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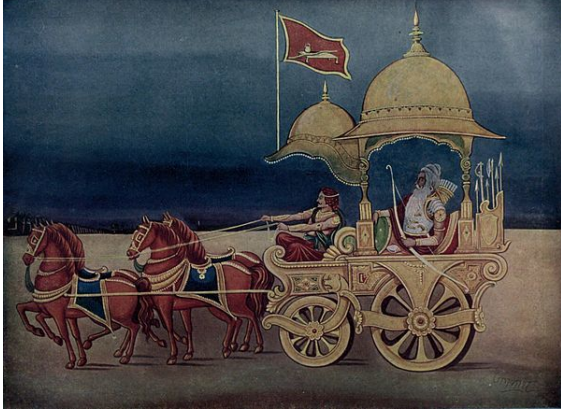
Droṇa implies that he was not gestated in a womb, but outside the human body in a *droṇa* (vessel or a basket).

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Drona

This article is about Droṇācārya. For other uses, see [Drona \(disambiguation\)](#).

In the epic *Mahābhārata*, **Drona** (Sanskrit: द्रोण, *droṇa*)



Droṇācārya as commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army.

or **Dronacharya** (Sanskrit: द्रोणाचार्य, *droṇācārya*) was the royal guru to Kauravas and Pandavas. He was a master of advanced military arts, including the *Devāstras*. Arjuna was his favorite student. **Droṇa**'s love for Arjuna was second only to his love for his son *Aśvatthāma*. He is avatar of *Bṛihaspati*.^[1]

1 Birth and early life

Droṇa implies that he was not gestated in a womb, but outside the human body in a *droṇa* (vessel or a basket).

The story of Droṇa's birth is related dramatically in *Mahābhārata*, Book I: Ādi Parva, Sambhava Parva, Section CXXXI.^[2] Bharadvāja went with his companions to the *Gaṅgā* River to perform his ablutions. There he beheld a beautiful *apsara* named *Ghritachi*(*Ghṛtācī*) who had come to bathe. The sage was overcome by desire, causing him to produce a reproductive fluid. Bharadvāja Muni captured the fluid in a vessel called a *Droṇa*, and Droṇācārya himself sprang from the fluid thus preserved. Droṇa would later boast that he had sprung from Bharadvāja without ever having been in a womb.

Droṇācārya spent his youth in poverty, but studied religion and military arts such as archery, in which he gained expertise, together with the then prince of *Pañcāla*, *Drupada*. *Drupada* and Droṇācārya became close friends.

Droṇācārya married *Kṛipī*, the sister of *Kṛipa*, the royal teacher of the princes of *Hastinapura*. Like Droṇa him-

self, *Kṛipī* and her brother had not been gestated in a womb, but outside the human body (see [Kṛipī](#) page). *Kṛipī* and Droṇa had a son, *Aśvatthāma*.^[3]

1.1 Guru Paraśurāma

Learning that *Paraśurāma* was giving away his possessions to *brāhmaṇas*, Droṇa approached him. Unfortunately, *Parasurama* only had his weapons left. He offered to give Droṇa the weapons as well as the knowledge of how to use them. Thus, Droṇa obtained all of his weapons, including the very powerful *Brahmastra*. With *Parasurama*'s knowledge, Droṇa became an *acharya*.^[4]

1.2 Droṇa and Drupada

For the sake of his wife and son, Droṇa desired freedom from poverty. Remembering the promise given by *Drupada*, he decided to approach him to ask for help. However, King *Drupada* refused to even recognize their friendship.

Drupada gave Droṇa a long and haughty explanation of why he was rejecting him. Friendship, said *Drupada*, is possible only between persons of equal stature in life. As a child, he said, it was possible for him to be friends with Droṇa, because at that time they were equals. But now *Drupada* had become a King, while Droṇācārya remained a luckless indigent. Under these circumstances, friendship was impossible. However, he said he would satisfy Droṇācārya if he begged for alms befitting a Brahmin, rather than claiming his right as a friend. Droṇa went away silently, but in his heart he vowed revenge.^{[2][5]}

2 As a teacher

Droṇācārya's legend as a great teacher and warrior is marred by notoriety from his strong moral and social views, which inspire great debates about morality and *dharma* in the *Mahābhārata* epic.

