

# MAHABHARATA – Part 20

(Abhimanyu's Triumph and Fall)



After Bhishma's fall, Guru Dronacharya was made commander-in-chief, and he promised Duryodhana to capture Yudhishtira alive. Drona made many attempts during the eleventh and twelfth days of war to take Yudhishtira prisoner, but failed. After listening the harsh words of Duryodhana, Dronacharya assured him to capture Yudhishtira or to kill one of the great Pandava warriors. But he said Duryodhana must keep Arjuna far away.

A plan was put into action. On the thirteenth day of war, a group of people, a small army, called the Samsaptakas challenged Arjuna to battle. They knew Arjuna never turned down a challenge to battle. He accordingly went to attack them, where they were arrayed in the south of the main battle field. When Arjuna left the main front for meeting the Samsaptakas, Drona quickly arranged his army in lotus formation (called Padma Vyuha or Chakra Vyuha), a formation almost impossible to break into. He attacked Yudhishtira fiercely. Bhima, Dhrishtadyumna, Drupada, Satyaki, and others tried their best to interfere with Drona's work, but they were not able to make a dent in the formation. Drona's army started slaughtering the Pandava army from all directions of Chakra Vyuha like a wild fire consuming a forest.

Arjuna had instructed his son, Abhimanyu, to break through the Padma Vyuha, but he was yet to be instructed in the art of coming out. Finding no other solution, Yudhishtira asked Abhimanyu to break away the web of the enemy forces and open a passage for the Pandava forces to penetrate through. He was confident that once the formation was broken through, other Pandava warriors could follow close on the heels of Abhimanyu and smash the Kaurava forces. Abhimanyu instantly agreed to do so. There was nothing he desired more than glory in battle.

The day proved to be the day of Abhimanyu's triumph. He asked his charioteer to break through the web with all the fury at his command. The Kaurava warriors were perturbed as they saw Abhimanyu's chariot approached them with great speed. "Here is one greater in valor than Arjuna," they thought and began to lose heart. Like a young lion in a herd of elephants, Abhimanyu rushed on. There was a ripple in the Kaurava ranks which bent under his headlong onslaught. The bend soon became a break and under Drona's very eyes, the formation was breached and Abhimanyu entered the Vyuha. But the breach closed under the inspiration of Jayadratha, king of the Sindhus, before the other Pandava warriors could force their way in. The sixteen year old warrior, Abhimanyu, was all alone inside the Padma Vyuha, isolated and surrounded by a number of veteran Kaurava warriors. But they fell like moths into a fire, one after another. Abhimanyu's shafts searched the weak points in the armor of his enemies.

Seeing the destruction wrought by Abhimanyu, agitated Duryodhana rushed in person to oppose the youthful warrior. Drona, having learnt that the prince himself was engaged in

battle with Abhimanyu, became anxious and sent veterans to protect Duryodhana. With great difficulty, they managed to rescue Duryodhana from the boy hero. Abhimanyu was greatly disappointed at the escape of Duryodhana. He vented his anger on the warriors that had come to rescue him, and fought them. Then, throwing away all sense of shame and chivalry, a large number of veteran warriors made a combined and simultaneous attack on Abhimanyu, who found himself alone, surrounded by enemies on all sides. But, even as a rock receives the rising tide of the sea, Arjuna's son withstood this united onslaught.

Drona, Aswathama, Kripa, Karna, Sakuni, Salya, and many other great warriors in their chariots, equipped with all arms, surged to attack the young hero, only to be dashed back, baffled and broken. Drona's bow was broken, Karna's armor was pierced. Salya was badly wounded and sat, unable to move, in his chariot. Salya's brother came up in great wrath to avenge his brother's disgrace but he fell and his chariot was broken to pieces. Abhimanyu made Dushshasana faint in his car. His charioteer just managed to drive away from the field, saving Dushshasana's life. Thus did Abhimanyu, alone and unsupported, opposed a host of veteran warriors.

