

MAHABHARATA



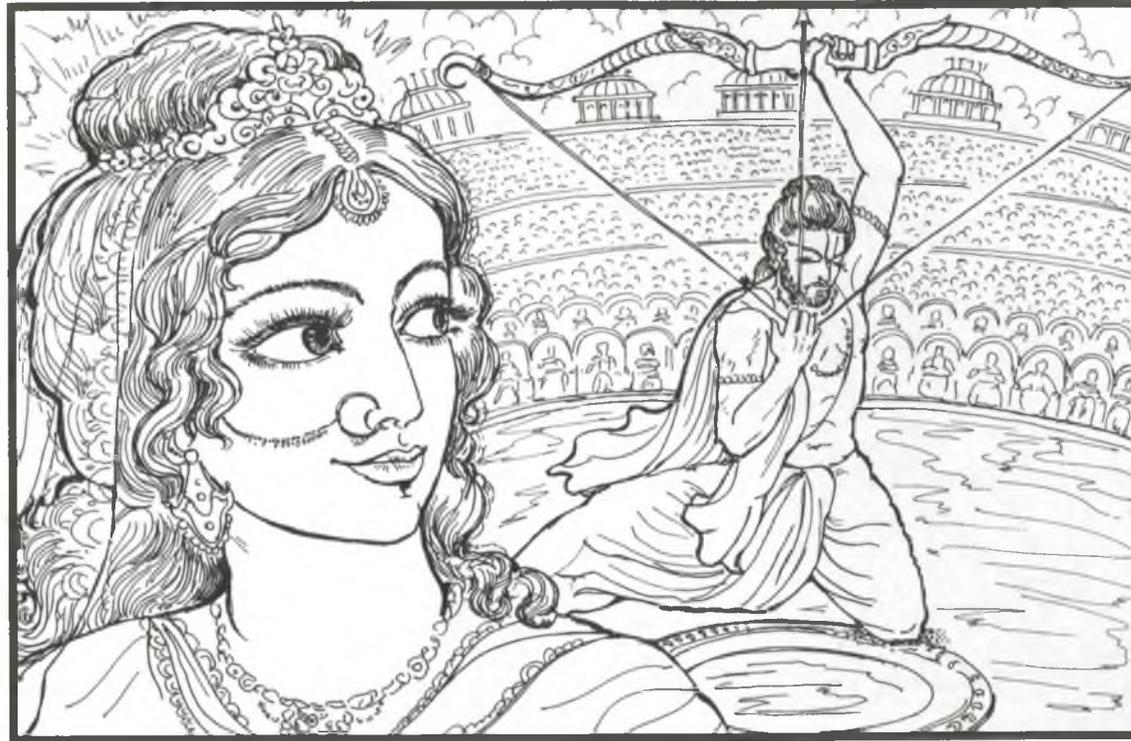
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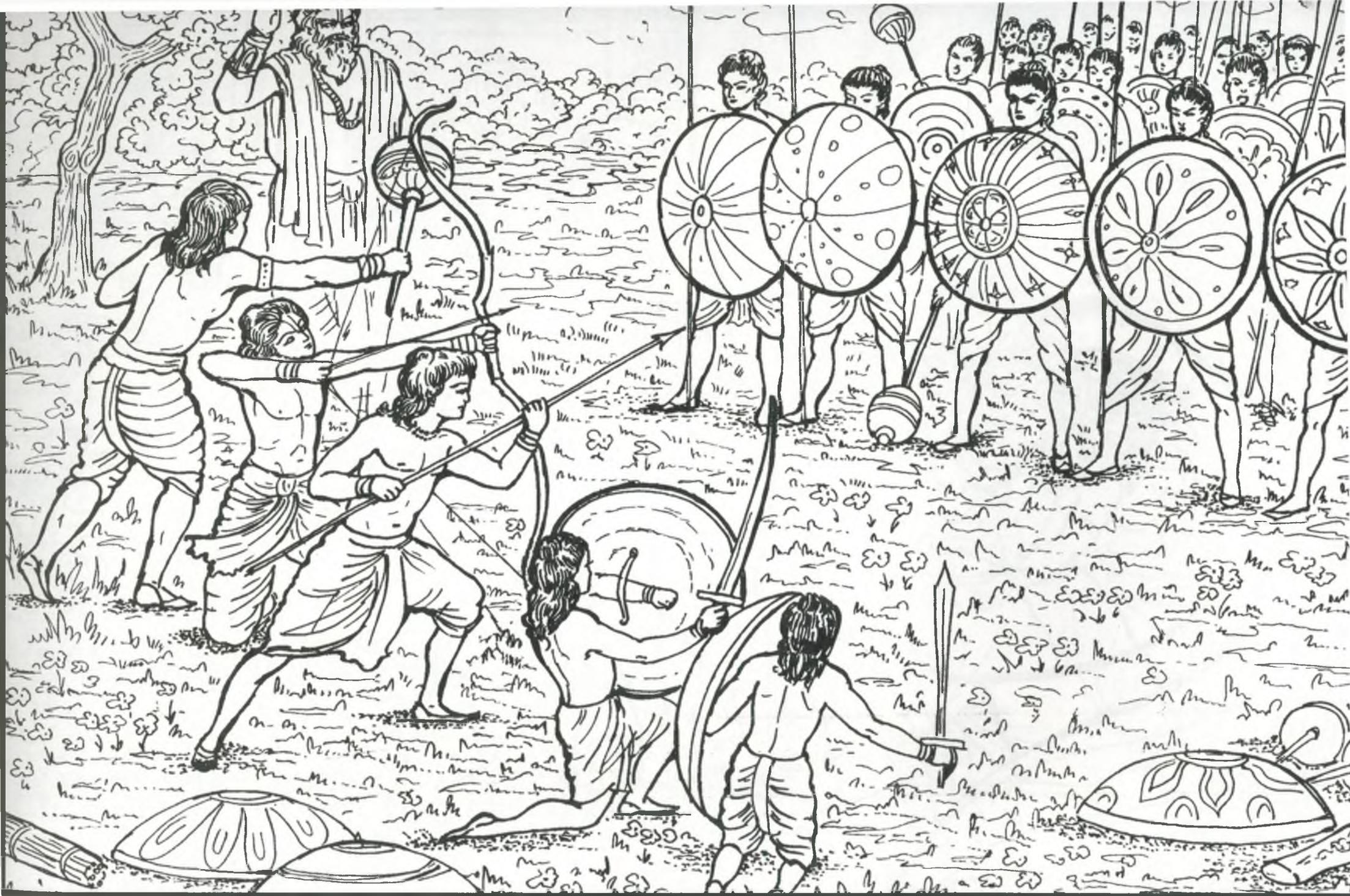
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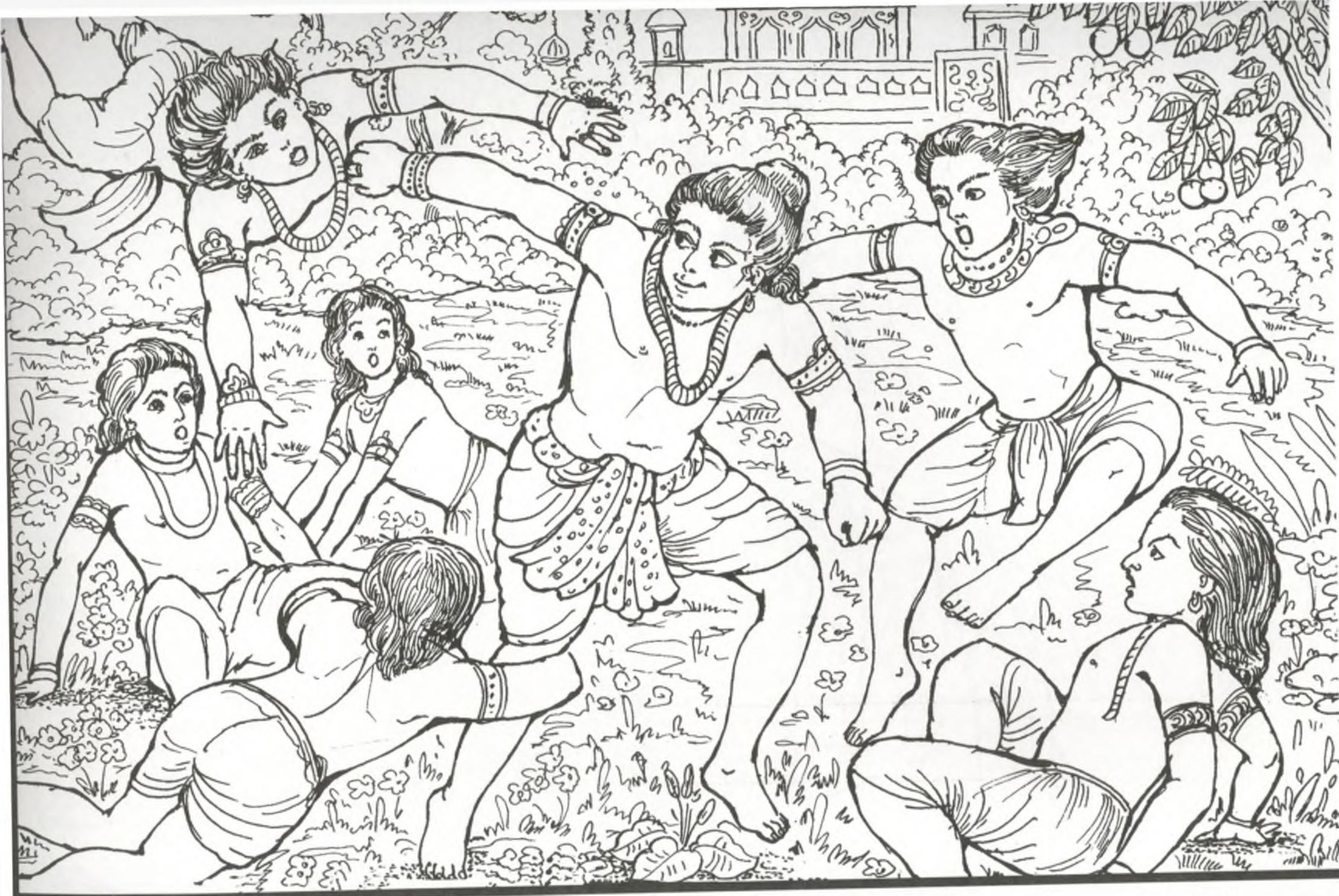
About 5000 years ago, the great King Pandu Maharaja of the illustrious Kuru dynasty ruled over India. He had two beautiful wives named Queen Kunti and Queen Madri, wonderful sons whose names were Yudisthira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva. These five sons of King Pandu were all great devotees of Lord Krishna and were known as the Pandavas. Their name and fame spread all over the world and even today millions of people still read about these wonderful people.



