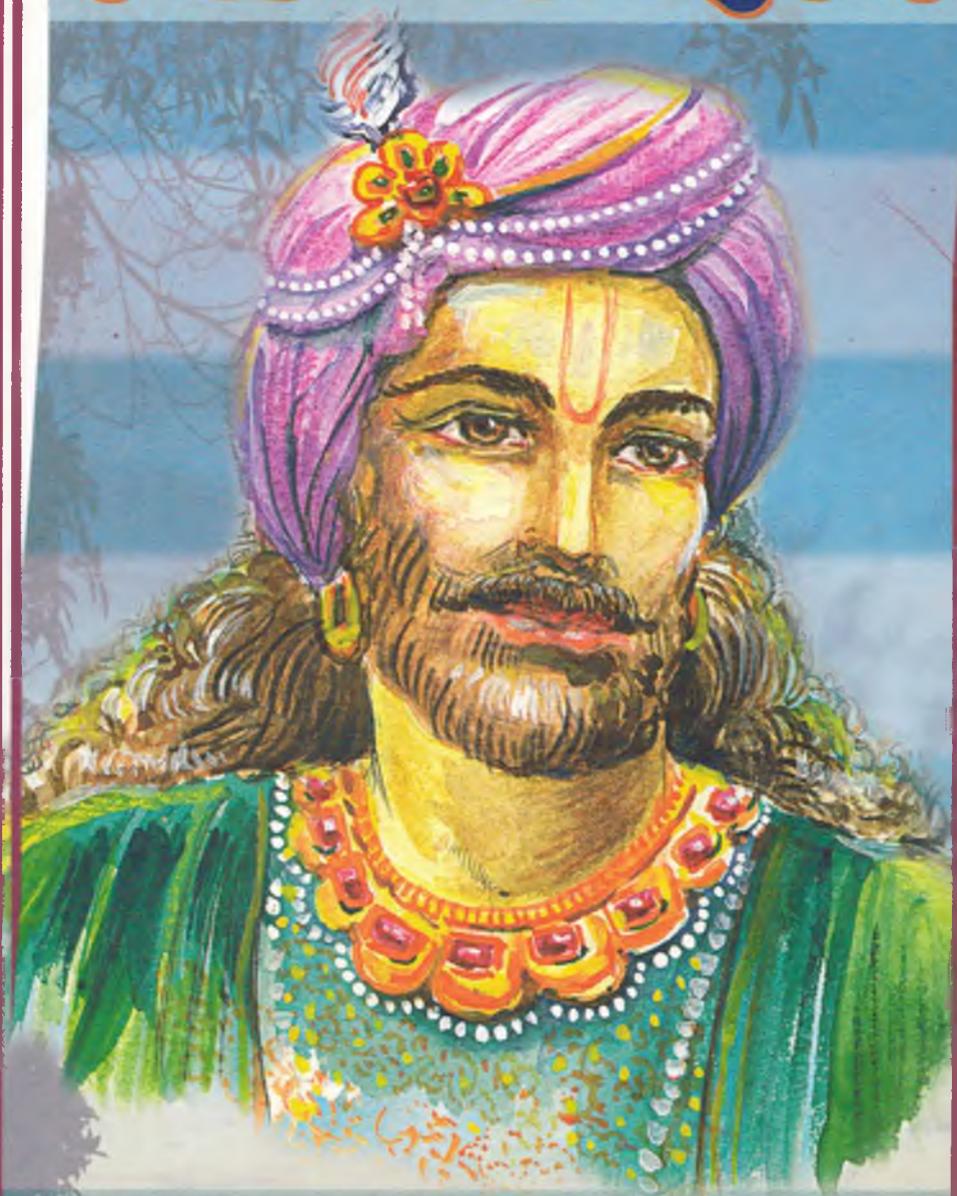


VIDURA



AN EPIC CHARACTER OF MAHABHARAT

EPIC CHARACTERS OF MAHABHARAT

VIDURA



Conceived, designed, and published by Isvara dasa

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King Dhritarastra ruled the world five thousand years ago. His younger brother Vidura was his chief advisor. The king listened carefully to Vidura, but he was weak willed and couldn't follow his brother's advice. Vidura sometimes felt that he was wasting his time, but he remained loyal to his brother and never stopped trying to help him. King Dhritarastra had been born blind and he was also blind to truth and morality. His attachment for his ambitious sons brought out the worst in him—resulting in the death of millions.

King Dhritarastra was the guardian of many children: his one hundred sons, his daughter, and his five nephews, the Pandavas. The boys were all raised in the palace and schooled

together. They should have been treated equally, but the king was so partial to his sons that he found difficulty in correcting them. He said nothing when, out of envy, his sons tried to kill the Pandavas. Vidura hated injustice, but hard as he tried, he couldn't persuade the king to control his sons.

Perhaps Vidura's sense of fairness was because he had been Yamaraj in his last life and perhaps his loyalty to King Dhritarastra was simply because he loved his older brother.

Vidura's mother was not a queen; she was just a maid who worked in the palace. He wasn't therefore considered equal to his brothers. He did not have much power in the kingdom and his wives and children were not accepted as part of the Kuru family.

Lord Krishna's plan was that Vidura, although an exalted soul, be born as the son of a poor woman. This plan had begun to unfold in Vidura's previous life.

Once upon a time, Manduka Muni sat in meditation in a beautiful forest near a river. He was self-absorbed and unaware of the world around him. A group of soldiers rode up to him in a great hurry and asked if he had seen a band of thieves. He didn't answer them.



They couldn't understand why he ignored them, so they yelled at him, but still he didn't respond. The soldiers thought him very rude and rode off in an angry mood to continue their search. Soon they captured the thieves and found the stolen goods, which had been hidden in Manduka Muni's cottage.



“Aha! Now I understand why that sage was so quiet,” said one of the soldiers. “He must be the leader of the thieves. Let’s bind him and take him to the king.”

The chief magistrate sentenced Manduka Muni to death. “Pierce him with a wooden lance,” said the magistrate. “We don’t tolerate thieves in this kingdom!”

The king heard what had happened and rushed to the place of execution just in time to save Manduka Muni from being stabbed to death. The king knew that they were dealing with a

great personality and was worried about the offense his men had made. He released Manduka Muni and begged for forgiveness.