2.1 The ball and the ring

Droṇācārya went to *Hastinapura*, in a hope to open a school of military arts for young princes, with the help of King *Dhṛtarāṣṭra*.^{[6][6]} One day, he saw a number of young boys, the *Kauravas* and *Pandavas*, gathered

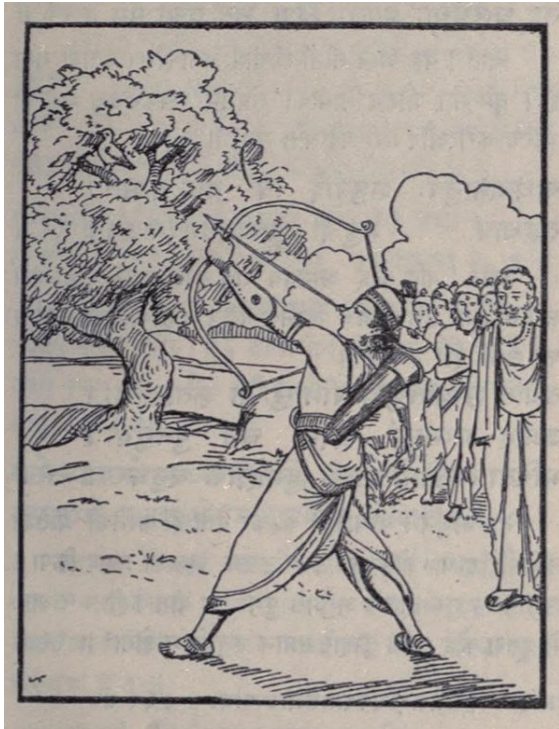
around a well. He asked them what the matter was, and Yudiṣṭhira, the eldest, replied that their ball had fallen into the well and they did not know how to retrieve it.

Droṇācārya laughed, and mildly rebuked the princes for being helpless over such a plain problem. Droṇa first threw in a ring of his, collected some blades of grass, and uttered mystical Vedic chants. He then threw the blades into the well one after another, like spears. The first blade stuck to the ball, and the second stuck to the first, and so on, forming a chain. Droṇa gently pulled the ball out with this rope of grass.

In a feat that was even more amazing to the boys, Droṇa then chanted Vedic mantras again and fired a grass blade into the well. It struck within the center of his floating ring and rose out of the well in a matter of moments, retrieving Droṇa's ring. Excited, the boys took Droṇācārya to the city and reported this incident to Bhīṣma, their grandfather.

Bhīṣma instantly realized that this was Droṇa, and - his prowess having been exemplified - asked him to become the Guru of the Kuru princes, training them in advanced military arts. Droṇa then established his Gurukula near the city, where princes from numerous kingdoms around the country came to study under him. This village came to be known as Guru-Gram ("guru" - teacher, "gram" - village), and has now developed into the city of Gurgaon.

2.2 Arjuna, the favorite pupil



The test of Dronacharya

Of all the Kaurava and Pāṇḍava brothers training un-

der Droṇa, Arjuna emerged as the most dedicated, hard-working and most naturally talented of them all, exceeding even Droṇa's own son Aśvatthāma. Arjuna assiduously served his teacher, who was greatly impressed by this devoted pupil.^{[7][7]}

Arjuna surpassed Droṇa's expectations in numerous challenges. When Droṇācārya tested the princes' alertness and ability by creating an illusion of a crocodile attacking him and dragging him away, most of the princes were left dumbfounded. Arjuna, however, swiftly fired arrows to slay the illusioned animal, and Droṇācārya congratulated Arjuna for passing this test. As a reward, Droṇa gave Arjuna mantras to invoke the super-powerful divine weapon of Brahma known as Brahmāstra, but told Arjuna not to use this invincible weapon against any ordinary warrior. The weapon had a sharp edge surrounded below by three heads of Lord Brahma.