By the will of providence, King Pandu died suddenly due to the curse of a sage. Queen Madri decided to enter the funeral pyre of her husband, leaving Queen Kunti and the five children in the care of Grandfather Bhishma, the grandsire of the Kuru dynasty. Bhishma took very good care of the Pandavas while they were growing up and Arjuna became treating him as his own son



Meanwhile, Pandu's blind brother Dritarashtra was appointed as regent to rule the kingdom until the Pandavas were old enough to take charge of the kingdom. As royal princes of the Kuru dynasty, the Pandavas were trained in all the martial arts and use of various weapons by the great brahmana teacher Dronacharya.



The strongest amongst the five Pandavas was Bhima, who it was said possessed the strength of 10,000 elephants. It was Bhima who always emerged victorious in mock fights Pandavas the their 100 cousins, the Kauravas, the sons of Pandu's blind brother Dritarashtra. This led to great rivalry between the eldest of Kauravas named Duryodhana and one occasion Duryodhana even tried to poison Bhima but the attempt failed.



Arjuna was an exceptional student and under the expert guidance of guru Dronacharya, who loved him as his own son, he rose to become the greatest archer in the world. The skill of Arjuna was another reason for the intense hatred for the Pandavas, that was growing in the hearts of Duryodhana and his brothers.



During the mock fighting and practice sessions, the Pandavas led by Bhima always came out victorious. Bhima would pick up Duryodhana and his brothers and throw them high as if they were made of straw. The Pandavas were so expert in all the martial arts that they could not be easily defeated. This led to even more animosity towards the Pandavas. Duryodhana and his brothers, who began plotting how to kill the Pandavas and usurp their kingdom.



Both Bhima and Duryodhana were expert in fighting with the mace having both been instructed by Lord Balarama. During practice sessions Duryodhana used all his skills and employed every trick that he knew, but he could not get the better of Bhima. Sometimes their mock fights turned into a 'fight to the death' and others had to intervene to stop the fighting that erupted between them.



One day during a practice session a powerful warrior appeared at the combat arena and challenged Arjuna to trial of strength with the bow. Arjuna accepted the challenge from the stranger who called himself Karna. Arjuna soon found that whatever he could do, the stranger could do even better. At that moment Dronacharya stopped the duel and enquired from Karna about his caste. When he found that his father was Sudra not Ksatriya, he stopped the combat on account of Karna's low caste. Seeing an opportunity to find a new friend and ally against the Pandavas, Dronacharya advised Arjuna to ally himself with Karna.



