

# CHAPTER IV

## LIFE OF BHĪṢMA AS DEPICTED IN THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*

### IV.I Introduction

Bhīṣma is one of the central and the most honoured characters of the *Mahābhārata*. He occupies a glorious position in the galaxy of the personages of the *Mahābhārata*. He is known for his supreme devotion towards the Lord. He was admired even by Lord Śrīkṛṣṇa. Bhīṣma was born as Devavrata and is the grandfather of the heroes and villains of the epic *Mahābhārata*. He gave up marriage and throne for his father's sake. To the people of India he is the symbol of mature wisdom.

Bhīṣma was a great *Jñānī*, a man of wisdom, and also a man of great renunciation (*mahātyāgī*). Śrī Rāma obeyed his father's words only for fourteen years but Bhīṣma stuck to his father's words for the rest of his entire life. By his great determination and strict observance of his vows, he got his name Bhīṣma.

### IV.II The Lineage of Bhīṣma

The *Mahābhārata* describes how a king was born as Śāntanu on account of a curse and married to Gaṅgā and how the eight Vasus cursed by sage Vasiṣṭa were born as sons to Śāntanu and Gaṅgā. At the time of her marriage to Śāntanu, Gaṅgā had imposed a condition that Śāntanu should never interfere or obstruct her from doing anything she liked as a condition of marriage to him. She also warned Śāntanu that she would abandon him and go away, if he objects to her actions. Gaṅgā had promised the Vasus that she will throw them into the river the moment they were born, to free them from their curse

of having an earthly life. Gaṅgā threw into the river the seven children born to her, one after the other, as soon as they were born saying “I make you pleased”. The saddened Śāntanu did not obstruct Gaṅgā, though he was highly displeased. When Gaṅgā took her eighth son in her arms to throw him into the river as usual, Śāntanu could not bear the familiar sight. He shouted at his wife Gaṅgā and asked: “Who are you? Why are you killing your own children? Will you not spare this child at least?” Then Gaṅgā revealed her identity and the curse of Vasiṣṭa that required her to throw the seven of the eight sons, who were Vasus. She assured Śāntanu that the eighth son will be spared and that he would become a great person. It was this eighth son of the king Śāntanu and Gaṅgā who was named Devavrata and later on became famous as Bhīṣma.

तथा भीष्मः शान्तनवो गङ्गायाममितद्युतिः ।

वसुवीर्यात्समभवन्महावीर्यो महायशाः ॥ *Mahābhārata*, Ādiparva, 63-91

शान्तनुः खलु गङ्गां भागीरथीमुपयेमे तस्या-

मस्य जज्ञे देवव्रतो नाम यमाहुर्भीष्ममिति ॥ *Ibid*, 95.47

तथारूपस्तथाचारस्तथावृत्तस्तथाश्रुतः ।

गाङ्गेयस्तस्य पुत्रोऽभून्नान्ना देवव्रतो वसुः ॥ *Ibid*, 100.21

He was a descendant of the well-known lineage of the Kurus. From amongst the gods known as the Vasus he was the eighth Vasu called *Dyau* who descended upon the earth in the form of Bhīṣma in consequence of the curse invoked by the great Ṛṣi Vasiṣṭa. Even as a boy he studied the Vedas alongwith their auxiliary sciences and also learnt the use of divine weapons through repeated practice. While practicing the use of weapons once he intercepted the flow of the Ganges with his arrows.

He was strong in body and mind. His extraordinary powers and intellect were manifested even in his childhood. He was also called Śāntanava after

his father and Gāṅgeya, Nadija after his mother (the river goddess). Mother Gaṅgā disappeared then with the child. She saw to it that her son was given the best education and training.

### **IV.III Birth**

The legend behind Bhīṣma's birth is as follows - once the eight Vasus (Aṣṭavasus) visited Vaśiṣṭa's ashram accompanied by their wives. One of the wives took a fancy to Nandini, Vaśiṣṭa's wish-bearing cow and asked her husband Prabhāsa to steal it from Vaśiṣṭa. Prabhāsa then stole the cow with the help of the others who were all consequently cursed by Vaśiṣṭa to be born in the world of men. Upon the Vasus appealing to Vaśiṣṭa's mercy, the seven Vasus who had assisted in stealing Nandini had their curse mitigated such that they would be liberated from their human birth as soon as they were born; however, Prabhāsa being protagonist of the theft, was cursed to endure a longer life on the earth. The curse however is softened to the extent that he would be one of the most illustrious men of his time. It was this Prabhāsa who took birth as Devavrata (Bhīṣma).

### **IV.IV Early life**

Bhīṣma was born as the youngest son of the illustrious king Śāntanu and Gaṅgā. As per the *Mahābhārata*, Śāntanu saw Gaṅgā on the banks of river Gaṅgā and enamoured by her beauty and asked her to marry him. She agreed but with the condition that Śāntanu would never question her, no matter what her actions - if he ever broke his promise, she would leave him, never to be a part of his life again. Śāntanu readily agreed to this seemingly harmless condition and was thus married to Gaṅgā. Eight children were born to this union, the eighth of which was Bhīṣma himself. The seven siblings born before him were drowned by their mother Gaṅgā in order to break their curse - as they were incarnations of the aforementioned Vasus, who do not

like to live the life of Humans. Śāntanu silently bore the torture of watching his wife drown his offspring seven times. However, when Gaṅgā was about to drown Bhīṣma, Śāntanu could no longer contain his anguish and burst into protest. Gaṅgā, aware of the eighth child's destiny to live a long life on earth, did not drown the child. However, since Śāntanu had broken his promise given to her at marriage, she left Śāntanu promising to return the child to him once he is grown up. And goddess Gaṅgā disappeared. During his time with his mother, Bhīṣma learnt political science from Bṛhaspati, the guru of the Devas, Vedas and Vedāṅgas from the sage Vaśiṣṭa, and archery from Paraśurāma, also known as Bhārgava, thus becoming an exceptionally skilled administrator.

But Śāntanu did not let his personal sorrow affect his duties as a king. He continued ruling wisely and well. And so the years passed. Then one day as Śāntanu came once again to the banks of the Ganges, hunting deer and observed that the flow of Ganges seemed to be subdued and restrained by the arrows. He walked few steps further and was amazed by seeing an extraordinary and godlike youth.

Meanwhile Gaṅgā appeared and introduced to him with that child saying, “This is Gāṅgeya, the eighth son I bore you. He is unsurpassed in wisdom and the use of weapons. He has earned the title Devavrata. Take him home and make him your heir.