In a great challenge, Droṇa set up a wooden bird upon a tree, and from across the adjacent river, asked the princes to shoot it down by striking its eye. When prince Yudiṣṭhira tried first, Droṇa asked him what he saw. Yudiṣṭhira replied that he saw Droṇa, his brothers, the river, the forest, the tree and the bird. Droṇa replied that Yudiṣṭhira would fail and asks another prince to step forward. The others, even Ashwatthama, gave the same reply, and Droṇācārya was disappointed with all. But when Arjuna stepped forth, he told Droṇācārya that he saw only the eye of the bird and nothing else. Droṇa asked him to shoot, and Arjuna did strike the bird down in the eye.

Drona asked the cook never to serve food to Arjuna in the dark and also tells the cook that he should not tell Arjuna about this order from Drona. One day Arjuna was eating food and the light was put off by the wind. Arjuna noted that even in complete darkness, by practice, hands would reach one's mouth. This struck Arjuna, and he started to practice archery in darkness. He began training by night to use his weapons in absolute darkness, and steadily achieved a great level of skill.^{[7][8][8][9]} Droṇa was greatly impressed by Arjuna's concentration, determination and drive, and promised him that he would become the greatest archer on earth. Droṇa gave Arjuna special knowledge of the Devāstras that no other prince possessed.

After some time, Arjuna earned Ashwatthama's jealousy. When Ashwatthama demanded that Drona give him proof of Arjuna's excellence, Drona complied. Droṇa gave each prince a pot to fill with water before he imparted lessons. He gave his son Aśvatthāma a wide-necked pot unlike the others' narrow-necked ones, and gave him special knowledge, when others took time to return. But Arjuna used his knowledge of a mystical water weapon, Varunastra to fill his pot swiftly and started returning as early as Ashwatthama. Ashwatthama apologized to his father for doubting him. Drona responded that while he loved Ashwatthama as his son, as a guru, he loved Arjuna because of Arjuna's excellence.^{[7][8][8][9]}

2.3 Treatment of Ekalavya and Karṇa

[10] [11] [12] [13]

2.3.1 Ekalavya

A strong criticism of Droṇācārya springs from his behavior towards Ekalavya and his strong bias in favor of Arjuna.^[14]

Ekalavya was the son of a Niṣāda chief (tribal), who came to Droṇācārya for instruction. Droṇācārya refused to train him along with the kṣatriya princes because Ekalavya was not a kṣatriya prince. Many sources report that in addition, Ekalavya's father was a commander of the Kingdom of Magadha, which was ruled by Emperor Jarasandha. At that time, Jarasandha, having never been conquered by Pandu, had been building an empire in East-India; relations between Hastinapur and Magadha were rough. Drona feared that Ekalavya would have become an unconquerable warrior for a rival army and felt an obligation to defend the land that gave him asylum, even at the cost of teacher-student ethics. Hence, Drona rejected the request of Ekalavya to be his teacher. Ekalavya began study and practice by himself, having fashioned a clay image of Droṇācārya. Solely by his determination, Ekalavya became a warrior of exceptional prowess, with abilities to be better than the young Arjuna.

One day, a dog's barking disturbed a focused Ekalavya. Without looking, Ekalavya fired arrows that sealed up the dog's mouth. The Kuru princes saw this dog running, and wondered who could have done such a feat. They saw Ekalavya, who announced himself as a pupil of Droṇa.

Arjuna reported this to Drona. Droṇa visited Ekalavya with the princes. Ekalavya promptly greeted Drona as his guru. Heavily, Droṇācārya asked Ekalavya for a Dakṣiṇa. When Ekalavya promised anything, Droṇācārya asked for Ekalavya's right thumb. Though his expression faltering, after confirming the request, Ekalavya unhesitatingly cut it off and handed it to Droṇācārya, despite knowing that this would irreparably hamper his archery skills. Cleverly, Drona both defends his promise to Arjuna as well as his obligation to protect Hastinapur by disarming a potential threat.