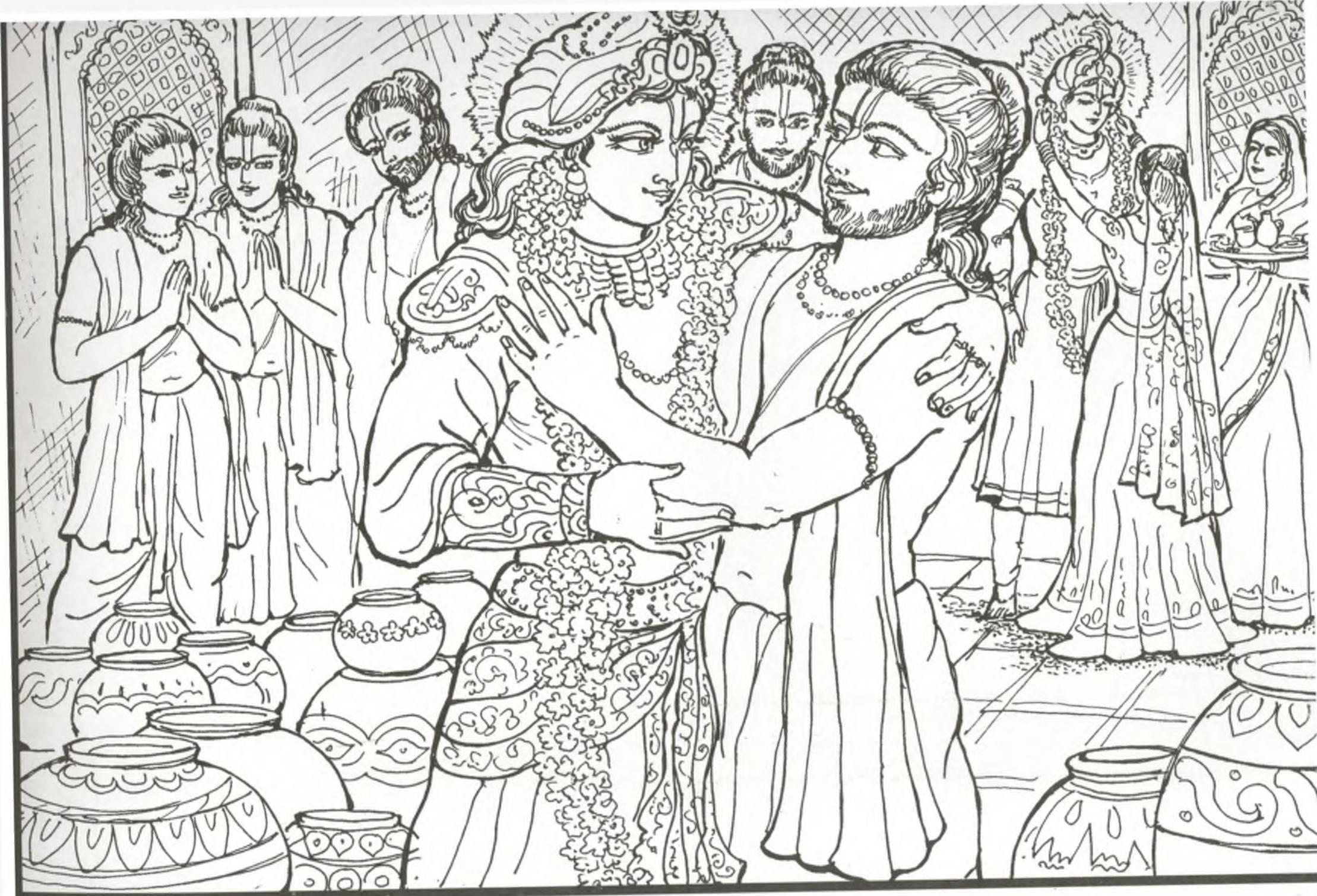
The Kauravas invited the Pandavas to spend a holiday in a palace in the country. The palace had been specially built of wood, lac, and highly inflammable material. During everyone was sleeping, Duryodhana's servant set the palace on fire hoping the Pandavas would be burnt to death. By Krishna's grace, the Pandavas escaped in the 'nick of time'. Bhima, with his superhuman strength picked up his mother and four brothers and ran swiftly into the jungle for safety. Bhima ran the whole night before stopping to put his



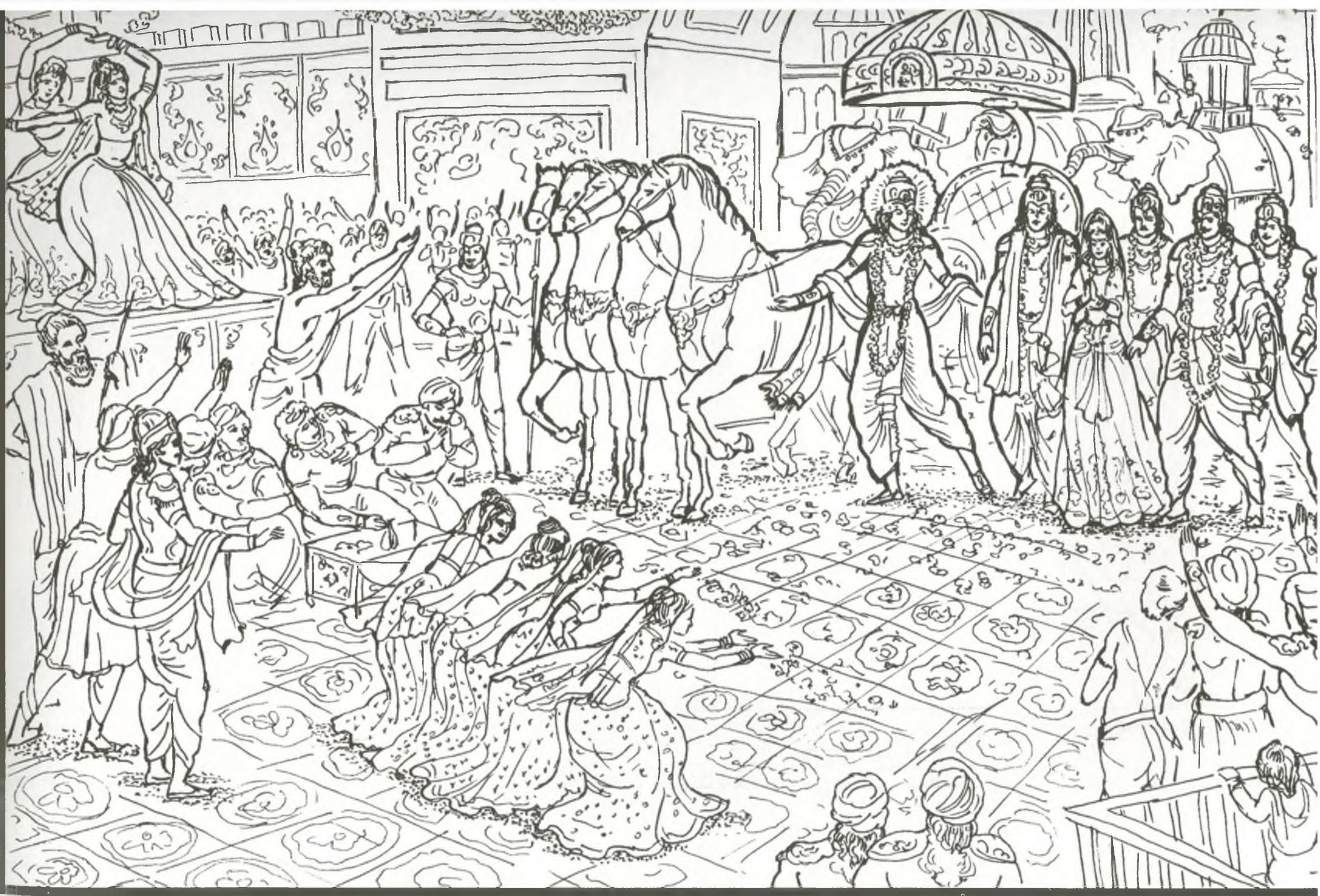
During the time the Pandavas were hiding in the jungle they were attacked by a man-eating Rakshasha, who intended to kill and eat them. Bhima single-handedly fought with the Rakshasha and eventually killed him by breaking his back. On the order of Queen Kunti, Bhima married the young sister of the Rakshasha named Hidimba because as her brother was the only one who had no other restriction.



