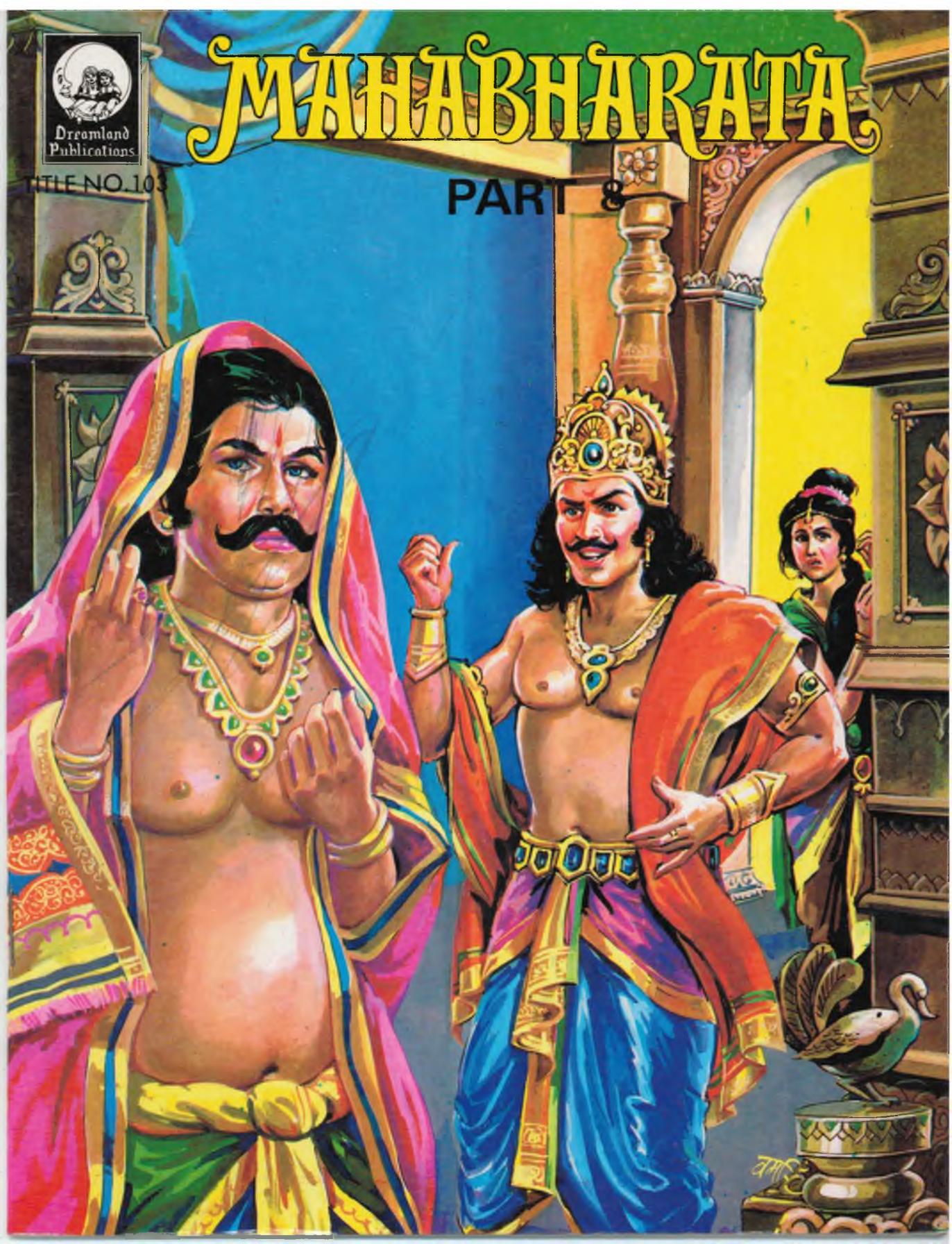




# MAHABHARATA

TITLE NO. 103

PART 8



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# MAHABHARAT

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The Death-god praised Yudhishtir saying, "You are great, my son. You have pleased me ignoring your hunger, thirst, sorrow, attachment and also have conquered greed, pride and anger. So, I want to confer the title of *Dharmraj* on you. Also, I want to give you two boons. Ask for what you want." Yudhishtir asked for his boons as follows :

"Sir, we have promised a Brahman to find out his churner and igniting-rod which he had lost when a deer took them away on being entangled in its horns. Be kind to bless us so that we may be able to find them out and restore them to the Brahman . As for my second boon, I implore you to enable us to remain untraced during the thirteenth year of our exile," remarked Yudhishtir.

Hearing Yudhishtir's words, the Death-god put on a smiling face and said, "That deer was none else but myself. I had enacted the entire game with a view to testing you. Here are the two things of the Brahman. Take them and restore them to their owner. He will be very pleased to have them back."

Saying these words, the Death-god handed over the churner and igniting-rod to Yudhishtir who felt highly glorified.



Regarding the second boon, the Death-god directed Yudhishtir to go to the capital of King Virata and pass the thirteenth year of exile there safely.

Now the Pandavas quenched their thirst and returned to the place with a vessel full of water where Yudhishtir had left Draupadi. When she had also satisfied her thirst, they began to think over how to pass the thirteenth year without being discovered by anyone at Viratanagar.

It was decided that Yudhishtir should approach the king in the guise of a Brahman named Kank to be appointed as one of his advisors. As for Bheema, he chose to become the chief cook of the king. Arjuna who had been cursed by a nymph named Urvashi to remain a eunuch for a year, decided to take up the job of teaching dance and music to princess Uttara and her friends. Nakula chose to be the royal syce while Sahdev decided to be the royal cowherd. As for Draupadi, she adopted the name—Sairandhri—and agreed to serve queen Sudeshana as a maid in the palace.