Manduka Muni did not blame the king, knowing that suffering is the result of a reaction to a past misdeed, but he looked back over his life and considered that he had been sinless. He wanted to know why he had been placed in difficulty and so he went to Yamaraj, the lord of death, to find out what he had done wrong. Yamaraj told him that in his present life, as a child, he had pierced an ant with a thorn and having killed it, he was destined to take the reaction.



Manduka Muni said, "That's not fair. I was just a child. You can't blame me for the act of an innocent child. I curse you to take birth in a low-class family on earth. Then you'll see what it's like to live in the material world. I curse you to live as a sudra for one hundred years."

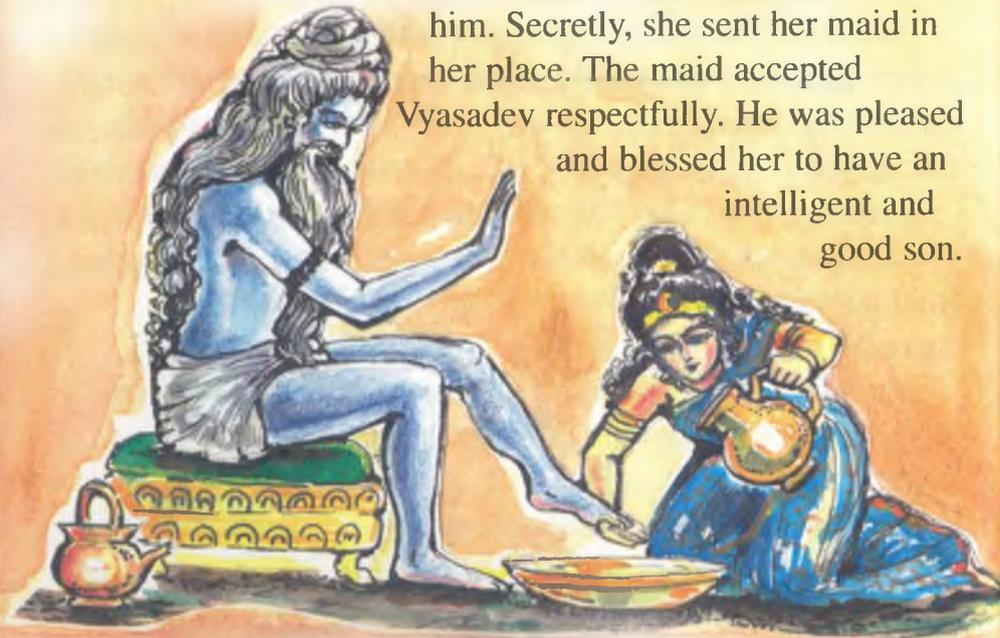
Manduka Muni was a great yogi and his cursing was very powerful, but Yamaraj could have easily countered the curse. He chose not to. He accepted it as Krishna's arrangement and agreed to go to earth. He was born to one of the maids in the palace and was known as Vidura. Although his mother was a maid, his father was the great sage Shрила Vyasadev, and his brothers were Dhritarastra and Pandu, the most powerful princes in the world.

Dhritarastra, Pandu, and Vidura were born to different mothers, but they had the same father, Vyasadev. Because Vichitravirya had died leaving no heir, his brother Vyasadev had been asked to father children in his wives. In those days it was acceptable for a man to beget children in the wives of his dead brother. The palace elders decided to call Vyasadev to give the senior queen, Ambika, a child.

It seemed a good idea and everyone agreed, but when Vyasadev came to Ambika she was shocked by his long matted hair and elderly looks. She did not want him to touch her and she closed her eyes tightly. The result was that her son, Dhritarastra, was born blind.

The elders decided that Vyasadev should be called again to father a child in the younger queen, Ambalika. When she saw Vyasadev, she turned white with fright and as a result her son, Pandu, was weak and pale.

The plan to get an heir was not going well. These boys were not acceptable heirs. Dhritarastra's blindness disqualified him from ruling and Pandu was considered too frail to be a good warrior. So Vyasadev was called again for Ambika. This time she didn't go to him. Secretly, she sent her maid in her place. The maid accepted Vyasadev respectfully. He was pleased and blessed her to have an intelligent and good son.



In this way Vidura came into the world.

Grandfather Bhishma cared for the three boys equally and they had a happy childhood under his care. Dhritarastra grew strong, Pandu became an expert archer, and Vidura was wise and religious. In time they all married and had children.





The future looked bright but when Dhritarastra's first son was born things began to go wrong.

On the night of the birth there was a terrible storm, the worst storm anyone had ever seen. Jackals howled, meteors crashed, and thunder roared. These omens pointed to a horrible future for the Kurus. Above the terrible sounds of the storm, Vidura heard baby Duryodhan braying like an ass, and understood that the child was a demon. He pleaded strongly with King Dhritarastra to get rid of him.

"This child will destroy the whole family," he said. "Take heed of the evil omens and abandon him now. If you keep

him he will cause our ruination. Get rid of him before you become too attached."

It was already too late. A father naturally dotes on his first son and King Dhritarastra was no exception. He was blinded by love for the evil little prince.

The sons of Pandu and King Dhritarastra grew up together and were trained as warriors. They learned to use weapons, to fight, and to be leaders. Naturally there was a sense of rivalry between the growing boys, but the envy of the Kauravas increased and became unnatural. They were infuriated to see the Pandavas superior to them in everything: in learning, in weaponry, and even in sport. In childish play, the sons of Pandu defeated the sons of King Dhritarastra. The Pandavas were also more popular. They were gentle, modest, and sweet natured, whereas the Kauravas were selfish, proud, and much less likeable.



Over the years, the seeds of childish envy grew into something serious and sinister. Yudhistir was heir to the throne, but it was clear that Duryodhan wanted to be king. From an early age, he tried everything he could to get rid of the Pandavas. Duryodhan and his brother, Duhshasan, teamed up with their wicked uncle Shakuni and devised plans to kill their cousins.

There were other bad men who joined them. The clever and evil-minded Purochan helped with a plan to have the Pandavas burned alive in a house made of wood soaked in inflammable materials such as lac, ghee, and oil. Duryodhan liked the plan and had the house built quickly. When it was ready he invited Queen Kunti and the Pandavas to go and live in it.