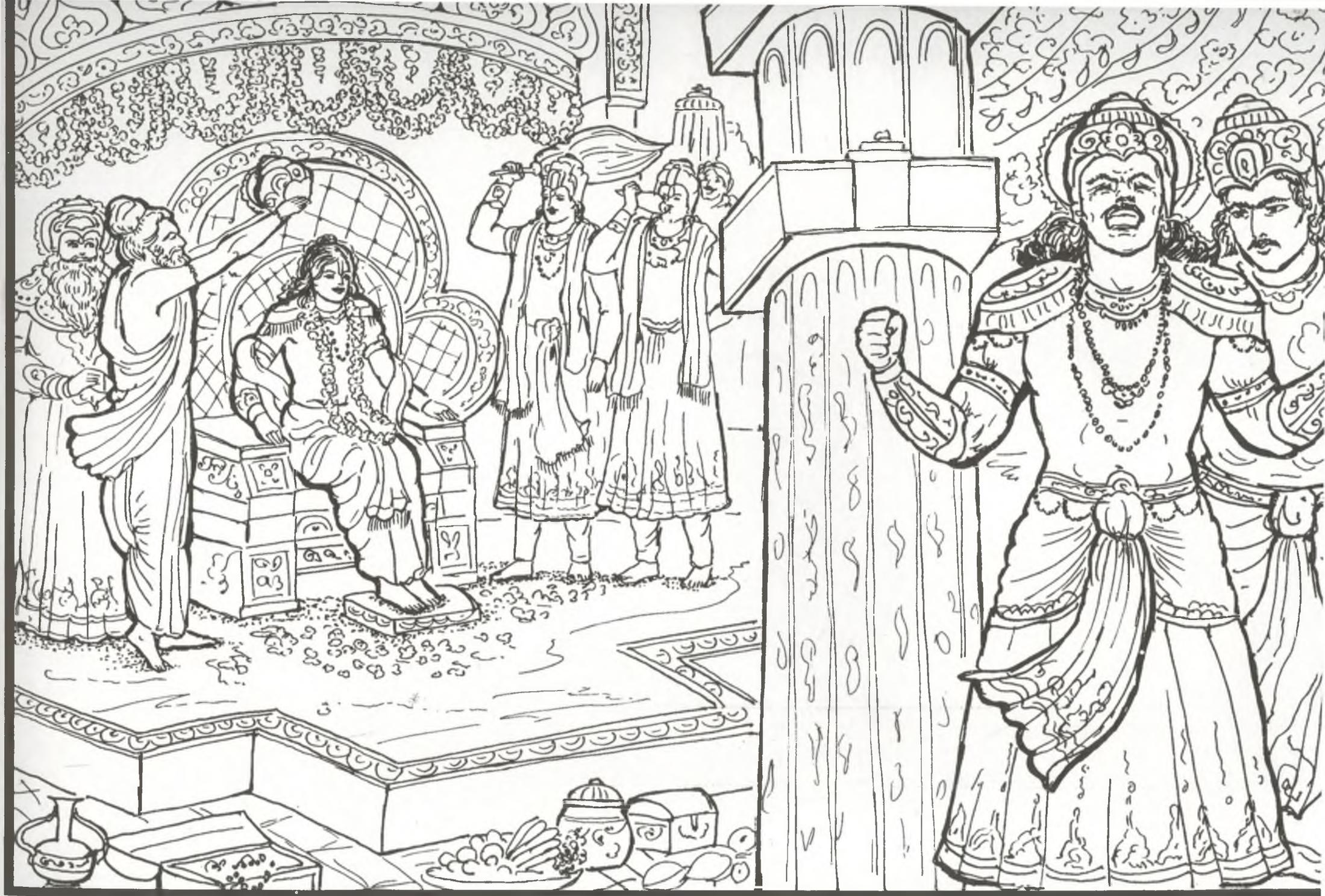
After a long time in the jungle the Pandavas decided to go to the kingdom of Panchala. The king whose name was Droupada was holding a great svayamvara marriage of his most beautiful daughter Princess Droupadi. Arjuna, in the disguise of a brahmana defeated all the royal princes in the archery contest and won the hand of Princess Droupa of Queen Kunti. Droupadi was married to all five of the Pandava brothers



Knowing that the Pandavas had gone to the kingdom of Panchala, Lord Krishna arrived there to congratulate Arjuna on his victory in the svayamvara ceremony and on gaining the beautiful Princess Draupadi, who was also a very great devotee of Lord Krishna. The news of Arjuna's victory in the svayamvara ceremony soon reached Hastinapura. They realized that the Pandavas were not dead and would soon return to claim their rightful kingdom now being ruled by Pandu's blind brother Dritarashtra.



After winning the hand of Princess Droupadi, the Pandavas decided to go back to Hastinapura with Lord Krishna and lay claim to their kingdom. The citizens of Hastinapura, and the Pandavas very much were overjoyed to hear the news they were safe and were returning to Hastinapura. A great festival was organized to welcome the Pandavas back to and thousands of people came on to the streets to greet them. Only the Kauravas were unhappy at the return of the Pandavas and distressed that all their attempts to kill them



Much to the dislike of Duryodhana and his brothers, the eldest son of king Pandu, Yudisthira, was installed as the crown prince of Hastinapura and it was now only a question he would take over the reigns of power from Dritarashtra and become the new king. This caused great anguish in the hearts of Duryodhana and his brothers who immplotting their next move against their rival, causing the Pandavas