अजमीढो वरस्तेषां तस्मिन्वंशः प्रतिष्ठितः ।

षट्पुत्रान्सोप्यजनयात्तिसृषु स्त्रीषु भारत ॥ *Ibid*, 94.31

He is a mighty archer and has learnt all there is to know about the duties of a king.”

यं पुत्रमष्टमं राजस्त्वं पुरा मय्यविन्दथाः ।

स चायं पुरुषव्याघ्र सर्वास्त्रविदनुत्तमः ॥  
गृहाणेमं महाराज मया संवर्धितं सुतम् ।  
आदाय पुरुषव्याघ्र नयस्वैनं गृहं विभो ॥  
वेदानधिजगे साङ्गान्वसिष्ठादेश वीर्यवान् ।  
कृतास्त्रः परमेष्वासो देवराजसमो युधि ॥  
सुराणां संमतो नित्यमसुराणां च भारत ।  
उशना वेदयच्छास्त्रमयं तद्वेद सर्वशः ॥  
तथैवाङ्गिरसः पुत्रः सुरासुरनमस्कृतः ।  
यद्वेदशास्त्रं तच्चापि कृत्स्नमस्मिन्प्रतिष्ठितम् ॥  
तव पुत्रे महाबाहौ साङ्गोपाङ्गं महात्मनि ।  
ऋषिः परैरनाधृष्यो जामदग्न्यः प्रतापवान् ॥  
यदस्त्रं वेद रामश्च तदेतास्मिन्प्रतिष्ठितम् ।  
महेष्वासमिमं राजन्राजधर्मार्थकोविदम् ॥  
मया दत्तं निजं पुत्रं वीरं वीर गृहं नय ।  
तथैवं समनुज्ञातः पुत्रमादाय शान्तनुः ॥ *Ibid*, 100.33 to 40

And Gaṅgā vanished. Śāntanu took Devavrata and returned home joyfully. When they reached his palace, he summoned all his kinsmen, the Pauravas to him and declared that Devavrata should be the heir to his throne. The Pauravas looking upon the godlike youth admired him and accepted the king's declaration. And hence he was coronated as prince. Devavrata soon earned the love and respect of people of Hastināpura.

गुणवन्तं महात्मानं यौवराज्येऽभ्यषेचयत् ।

पौरवाञ्छान्तनोः पुत्रः पितरं च महायशाः ॥ *Ibid*, 100.43

Then Śāntanu continued ruling the great Kuru kingdom with fraternal

solicitude with iron hands. His was the first kingdom in the Aryan land. His city Hastināpura was the first city in the Āryāvarta. He loved his people as his own children, and they loved him as their own father. He had only one son named Devavrata. He was a handsome prince, strong in body and mind, his extraordinary powers and intellect were manifested in his personality. The king was filled with joy. The whole Kuru kingdom was filled with the praises of his son. He thought of retiring from the world and of placing Devavrata on the throne. But his idea was changed by an incident which happened in one of his hunting excursions.

He went to the banks of the Ganges and met Satyavatī – a fisherman’s daughter, extraordinarily beautiful and charming. The king fell deeply in love with her as soon as he saw her. He then approached her father and asked for his daughter’s hand in marriage. But the fisherman demanded something which the king could never give. He asked for a vow from him that his throne should be occupied by the offspring of this girl and none else. If the great king would agree, he would then give his daughter to him, otherwise not. This meant depriving prince Devavrata his just inheritance, in other words driving away his beloved son from the throne. The king could not do this. It was impossible for him to commit such a mistake. Therefore he returned home disappointed and broken-hearted.

Why was such a poor and low man so proud of his daughter? There is a story attached to her as observed by J. N. Bose in the following words: “She had not been so beautiful and charming as she was then. Besides a foul nauseating smell of fish emanated from her body, she was named Matsyagandhā. But one day when the great sage Parāśara was crossing the Ganges, he saw this girl on an island and was so pleased with her as to take her to his embrace. By the great sage Parāśara’s grace, she at once became the most beautiful of all girls, and the fishy smell of her body disappeared.

He also blessed her and said that she would be the beloved queen of a great king and her sons and son's sons will be great kings of the Āryāvarta. The sage went away, but a son was born to the girl on the island who afterwards became the greatest sage of the Āryan land. Because he was black he was called Kṛṣṇa, because he was born on an island, he was called Dvaipāyana, and because he compiled the Vedas, he was called Vyāsa. This son of fisherman's daughter, who changed her name from Matsyagandhā to Satyavatī, wrote the great *Mahābhārata*. This was the reason why her father was so proud of her, and why he dared to refuse a great king and tried to extort a vow.”<sup>115</sup>

But king Śāntanu was not the man to indulge his fancy or enjoy pleasure at the sacrifice of his own beloved son who is the joy and pride of his whole kingdom. This made Śāntanu despondent. He could not forget the beautiful Satyavatī. Love could not be easily suppressed. He struggled on with his heart and mind, and daily grew to be more and more melancholy, sad and sorrowful. He forgot all pleasure, his favourite games, hunting, sporting; he loved retirement and neglected his State- business. Daily he grew to be weak and thin. Devavrata marked his father's change. He could not ask his father, although many a time he hinted at it. The king evasively answered him and sent him away on this or that pretext.

But Devavrata loved his father as no son loved his own. He knew and felt that something had happened to his beloved father. He was not son who would sit quiet when his father was getting miserable. He began enquiring amongst his father's courtiers. He went to an old minister who was devoted to his father. From him he came to learn his father's secret. He said nothing to anybody. He went straight to the fisherman's house and asked his daughter Satyavatī for his father. The fisherman repeated what he had said to the great king.

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<sup>115</sup> Bose, J. N., *Bhīṣma – His Life and Teachings*, p. 17

## IV.V Bhīṣma's vow

(Bhīṣma means *He of the terrible oath*, referring to his vow of life-long celibacy. Originally named Devavrata, he became known as Bhīṣma after he took the *bhīṣana pratijñā* ('terrible oath') — the vow of life-long celibacy and of service to whoever sat on the throne of his father - the throne of [Hastināpura](#)).

Devavrata promised him that he would never stake a claim to the throne, implying that the child born to Śāntanu and Satyawatī would become the ruler after Śāntanu, and in his words, “I am the only son of my father; I am the heir to the throne. I take a vow in the name of all that is holy and sacred that I renounce my entire claim to the throne of my sister, all my claim to the sovereignty of the Kuru kingdom, in favour of my brother or brother's that will be born of your daughter, my step-mother.”