Drawing up the above mentioned plan, the Pandavas reached the capital of king Virata. They hid their weapons in a pit under a tree.



Reaching the capital of King Virata, the Pandavas got to the king's presence and asked for employment for each of them. They narrated their respective qualifications and implored the king to take each of them in his service. The king consulted his prime minister and finally took the five Pandavas in the royal service just as they had planned.

As for Draupadi, she was sent to queen Sudeshna who was highly impressed by her beauty and proportionate figure. The queen asked her if she would like to act as her maid. Draupadi agreed but on two conditions. The first being that she would not clean used utensils while the second that she would not eat the food left over by any eater. Queen Sudeshna had, in fact, taken fancy to Draupadi and so she could not help agreeing to the conditions placed before her by Draupadi.

Keechak was queen Sudeshna's brother who was the chief commander of King Virata's forces. The king being very weak, the real power in the entire kingdom was wielded by Keechak who was very brave.

One day Keechak visited his sister and chanced to see Draupadi.



Keechak had been caught up with Draupadi's personal charm. So, he decided to lay hands on her somehow or other. He went to the royal palace next day and finding Draupadi alone, said to her, "I am badly in love with you, O Lovely Dame. If you agree to live with me, I shall shower every comfort and luxury on you. I am the virtual ruler of this kingdom. My brother-in-law is the king in name only. So, you will be no less than a queen here."

Enraged at Keechak's vulgarity, Draupadi swore at him saying, "Hold your tongue, O Keechak. You perhaps don't know who I am. If my protectors get wind of your evil design, they will not leave you alive even if you go to the under-world (*Patal*) for safety. Cut to the quick at Draupadi's reproach, Keechak approached his sister and said, "Sister! I have lost my heart to your maid Sairandhri and I cannot remain alive without her. Do something so that I may get her hand."

"Brother! Sairandhri is my favourite maid and I cannot play false with her. But I can do one thing for you. I will send her to your apartment on some pretext. It is upto you to win her heart with your love."

Hearing these words, Keechak went away.



After a few days, came off a big festival which was to be celebrated in the palace with great pomp and show. The queen needed some articles for her worship on the festival day. So, she called Sairandhri and said, "Tomorrow is a big festival and I need some articles for Lord Shiva's worship. My brother Keechak has managed to bring these articles from the market. Go and fetch them here." Hearing the queen's bidding, Sairandhri went to Keechak's apartment though trembling out of fear. She said to him, "Sir! the queen has asked for the articles to be used for the worship of Lord Shiva."

Keechak was beside himself with joy to see her sister's maid in his apartment. He tried to grab her in her arms with a view to carrying out his evil design but Sairandhri was too alert for it. She pushed him back and rushed out of his apartment. She approached the court where the king was sitting along with his nobles. Keechak ran after her and caught hold of her before the very eyes of the king and his courtiers. Nobody could dare to stand in Keechak's way. So, he kicked Sairandhri and went away threatening her with dire consequences.

As for Sairandhri, she was highly enraged at her open disgrace and went to where Bheema was sleeping.



Draupadi waked Bheema up and told him all what had happened. Hearing of Keechak's misdeed. Bheema was, in fact, so perturbed to see his wife Draupadi working as a maid. He lost his temper and got ready to go and kill Keechak

But Draupadi had calmed down by now. She could well imagine the consequences in case her husbands came to be exposed. So, she pacified Bheema, who thought for a while and hit upon a clever plan. He advised Draupadi to show a soft corner to Keechak and win his confidence in order to invite him to the dancing-hall at mid-night the next day for a happy tryst.

As Keechak was badly after Sairandhri, he again cornered her in a part of the palace and compelled her to obey him. Sairandhri was already in the look out for a chance to take Keechak in. She said in an amorous tone, "I am sorry for my rude behaviour of yesterday. I have decided to surrender myself to you."

Keechak was beside himself with joy to hear Sairandhri's words. So, he urged her to come to his apartment at night. But Sairandhri put forward a different suggestion saying, "I am being protected by invisible *gandharvas* when I leave my place at night. I shall wait for you in the dancing-hall."



Keechak was uneasily waiting for the night to fall as he was to meet his beloved at about midnight in the dancing-hall. On the other side, Bheema was chalking out a plan how to punish Keechak for his impertinence.

As soon as night fell, Bheema disguised himself as a woman and reached the dancing-hall to meet Keechak. He had decided to make short work of him.

When darkness had prevailed, Keechak began to get ready to go to the dancing hall in order to meet Sairandhri. He took a lot of wine and was in full intoxication. When it was about midnight he left his apartment and slowly made for the dancing hall. Reaching there, he was very happy to see Bheema disguised as a lady. Because of immense intoxication, he could not locate Bheema and tried to embrace him taking him for Sairandhri.

Bheema was already waiting impatiently for Keechak's arrival. As soon as Keechak projected his arms towards Bheema, he caught hold of him and flung him on the floor. Giving him no chance to rise, he thrashed him like anything and then strangled him to death. Tying Keechak's body into a bundle, Bheema slunk away silently and nobody could know about Keechak's murder by him.



Next morning everybody came to know of Keechak's death but nobody knew who his murderer was. When the news reached queen Sudeshna, she came running to the dancing-hall accompanied by her husband. She was highly amazed at her brother's death. Also, her sorrow knew no bounds because in Keechak's absence the kingdom of Viratnagar was quite unsafe.

The queen called Sairandhri and asked her if she knew anything about Keechak's murderer. Sairandhri said to the queen, "At night I am protected by my gardharvas (protectors) who remain invisible. I had told your brother that he should not have any evil design towards me but he did not care for my warning at all. So, it must be my protectors who have killed your brother."