Empowered by a boon he had received from Shiva, the Kaurava brother-in-law Jayadratha kept the rest of the Pandava army outside the Chakra Vyuh formation. All the concerted efforts of Yudhishtira, Bhima, Nakula, Sahadeva, Dhrishtadyumna, Shikhandi, Drupada, Virata, Satyaki and several other warriors were not able to enter the Vyuh through the gap Abhimnyu had made in it. The young hero was thus isolated and surrounded by the Kaurava forces. The son of Arjuna and Subhadra was however undaunted. Almost the entire army of the Kauravas was routed by the mighty Abhimanyu. Duryodhana's son Lakshmana, a gallant young warrior, then charged on Abhimanyu. Within no time, Abhimanyu's arrows pierced Lakshmana's chest, and brought him to death. The Kaurava army was filled with grief.

Duryodhana ordered everyone to kill Abhimanyu at any cost. The Kauravas had a counsel among themselves. Drona told them, with great pride in his words and a broad smile on his lips, "Abhimanyu cannot be vanquished in a direct battle even by all the Gods and the Asuras together. Destroy his weapons, destroy his chariot, kill his protectors, and then we would be able to slay him." Accordingly, six maharathis, Drona, Kripa, Karna, Ashwathama, Brihatbala, and Kritavarma together attacked Abhimanyu from all directions, against all rules of righteous battle. Karna severed his bow, Kritavarma killed his horses, and Kripa his protectors. Abhimanyu, now without his chariot and bow, began battling them with his sword and shield. Drona destroyed the shield. Then he took a chariot wheel, and fought fiercely like Krishna with the discus. But the combined onslaught of six Kaurava warriors overpowered him as they broke the chariot wheel which Abhimanyu held. The son of Dushshasana came up then and closed with him in mortal combat. Both went down

together but Dushshasana's son rose again and hit Abhimanyu on the head. The young warrior fell down, never to rise again.

Abhimanyu was killed most treacherously by the warriors of the Kaurava army. Six great warriors dared to commit this dastardly crime on the holy field called Kurukshetra. Drona, the Commander of the Kaurava army, proved himself to be as sinful and treacherous as Duryodhana. There was great joy and cheering in the Kaurava warriors who danced around the dead boy like savage hunters rejoicing over their prey. They shouted for joy and their cry was taken up by the others. The entire field resounded with it. The cry struck terror in the hearts of Yudhishtira and the other Pandavas. They knew that their beloved Abhimanyu had been slain.

The Sun set. The Kaurava army returned to their camp with great joy at the death of Abhimanyu, and the Pandava camp was sunk in the deepest gloom.

As the day ended, Krishna and Arjuna turned their chariot to return to the camp. They had managed to defeat and kill the Samsaptakas in a great battle. They reached the Pandava camp and were greatly puzzled to be greeted by complete silence. They entered Yudhishtira's tent. Arjuna looked at the depressed faces of his brothers and said, "What has happened to upset you? I heard that Drona had arranged the Kaurava army in the Chakra Vyuha. No one can enter it, but I taught Abhimanyu how to pierce it and enter the Vyuha, but not how to come out of it. Did you send my child into that death trap?" No one spoke or dared to look at Arjuna. Finally, Yudhishtira broke the silence, and narrated everything that had happened. Arjuna fell into a swoon when he heard the full story, overwhelmed by grief. He was revived soon. His frame trembled with fury as he stood up and said, "I promise you that I will kill this Jayadratha before sunset tomorrow. If I do not do it, I promise that I will enter the blazing fire with my Gandiva in my hand!" Saying this, Arjuna twanged his mighty Gandiva and Krishna blew his Panchajanya loudly.