एवमेतत्करिष्यामि यथा त्वमनुभाषसे ।

योऽस्यां जनिष्यते पुत्रः स नो राजा भविष्यति ॥ *Ibid*, 100.87

At this, Satyawatī's father retorted that even if Devavrata gave up his claim to the throne, his (Devavrata's) children would still claim the throne. Devavrata then took the terrible vow of life-long celibacy saying that to make the succession of your daughter's children certain and sure, I shall never marry or beget a son or a daughter, thus sacrificing his ‘crown-prince’ title and denying himself the pleasures of conjugal love.

दाशराज निबोधेदं वचनं मे नृपोत्तमः ।

शृण्वतां भूमिपालानां यद्ब्रवीमि पितुः कृते ॥

राज्यं तावत्पूर्वमेव मया त्यक्तं नराधिपाः ।

अपत्यहेतोरपि च करिष्येऽद्य विनिश्चयम् ।

अद्य प्रभृति मे दाश ब्रह्मचर्यं भविष्यति ।

अपुत्रस्यापि मे लोका भविष्यन्त्यक्षया दिवि ॥ *Ibid*, 100.94 to 96

The fisherman had nothing more to say. Hearing these words the gods showered flowers on him. It gave him immediate recognition among the gods and the sages who uttered the word ‘Bhīṣma’ meaning *He of the terrible oath* for him. This Bhīṣma then went to Satyavatī and requested her to ascend his chariot to go to Hastināpura. At Hastināpura Bhīṣma told father Śāntanu everything and placed her before him. His father granted him the boon of *icchāmaraṇa* (control over his own death - he could choose the time of his death, but he was not immortal).

तच्छ्रुत्वा दुष्करं कर्म कृतं भीष्मेण शान्तनुः ।

स्वच्छन्दमरणं तुष्टौ ददौ तस्मै महात्मने ॥ *Ibid*, 100.102

What Bhīṣma was and became can be easily guessed from the noble sacrifices that he made for his beloved father. A young prince of his age, a young man of twenty, sacrificed willingly and gladly all his prospect, all his hopes, all his pleasures, his inheritance, his sovereignty over the biggest of Āryan kingdom’s, is hardly to be found depicted in any of the literatures of the world. He not only sacrificed all this, but vowed to be ever true, faithful, and friendly to the children of his step-mother whom he himself brought for his father and made her his great queen. Everybody cannot be this, and perhaps none but Bhīṣma could do it.

Śāntanu married Satyavatī. Bhīṣma also took another vow shortly after the marriage of Śāntanu and Satyavatī. He vowed that he would see his father’s image in whoever sit on the throne of Hastināpura and would serve him without question. This vow ended up being the main cause of his problems later on when his nephew [Dhṛtarāṣṭra](#) took the throne and wished to make his own son, [Duryodhana](#) the crown prince instead of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's brother

Pāṇḍu's son Yudhiṣṭira who was the elder to Duryodhana (and reckoned by all to be the most worthy to become king). As a result Bhīṣma was forced to comply with all of Dhṛtarāṣṭra's orders no matter what injustice was done to the Pāṇḍavas.

In a few years his step-mother Satyavatī gave birth successively to two princes, the eldest son was named Citrāṅgada and the other Vicitravīrya. But his father was not destined to live long and enjoy his happiness. When the princes were but children, king Śāntanu breathed his last. Bhīṣma felt at his beloved and dear father's death. But he had to forget his great bereavement, for his step-brothers were young and therefore could not assume the region of the great kingdom. He had to rule the country on their behalf and to bring them up suitably to the great position they were to assume when they would be of age.

He loved them more than himself; he gave them the highest possible training, and made them the greatest heroes of the age. But Citrāṅgada was unfortunately killed when he went to give battle to an enemy who dared to attack the Kuru kingdom. He arranged for the performance of his last ceremony.

तस्मिन्पुरुषशार्दूले निहते भूरितेजसि ।

भीष्मः शान्तनवो राजा प्रेतकार्याण्यकारयत् ॥ *Ibid*, 101.11

After his untimely death, Bhīṣma placed his brother Vicitravīrya on the throne. He then looked about for a princess to make her his queen. At this time the king of Kāśī was celebrating the Savyamvara of his three beautiful daughters named Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā. The whole of the Āryan land heard their charms and beauty; they were known to be best and the most beautiful princesses in all Āryāvarta. Therefore Bhīṣma made up his mind to make them his young brother's queens. When he arrived at the

Svayamvara, he found all the great and powerful kings and princes of the Āryan land from one end to the other had assembled there. But Bhīṣma ignoring their presence, ignoring the king of Kāśī and his powerful army, took the princesses into his chariot and addressed the kings and princes thus; “I forcibly take away these beautiful princesses whom I shall give in marriage to my heroic brother Vicitravīrya, who, as you all know, is the mighty king of the Kuru kingdom. A *Kṣatriya* prince has this right; therefore I take the princesses away if anybody dares to fight with me – come, I stand prepared.” A great battle was fought, but there was none who could stand before the great hero of the Kuru race.

भीष्मस्तदास्वयं कन्या वरयामास ताः प्रभुः ।

उवाच च महीपालान् राजज्जलदनिःखनः ॥

रथमारोप्य ताः कन्या भीष्मः प्रहरतां वरः ।

आहूय दानं कन्यानां गुणवद्भयः स्मृतं बुधैः ॥ *Ibid*, 102.11 to 58

After defeating them all, Bhīṣma triumphantly carried away the Kāśī princesses to his city of Hastināpura. There with great pomp and grandeur the two sisters *viz.* Ambikā and Ambālikā were married to king Vicitravīrya of the vast Kuru kingdom.

अलंकृत्य यथाशक्ति प्रदाय च धनान्यपि ।

प्रयच्छन्त्यपरे कन्या मिथुनेन गवामपि ॥

वित्तेन कथितेनान्ये बलेनान्येऽनुमान्य च ।

प्रमत्तामुपयन्त्यन्ये स्वयमन्ये च विन्दते ॥

आर्षं विधिं पुरस्कृत्य दाराविन्दति चापरे ।

अष्टमं तमथो वित्त विवाहं कविभिर्वत्तम् ॥ *Ibid*, 102.13 to 15

But he too was not destined to live long. Just after his marriage he died.

Bhīṣma arranged for the performance of the last ceremony.

राज्ञो विचित्रवीर्यस्य सत्यवत्या मते स्थितः ।

ऋत्विग्भिः सहितो भीष्मः सर्वैश्च कुरुपुङ्गवैः ॥ *Ibid*, 102.73

This way the great Kuru dynasty was at the point of extinction. There was no other prince to perpetuate the line. There was Bhīṣma, but he was precluded from marrying by his great and noble vow.