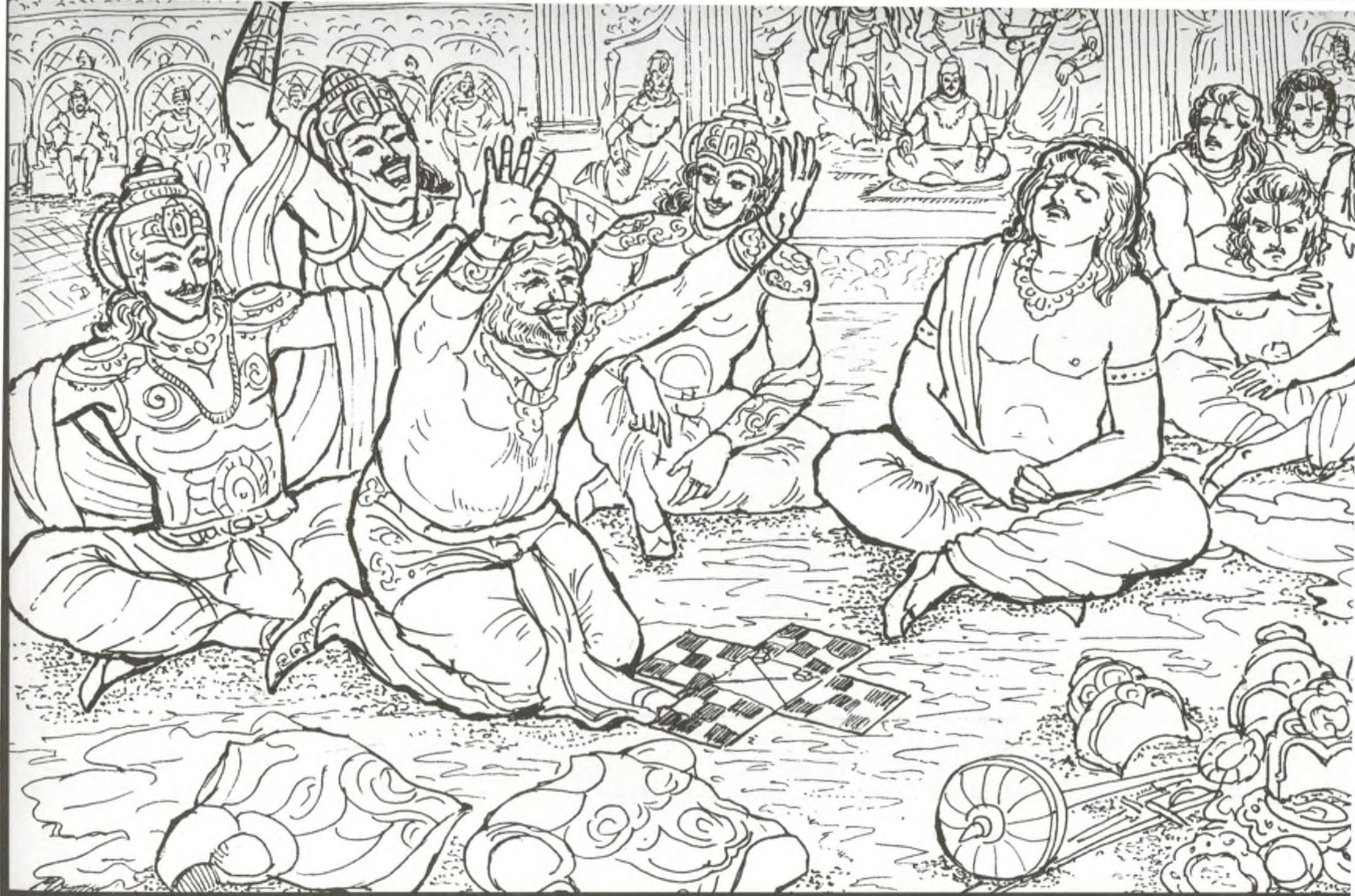
Dritarashtra was reluctant to give up the throne of Hastinapura in favor of the rightful heir Maharaja Yudhishthira and desired that his own son Duryodhana become king. On Lord Krishna's order, Vishvakarma, the engineer of the demigods was put in charge to build a new city for the Pandavas that would be known as Indraprastha. This new city was in every way superior to any other city in the world, including Hastinapura and even rival



Once the new city was completed, Yudisthira Maharaja decided to perform the Rajasuya horse sacrifice for becoming the ruler of the whole world. He selected Lord Krishna as the guest and most worthy person and duly worshipped him with great pomp in the assembly hall of Indraprastha. The opulence and majesty of the Pandavas new city was unparalleled in the history of the world and this made Duryodhana and his brothers very angry. One day, Duryodhana decided to burn the Pandavas in the hall of Indraprastha.



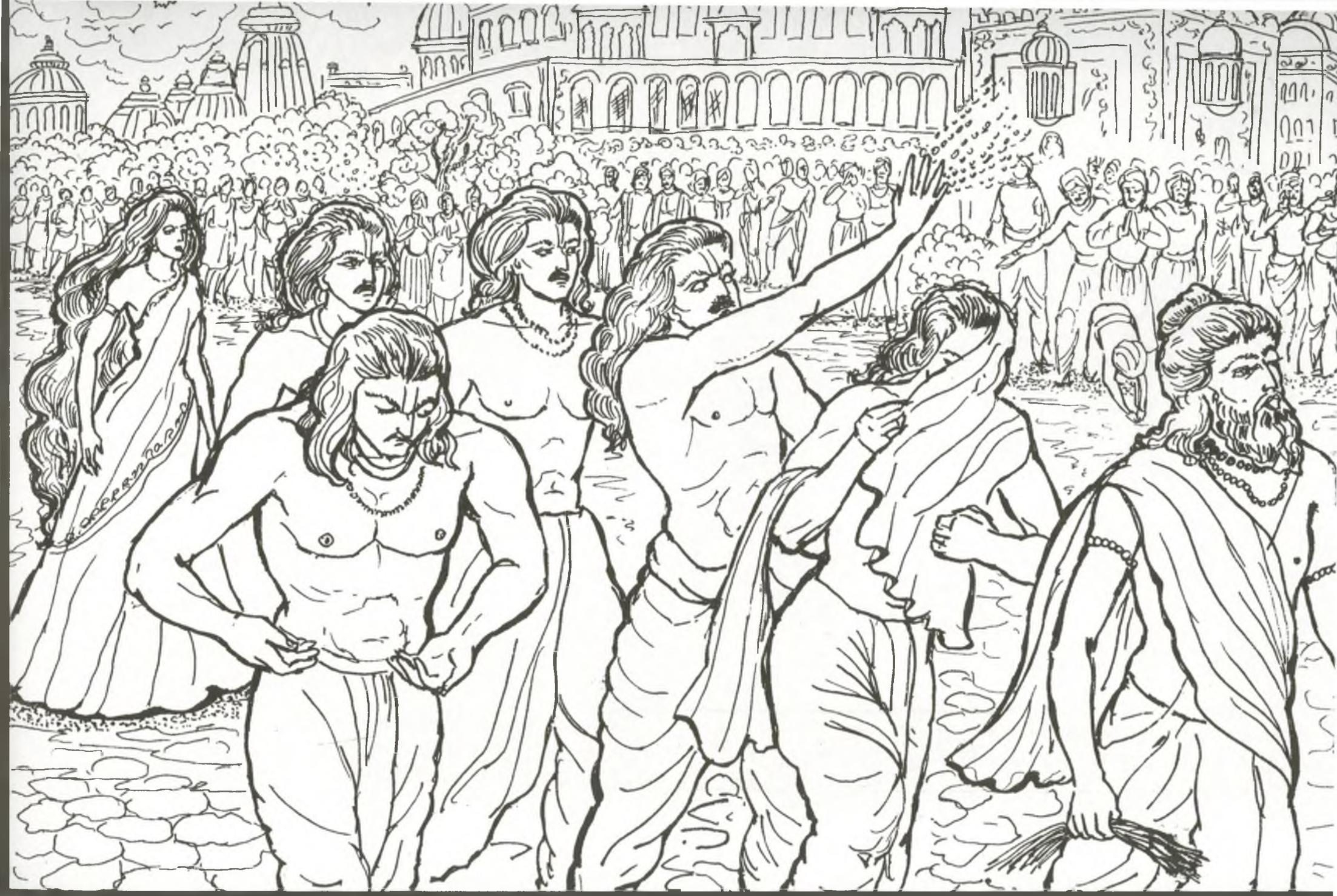
Out of curiosity, Duryodhana and his brothers decided to visit the Pandavas at Indraprastha to see for themselves the great opulence of the city. A special feature of the hidden pools of water that were so well designed that nobody could tell the difference between polished marble floors and the pools of water. Unfortunately, Duryodhana identifies the difference and falls into one of the pools, much to the amusement of Princess Draupadi who laughed very loudly at the misfortune of Duryodhana, who