The queen was so scared to hear Sairandhri's words that she said to her, "It is not improbable that your protectors choose to hit at us as well. So, I request you to leave our palace and go elsewhere." Sairandhri replied, "Mistress I am ready to obey your order but at the same time I request you to allow me thirteen days for finding a job for myself. After this time, I will leave your palace." The queen complied with her request on the condition that the king and the prince should not be harmed in any way.



The thirteenth year of the Pandavas' exile had started, we know. How could, then, Duryodhana sit at ease? He made up his mind to trace the Pandavas and send them into exile for another twelve years according to the conditions decided upon. So, he called his best spies and sent them in all directions to discover the Pandavas.

The spies searched high and low for the Pandavas in every forest, royal capital and such place where they could think of a hide-out for them. They remained unsuccessful in their mission though they came to know of Keechak's murder by some invisible gandharvas. They returned to Hastinapur much to the chagrin of Duryodhana, though news of Keechak's death agitated Duryodhana's mind.

On the one hand, Duryodhana felt highly pleased to hear of Keechak's death because it was now easy for him to attack and capture the kingdom of Viratnagar (Matsya Kingdom). On the other hand, his death by some invisible gandharvas plunged Duryodhana into a sea of doubts regarding the Pandavas. He said to his courtiers, "The mysterious murder of Keechak seems to be the handiwork of none else but Bheema and as far as maid Sairandhri is concerned, she can't be anybody but Draupadi.

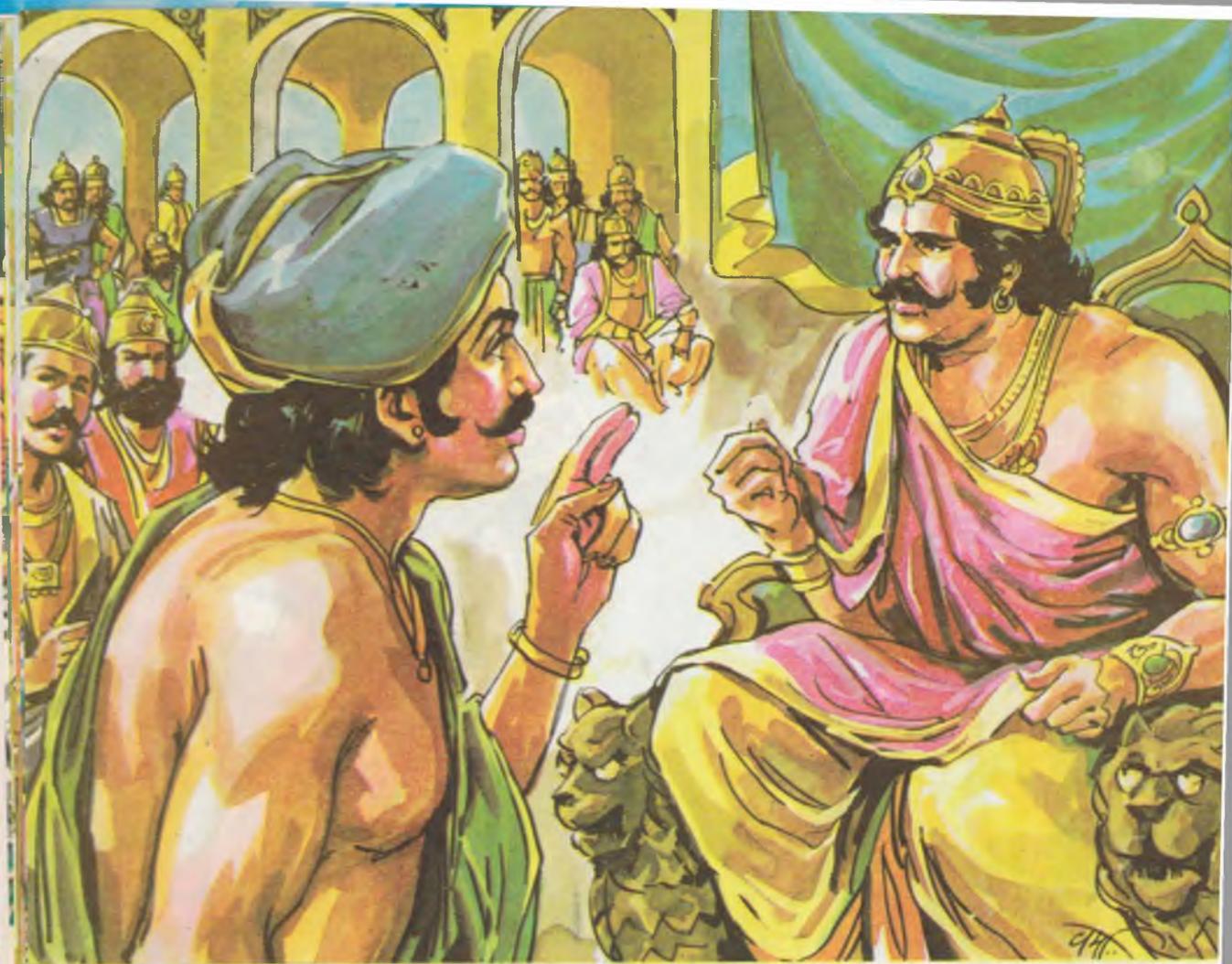


Duryodhana made up his mind to attack the Matsya kingdom and uncover the Pandavas there. Susharma, ruler of Trigart, was present at Hastinapur at that time. He was Duryodhana's friend and had suffered a lot at Keechak's hands. He said, "Duryodhana! your army should attack the kingdom of Virata from the north while I shall invade it from the south. Having captured it, we shall divide it fifty-fifty." Karna supported what Susharma had said

"It is a very good plan. There is nothing to fear even if the Pandavas happen to be at Viratnagar because they are quite penniless and without any army there."