2.3.2 Karṇa

Droṇācārya similarly rejected Karṇa, as he wasn't a prince. The school established by Droṇācārya belonged only to the princes of Hastinapur and her allies. Humiliated, Karṇa vowed to learn nonetheless, and obtained the knowledge of weapons and military arts from Drona's own teacher Paraśurāma. Thus, Droṇa inadvertently laid the foundation for Karṇa's great rivalry with Arjuna.

2.4 Revenge upon Drupada

On completing their training, Droṇācārya asked the Kauravas to bring him Drupada bound in chains.

Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Yuyutsu, Vikarṇa, and the remaining Kauravas even with Drona's son Aswattama attacked Pañcāla with the Hastinapur army.

They failed to defeat the Pañcāla army, whereupon Droṇācārya sent Arjuna and his brothers for the task. The five Pāṇḍavas attacked Pañcāla with another army. Arjuna defeated Drupada, as ordered.

Droṇācārya took half of Drupada's kingdom, thus becoming his equal. He forgave Drupada for his misdeeds, but Drupada desired revenge. He performed a Yajña to have a son who would slay Droṇācārya and a daughter who would marry Arjuna. His wish was eventually fulfilled and thus were born Dhṛṣṭādyumna, the slayer of Droṇācārya, and Draupadī, the consort of the Pandavas.

3 Droṇācārya in the war



Droṇācārya became the Chief Commander of the Kuru Army for 5 days of the war.

Droṇācārya had been the preceptor of most kings involved in the Kurukṣetra, on both sides.

Droṇācārya strongly condemned the sending into exile of Pāṇḍavas by the wicked prince Duryodhana and his brothers and for their abusive treatment of the Pāṇḍavas, beside usurping their kingdom. But being a servant of

Hastināpura, Droṇācārya was duty-bound to fight for the Kauravas, and thus against his favorite Pāṇḍavas.

Dronacharya was one of the most powerful and destructive warriors in the Kurukshetra War. He was an invincible warrior, whom no person on earth could defeat. He single-handedly slayed hundreds of thousands of Pandava soldiers, with his powerful armory of weapons and incredible skill.

After the fall of Bhīṣma, he became the Chief Commander of the Kuru Army for 5 days of the war.

He was also the mastermind behind a devious method to surround and kill Arjuna's son, Abhimanyu, because he could not find any other means to defeat Abhimanyu in battle.^[15] He was also extremely hurt by Abhimanyu, and stayed in battle, only because he had to.

3.1 Abhimanyu's killing

See Also: Abhimanyu, Arjuna



The Pāṇḍavas' nephew Abhimanyu battles the Kauravas and their allies

On the 13th day of battle, the Kauravas challenged the Pāṇḍavas to break a spiral shaped battle formation known as the *Chakravyuha* (see Wars of Hindu Mythology). Droṇācārya as commander formed this strategy, knowing that only Arjuna and Śrī Kṛṣṇa would know how to penetrate it. He asked the King of the Sarṅṣaptaka army to distract Arjuna and Śrī kṛṣṇa into another part of the battlefield, allowing the main Kuru army to surge through the Pāṇḍava ranks.

Arjuna's young son Abhimanyu had the knowledge to penetrate the formation but didn't know the way out. At the request of Yudhishtira, Abhimanyu agreed to lead the way for the Pāṇḍava army and was able to penetrate the formation. However, he was trapped when Jayadratha, the king of Sindhu, held the Pāṇḍava warriors who were following him, at bay. Abhimanyu did not know how to get out of the Chakra Vyuham, but embarked upon an all-out attack on the Kuru army, killing tens of thousands of warriors single-handedly. He even held Karna and Droṇācārya himself at bay. Amazed at his prowess

and courage, he was considered by the Kurus to be his father's equal in greatness.

With his army facing decimation, Droṇa asked Karna, Duḥśāna and others to simultaneously attack Abhimanyu, to strike down his horses and his charioteer and to disable his chariot from different angles. Left without support, Abhimanyu began fighting from the ground, whereupon all the Kuru warriors simultaneously attacked him. Exhausted after his long, prodigious feats, Abhimanyu was weakened, and grabbing one of the wheels of his chariot, blocked all the attacks, but eventually was killed by the simultaneous attack by seven kaurava warriors.