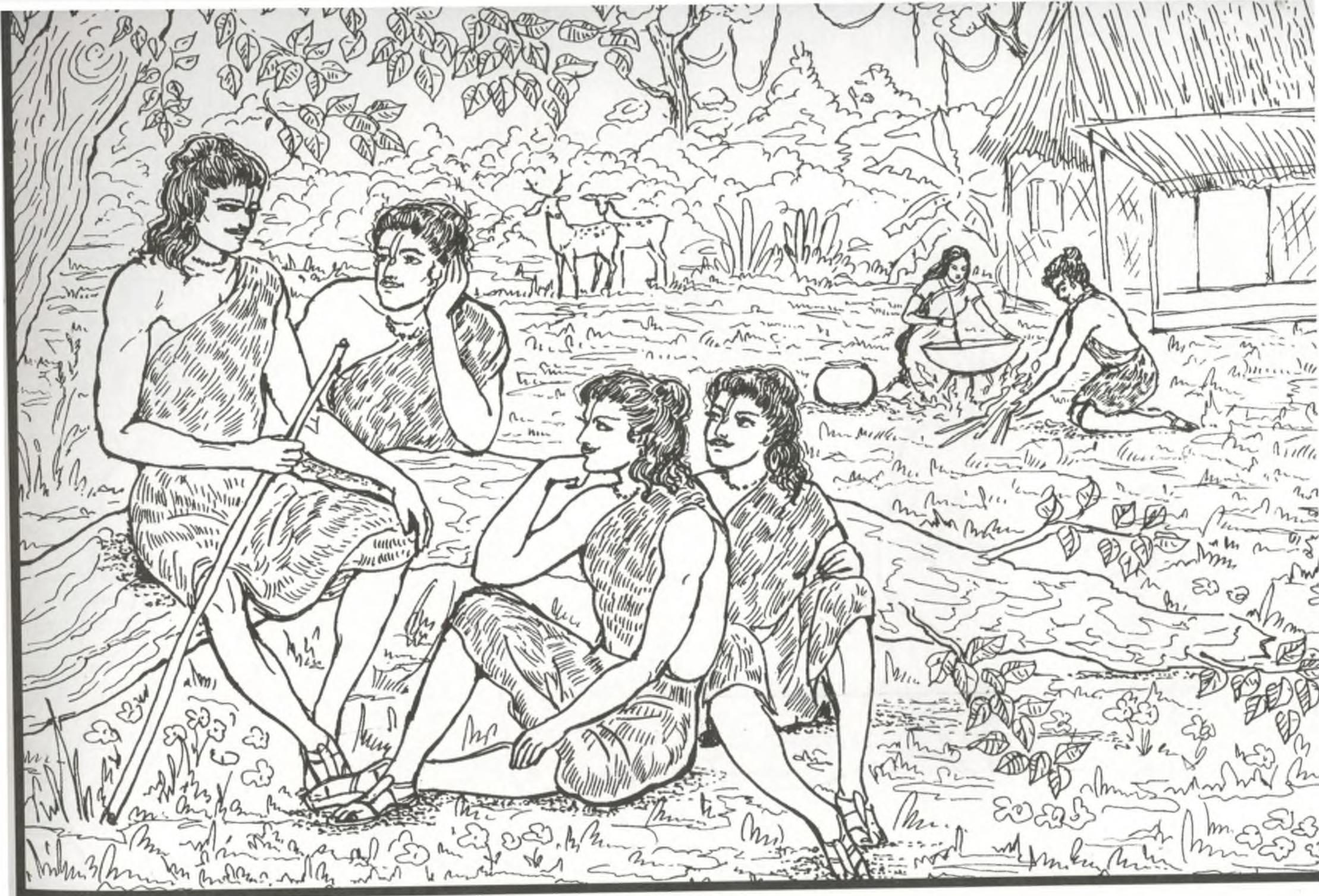
On returning to Hastinapura, Duryodhana began plotting with his brothers and Karna, how to deprive the Pandavas of their great opulence. It was decided to invite the Pandavas to and engage Yudhishtira in a game of dice. With the help of Duryodhana's crooked uncle Shakuni, an expert cheat at dice, they would deprive Yudhishtira of all his possessions. Yudhishtira had any weakness at all, it was gambling with dice. By the end of the dice game, Maharaja Yudhishtira not only lost all his possessions including Indraprastha, but a



Having won all the possessions of Maharaja Yudisthira including his wife, Duryodhana ordered his brother Dushashana to drag Draupadi into the assembly and strip everyone to see. Understanding that no one, not even her five husbands could save her, she started praying to Lord Krishna to save her from humiliation. To everyone's surprise, Lord Krishna would not allow his pure devotee to suffer the humiliation of being stripped naked in the assembly of the Kauravas.



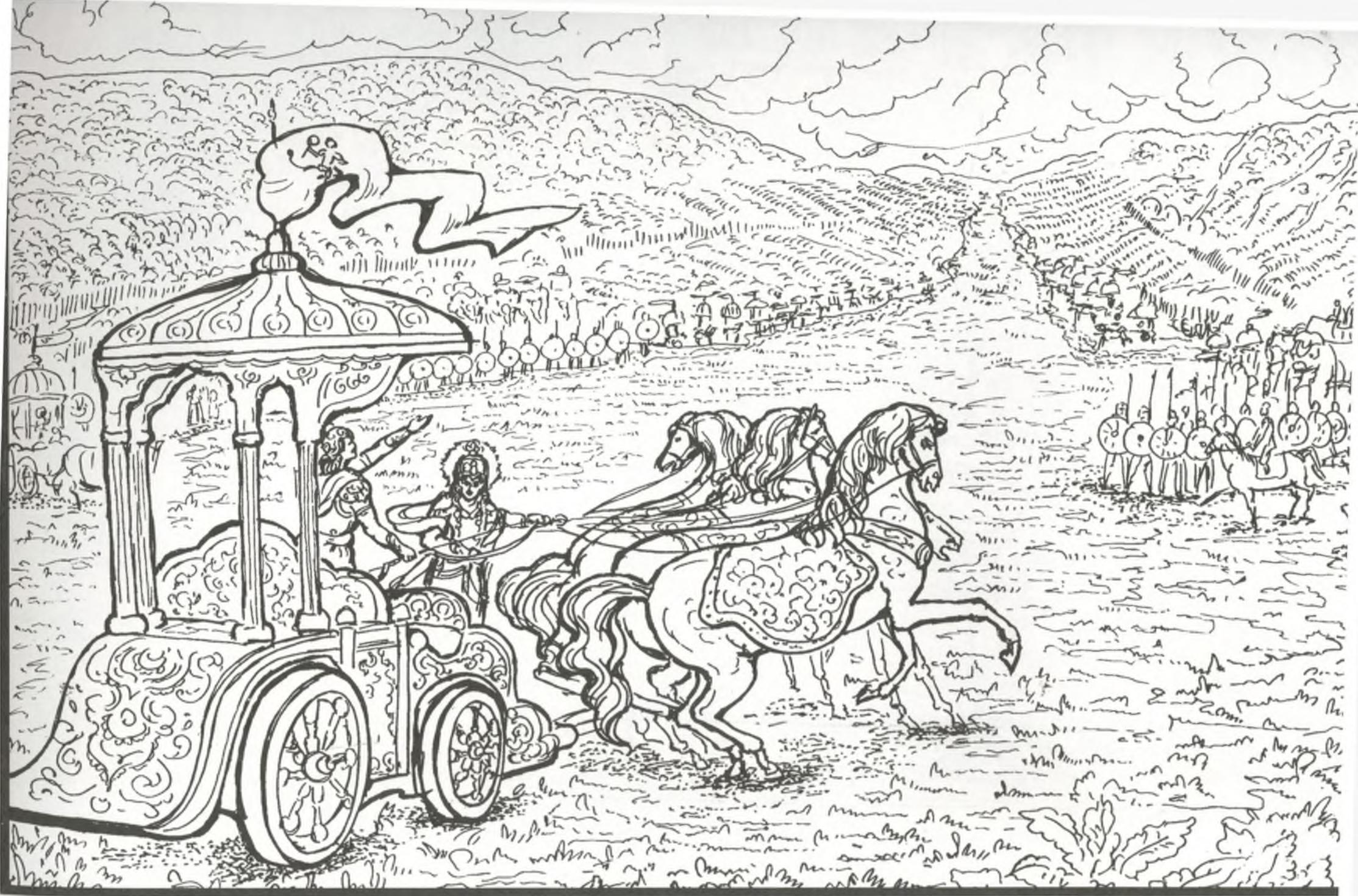
King Dritarashtra, understanding the trickery of Duryodhana and his accomplices, forced his son to give back all the possessions of Maharaja Yudhishthira and arranged for him to return to Indraprastha. But Duryodhana was not happy with his father's decision and called the Pandavas for another game of dice. Once again, Shakuni defeated Yudhishthira and the Pandavas were forced to vacate Indraprastha and live in the forest as hermits for fourteen years.