When Satyavatī recovered a little from her great sorrow at the bereavement for the untimely death of her two sons, she requested, entreated and beseeched Bhīṣma to marry and to beget children.

तयोरुत्पादयापत्यं संतानाय कुलस्य नः ।

मन्नियोगान्महाबाहो धर्मं कर्तुमिहार्हसि ॥

राज्ये चैवाभिषिच्यस्व भारताननुशाधि च ।

दारांश्च कुरु धर्मेण मा निमज्जीः पितामहान् ॥ *Ibid*, 103.10 to 11

But Bhīṣma sorrowfully told his step-mother that to break a solemn vow for a Kṣatriya was worse than death. He declared that he would not give up truth at any cost and would not marry and would not have any relation with women.

तथोच्यमानो मात्रा स सुहृद्भिश्च परंतपः ।

इत्युवाचाथ धर्मात्मा धर्म्यमेवोत्तरं वचः ॥

असंशयं परो धर्मस्त्वया मातरुदाहृतः ।

त्वमपत्यं प्रति च मे प्रतिज्ञां वेत्थ वै पराम् ॥

जानासि च यथावृत्तं शुल्कहेतोस्त्वदन्तरे ।

स सत्यवति सत्यं ते प्रतिजानाम्यहं पुनः ॥

परित्यजेयं त्रैलोक्यं राज्यं देवेषु वा पुनः ।

यद्वाऽप्यधिकमेताभ्यां न तु सत्यं कथंचन ॥  
 त्यजेच्च पृथिवी गन्धमापश्च रसमात्मनः ।  
 ज्योतिस्तथा त्यजेद्रूपं वायुः स्पर्शगुणं त्यजेत् ॥  
 प्रभां समुत्सृजेदको धूमकेतुस्तथोष्मताम् ।  
 त्यजेच्छब्दं तथाकाशं सोमः शीतांशुतां त्यजेत् ॥  
 विक्रमं वृत्रहा जह्याद्धर्मं जह्याच्च धर्मराट् ।  
 न त्वहं सत्यमुत्स्रष्टुं व्यवसेयं कथंचन ॥ *Ibid*, 103.12 to 18

At this stage Bhīṣma reminded her of the birth of her son on the island before her marriage, the son who was begotten by Parāśara and the son who was now the great world-renowned sage Vyāsa.

एवं निःक्षत्रिये लोके कृते तेन महर्षिणा ।  
 ततः संभूय सर्वाभिः क्षत्रियाभिः समन्ततः ॥  
 उत्पादितान्यपत्यानि ब्राह्मणैर्वेदपारगैः ।  
 पाणिग्राहस्य तनय इति वेदेषु निश्चितम् ॥  
 धर्मं मनसि संस्थाप्य ब्राह्मणांस्ताः समभ्ययुः ।  
 लोकेऽप्याचरितो दृष्टः क्षत्रियाणां पुनर्भवः ॥  
 ततः पुनः समुदितं क्षत्रं समभवत्तदा ।  
 इमं चैवात्र वक्ष्येऽहमितिहासं पुरातनम् ॥ *Ibid*, 104.5 to 8

Hence Satyavatī called her son Vyāsa to Hastināpura and induced him to save the dynasty of the Kuru Kings. Vyāsa begot two sons on the widows of King Vicitravīrya and one other son on a hand-maiden of the widowed queens.

जगाम मैथुनायैव ममतां चारुलोचनाम् ।  
 शुक्रोत्सर्गं ततो बुद्ध्वा तस्या गर्भगतो मुनिः ॥

पद्भयमारोधयन्मार्गं शुक्रस्य च बृहस्पतेः ।

स्थानमप्राप्तमथ तच्छुक्तं प्रतिहतं तदा ॥ *Ibid*, 104.18 to 19

The eldest was named Dhṛtarāṣṭra, who unfortunately became blind, the other was named Pāṇḍu, because it was said he was born pale. The son of the maid was called Vidura.

Thus Bhīṣma, though he renounced his claim for the throne, though he vowed never to marry, yet he had all along to rule the kingdom and bring up the children. He had to do this when his father died leaving his two brothers mere children. And then again, they two died early, and he had to rear up his brother's children as begotten by the great sage Vyāsa. For years and years together, he was a father to them and had to rule the Kuru kingdom on their behalf. From his father's death till his nephew's sons grew to be young princes, he was the mighty ruler of the Kurus, a ruler who was the beloved of all, a ruler who stood towering over all the kings of the Aryan Land. The kingdom was adorned with hundreds of sacrificial stakes virtuously ruled by Bhīṣma. The wheel of virtue having been set by him, the country became so delightful that the subjects of other kingdoms, leaving their homes, came to dwell in the Kuru kingdom and increase its population.

When the three princes grew up and became handsome, powerful, virtuous and learned men, Bhīṣma thought of marrying them to beautiful young princesses. He, having heard the beauty and virtue of Gāndhārī, the daughter of Suvala, the king of Gāndhāra, modern Kandahāra, sent a messenger to the king proposing marriage of his daughter with the eldest of the Kuru prince, Dhṛtarāṣṭra.

He gave his virtuous daughter to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. The ever chaste princess Gāndhārī, learning that her future husband was blind, bandaged her own eyes with cloth and this she kept till her death. There was no other example

of a wife of such devotion to her husband in any of the literature of the world. When Dhṛtarāṣṭra was married, Bhīṣma arranged the marriage of the second prince Pāṇḍu. This prince got his first wife, Pṛthā by name, large eyed daughter of Kuntībhoja. King Kuntībhoja solemnized the marriage in great pomp and presented his son-in-law with much wealth. But great Bhīṣma set his heart on marrying his beloved nephew Pāṇḍu to the sister of the king of Madra, who was then one of the most powerful monarchs amongst all the Aryan monarchs. He went to the capital of the king of Madra and asked for the hand of her in marriage with Pāṇḍu.