“Please go and enjoy the beautiful city of Varanavat. We have built a special house for your pleasure,” said Duryodhan. He was overjoyed at the thought of never seeing them again. Vidura knew of the wicked plan, but he was clever enough to foil it.

As the Pandavas were leaving for Varanavat, Vidura spoke to Yudhistir in a tribal language that no one else could understand. He said, “He survives who understands that the consumer of wood does not destroy those who dwell in a hole in the forest.”

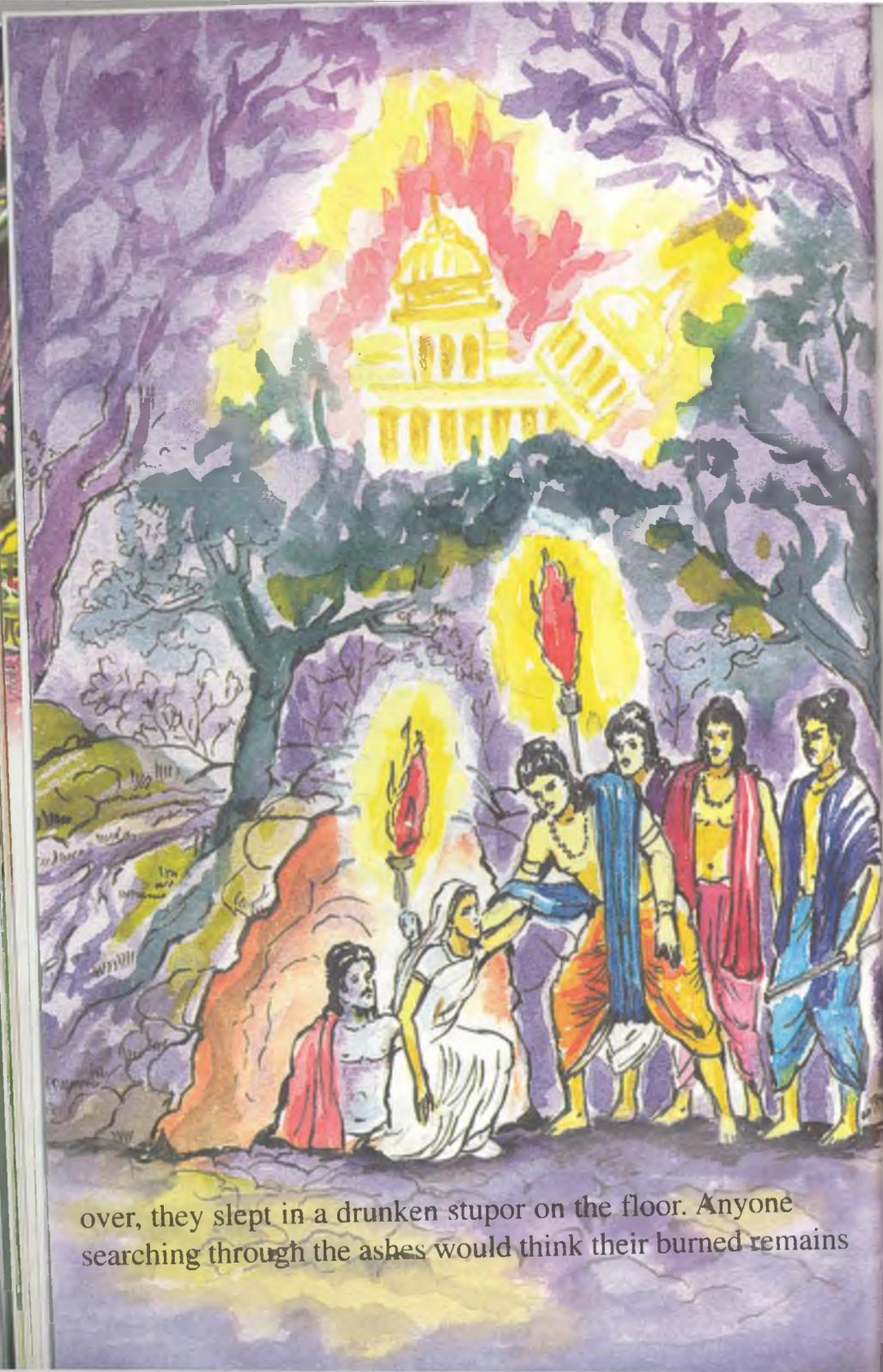
Yudhistir understood and he warned the others to look out for signs of fire. When they entered the beautiful house, the Pandavas were at once aware of the strong smell of lac permeating the house. It filled their lungs and made them feel sick. They hoped that Vidura would send help.



Without delay, Vidura came in disguise to see them and told them what to do. He said that if a lighted splinter touched the lac, the house would immediately catch fire and would quickly burn to the ground. He told them that the housekeeper would start the fire on the fourteenth night of the waning moon. Then he sent a miner who dug a tunnel for their escape. The entrance was concealed inside the house and the exit was hidden far away from the house, in the forest.

They lived in Varanavat for a year and there were no signs of fire. They'd had enough of the waiting game, so they decided to set the house alight, escape into the forest, and go into hiding.

One evening a grand festival was held in the house of lac and many people attended. A serving woman and her five sons drank so much liquor that, when the festivities were



over, they slept in a drunken stupor on the floor. Anyone searching through the ashes would think their burned remains

were the bodies of Queen Kunti and the Pandavas. It was a good cover up.

The Pandavas threw ghee and oil generously about the house, lit the fire, and entered the tunnel. As the house blazed and the sky reddened from the flames, the Pandavas ran safely through the tunnel. Purochan, who had first suggested burning the Pandavas, was in the house for the grand festival. He had not expected the fire at that time and he was burned to death.

Vidura had arranged for a boatman to meet the Pandavas and ferry them across the River Ganges. Vidura took great care that no one else knew about the rescue plans. Because he was such an honest man, he was a good judge of character and he used only the best men to help with the escape. So that Yudhistir would recognize genuine helpers, Vidura sent men who spoke the same tribal language as he had spoken.