Duryodhana also agreed to what Karna had said and in order to carry out the plan, he sent for his brother Dushashan. In no time, Dushashan reached the court and, bowing low before his brother, stood silently waiting for his order. Duryodhana told him about the entire plan and said, "Brother! go at once and get the army ready for an invasion on the Matsya Kingdom."

Then turning to Susharma, Duryodhana said, "Friend! you should invade Viratnagar from the south and engage the Matsya army there. My army will, then, attack the town from the north and easily capture it."



The next day Susharma led his army to launch an attack upon the Matsya Kingdom. In no time, he captured a large territory and all the milch cattle that he could lay hands on. The army of Hastinapur led by Dushashan attacked the Matsya Kingdom from the north and the king of Viratnagar found himself between the devil and the deep sea. People of the kingdom ran to the court to inform the king of the attack and to ask for his protection.

The king Virata got afraid as he found himself unable to meet the situation. But Yudhishtir (Kank) assured him of help in the war. So, the army of the Matsya Kingdom got ready to face the army of Susharma. The king asked his brother Shataaneek to provide a chariot to Kank and equip it with a flag, an armour and various arms and weapons.

Kank asked king Virata to send his four brothers also with him to take part in the war. So, all the four of them were also provided with chariots, flags and their respective favourite arms and weapons. The assurance given by Kank to the king and the queen had the desired effect and they felt convinced that these five servants could avert the danger that had overtaken their kingdom.



Kank, along with his brothers, led the regiment that came face to face with the Kaurva army. A fierce battle began and the Kaurva generals were amazed at the manner in which the Matsya army was facing them. They had never expected such a stiff resistance on the part of king Virata's army. But they could not recognise Yudhishtir who was commanding the army of king Virata.

The battle went on in full swing till nightfall. When it was time for the day's battle to close. Susharma played a nasty trick and captured king Virata who was on his way back to his camp.

As soon as the king was captured, his soldiers lost heart and ran pell-mell. Some of them came to Yudhishtir and informed him of the king's capture.

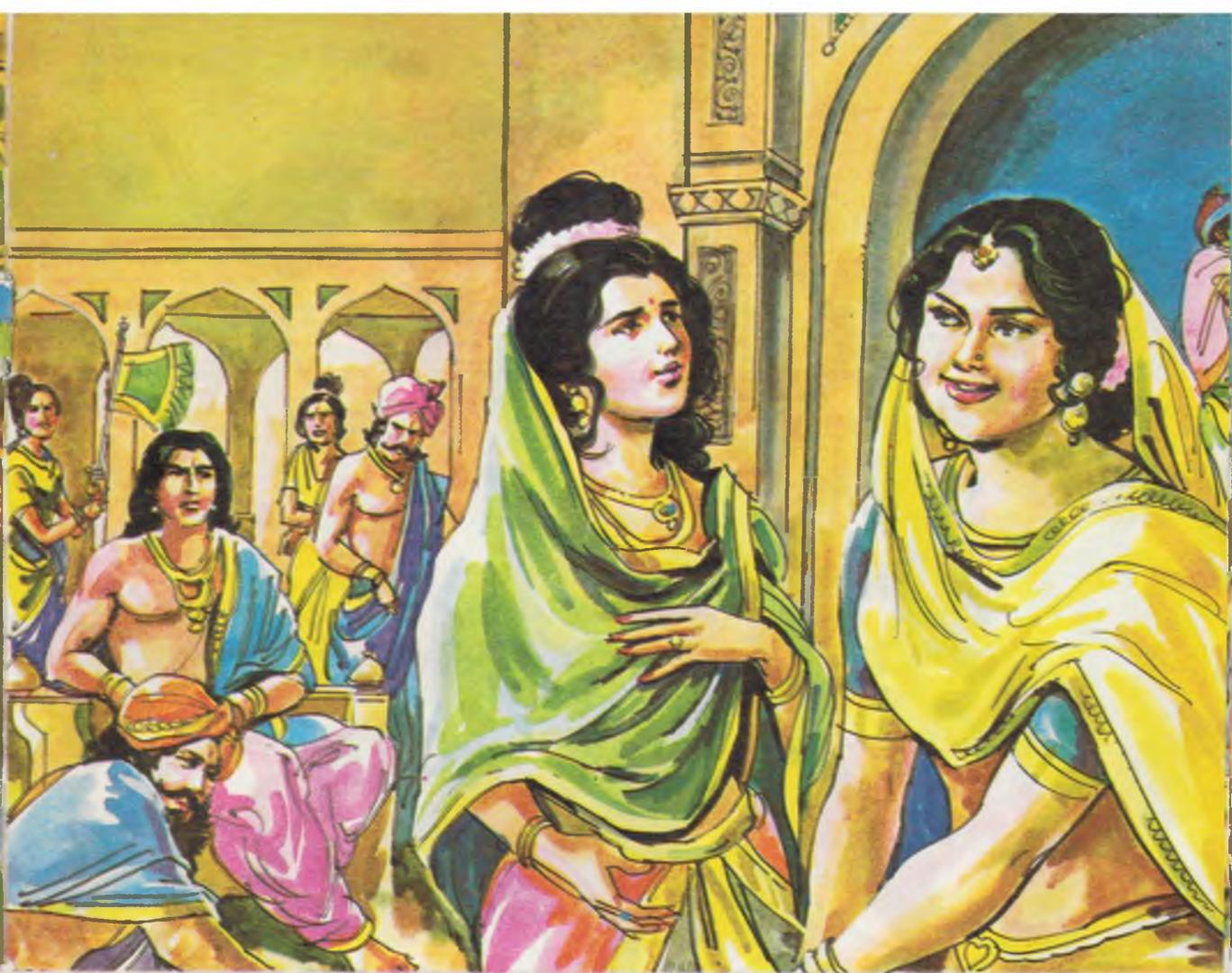
Kank (Yudhishtir) called Vallabh (Bheema) and said to him, "Brother! the soldiers of the enemy have captivated king Virata and he is in trouble. We are living in his shelter. So, we are duty-bound to rescue him and also to defend his kingdom." Hearing these words, Vallabh bucked up the running soldiers and encouraged them to resume the battle under his command. The soldiers returned and led such a fierce attack on king Susharma that his chariot came to be broken.