तां तु तेजस्विनीं कन्यां रूपयौवनशालिनीम् ।  
व्यावृण्वन्पार्थिवा; केचिदतीव स्त्रीगुणैर्युताम् ॥  
ततः सा कुन्तिभोजेन राज्ञाहूय नराधिपान् ।  
पित्रा स्वयंवरे दत्ता दुहिता राजसत्तमः ॥  
ततः सा रङ्गमध्यस्थं तेषां राज्ञां मनस्विनी ।  
ददर्श राजशार्दूलं पाण्डुं भरतसत्तमम् ॥  
सिंहदर्पं महोरस्कं वृषभाक्षं महाबलम् ।  
आदित्यमिव सर्वेषां राज्ञां प्रच्छाय वै प्रभाः ॥  
तिष्ठन्तं राजसमितौ पुरंदरमिवापरम् ।  
तं दृष्ट्वा सानवद्याङ्गी कुन्तिभोजसुता शुभा ॥  
पाण्डुम नरवरं रङ्गे हृदयेनाकुलाभवत् ।  
ततः कामपरीताङ्गी सकृत्प्रचलमानसा ॥ *Ibid*, 112.2 to 7

Then mighty ruler of Madra willingly accepted the proposal and gave her away to him. He brought away the beautiful Mādrī princess to Hastināpura, and on auspicious day and moment the marriage ceremony was performed in great pomp and grandeur. Then he brought the daughter of king Devaka to

Hastināpura and arranged marriage of her with Vidura.

अथ पारसवी कन्यां देवकस्य महीपतेः ।

रूपयौवनसंपन्नां स शुश्रावापगासुतः ॥

ततस्तु वरयित्वा तामानीय भरतर्षभः ।

विवाहं कारयामास विदुरस्य महामतेः ॥ *Ibid*, 114.12 to 13

Bhīṣma was ruling the vast Kuru kingdom since his father's death. Now his nephews had become in every way fit to ascend the throne and to assume the sovereignty in their own hand. Therefore at the first opportunity, he retired and made room for his nephews. But a difficulty arose. The eldest prince Dhṛtarāṣṭra was blind, and therefore could not ascend the throne. Bhīṣma called both of them before him and explained matter. Dhṛtarāṣṭra gladly gave his younger brother, prince Pāṇḍu, permission to assume the sovereignty of the Kuru race, and Pāṇḍu too agreed to rule the country with his elder brother's permission, guidance and control. Then the good and mighty Bhīṣma on an auspicious day placed Pāṇḍu, with all solemn and proper ceremonies and in much pomp and grandeur, on the ancient throne of the vast mighty and prosperous Kuru kingdom. King Pāṇḍu began well. He followed the footsteps of his wise and mighty uncle. But Pāṇḍu was not able to pull long with his brother. Notwithstanding the presence of the wise and good Bhīṣma, evidently two brothers disagreed, and Pāṇḍu determined to renounce his kingdom and to leave Hastināpura. No one could change his mind. With his two young wives, Kuntī and Mādrī, and with a few retainers, he left for ever his ancestor's kingdom and went away to the Himālayas, where he lived till he died. Thus Bhīṣma was obliged to take up the reign of the Kuru kingdom, as Dhṛtarāṣṭra was blind. Vidura also helped him much. He had to rule the country for another twenty or twenty-five years till the eldest son of Dhṛtarāṣṭra became a mighty young prince.

Then Gāndhārī, the wife of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, gave birth to one hundred sons and a daughter. The eldest was Duryodhana. For years together the Kurus had no news of their beloved king Pāṇḍu or of his two queens. But many years after, Kuntī returned to Hasināpura with five young princes, the eldest being some years older than Duryodhana, and the second being of his same age. She said that the three elder ones were born of her, and the two younger ones, who were twins, were the sons of Mādrī. King Pāṇḍu was dead and Mādrī had ascended the funeral pyre of her husband. She, therefore, had returned to Hastināpura with the five Pāṇḍu princes who were respectively named Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva. Bhīṣma welcomed the young princes as his own beloved grandsons. The wise and learned Vidura supported him and all the Kurus were therefore silent. Dhṛtarāṣṭra did not express his consent and willingly or unwillingly received them as his own sons. They were affectionately brought up by Bhīṣma and Vidura. Bhīṣma searched for an appropriate teacher for the training of these princes.

Then he placed them under the tuition of Kṛpa and then that of venerable Droṇa.<sup>116</sup>

कूपारामसभावाप्यो ब्राह्मणावसथास्तथा ।

बभूवुः सर्वर्धियुतास्तस्मिन् राष्ट्रे सदोत्सवाः ॥

भीष्मेण धर्मतो राजन्सर्वतः परिरक्षिते ।

बभूव रमणीयश्च चैत्ययूपशताङ्कितः ॥

स देशः परराष्ट्राणि विमृज्याभिप्रवर्धितः ।

भीष्मेण विहितं राष्ट्रे धर्मचक्रमवर्तत ॥

क्रियमाणेषु कृत्वेषु कुमाराणां महात्मनाम् ।

पौरजानपदाः सर्वे बभूवुः परमोत्सुकाः ॥

<sup>116</sup> Mahābhārata, Ādiparva, 130-77 to 79

गृहेषु कुरुमुख्यानां पौराणां च नराधिप ।

दीयतां भुज्यतां चेति वाचोऽश्रूयन्त सर्वशः ॥

धृतराष्ट्रश्च पाण्डुश्च विदुरश्च महामतिः ।

जन्मप्रभृति भीष्मेण पुत्रवत्परिपालिताः ॥

संस्कारैः संस्कृतास्ते तु व्रताध्ययनसंयुताः ।

श्रमव्यायामकुशलाः समपद्यन्त यौवनम् ॥ *Ibid*, 109.12 to 18

Thus they grew up to the great joy of the people of Hastināpura, to whom Pāṇḍu was very much beloved, till at last the Kuru princes with Duryodhana at their head became extremely jealous of them. They were born proud, malicious, jealous and vindictive, and Bhīṣma and Vidura could not make them good. By the advice of Vidura and at the dictate of great Bhīṣma, Dhṛtarāṣṭra also attempted to guide his sons to virtuous path, but all was of no avail. Even Bhīṣma could do nothing. He was thrust aside. His words which were law and were like the words of the holy Vedas to entire Kuru race were now disregarded by the insolent and proud Kuru princes. He reproached them, reasoned with them, beseeched and entreated them, but they remained silent before him. They did not reply or argue with him, but avoided him as much as possible. Bhīṣma then determined to place Yudhiṣṭhira on the throne of the Kuru kingdom assuming that this ill feeling of Kauravas would disappear. The Kauravas would submit to the inevitable and would not create unnecessary mischief. But he was disappointed. The enmity between them grew bitterer than ever.