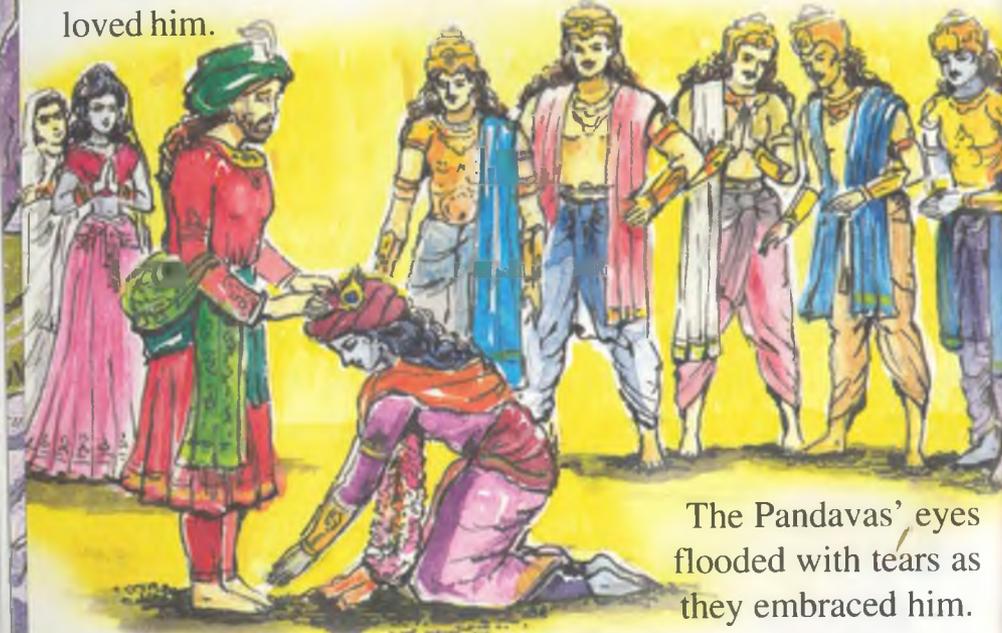
When news of the fire reached Hastinapur, the Kauravas pretended to be overwhelmed with grief and made a show of lamenting loudly. Only Vidura knew the truth and said nothing.

As the Pandavas continued to move from place to place, people were glad to give them food and shelter, and they remained in hiding in the forest for five years.

Then one day they heard about a contest to win Draupadi's hand in marriage. Disguised as brahmins, they went to Panchal. Arjuna entered the competition and won. Seeing Arjuna's large shoulders, muscular body, and skill in archery, people guessed that the five men were the Pandavas.

News of the contest soon reached the palace at Hastinapur. King Dhritarashtra's heart was shattered when he heard that the Pandavas were flourishing, having made an allegiance with Draupadi's father, King Drupada. He feared they would attack. He had to act quickly. He immediately sent Vidura to take a message inviting the Pandavas to come home and take their fair share of the kingdom.

Vidura rode to Panchal and was greeted by the leaders of the city with great respect. Lord Krishna, the king, and the noblemen offered obeisances to Uncle Vidura. Everyone loved him.



The Pandavas' eyes flooded with tears as they embraced him.

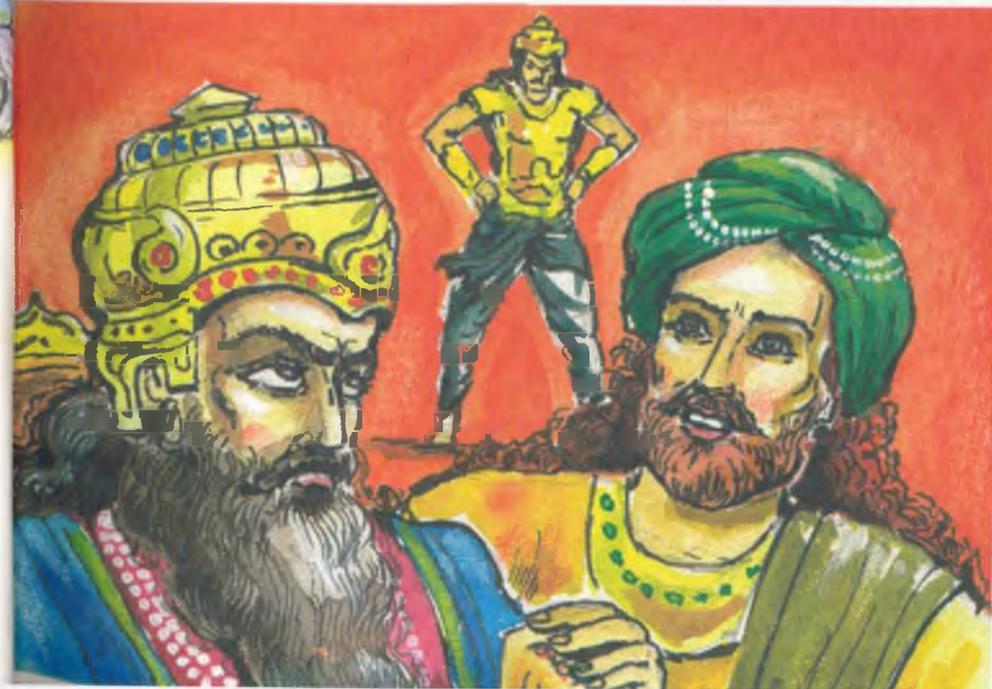
It was six years since they had seen their dearest uncle. Vidura was also overcome with happiness. How he loved his nephews! He recovered his emotions and gave them King Dhritarashtra's message, asking them to come home. They agreed to go with Vidura.

On returning to Hastinapur the Pandavas were offered some land, which was nothing more than a desert. They accepted the offer, glad to have a place of their own.