As soon as king Susharma's chariot came to be broken, he was compelled to jump down. King Virata was also on this very chariot. So, he also jumped down. Susharma's soldiers were non-plussed and king Virata reaped full advantage of it. He snatched the sword of king Susharma and cleared his way through the enemy ranks to his own side.

As for king Susharma, he fled the battle field to save his life. But Vallabh was more than a match for him. He grabbed him in a flash and flung him on the ground. He was going to kill him when Kank hailed him saying, "Vallabh! Leave him free; don't kill him." So, Vallabh let Susharma off giving him a warning never to take courage to turn an evil eye towards the Matsya kingdom. Susharma saluted king Virata and Vallabh and left the spot plunged in limitless shame.

King Virata, now standing at the side of Kank challenged the Kaurva army. Before long it was also routed and king Virata was crowned with a glorious victory. So, the king said to Kank, "It is because of you and your brothers that my enemies had to lick dust. You are the virtual ruler of my kingdom in place of Keechak now." "No sir; we are only your servants. We have done just our duty," said Yudhishtir.



Hearing the news of the defeat of Susharma and Dushashan, Karna came with a fresh reinforcement and launched a fresh attack on the Matsya kingdom. His aggression was so fierce that he captured a vast territory and about sixty thousand milch cattle of Virata's kingdom. At this, one of the farmers ran to the palace and informed prince Uttar of the loss of their cows requesting him to do something for their restoration.

The prince was, no doubt, a brave warrior. But his charioteer had been killed in the battle against Dushashan. He expressed his helplessness to do anything in the absence of a good charioteer. Brihannala (Arjun) overheard what the prince had said. So, he asked Sairandhri to go and tell the prince that he could act as a charioteer.

Sairandhri went to the prince and said, "Brihannala, the music teacher of your sister Uttara, has been the charioteer of the brave Pandava— Arjuna. You can ask for his services. After all, he is one of your employees."

So, prince Uttar asked Brihannala to lead his chariot to where Karna's army was playing havoc. In no time, the chariot was driven to that place.



As soon as prince Uttar's chariot reached the field of battle, he cast a glance on the Kaurva army. Seeing the fearful warriors and the weapons they were equipped with the Matsya prince turned pale out of fear. He felt that he would never be able to fight against them much less gain a victory over them. So, he decided to turn back without offering any resistance to Karna.

Prince Uttar said to Brihannala (Arjun), "Drive my chariot back to the palace. I can't face mighty Karna and his soldiers." But the charioteer argued, "No, sir; we must not return without rescuing the cows otherwise everybody will jeer at you and the ladies of the palace will taunt you suggesting to you that you should wear bangles and hide in the palace."

But the prince turned a deaf ear to what the charioteer had said. So, Brihannala said to him, "It is unbecoming of a true Kshatriya to show his back in the battle-field. So, be kind to hold the reins of the horses and let me fight for you."

The prince agreed to act as the charioteer and Arjuna drove the chariot to the tree where they had hidden their arms and weapons before entering Viratnagar to pass their thirteenth year of exile.



Arjuna took out his favourite bow — *Gandeeva* — and other divine weapons which he had got from various gods during his stay at Mount Kailash and Amaravati. Handing across the reins of the horses to prince Uttar, Arjuna took his seat as a warrior in the chariot though he was in the guise of a eunuch. Reaching the battle - field, Brihannala began to shower arrows at Karna and his army.

Karna and his soliders could not help bursting into loud laughter to see a eunuch trying to face them. But Dronacharya was very serious because he had recognised Arjuna though he was disguised. He whispered to Bhishma, "I doubt this eunuch is in reality Arjuna. the brave Pandava. We must protect Duryodhana because we are fighting from his side." Karna felt annoyed to hear Drona's words and said, "So what, if he is Arjuna? We care a fig for him."

But Duryodhana intervened asking Karna to be cool and take the words of the great guru not lightly but in their true perspective. He added, "Karna! how wonderful it will be if he turns out to be Arjuna! It will serve our purpose nicely and the Pandavas, on being discovered, will have to go into exile for another twelve years according to the conditions decided upon."



As far as Brihannala (Arjun) was concerned, he remained unmoved hearing the laughter of the Kaurva soldiers. As the thirteenth year of the exile had been over, he decided to manifest a clue to his enemies about his identity. So, he sounded his famous shell — *Devadutt* — and its sound was immediately recognised by Duryodhana who jumped in joy saying, "Undoubtedly he is Arjuna. How lucky for me that the Pandavas have failed to fulfil the conditions decided upon after the game ! Now they will have to spend another twelve years in exile."

But Bhisma intervened saying, "You are mistaken, Duryodhana. The thirteenth year of exile has already been over. Now it is for you to decide whether you should face Arjuna in the battle or seek a settlement with the Pandavas."

"But I won't give them their kingdom back in any case. So, it is advisable to start preparing for the impending war." retorted Duryodhana.

"All right; you should drive all the sixty thousand milch cattle to Hastinapur under your protection with half the army escorting you. With the rest of the soliders, I along with Karna, Drona, Kripa and Ashwathama, undertake to face Arjuna in the battle-field.



As for Arjuna, he lost no time to discover that Duryodhana could not be seen anywhere in the field of battle while all other Kaurva warrior were distinctly visible. It occurred to him that Duryodhana must have chosen to drive the milch cattle to Hastinapur leaving the other warriors back to face him. So, he directed prince Uttar to set the chariot in hot chase of Duryodhana so that he should be defeated and the milch cattle be won back.

