

with his own name to be living in this world. So he killed the king. After that Vicitravīrya became king. Bhīṣma had to take up the task of arranging a suitable marriage for Vicitravīrya.

2) *The Swayamvara.* It was at this time that Bhīṣma came to know that the King of Kāśī was arranging the Swayamvara of his three daughters, Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā. Bhīṣma went there and in the presence of all the kings who had assembled there, took the three princesses with him to Hastināpura. There he made all preparations for the marriage. But as the time for the ceremony approached, the eldest and most beautiful of the princesses, Ambā went to Bhīṣma and said: "I had already made up my mind long ago to marry Sālva, the King. Besides, we are deeply in love with each other. Therefore, please consider whether it is proper on the part of a great man like you to force me into another marriage."

On hearing this, Bhīṣma allowed her to do as she liked. Ambā then went to King Sālva and made an appeal to him to accept her as his wife since they were mutually in love.

3) *Sālva's rejection.* To her words Sālva replied: "What you have said about our mutual love is true. But it is not right for a man to accept a woman who has been accepted by another. I saw Bhīṣma taking you by hand and helping you into his chariot. Therefore go at once to Bhīṣma himself and ask him to accept you." Stunned by his words, she turned away, to go to the forest to do penance.

4) *Revenge on Bhīṣma.* In the Mahābhārata, Udyoga Parva, Chapter 17, we find that Ambā had cherished a secret desire to wreak vengeance on Bhīṣma. She went to the Āśrama of Śaikhāvatya Muni in the forest and stayed there for the night. Her wish to do penance was approved by the Muni. On the next day, Ambā's maternal grandfather, Hotravāhana (Sṛñjaya) came that way. Hotravāhana came to know of all her misfortunes. He advised her to inform Paraśurāma of all her grievances. Just at that moment Akṛtavraṇa, a follower of Paraśurāma happened to come there. Hotravāhana introduced Ambā to Akṛtavraṇa. Both Akṛtavraṇa and Sṛñjaya explained all her affairs to Paraśurāma. Paraśurāma undertook to persuade Bhīṣma to accept Ambā (as his wife). But Paraśurāma's proposal was turned down by Bhīṣma. A terrible duel took place between them at Kurukṣetra. When the fight reached a critical stage, Nārada and the gods induced Paraśurāma to withdraw from the duel. Thus the fight ended with equal victory to both. Finding that it was not possible to achieve her object through Paraśurāma's mediation, Ambā renounced food, sleep etc. and went to the Yamunā valley to do penance for six years. (M.B., Udyoga Parva, Chapter 188). After that for one year she went on a fast, lying under the water in the river Yamunā. Again for another year she did penance, standing on the tip of the toes and eating only dry leaves. Next, she reduced the sky and earth to flames by doing penance. The goddess Gaṅgā appeared to her and when she understood her plight, she told Ambā that it was not possible to kill Bhīṣma. In her agony and despair, without even drinking water, she wandered about here and there. The goddess Gaṅgā cursed her to become a river in the Vatsa country. As a result of the curse, a part of her was turned into the river known as Ambā.

5) *Śiva's Boon.* The remaining part of her engaged herself in penance. Śiva appeared to her and told her that in the next birth she would attain masculinity. He added that she would be born in the Drupada dynasty as a great archer under the name of Citrayodhi and kill Bhīṣma. Pleased with this prophecy, she took a vow that she would kill Bhīṣma and making a pyre, burnt herself to death.

6) *Rebirth.* King Drupada's queen had been in great distress for a long time because she had no children. Drupada propitiated Śiva by worshipping him for an issue. Śiva blessed him and said that a girl would be born to him, but she would be transformed into a boy. In due course, the queen gave birth to a girl, but it was announced that it was a boy. Therefore the child had to be brought up, dressed like a boy. The child became famous under the name of Śikhaṇḍī. When Śikhaṇḍī attained youth, Drupada decided to look for a wife for him (her?). Still he was greatly perplexed as to how to find a wife for Śikhaṇḍī who was already a youthful virgin! But his wife assured Drupada that Śikhaṇḍī would become a man, according to Śiva's blessing. So, Drupada made a proposal for Śikhaṇḍī's marriage with the daughter of the King of Daśārṇa.

7) *Śikhaṇḍī's Marriage.* Hiranyavarṇa, the King of Daśārṇa, gave his daughter in marriage to Śikhaṇḍī. The couple arrived at Kāmbalyapura. By this time the wife came to know that the "husband" was a woman. She disclosed the secret to her Ladies-in-waiting. They in turn communicated it to the king. Enraged at this, Hiranyavarṇa sent a messenger to King Drupada to ascertain the truth of the matter. He even began to make preparations for waging a war against Drupada, King of Pañcāla. Drupada and his queen were in a fix. At this stage the distressed Śikhaṇḍī proceeded to the forest, determined to commit suicide. People were afraid of entering that forest because a Yakṣa named Sthūṇakarṇa lived there. Śikhaṇḍī went to the premises of the Yakṣa and performed certain rites for a number of days. The Yakṣa appeared to her. Śikhaṇḍī explained the whole matter to him. They entered into a contract. According to it, they exchanged their sexes—Śikhaṇḍī receiving the male sex of the Yakṣa and the Yakṣa receiving the female sex of Śikhaṇḍī. Śikhaṇḍī returned home as a man. Drupada repeated with greater force his old plea that his child was a man. Hiranyavarṇa made a thorough examination of Śikhaṇḍī and convinced himself of the truth. Many years after, Hiranyavarṇa died.

8) *Kubera's Arrival.* At that time, in the course of his world tour Kubera arrived at the residence of Sthūṇakarṇa. The Yakṣa who was in female form, did not come out to receive Kubera. In his anger, Kubera pronounced a curse that the female sex of Sthūṇakarṇa and the male sex of Śikhaṇḍī would continue for ever. The Yakṣa prayed for the lifting of the curse. Kubera released him from the curse by saying that after the death of Śikhaṇḍī, the Yakṣa would be restored to his own male sex.

According to the previous agreement, Śikhaṇḍī went to Sthūṇakarṇa's place after the death of Hiranyavarṇa. But coming to know of all that had happened, he returned home. Thus Śikhaṇḍī became a man permanently. Śikhaṇḍī had received his training in arms under Droṇācārya. In the great Kaurava-Pāṇḍava battle, he became a charioteer.