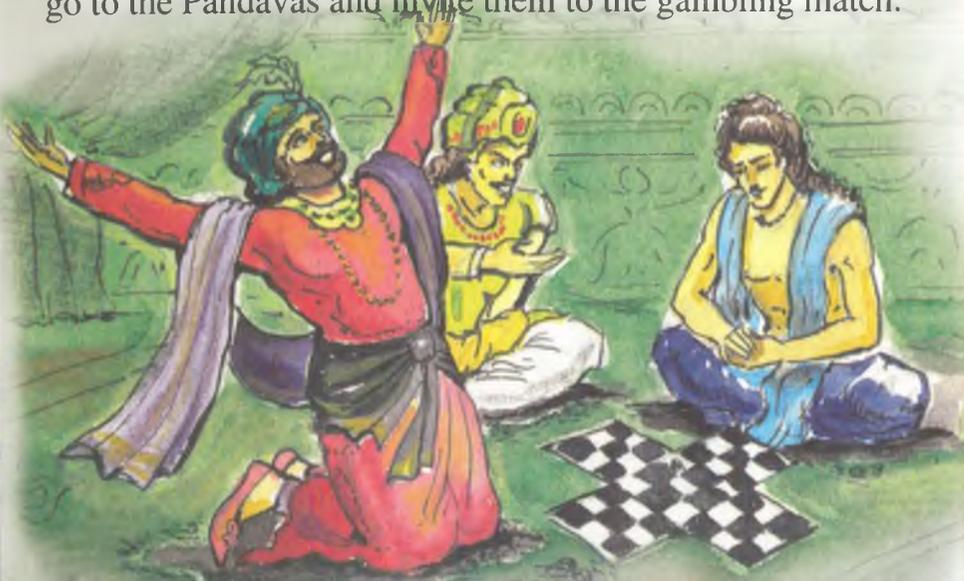
Very quickly, their land increased in beauty and natural resources. Soon it was blooming with every kind of opulence. The Kauravas were bewildered. How could wasteland have been so quickly transformed? Again their envy blazed and again they schemed to destroy their cousins. Working with Shakuni, they planned an unfair game of dice in which Yudhistir would lose everything.

Vidura had witnessed attempts to poison, burn, and humiliate the Pandavas. He had cried to see them abused. He thought that the Kauravas could do nothing more to shock him, but when he heard about the dice game he felt crushed. He asked King Dhritarashtra to stop the evil affair. He said that if the match took place the entire family would be ruined.

"It is immoral. It goes against the laws of religion," Vidura said. "Your own sons will suffer horrible reactions for



cheating. Gambling is evil and it always brings evil results. I implore you, please don't let this happen." The poor blind old king knew it was good advice, but he couldn't stand in Duryodhan's way, quite the opposite; he ordered Vidura to go to the Pandavas and invite them to the gambling match.

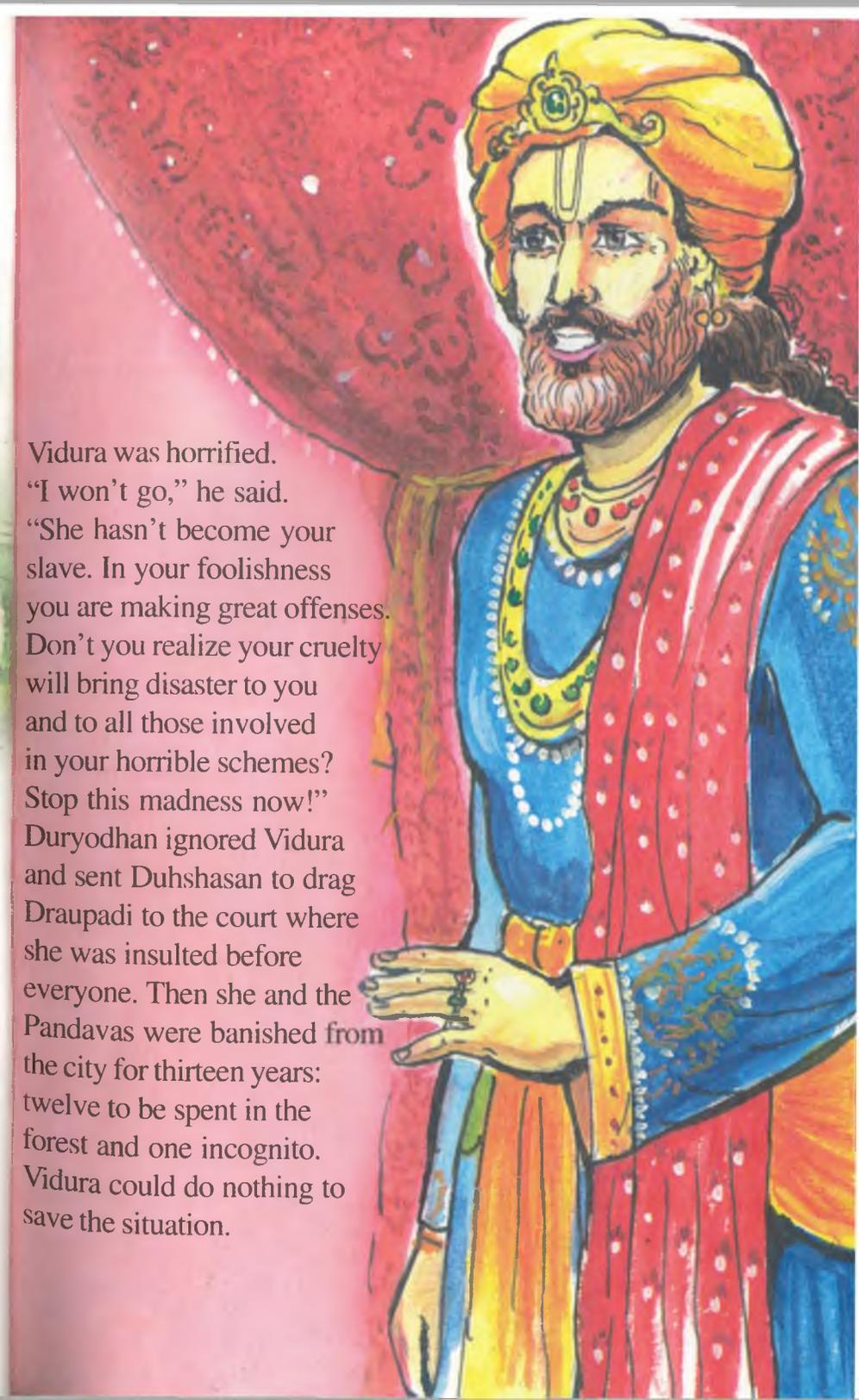


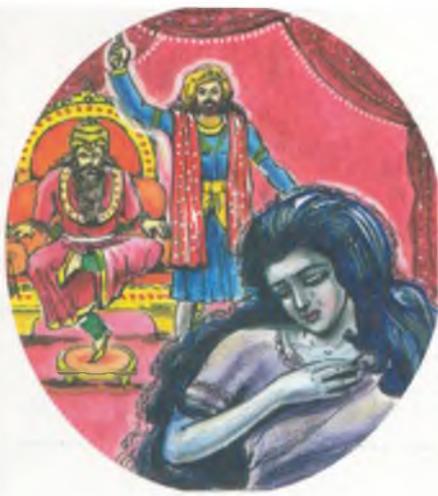
For a warrior to refuse a challenge to fight or to gamble was unthinkable, so Yudhistir accepted the invitation and by playing dice with Shakuni, he lost everything he owned, including his brothers, his wife, and himself.