Before placing good and virtuous Yudhiṣṭhira on the throne of his venerated ancestors, Bhīṣma asked Droṇācārya to test the excellence of his pupils in a great tournament. This was a policy of the greatly wise Bhīṣma. Amongst all the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas, Arjuna alone won the trial. But before the end of the tournament, Karṇa entered and with due permissions he participated

and showed his unmatched and most difficult feats. Duryodhana, seeking in him an opportunity, gladly welcomed him and made him his close friend. The sudden appearance of Karṇa upset the wise policy of Bhīṣma. His reception and welcome by the wicked Duryodhana, and his virtually joining his wicked party made Duryodhana certain of success, and thus Bhīṣma was defeated in his noble and wise aim. But he did not give up all hope. He thought of another means and soon put it into practice. He was much pained by the bitterness that had grown among his grandsons, but could do nothing. In the last sixty or seventy years, from the day on which he took his great vow of celibacy and renunciation till now, he never repented it. But now by the misbehaviour of the wicked Kuru princes, especially of the proud, insolent and vicious Duryodhana, his mind was filled with sorrow.

By the advice of the Kuru grandfather Bhīṣma, king Dhṛtarāṣṭra in due form proclaimed the eldest Pāṇḍava Yudhiṣṭhira as the heir-apparent to the Kuru kingdom. This was the severest gall and warm wood to the wicked Duryodhana. He grew almost mad in anger and vexation. Daily the popularity of Yudhiṣṭhira and the Pāṇḍavas were growing. Their praises were sounding over the Kuru kingdom from end to end. The people defied the Kuru princes and spoke ill of them. He consulted secretly with his maternal uncle Śakunī, his friend Karṇa and his brother Duṣṣāsana, and resolved to burn the five Pāṇḍavas to death. Duryodhana any how convinced his father to send Pāṇḍavas to Vāraṇāvata where they sent one wicked person who built there a house of lac. This house was intended for the Pāṇḍavas. Bhīṣma knew nothing of this infamous plot. Vidura came to know all about it. So he secretly made all proper arrangements, so that they might escape from that lac-house. Pāṇḍavas with their mother Kuntī reached there. One midnight, the wax palace was set on fire. The Pāṇḍavas and their mother Kuntī safely escaped towards the forest through the tunnel in the wax palace. The people of Vāraṇāvata sent a message to Hastināpura that the

Pāṇḍavas have been burnt to death in a fire which has reduced their palace to ashes. This news made Bhīṣma very sad.

Kuntī and Pāṇḍavas disguised themselves as Brahmins and went from one place to another till; they arrived in the kingdom of Drupada. When Draupadī was of marriageable age, king Drupada held a *Svayaṃvara*. The Kauravas, Karṇa, Śiśupāla, Jarāsandha, Śrīkṛṣṇa and even Pāṇḍavas in the disguise of Brahmins were present at the *Svayaṃvara*. One by one, many kings and princes came forward to hit the eye of the fish. But none succeeded. Embarrassed and disappointed, they returned to their seats. At last Arjuna who was sitting among the Brahmins stood from his seat, picked up the bow, strung it, looked in the water, aimed at the target, shot an arrow and won the challenge and Draupadī both. Then she became the joint-wife of all five *Pāṇḍavas*. The Pāncāla king's pleasure knew no bounds when he learnt that his heart's desire had been fulfilled, and that his beloved daughter had been married to the Pāṇḍu princes. He welcomed them with royal pomp and grandeur. This news soon reached Hastināpura. On knowing this the people roared with joy and loudly asked for their return. Pāṇḍavas were invited to the city Hastināpura. Bhīṣma advised Duryodhana to give Pāṇḍavas due share in the kingdom. On being asked by Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīṣma declared to propitiate the initial *Argha* to the Lord Kṛṣṇa first.

एष त्वेषां समस्तानां तेजोबलपराक्रमैः ।

मध्ये तपन्निवाभाति ज्योतिषामिव भास्करः ॥

असूर्यमिव सूर्येण निर्वातमिव वायुना ।

भासितं ह्लादितं चैव कृष्णेनेदं सदो हि नः ॥ *Sabhāparva*, 36.28 & 29

But everybody did not approve of this proposal. The mighty king of Cedi and the celebrated king Śiśupāla took the lead of opposition. King Śiśupāla rose in anger and addressed Bhīṣma that when so many illustrious kings

were present there, then Kṛṣṇa by no means deserved to have a royal worship. He not only began to abuse the revered Bhīṣma in the strongest term, but he abused Kṛṣṇa at his heart's consent. Having seen that assembly of kings agitated by anger Yudhiṣṭhira got tensed and asked Bhīṣma Pitāmaha that what should be done then. Bhīṣma Pitāmaha consoled him not to fear from any as he has already settled a way that is both beneficial and conforms to policy.

Bhīṣma then turned towards the assembled kings and addressed them that the end of their words was not seen. As Kṛṣṇa being present, could be challenged by him who opposed. It would settle the matter without further ado. Roaring and foaming the wrathful Śiśupāla rose and challenged Lord Kṛṣṇa for fight. There was the fight, as the all-knowing Bhīṣma forethought. And thus Śiśupāla was easily killed by great Kṛṣṇa. Then the other refractory monarchs were struck with awe and became silent. Then in due form, the great sacrifice was solemnised and the virtuous Yudhiṣṭhira became the king of all the kings of the Aryan Land. If great Bhīṣma were not there, it was quite evident that it would have been impossible for the Pāṇḍavas to perform the great *Rājasūya* sacrifice. Bhīṣma was the towering personality amongst all the kings of Āryāvarta. He stood at the head of all. He was all in all in all matters.

The wealth, prosperity and magnificence of Yudhiṣṭhira made the wicked Duryodhana mad with jealousy. His great rival, to destroy whom he tried various diabolical means, had become the sovereign king of all the kings of the Aryan land, and he, the head of the great Kuru race, had now to play second fiddle in his own kingdom. He consulted his maternal uncle Śakunī and got advised to invite Yudhiṣṭhira and the other Pāṇḍavas to play the game of dice. Bhīṣma was not aware of this fact till the Pāṇḍavas arrived for the game. The reason was, he lived a very retired life and after giving half

the kingdom to the Pāṇḍavas, he thought Duryodhana and his brothers would allow them to live in peace. But such was not the case. Pāṇḍavas lost everything including Draupadī in that infamous game. Duryodhana insulted her by saying that she would join the serving women and would sweep the chambers. Duḥśāsana went into the inner apartment and dragged her into the public court. On being pressurized by Bhīṣma, Vidura, Droṇa and others, Dhṛtarāṣṭra jumped in between and solved the matter by bestowing Draupadī with a boon for that cause and sent Pāṇḍavas to their kingdom with honour and dignity.