While living in the forest the Pandavas and their wife Princess Droupadi were forced to live on roots and wild fruits and had to make clothes from tree bark and animal skins. In this way time passed quickly and before long it was twelve years in exile, the Pandavas moved from one forest to another, constructing simple grass huts for sleeping at night.



Meanwhile in Hastinapura, Lord Krishna was pleading with Duryodhana for a peace settlement and the return of the Pandavas kingdom, but Duryodhana was in no mood to give an inch of land to the Pandavas. Duryodhana was determined that if the Pandavas tried to return, he would go to war with them. Even the ardent pleas of Srila Narada Muni were rejected by the evil minded Duryodhana.



The holy place known as Kurukshetra was chosen as the site of the fratricidal war between the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas. Lord Krishna decided not to take part in the war and agreed to be Arjuna's chariot driver. Hundreds of royal kings arrived with their vast armies from many parts of the world. As the two armies faced each other on the battlefield, Krishna drove the chariot between the two armies so that he could see all those who had come to fight with him.



Upon seeing all his cousins and other family members in the ranks of the enemy, including his grandfather Bhisma, his guru Dronacharya, and many others worthy of his wo become despondent, put down his bow and informed Lord Krishna that he did not feel good about killing so many family members. He said that simply for a kingdom, mi



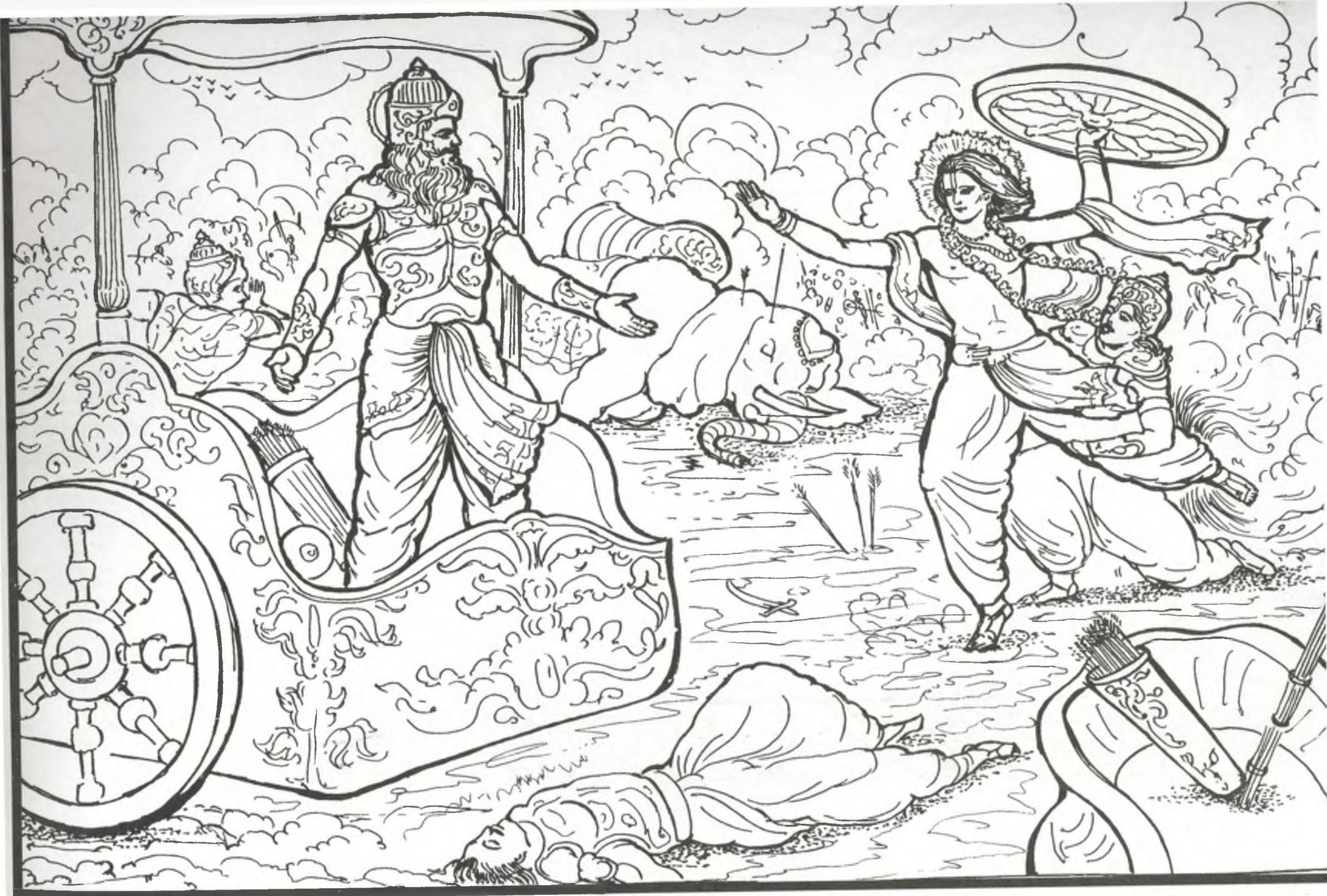
Lord Krishna informed Arjuna that as a Ksatriya prince he was duty bound to uphold the principles of religion and fight against those who were evil and irreligious. Krishna said it was his own will that the Kauravas should be vanquished so as to relieve the world from the burden of so many irreligious Ksatriyas. He also told Arjuna that as the spirit is immortal, it cannot be killed. After hearing Krishna's words of wisdom, Arjuna regained his courage and was ready to fight.