Vidura was disgusted by the whole affair but could do nothing. His mind started spinning when Duryodhan ordered him to go to the ladies' quarters to fetch Draupadi to the court.

"Go and fetch Draupadi. Bring that servant girl here. She can serve as a sweeping maid before the whole assembly," said Duryodhan.

Vidura was horrified. "I won't go," he said. "She hasn't become your slave. In your foolishness you are making great offenses. Don't you realize your cruelty will bring disaster to you and to all those involved in your horrible schemes? Stop this madness now!" Duryodhan ignored Vidura and sent Duhshasan to drag Draupadi to the court where she was insulted before everyone. Then she and the Pandavas were banished from the city for thirteen years: twelve to be spent in the forest and one incognito. Vidura could do nothing to save the situation.





It seemed that no one could, but at least he saved Queen Kunti.

“She is too frail to live in the forest,” he said. “Why should she undergo such an ordeal? Let her come and stay at my cottage and my family will look after her.”

The Pandavas left

Hastinapur with Draupadi. As they walked away, crowds of citizens followed them, crying and begging them to stay. Vidura told the Pandavas not to worry.

“You will return to glory. One day you’ll rule the whole world,” he said. “Goodness always wins over evil. You will be victorious. Have no doubt!”



King Dhritarastra’s conscience tortured him day and night. He continued to seek Vidura’s advice. While the Pandavas were in exile King Dhritarastra asked Vidura how his sons could win the favor of the people.

“Please tell me how to protect my sons and how to help them rule the kingdom,” he said. Vidura ground his teeth in utter frustration.



“Success comes from virtue,” he said. “You must change their attitude. Start by telling your son to call the Pandavas back, to beg for forgiveness, and to give them their share of the kingdom. Only then will war be avoided. If you can’t control Duryodhan then get rid of him. Give up this one crow and accept the Pandavas who are like five peacocks.”

The truth was unbearable to the old king. “You have always favored the Pandavas,” he snapped. “I don’t want your council. Stay or go, as you like.”

“I will go. You’re bringing doom to the Kauravas. You won’t listen to me, so I can’t help you. It’s better I go,” said Vidura, and he left the palace.

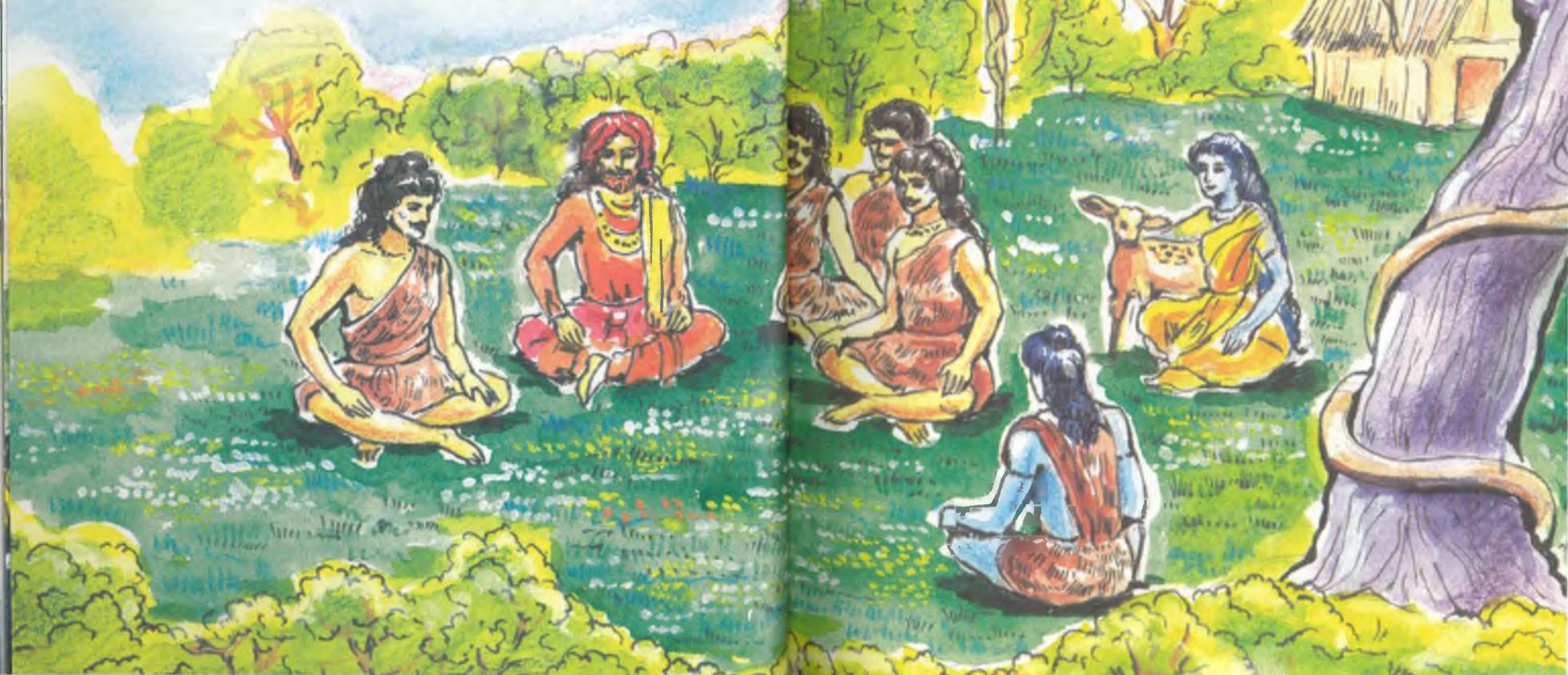
Vidura mounted his chariot and went to Kamyaka forest. There he was greeted warmly by the Pandavas.