All this was an extreme violation of the rules of war, whereby a lone warrior may not be attacked by more than one, and not at all if he is disabled or without chariot. This devious murder of his son enraged Arjuna, who swore to kill Jayadratha, whom he saw as responsible for his son's death. If he failed to do so the next day, he would step into fire and commit suicide.

Duryodhana lined up the entire Kuru army, with an entire akṣauhiṇī (approximately 10,745 soldiers) in front of Arjuna, to thwart his mission. But Arjuna exhibited his great prowess, and before the end of the day slayed more than two hundred thousand warriors, including the ruler of Kamboja, Sudakshin single-handedly. With the help of Krishna, Jayadratha was killed right before sunset.

On the whole, Arjuna devastated a large portion of the Kuru army dramatically in just one day of fighting.

4 Yudhiṣṭhira's capture and Droṇācārya's death

In the war, Yudhiṣṭhira was targeted by Droṇācārya to get captured. For this plan to be successful, Duryodhana invited King Bhagadatta, who was a son of the asura Narakāsura, in order to fight against the Pāṇḍavas.

Bhagadatta was the King of Prajokiyatsa (in present-day Assam or Burma). As Krishna had killed his father Narakasur, Bhagadatta agreed to join the Kauravas opposing Kṛṣṇa. But in spite of Bhagadatta's support, Droṇa failed to capture Yudhiṣṭhira alive. The Kuru commander and preceptor did, however, kill hundreds and thousands of Pāṇḍava warriors, thus advancing Duryodhana's cause.

On the 15th day of the Mahābhārata war, Droṇa got instigated by King Dhritarastra's remarks of being a traitor. He used the Brahmadanda against the Pāṇḍavas. Brahmadanda was a spiritual divine weapon that contained the powers of seven greatest sages of Sanātana Dharma (Sapta Ṛṣis). But Droṇācārya did not impart this knowledge either to Arjuna or to Aśvatthāma. Thus, he proved to be unconquerable on the 15th day of war.

Kṛṣṇa knew that it was not possible to defeat Droṇācārya when he had bow and arrow in his hands.



Death of Dronācārya

Kṛiṣṇa also knew that Dronācārya loved his son Aśvatthāma very dearly. So, Kṛiṣṇa suggested to Yudhiṣṭhira and other Pāṇḍava brothers that, if he were convinced that his son was killed on the battlefield, then Dronācārya would be so sad that he would lay down all his arms on the ground and it would be easier to kill him.

In order to find a way out, Kṛiṣṇa suggested Bhīma to kill an elephant by name Aśvatthāma and claim to Dronācārya that he has killed Dronacharya's son Aśvatthāma. After killing the elephant as suggested; he loudly proclaimed that he had killed Aśvatthāma. Dronācārya however, did not believe Bhīma's words and approached Yudhisthira. Drona knew of Yudhiṣṭhira's firm adherence to Dharma and that he would never ever utter a lie.

When Dronācārya approached Yudhiṣṭhira and questioned him as to whether his son was dead, Yudhiṣṭhira responded with the cryptic 'Aśvatthāma is dead. But it is an elephant and not your son'.

Kṛiṣṇa also knew that it was not possible for Yudhiṣṭhira to lie outright. On his instructions, the other warriors blew trumpets and conches, raising a tumultuous noise in such a way that Dronācārya only heard that "Aśvatthāma was dead", but could not hear the latter part of Yudhiṣṭhira's reply.

Out of grief, and believing his son to be dead, Dronācārya descended from his chariot, laid down his arms and sat in meditation. Closing his eyes, his soul went to Heaven in search of Aśvatthāma's soul. Dhṛiṣṭādyumna took this opportunity and beheaded the unarmed Dronācārya.