But Duryodhana was not to be cheated of his victory. For the second time, he consulted his maternal uncle Śakunī and got advised to invite Yudhiṣṭhira and the other Pāṇḍavas to play the game of dice. This time the condition was that the loser will pass twelve years in a forest and a year more incognito. And if the condition was broken then again twelve years in a forest and a year more incognito. Pāṇḍavas again lost in the game of dice. Bhīṣma was helpless. Last time he made the blind king return all the wealth of the Pāṇḍavas which was won by deceit at play. But this time what he could, he did. He himself was a life-long celibate. He himself gave up all claim to his father's kingdom. The reason was he gave his word to his step-mother's fisherman father. How could he now ask Yudhiṣṭhira to deviate from the path of virtue and break his word? He gave his blessings to the Pāṇḍavas with tears in his eyes and told them that they would again get back their kingdom, and the Kurus would all be destroyed. Thus the Pāṇḍavas with their beloved wife entered a deep forest and they were lost to the outside world. They lived for twelve years in various forests and had many adventures. At last the dreaded thirteenth year came, and they entered the services of the king of Virāṭa in various capacities. The thirteenth year was passed by the Pāṇḍavas unrecognized. It is needless to say that the wicked Duryodhana moved heaven and earth to discover them, for they would go to

exile again for twelve years. So that he could be able to enjoy the kingdom without any hindrance from any quarter. But though he tried his utmost, yet he could not find them. Then Droṇācārya advised him for peace and unity with the mighty sons of Pāṇḍu.

Then Bhīṣma, conversant with the Vedas, acquainted with the properties of time and place and possessing knowledge of every duty of morality, after conclusion of Droṇācārya's speech, applauded the words of the preceptor and spoke unto the Kuru princes for their benefit.

But Duryodhana and his wicked brothers and counsellors were not the men to listen to reason. They intentionally slighted Bhīṣma, Droṇācārya, Kṛpācārya and Vidura's words. He determined to search out the Pāṇḍavas and to send them again into exile for another thirteen years. Hearing some rumour that the Pāṇḍavas were likely hiding themselves in King Virāṭa's kingdom, he resolved to attack. When attacked, King Virāṭa went out to give battle to the Kurus and the four Pāṇḍavas except Arjuna went with him. Everything therefore, that the Pāṇḍavas had promised had been exactly fulfilled by them. Then the battle was started. Arjuna single handed defeated them all. After returning victorious from the battle, the Pāṇḍavas found no more necessity to remain any longer in disguise. When King Virāṭa knew who they were, he welcomes them with all the honour befitting to the great Pāṇḍavas. King Virāṭa asked Arjuna to marry his son Abhimanyu with Uttarā, King Virāṭa's daughter. He agreed to. When the marriage of Abhimanyu and Uttarā was settled, invitations to different kings were issued. When the marriage was solemnized, the assembled kings consulted about what the Pāṇḍavas should do to get back their parental kingdom. It was settled to send an envoy to the Kurus and to ask for the kingdom; and if they refused, then to prepare for war. King Drupada's chief priest Sañjaya went to the Kurus as the messenger of the Pāṇḍavas. Bhīṣma welcomed him

with due respect. He delivered the message of the Pāṇḍavas. Duryodhana, on being told by Karṇa, denied to give them their share in the parental kingdom and conveyed the message to get ready for the battle. Bhīṣma wanted to bring peace amongst them and thus advised Duryodhana. He did not listen to the advice given by Bhīṣma. He and his brothers, backed by Karṇa and Śakunī, were solemnly resolved to fight, to die or to win.

Thus war was determined upon. Their parents, king Dhṛtarāṣṭra and queen Gāndhārī tried their utmost to dissuade their wicked sons, but failed. There was absolutely no chance any longer for peace. Both parties prepared for war and invited their respective friends, relatives, kings and potentates to their aid. After consulting different counsellors, Duryodhana decided to induce grandfather Bhīṣma as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army. Bhīṣma unwillingly assumed the chief command of the Kaurava army, because he was bound by his solemn vow. He never dreamt that his vow would produce such disastrous results and he would have to fight with his most beloved Pāṇḍavas.

He was then over hundred years of age, but still he was full of vigour and youthful energy. He was still the greatest general and warrior of the Aryan Land. He was true to his solemn vow, that knowing full well the unrighteous nature of the Kauravas, he, with sad and sore heart, was obliged to fight and that too with the Pāṇḍavas. Bhīṣma then described the various warriors of the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava armies.

#### **IV.VI In the *Mahābhārata* War**

Bhīṣma is the one who witnessed the [Mahābhārata](#) completely from the beginning since the rule of [Śāntanu](#). In the great battle at [Kurukṣetra](#), Bhīṣma being the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava forces fought for ten days compared to Droṇa's five, Karṇa's two and Śalya's one-the last day. He

fought reluctantly on the side of the Kauravas; nevertheless, he gave it his best effort. At one stage, Arjuna's disinclination to fight him nearly made Kṛṣṇa to break his vow not to raise a weapon in the war. Not even Arjuna was able to defeat Bhīṣma because in addition to being a peerless warrior he was blessed with choosing the moment of his death.

In this war, Bhīṣma vowed not to kill any of the Pāṇḍavas, as he loved them, being their grandfather. Duryodhana often confronted Bhīṣma alleging that he was not actually fighting for the Kaurava camp as he would not kill any Pāṇḍava but would let them kill Kauravas. But in fact, Bhīṣma was the strongest barrier that had protected the Kaurava camp from impending defeat.

The war was thus locked in a stalemate. As the Pāṇḍavas mulled over this situation, [Kṛṣṇa](#) advised them to visit Bhīṣma himself and request him to suggest a way out of this stalemate. Bhīṣma knew in his heart that the Pāṇḍavas were righteous and chaste, and that he stood as the greatest obstacle in their path to victory, so when they visited Bhīṣma, he told them that if faced by a woman in battle he would cease to fight and not lift weapons against her.

The Pāṇḍavas were initially not agreeable to such a ploy, as by bringing a woman to the battleground they would disgrace themselves, but [Kṛṣṇa](#) suggested a clever alternative. And thus, on the next day - the tenth day of battle - [Śikhandī](#) accompanied Arjuna on the latter's chariot and they faced Bhīṣma who put his bow and arrows down. He was then felled in battle by a reluctant, ashamed and tearful [Arjuna](#) pierced by innumerable arrows. As Bhīṣma fell, his whole body was held above the ground by the shafts of Arjuna's arrows which protruded from his back, and through his arms and legs. Seeing Bhīṣma laid on such a bed of arrows humbled even the gods who watched from the heavens in reverence, silently blessing the mighty

warrior.