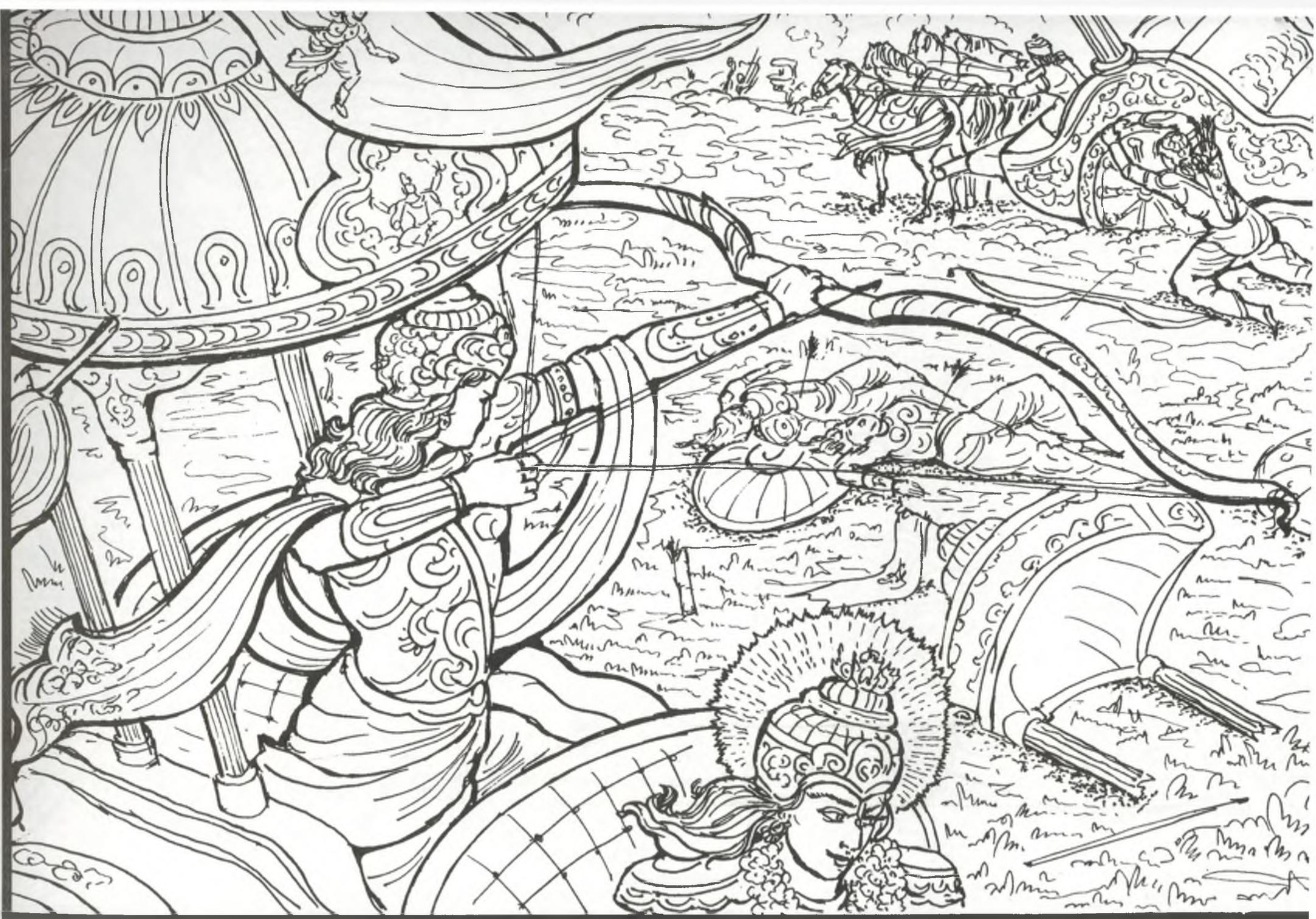
The five Pandavas fought like great heroes killing thousands on the battlefield everyday. Arjuna fired showers of arrows from his famous bow Gandiva. Bhima fought with his mace, smashing men, horses and elephants as he rampaged through the enemy lines. Maharaja Yudisthira fought with spears and javelins which he threw with great precision. Sahadeva was an expert at fighting with swords and shields, cutting the enemy down one after another.



Bhishma, the commander-in-chief of the Pandavas army was the strongest man on the battlefield and engaged in fighting with the war elephants. With simply one blow from his mace he would smash the head of the elephant and when the elephant fell down, he would kill the rider. In this way he destroyed almost all the war elephants single-handedly, reducing



As the ferocious battle raged on, only two warriors stood in the way of the Pandavas victory. One was Bhishma and the other was Karna. Both had the ability to kill Arjuna, mainstay of the Pandava forces. Bhishma directly engaged Arjuna in combat firing hundreds of arrows at both him and Lord Krishna, who was driving Arjuna's chariot. At one was on the verge of being killed by Bhishma, forcing Krishna to pick up the wheel of a broken chariot in order to kill Bhishma. Arjuna stopped him reminding him of his promi



The next day Bhishma was mortally wounded and Karna took over as commander-in-chief. As he engaged Arjuna in a fierce combat, his chariot got stuck in the mud and he forgot to remember the instructions of his guru, how to get the chariot out of the mud. Seeing a golden opportunity to finish Karna, Lord Krishna ordered Arjuna to cut off his head. Although Arjuna was reluctant to kill a warrior in this way, he realized that unless he heeded Krishna's advice, the Pandavas may lose the war. Arjuna then raised his bow



After eighteen long days of fierce fighting and the death of 650 million warriors on the battle field, the great Mahabharata war was almost over. Only the evil Duryodhana was left as the entire Kaurava army had been destroyed. Much to the dismay of his brothers, Maharaja Yudisthira gave another chance to Duryodhana and decided that Bhishma and Drona should fight to the death with maces and whoever won could claim victory in the battle and the throne of Hastinapura. The two great warriors began striking each other repeatedly with maces but were so evenly matched that it seemed neither one could defeat the other. The fight between Bhishma and Duryodhana raged on for hours and hours, both warriors using the same manuever and techniques that had learned to defeat the other. It appeared almost impossible for Bhishma to kill the evil Duryodhana. Lord Krishna then reminded Bhishma about



Bhima seething with anger suddenly charged at Duryodhana swinging his mighty mace in every direction. To avoid the attack of Bhima, Duryodhana jumped upwards, but it was too late mace came crashing down on Duryodhana's thighs completely smashing them, leaving him crippled and unable to move. A tumultuous cheer resounded from the ranks of the Pandavas. Bhishma then kicked Duryodhana and angrily stamped on his head. He told him that the destruction of his vast army and the slaughter of all his brothers was due to having insulted Drona.



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