howsoever costly that might be and irrespective of the consequences of giving to his own well being or security.