Vidura reminded them that their future was bright.

He said, “Because you are able to tolerate insults, and because you protect your dependents, one day you will be the lords of the earth. Know this for sure!”

It wasn’t long before King Dhritarastra regretted his childish outburst and realized that couldn’t bear to be separated from Vidura. He knew that Vidura was his greatest friend. He sent his secretary, Sanjay, to beg him to return.

Sanjay rode to the Pandavas’ camp and told Vidura that if he didn’t return King Dhritarastra would kill himself. Vidura was always very kind to the foolish old king and felt sorry for him. Despite the king’s weakness, Vidura wanted to see him again. He said his goodbyes quickly and returned with Sanjay to Hastinapur.





The night before the Pandavas were to return from exile, King Dhritarastra was in so much anxiety he could not sleep. He did not know what the Pandavas wanted, but he knew his sons would give them nothing. Restlessly pacing back and forth, his mind was in turmoil. Vidura tried to pacify him, but being unsuccessful, he called Sanat Sujana.

Vidura contacted Sanat Sujana by mystic power. As he sat in meditation, an effulgent person appeared, filling the room with light. He was Sanat Sujana. He spoke on philosophy and told the king how to prevent war. At the end of the night when the sage vanished, the king was still thoroughly miserable.

He admitted his weakness. "I actually favor the Pandavas," the king said, "But I can never abandon my sons. My life has been ruined for I am controlled by destiny."



Lord Krishna went to Hastinapur in a last attempt to prevent war. He was invited to stay at Duryodhan's palace, where He would receive every kind of comfort, but he chose to stay at the simple cottage of Vidura.



Vidura and his wife were both highly exalted people although they seemed to be of low birth, both having been born to sudrani mothers and brahmin fathers. They were great devotees of Lord Krishna and were overcome by happiness to

have Him in their home. They were so flustered and excited that they accidentally offered Krishna banana skins and threw away the bananas. Krishna accepted the skins and ate them because He knew they were offered with love. Krishna finds the love of His devotees more satisfying than all the riches in the world.

Vidura knew that the Kauravas would never change and he begged Krishna not to go to them.

“They will simply insult You and ignore Your request. Please don't put Yourself in such an awkward position,” said Vidura. But Krishna wanted to give Duryodhan a final chance to avert war.

“If he refuses to take My advice, he must accept the responsibility for the outcome,” Krishna said, as He mounted His chariot and rode away to see the Kauravas.

Krishna asked Duryodhan to stop cheating the Pandavas. He said that Duryodhan should stop the war by giving back the land to the rightful owners.

“Be fair to them and save massive bloodshed,” said Krishna. “Blood will flow in rivers if you continue with this miserly cheating.”

Duryodhan took good advice from no one. His greed had stolen his intelligence. In the palace that day, he exposed the full extent of his madness.

“Capture this Krishna!” he shouted. “Capture Him and bind Him. Lock Him away. No one will take the kingdom from me, no one!”

The Lord had tried to help, but Duryodhan was beyond reason. Krishna changed into His massive and fearful universal form and left the palace.

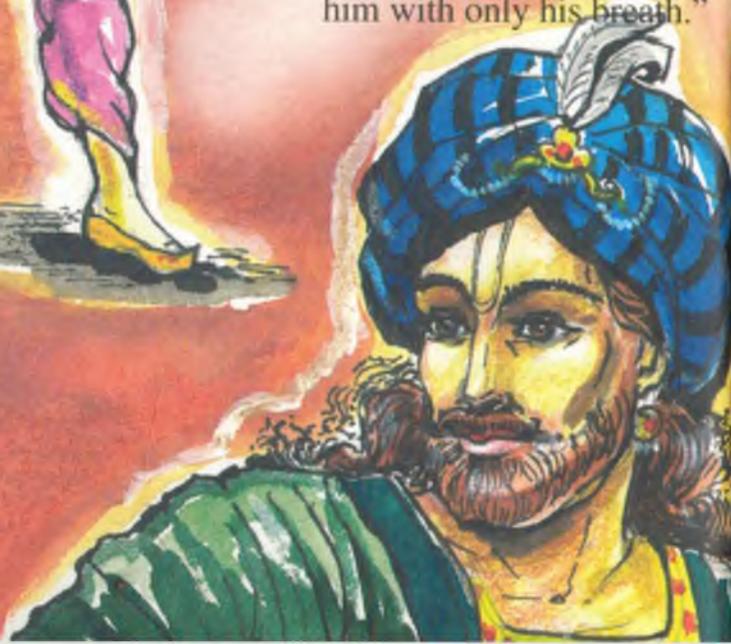


Vidura knew that he was not likely to be successful, but he made a last attempt to get rid of Duryodhan.

“You are supporting offence personified,” he said to Dhritarastra

“Relieve yourself of this ill fortune at once.”

Duryodhan, who was listening behind the door, burst into the room and shouted, “Who asked him to come here? Toss this son of a maidservant out of the palace and leave him with only his breath.”



The insult pierced Vidura’s heart and he wanted to go. He leaned his bow against the door, making it clear that he would take no part in the war, and he left to go on pilgrimage. Duryodhan would have liked Vidura beaten until there was nothing left but his breath, but he let him go.

Vidura was glad to be alone. It was a relief to be away from the politics of the palace and to have time to concentrate all his thoughts on Krishna. He traveled by foot to many holy places. Although he was pure, he didn’t feel fit to approach Krishna directly. He considered that he had become contaminated because of his association in the palace. He traveled to Ayodhya, Dvaraka, and Mathura. He went to many decorated temples and traveled through the countryside where the air was fresh and clean. He walked through orchards and bathed in clear rivers and lakes. When he arrived at the banks of the Yamuna he met Uddhava, another great devotee of Lord Krishna.



Uddhava had tears in his eyes and was in a deeply thoughtful mood when Vidura first saw him. He told Vidura the cause of his sorrow.

“My dear Vidura, the sun of the world, Lord Krishna, has set. He no longer makes footprints on the earth for He has left this world.”