Bhīṣma was succeeded by Droṇa as the Commander-in-Chief. Bhīṣma lay on the 'bed of arrows' till the end of the battle, bound by his vows and chose to die only after learning that the Pāṇḍavas had won. One of his last acts was to impart his final instructions on administration and kingcraft to Yudhiṣṭhira.

Bhīṣma took an arrow presented to him by Paraśurāma and aimed it at Śrīkṛṣṇa's forehead. It struck Lord Kṛṣṇa deep in the forehead. When Śrīkṛṣṇa pulled it out blood gushed in fountains and his whole body was drenched in blood. Śrīkṛṣṇa becomes wild like Rudra when he sets out to destroy the worlds. He jumped from the chariot holding the Sudarśana-Chakra in his hand and crying, "I shall kill Bhīṣma!" He had vowed not to touch his Chakra, but the oath was now forgotten. Bhīṣma was not disturbed, but on the other hand he was filled with joy. In fact his own wish had been fulfilled; for, he had vowed that he would make Śrīkṛṣṇa take up his Chakra.

Bhīṣma jumped down from his chariot and threw down his bow and arrows. He praised Śrīkṛṣṇa.

With folded hands he said, "Lord, I am a child before you; should you look for my shortcomings? I am your devotee; should you be angry with me? I shall be happy if you kill me, for then I shall go to heaven. Come, my Lord."

Śrīkṛṣṇa was pleased with his devotion. He withdrew his Chakra and returned to the chariot of Arjuna. Thus Bhīṣma's vows had all been fulfilled.

#### **IV.VII Fall of Bhīṣma**

So the war raged for nine days. Bhīṣma played havoc in the ranks of the [Pāṇḍavas](#). They suffered heavily, and lost all hopes of success. Yudhiṣṭhira

was utterly desperate and took the advice of Śrīkr̥ṣṇa. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa said that the only way to success was to seek the guidance of Bhīṣma himself.

That night Kṛṣṇa took Yudhiṣṭhira to Bhīṣma secretly. Yudhiṣṭhira fell at the feet of Bhīṣma. He said, "Grandfather, we are your grandchildren. We cannot overcome you not even the gods can do it. We cannot count how many men we have lost. I beg of you, grant us victory."

Kṛṣṇa added his voice to Yudhiṣṭhiras prayers. He said, "Sir, both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas are your grandchildren. You brought up the Pāṇḍavas. They are just and virtuous. They kept their promise. But Duryodhana did not give them back their kingdom. So it is your duty to protect them."

Bhīṣma knew very well that Sri Kṛṣṇa was partial to the Pāṇḍavas. The Kauravas were wicked men, they were unjust, and Kṛṣṇa would surely slay them. It was true that Bhīṣma was with the Kauravas; but it was only his body and not his heart that was with them. He had lived in Duryodhana's court. So it was his duty to fight for him. But the Pāṇḍavas had been just and virtuous, and so his heart was with them. It was right that he should help them. So he said, "My son, Duryodhana was doomed when he brushed aside Kṛṣṇa's advice; your victory was assured. Place Śikhaṇḍī before me and I shall throw down my bow and arrows. I shall not fight."

Bhīṣma knew that Śikhaṇḍī was none other than Ambā whom he had refused to marry. She wanted vengeance. She meditated on Lord Shiva; she wanted a boon that she would kill Bhīṣma. Lord Shiva granted her the boon; she was born again to kill Bhīṣma. Bhīṣma refused to consider Śikhaṇḍī as a man and would not fight with him.

#### **IV.VIII Bhīṣma on the Bed of Arrows**

The battle of the tenth day raged in greater fierceness. Bhīṣma was a terror to the enemies. Arjuna faced him and a terrible fight followed. As the fight progressed, Śikhaṇḍī appeared before Bhīṣma ready with weapons to fight with him. At once Bhīṣma threw down his bow and arrows. Arjuna's arrows had already weakened him. He fell to the ground. But his body did not touch the ground. Arjuna's arrows had formed a bed for him. Bhīṣma thanked Arjuna for having given him a hero's bed of piercing arrows. He said, "I want a pillow! Give me a pillow of arrows!" Arjuna raised the old warrior's head and shot arrows piercing the ground.

Bhīṣma's head rested on them. By then Duryodhana, Karṇa, Kṛpa and other leaders of the Kaurava army raced to the spot where Bhīṣma lay. Yudhiṣṭhira, Bhīma and others too stood near him. Bhīṣma was thirsty and asked for water to Arjuna.

Duryodhana asked his men to bring water. Bhīṣma smiled even in his pain and said to him, "My son, the water I seek is not the water you offer. He then looked at Arjuna. Arjuna understood his mind. He sent an arrow which pierced deep into the ground; crystal-clear waters shot up in fountains and fell straight into the open mouth of Bhīṣma. The stream of water welling up from the ground was none other than Mother Gaṅgā coming in the steam form to quench the thirst of her beloved son Bhīṣma. He felt the living presence of his mother and even while lying on the bed of arrows felt that he was resting on the lap of his mother.

Yudhiṣṭhira was crowned. He went with Sri Kṛṣṇa to pay his respects to Bhīṣma and seek his blessings. Bhīma, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahadeva and Draupadī were all there. They touched his feet and he blessed them. His last words of advice to Yudhiṣṭhira were: "Protect Dharma. Punish the wicked. Do not give up Truth. Give up egoism. Rule in the interests of the subjects.

May you all prosper!"

#### **IV.IX Passing Away of Bhīṣma**

As the Kauravas were losing the battle, Duryodhana approached Bhīṣma one night and accused him of not fighting the battle to his full strength because of his affection for the Pāṇḍavas. Bhīṣma, greatly angered, immediately he picked up five golden arrows and chanted mantras declaring, "tomorrow I will kill the Pāṇḍavas with these five golden arrows". Duryodhana, not having faith in Bhīṣma's words, asked Bhīṣma to give him custody of the five imbued golden arrows saying that he would keep them with him and return them the next morning.

As Bhīṣma was about to kill Arjuna with his arrows Lord Kṛṣṇa could not tolerate his devotees plight and He immediately threw down the chariot reins and jumped off the chariot onto the battlefield, lifted a chariot wheel and charged Bhīṣma, determined to send Bhīṣma to Death's abode.

It is believed that Bhīṣma died after the age of 350 years. The relation between Bhīṣma and Pāṇḍavas/Kauravas is described as that of a grandfather.