The prince complied with Arjuna's directive and drove the chariot towards Hastinapur. Seeing this, Karna advanced forward to bar Arjuna's way so that he might not be able to reach Duryodhana and harm him in any way. But Arjuna was in such a fury at that time that he defeated Karna and forced him to flee the battle-field. Not only this, Arjuna's arrows put the entire Kaurva army to rout,

Now Arjuna used the *sammohanastra* (alluring weapon) and the Kaurva soldiers as well as warriors came to stand still like dumb statues where each of them was. Reaping full advantage of the situation, Arjuna overtook Duryodhana and won all the milch cattle back. Leaving them in the custody of prince Uttar, Arjuna went to the tree where their weapons had been hidden. Hiding his weapons there, he reached the palace in the guise of Brihaanala.

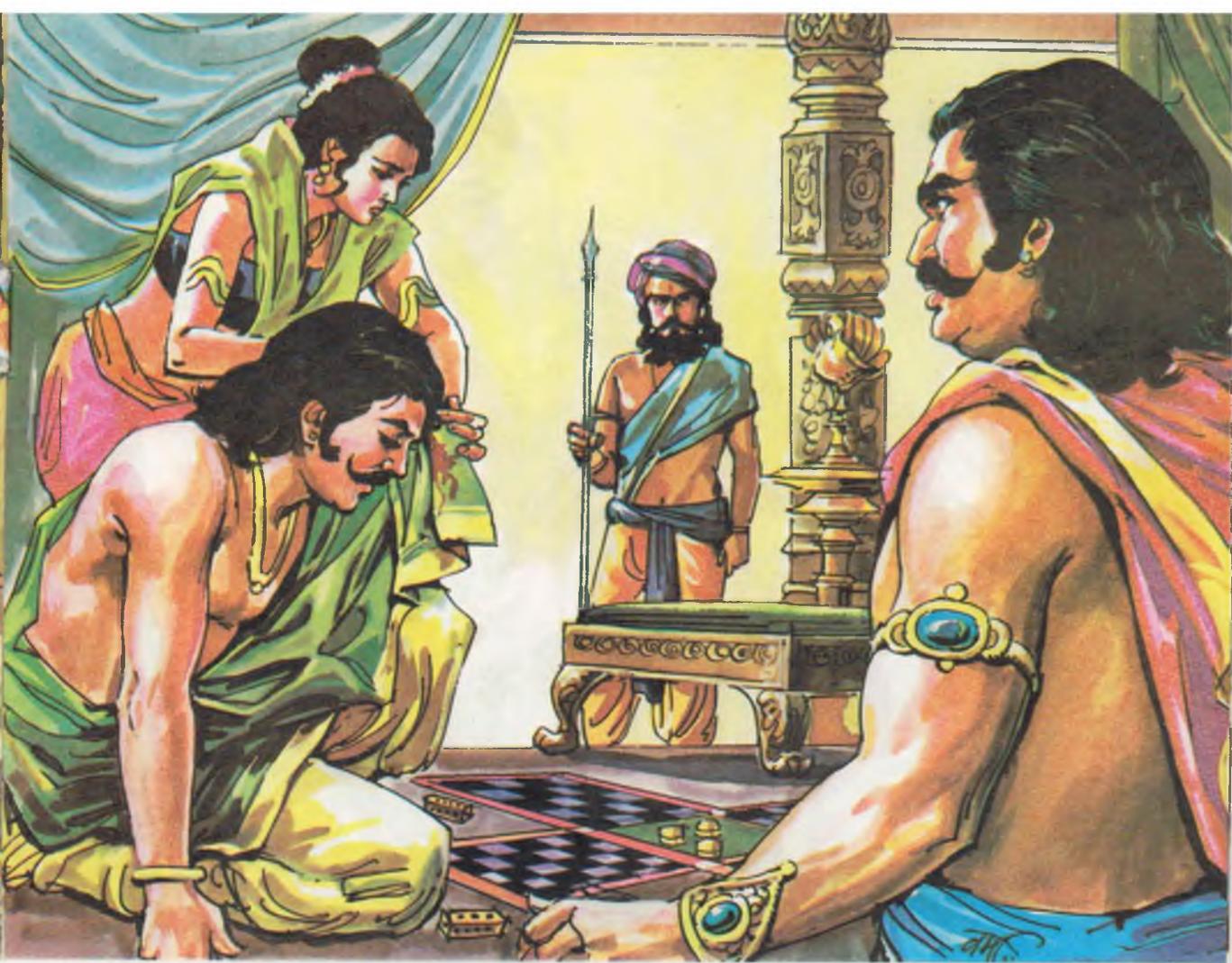


King Virata had defeated King Susharma with the help of Vallabh (Bheema) and won a glorious victory. The inhabitants of Viratnagar accorded a warm welcome to the victorious king. When the king reached the palace, he could not find his son Uttar anywhere. So, he felt highly worried and enquired about him. The king loved his only son very dearly indeed.

Seeing her father lost in anxiety, princess Uttara came to him and said, "Father dear, my brother has gone to face the Kaurva army escorted by Brihannala who had agreed to act as his charioteer." Before the king could say anything, a soldier presented himself before the king and said, "Victory to King Virata! Glory to My Master! our prince has defeated the Kaurvas and won back all the milch cattle."

The king was beside himself with joy to hear the words of the soldier. Throwing his necklace towards the soldier as a reward for bringing the happy news, King Virata ordered a grand reception to be accorded to the prince in honour of his victory over the mighty Kaurvas.

The town of Viratnagar came to be decorated profusely and reception-gates came to be erected at every step. People were bubbling with excitement and the royal palace put on a captivating look.