The Kauravas, who were celebrating their victory, were startled by the sound of Arjuna's Gandiva, and Krishna's famed Panchajanya. Spies came and told them about Arjuna's terrible oath. Jayadratha was panic stricken. He rushed to Duryodhana and said, "I am sure Arjuna will do what he has sworn to do. Please let me go back to my kingdom at once."

### **Questions:**

- What was the Padma or Chakra Vyuhu?
- Why was Abhimanyu sent into this formation?
- Why wasn't Arjuna there to help him?
- Who were the parents of Abhimanyu?
- Was he a great warrior like his father?

Did the Kauravas fight fairly against Abhimanyu?

Why or why not?

How did Arjuna react to the news of Abhimanyu's death?

What vow did Arjuna take when he heard of Abhimanyu's death?

## Sri Venkateswara Suprabhatam

Kousalya supraja Rama poorva sandhya pravarthathe; Uttishta Narasardula karthavyamdhaivamanhikam(1)  
Uthishtothishta Govinda Uthishta Garuda dwaja; Uthishta Kamalakantha trilokyam mangalam kuru (2)  
Matahassamastha jagatham MaduKaitabareh; Vaksho viharini manohara divya murthe  
Sriswamini sritha jana priya dana seele; Sree Venkatesa dayite tava suprabhatham (3)  
Tava Suprabhatamaravindalochane; Bhavatu prasanna mukha chandramandale  
Vidhi Sankarendra vanithabhirarchite; Vrisha saila natha Dayite Dayanidhe! (4)  
Atryadi sapta rishayah samupasya sandhyam; Akasa sindhu kamalani manoharani  
Aadaya Padayugam archayitum prapannah; Seshadri sekhara vibho tava suprabhatham (5)  
Panchananabja Bhava Shanmukha Vasavadyah; Trivikramadi charitam Vibhudas stuvanti  
Bhashapathih Patathi vasara suddhimaarat; Seshadri sekhara vibho thava Suprabhatham (6)  
Eeshatprapulla saraseeruha narikela; Poogadrumadi sumanohara palikanam  
Aavati mandam Anilassaha divyagandhah; Seshadri Sekhara Vibho tava suprabhatham (7)  
Unmeelya netrayugam uttama Panjarasthah; Pathrava sishta kadaleephala payasani  
Bhuktva saleelamatah Keli sukah patanthi; Seshadri sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatham (8)  
Tantree prakarsha madurasswanaya Vipanchya; Gayatyanantha charitham tava Naradopi  
Bhasha samagram asakrit kara chara ramyam; Seshadri Sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatham (9)  
Bringavali cha makharanda rasaani viddah; Jangara geetha ninadhais saha sevanaya  
Niryatyupanta sarasee kamalodharebhyah; Seshadri sekhara Vibho tava Suprabhatam (10)  
Yosha ganena varadadni vimatyamane; Goshalayeshu dadi manthana teevra goshah  
Roshat kalim vidadate kakhubhascha kumbah; Seshadri sekhara Vibho tava suprabhatham (11)

***Padmesa mitra satha pathragathali vargah  
harthum sriyam kuvalayasya nijanga Lakshmya  
Bherininadhamivabibhrati teevranadham  
Seshadri sekhara vibho tava Suprabhatham (12)***

*The swarm of bees in the lotuses is friends of the sun and is making loud sounds with a view to surpassing the splendour of the lustrous blue lotuses. Lord of Seshachala! May it be an auspicious dawn to Thee.*

***Srimannabhishta varadakhila lokhabando  
Sri Srinivasa dayaika sindho  
Sri devata griha bhujantara divyamurte  
Sri Venkatachalapathe tava suprabhatham (13)***

*O Srinivasa! The bestowal of all desired boons, closest kith and kin of the universe, ocean of compassion, O Lord of charming! Let this morning bring glory to you.*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucSm8aB\\_Mz0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucSm8aB_Mz0)

**Jumble Words – All words are from this lesson**

A S I L N

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F A S T H

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O A V L R

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C B E A R H

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P T H I R U M

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