

1 Muslim Karna and 4 Hindu Karnas

By London Swaminathan; Post No. 767 dated 30th December 2013

We come across the characters of four different Karnas in Mahabharata, Ramayana, Puranas and a Muslim Karna in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world. All the five Karnas had colourful life. Let us first look at the Muslim Karna. I have briefly touched this point in my previous post “ **Hindu Wonders in a Muslim Country**”.

The first President of Indonesia was Sukarno. He liberated the country from the Netherlands (Holland) and ruled the country for 21 years. He was a good friend of India and its first Prime Minister Jawaharalal Nehru. Sukarno’s mother was a Brahmin woman from Bali island of Indonesia. His Muslim father was a great admirer of Mahabharata. He liked Karna, the eldest brother of the Pandavas very much. But Karna sided with the baddies in the Great War. So it looks like Sukarno’s father named him Good (Su prefix in Sanskrit)Karna.

Sukarno had nine wives. His daughter Megavati Satyavati Sukarno Putri was a practising Muslim with a beautiful name in Sanskrit. She also ruled the country as President for some time. Her name Satyavati is also from the longest and greatest epic in the world—Mahabharata.

Sukarno in his autobiography relates the following about the name giving:

“ My name at birth was Kusno. I started the life as an unhealthy child. I had Malaria, dysentery, anything and everything. Father thought, ‘His name is not good. We must give him another name so that he may start fresh’. Father was a devotee of Mahabharata, the ancient Hindu classics. I had not yet reached puberty when father said, “ We shall name you Karna”. Karna is one of the greatest heroes in Mahabharata. Grasping my shoulders tightly, father looked deep into my eyes. “It has always been my prayer”; he declared, “ for my son to be a patriot and great hero of his people. You shall be a second Karna”.

Tat Twam Asi (You are That)-Upanishad Vakya

“Another episode from his auto biography: Father, however, was a strict school master. The rare times I was naughty he punished me harshly. One morning I climbed the Jambu Tree and knocked down a bird’s nest. Father was livid, “I taught you, I taught you to love animals”, he thundered. I shook with fright, ‘Yes father, You did’.

“ You will please be so good as to express the meaning of the phrase Tat Twam Asi. He is I and I am He. You are I and I am You. And were you not taught the special significance?”

“Yes, Father,It means God is in all of us”.

This incident throws much light on Sukarno’s father. He must be a good scholar. He used every opportunity to teach his son the great philosophy from the Upanishads and Hindu epics

Gantakarna (Bell Eared Karna)

The story of Gantakarna is very interesting. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa says, “Be not a bigot like Gantakarna”.

Gantakarna worshipped Shiva, but hated all other deities. Siva appeared before him and expressed his displeasure. He advised him to treat all gods with respect. But he wouldn’t change. Just to teach him that God is one, Siva appeared again, but in the form of Hari Haran (Half Vishnu+ Half Siva). It made him worse. He showed to ‘Arti ’ etc to Siva side only. He blocked the nostrils of Vishnu so that the incense fragrance would not reach him. Siva warned him that he would suffer for his bigotry. Ghantakarna was least bothered about Shiva’s warning. He retired to a village. Knowing his attitude, children of the village deliberately uttered Vishnu’s name in front of him. Vexed at this,

Ghantakarna hung two bells (Ghanta) on his ears (Karna). When the boys cried out “Vishnu, Vishnu”, he would ring the bells so that he would not hear them. He spent his entire life by ringing the bells!

Kumbhakarna (Rip Van Winkle of Hindu Literature)

I have already given the story of Kumbhakarna in my posts “Medical Evidence for Kumbhakarna’s Long Sleep” and “Do Words have Power?”

Kumbhakarna, brother of Ravana and son of Visravas and Kaikasi, is a very interesting character in the great Hindu epic Ramayana. He is a 50-50 character. Good and bad qualities mixed together. He slept for six months and was wide awake for another six months. He gave proper advice to Ravana and Vibheeshana. His character was the model for Gulliver’s Travels of Jonathan Swift. If a Hindu child reads Gulliver’s Travels today it will feel it is copied from Kumbhakarna character.

The interesting aspect of Kumbhakarna’s life is his sleeping pattern. There is a story behind it. He prayed to Brahma for Indra Asana (seat of Indra) but when Brahma actually appeared before him his tongue twisted and asked for Nidra Asana (ever sleeping place/seat). Brahma granted it. There is another version as well. Kumbhakarna wanted Nirdevatvam (annihilation of Devas), but ended with Nidratvam (permanent sleep). Whatever the boon may be, we know for sure he slept for a longer period.

Vikarna, Duryodhana’s brother

Mahabharata describes the great war between the 100 Kaurvas and the 5 Pandavas. The Kauravas were burning with jealousy and resorted to all the bad tricks in the world to eliminate Pandavas. But among the 100 Kauravs, there was only one good person Vikarnan. He advised his eldest brother Duryodhana to get back to good habits, but in vain.

Karna of Mahabharata

Karna was one of the greatest characters of Mahabharat, the longest epic in the world. He was a great philanthropist and very honest. Both these virtues worked against him because he supported the baddies in the war. In spite of this “bad quality”, he was one of the exemplary characters in the epic. He was the most loyal servant of Duryodhana who made him King of Angadesa at a crucial time. He was killed in the war by his own younger brother Arjuna, one of the five Pandavas. Hundreds of pages can be written about his munificence. His name is synonymous with charity. He was born with two big ear rings and came to be known as Karna.

Many More Karnas

Ghantakarna Mahavir is in Jain religion. He was the protector deity of Jains.

If one reads the history of India, Nepal and Sri Lanka, one can find many more Karnas. Lamba Karnas (long hole in the ear to wear ornaments) of North Indian origin ruled Sri Lanka for 360 years. Lambakarna Bhatta of Nepal built a Lakshmi temple in Kathmandu, capital of Nepal. Several Kandakarna (Shiva) temples exist in Kerala. Kandakarna effigies are burnt in Nepal as demons. Lambakarna (Long ear) is the name of a donkey in Panchatantra stories. In Tamil Nadu also women of certain castes make big holes in their ears to hang big golden kundalas.

Contact swami_48@yahoo.com

Pictures are used from different sites; thanks.