Uddhava told Vidura about the Kurukshetra war, the fall of the Yadus, and the departure of Lord Krishna from the world. Vidura asked Uddhava to tell him all that he had learned about transcendental knowledge, but Uddhava refused, considering himself unqualified. Instead he sent Vidura to hear from Maitreya Muni.

Vidura went to Hardwar and met Maitreya Muni in a beautiful place near a waterfall at the source of the Ganges. Maitreya told Vidura all that he had learned from Krishna about the glories of devotional service to the Lord.



Filled with knowledge, Vidura wandered here and there chanting Krishna’s glories for several years. Then his desire to help his older brother was re-awakened. He went to Hastinapur and was greeted warmly by everyone at the palace. King Yudhishthir recalled Vidura’s kindness.

“Dear Uncle,” he said, “do you remember all the times you saved us when we were young? We remember that you were always very kind to us. Your partiality, like the wings of a bird saved us from poisoning and arson.”

“I remember how you suffered,” said Vidura. “My heart still aches to think of it.”

After some time, Vidura spoke in private to Dhritarastra who had become old and sick. He reminded him that death was approaching and that it was time to concentrate on spiritual matters. He spoke very boldly hoping that at the last stage of their lives he could help Dhritarastra.

“You are living like a household dog,” he said. “You are eating the remnants of food provided by those you tried to kill. Leave this house at once and quit your old and useless body with dignity.”

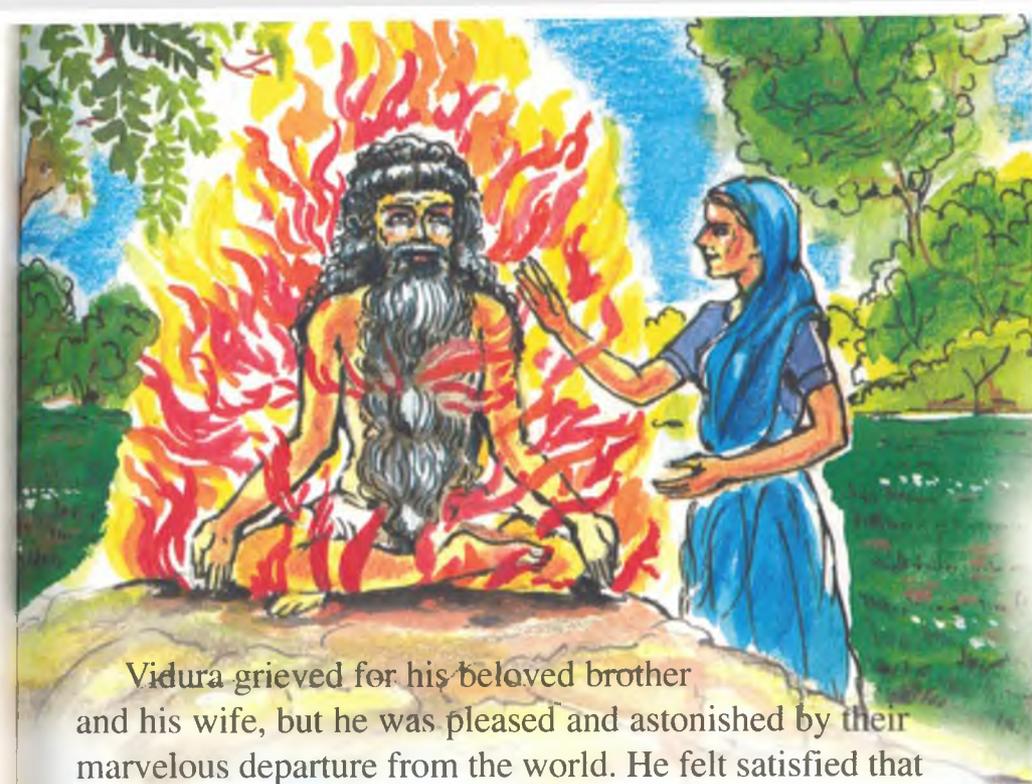
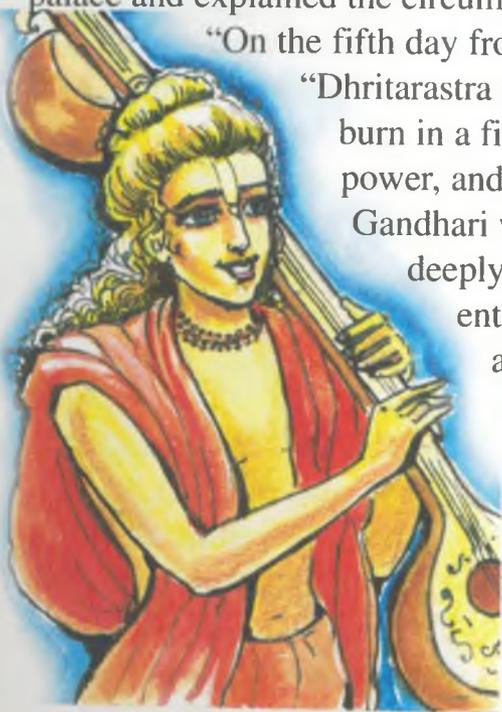
Vidura had always loved Dhritarastra and had given his life to help him. It was a great relief to Vidura that at last the sad old king was able to follow his advice.

The following morning, before anyone was awake, Dhritarastra and his wife, Gandhari, left for the Himalayas with Vidura.

On waking, Sanjay, Dhritarastra’s faithful secretary, searched the palace for his master and, being unable to find him, lamented with Yudhistir. Narada Muni arrived at the palace and explained the circumstances to them.

“On the fifth day from today,” he said,

“Dhritarastra will attain liberation. He will burn in a fire created by his own mystic power, and after he quits this world Gandhari will follow him. By thinking deeply about her husband while entering the fire, she will also attain liberation.”



Vidura grieved for his beloved brother and his wife, but he was pleased and astonished by their marvelous departure from the world. He felt satisfied that their lives, which had been filled with pain, had ended successfully.

Vidura continued alone to Prabhash and while immersed in thoughts of his dear Lord, Krishna, he left the world. He returned to Pitruoka and took up his position again as the lord of justice, Yamaraj.



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