5 Modern assessment

[11]

Drona partiality towards Arjuna is examined in many academic texts. Any great teacher would feel enthralled if his protegee so excels as Arjuna did, thus, so was Drona. Drona thus acted unfairly, when he demanded as guru dakshina, the right thumb of Ekalavya. This treatment of Ekalavya, as well as his rebuking of Karna, is criticized as being biased against lower castes. In some folklore, Sarasvati cursed Dronācārya with an unarmed, humiliating death for Drona's actions against Ekalavya and Karna. Sarasvati said that knowledge belonged to all, and that it was an acharya's duty to spread that knowledge everywhere. Despite whatever reasons he gave, Drona cheated Ekalavya and Karna to achieve something for himself-to protect his promise to Arjuna that he would make Arjuna the world's greatest archer, as well as his oath to Hastinapur.

Drona was somewhat parallel to Bhīṣma both in martial prowess, and in his unwavering commitment to fighting for the kingdom of Hastinapur irrespective of who the ruler was and whether or not the cause was just. Like Bhishma, Drona is criticized for his pride and conceit, siding with evil despite knowing of and acknowledging the righteousness of the Pandava cause. However, he was compelled to side with the Kauravas because he was indebted to their royal household, which had provided him and his family with shelter, wealth and an occupation. Krishna criticized this reasoning as mere pride-Drona wanted to put his obligation to Hastinapur over dharma so that no one questioned his honor.

Criticism is leveled at Dronācārya for remaining a mute spectator and not having protested the humiliation of Draupadī by Duḥśāsana and Duryodhana following the fateful game of dice.

Similarly, Dronācārya was criticized for many of his actions during the war:

- First, as a brahmin, and secondly, as the princes' teacher, he should have removed himself from the battlefield.
- Dronācārya tried to use divine weapons against the Pandava's common foot-soldiers. As he does so, a voice from the heavens told him not to use divine weapons so carelessly. As a teacher, he had even more of an obligation to not do so. However, Drona argued that his first obligation was to defeating his enemy and defending his soldiers, by whatever means he possessed.
- It may also be concluded that he was responsible for the devious and brutal murder of Abhimanyu, as it was he who had suggested simultaneously attacking and disabling the tired, outnumbered, and trapped warrior

Dronacharya's overarching actions during the war are portrayed differently. Undoubtedly, when he became commander-in-chief, the rules of war were averted. Divine weapons were used against ordinary soldiers, war continued throughout the night, warriors no longer engaged each other one-on-one (like against Abhimanyu), etc. Specifically, he was willing to try and end the war by capturing Yudhishtira, while Karna was not, as he considered it lacking honor. In some versions of the Mahabharata, this evidence is used to justify the caste system, as the point is subtly made that the reason why Drona was willing to break the rules of war and engage in less honorable acts was because he was a brahmin, not a kshatriya. He is compared directly to Karna, who, not even knowing that he was a kshatriya, still intuitively understood the kshatriya code/way-of-life. In other versions, Drona's differences in strategy are shown as a difference in philosophy-Drona believed, that as the commander-in-chief of the Kaurava army, his goal was to ensure the protection of his soldiers through any means necessary. By choosing to uphold the rules of war and the concept of honorable acts over his soldiers' lives, he would be doing them a disservice.

Ultimately, all of these actions do lead to Drona's death in the war. In that way, Drona paid the ultimate price for his crimes. He remains a revered figure in Hindu history, and a pillar of the Indian tradition of respecting one's teacher as an equal not only of parents, but even of God.

The Government of India annually awards the Dronacharya Award for excellence in sports tutelage to the best sports teachers and coaches in India.^[16]

It is believed that the city of Gurgaon (literally - "Village of the Guru") was founded as "Guru Gram" by Dronācārya on land given to him by Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the king of Hastinapur in recognition of his teachings of martial arts to the princes, and the 'Dronācārya Tank', still exists within the Gurgaon city, along with a village called Gurgaon.^[17]

6 See also

- *The Mahabharata*, by Kṛṣṇa Dharma
- Hindu mythology, Hinduism
- Wars of Hindu Mythology

7 References

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