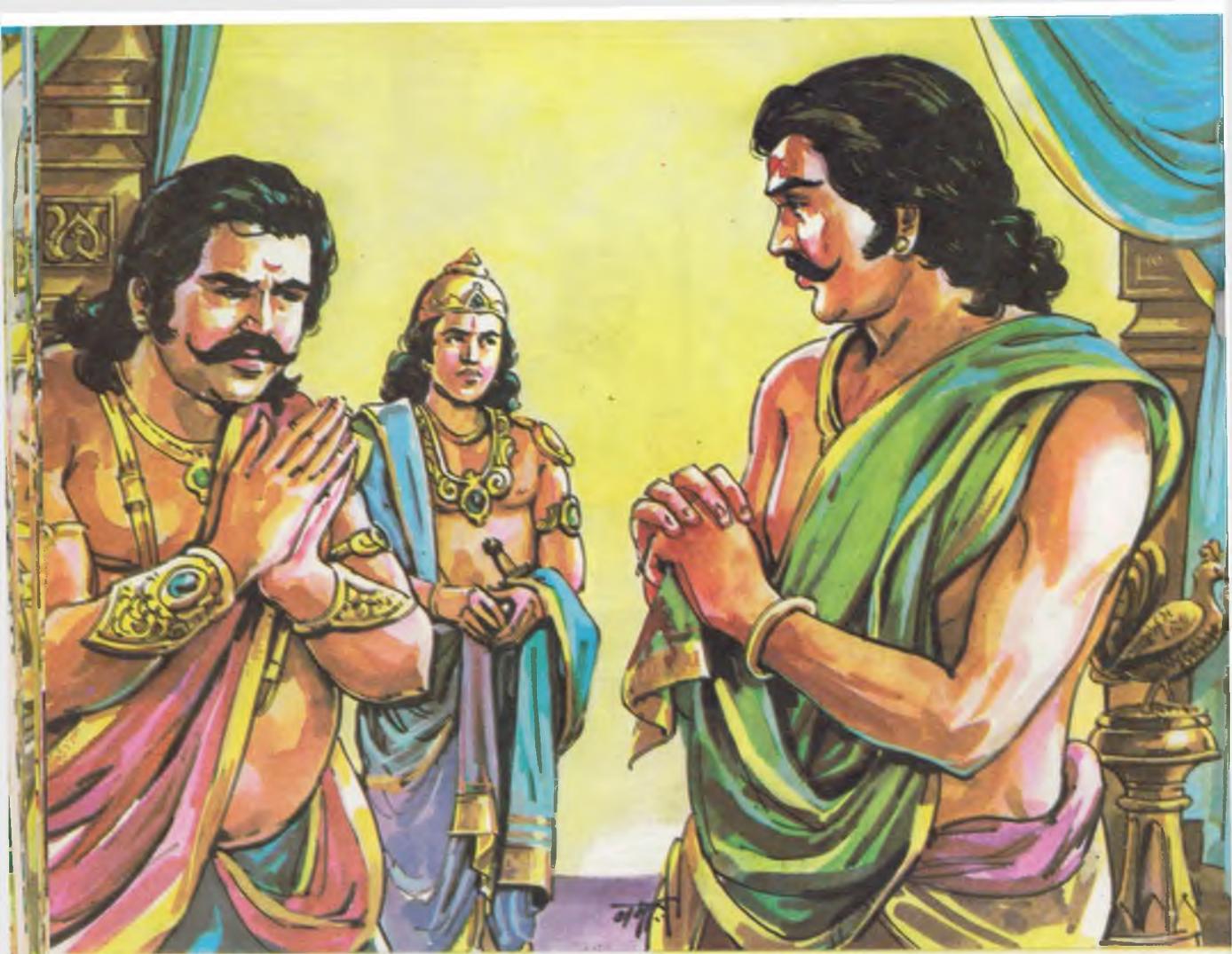


King Virata's joy knew no bounds and he was not able to contain himself indeed. He called Kank (Yudhishtir) and expressed a desire to play dice in order to kill time and to recreate himself after the fatigue of the war. So, the game began. After some time, the king remarked, "See Kank; how brave my son is! He has forced the mighty Kaurvas to lick dust."

"It was certainly to be so because Brihannala had agreed to act as the prince's charioteer," retorted Kank. How could the king put up with these words? At once his happiness disappeared and his eyes began to emit fire. He picked some dice and flung them at Kank's face saying, "You lowly Brahman! how dare you compare the prince with a eunuch. Do you think my son is not brave enough to face and defeat the Kaurvas without this eunuch? If you happen to say something like that again, I shall have your tongue cut off."

Yudhishtir, being tolerant by nature, did not say anything. His face began to bleed from several points. Luckily Sairandhri happened to come there. She wiped Kank's face wetting the edge of her saree.

Just then an attendant came in and informed the king of the prince's arrival.



"Show him in at once," ordered the king because he was feeling very impatient to see his victorious son and admire him for his exploit. So, the attendant went out and the prince stepped in the king's apartment. He touched the king's feet out of reverence. But when he looked at Kank's bleeding face, he felt highly amazed and asked him, "How is it, O Revered Brahmana? Who has committed the sin of hurting your face?"

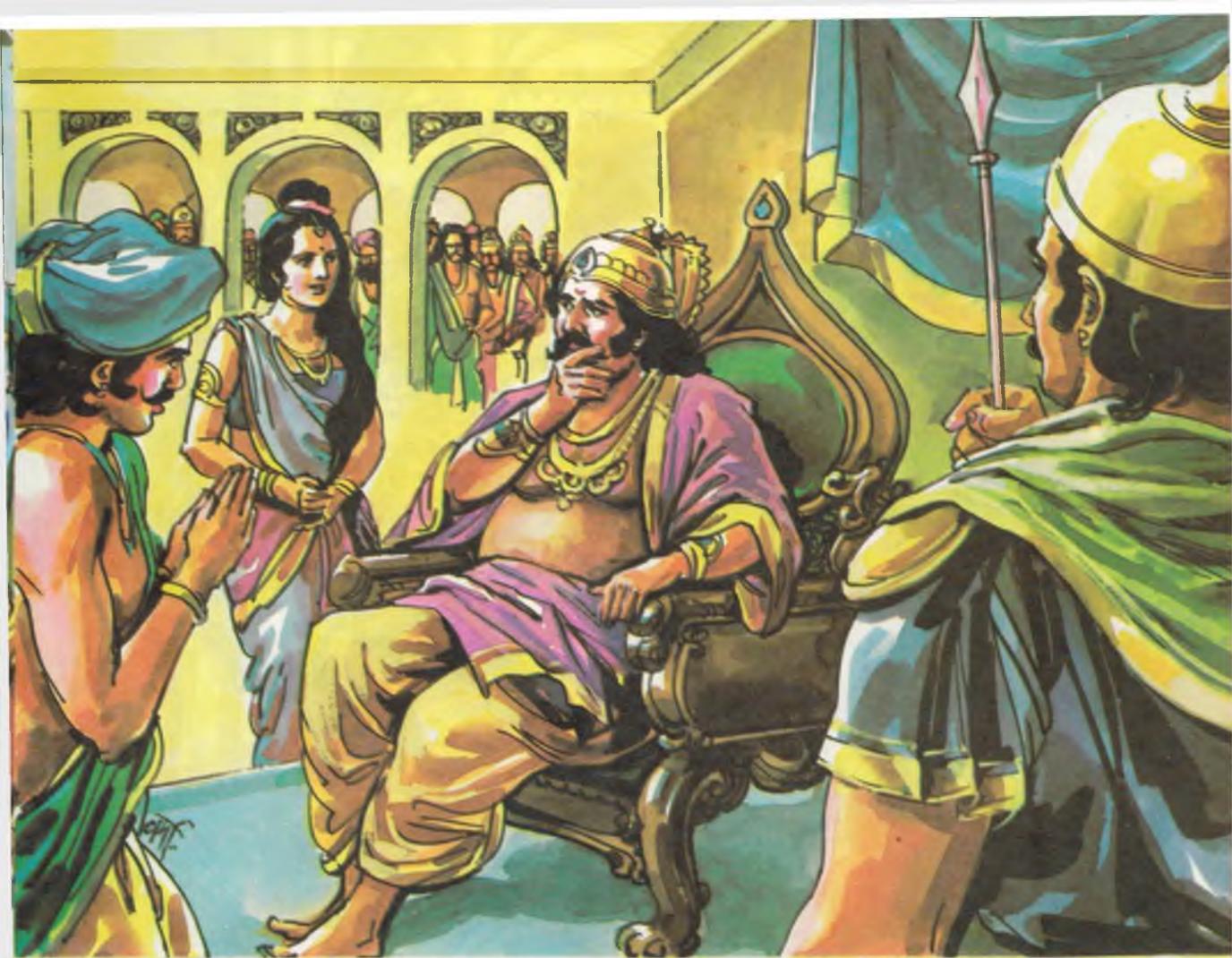
"It is I who have punished him for his grave offence, my son. He tried to compare eunuch Brihannala with you and I could not tolerate it," argued the king.

"But father dear, it is a grave sin to raise hands on a Brahmana. So, we must ask for his pardon. I am sure you don't know who he is," retorted the prince.

"Who is he, my son?" asked the king pensively.

"Father, he is Yudhishtir, the eldest Pandava known as Dharamraj, in the guise of a Brahmana," replied the prince.

"Where are the other Pandavas and Draupadi, then?" asked king Virata.



The prince disclosed that the other four Pandavas and Draupadi were also there in the palace itself. He disclosed everything to his father in detail. The king's repentance knew no bounds. He was so sorry for what he had done that he begged for Yudhishtir's pardon with folded hands. He said, "Excuse me for what I did in the heat of my uncontrolled anger. I am so happy to know about your reality. In fact, we all are glorified that you along with your brothers and wife Draupadi chose our kingdom to spend your thirteenth year of exile here and thus saved our kingdom from external aggressions as well. In no way, can we repay this favour done to us by you. I want to give my daughter to Arjuna in marriage."

"But sir, my brother Arjuna has taught your daughter as a teacher. How can he marry your daughter? Even then, we are ready to have her hand for Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son," argued Yudhishtir.

King Virata was overjoyed to hear Yudhishtir's words and instantly declared Uttara's engagement to Abhimanyu. Before long, Abhimanyu was invited to Viratnagar. Also, King Draupad, his son Dhrishtadyumna and Krishna were invited to grace the auspicious occasion of this marriage which was to be performed with great pomp and show according to religious rites.



Krishna, Balrama, Subhadra and several other Yadava warriors had reached Viratnagar on the invitation of king Virata. The Pandavas had started living in a town named Up-playa that was located in the Matsya Kingdom itself. Princess Uttara of Viratnagar was to be married to Abhimanyu, Arjuna's son from Subhadra.

Several other kings had also been invited to grace the auspicious occasion of Abhimanyu's marriage. Chief among them were the ruler of Kashi, king Drupad, his son Dhrishtadyumna and Satyaki, a renowned Yadava warrior. The marriage of Princess Uttara and Abhimanyu was performed with great pomp and show according to religious rites.

As the period of the Pandavas' exile had been over, the matter of the restoration of their kingdom to them was of immense importance. They had duly fulfilled the conditions imposed on them after Yudhishtira had lost the game due to the treacherous moves of Shakuni. All the supporters of the Pandavas were anxious to see them settled at Indraprastha as before.

