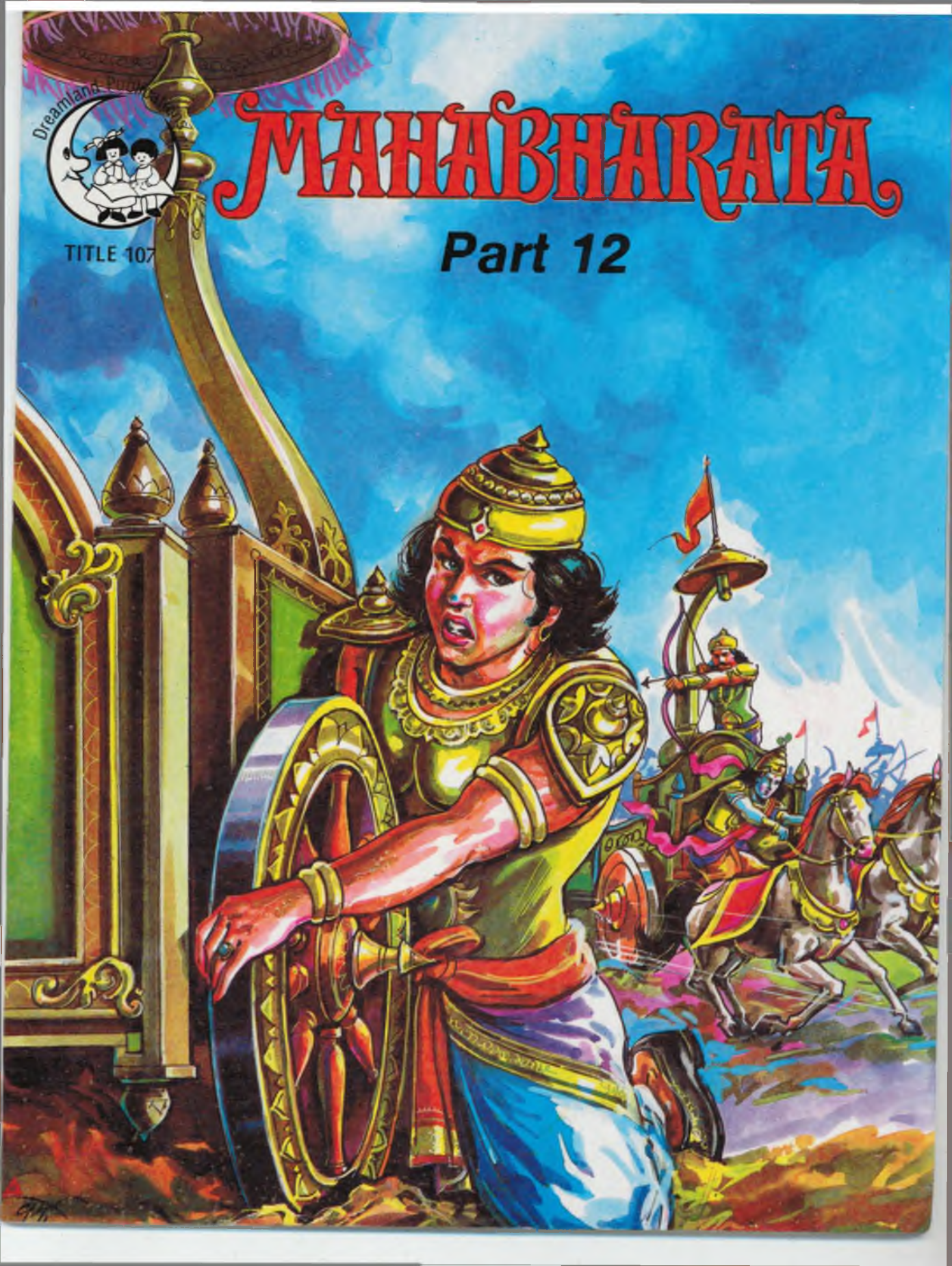


MAHABHARATA

Part 12



TITLE 107



MAHABHARATA



PUBLISHED BY
DREAMLAND PUBLICATIONS
4425, NAI SAK, DELHI-110006 (INDIA)
PHONE : 291 5831, 292 9770, FAX : 011-5 14 1327

Art Work by :
K.L. VERMA

Retold & Edited by :
T.R. BHANOT

Rs. 20.00

Processing - BEST PHOTO LITHO GRAPHERS

MAHABHARAT

Part 12



PUBLISHED BY
DREAMLAND PUBLICATIONS
J-128, KIRTI NAGAR, NEW DELHI - 110 015
PHONE : 543 5657, 545 5657, FAX : 011-543 8283



We have read on the last page of the previous book that Karna had come forward to check Bheema's advance. He showered volleys of arrows on the mighty Pandava and barred him from advancing further. Caring little for Karna's arrows Bheema was gradually getting nearer and nearer him. So, fierce was the fight between the two that Bheema was badly wounded. But he was not a person to be discouraged in any way. Getting near Karna's chariot, he killed the horses and broke the chariot to pieces with violent blows of his mace.

Karna, who was cool so far, flew into a rage and fell upon Bheema like a wounded leopard. Bheema was already in great fury. He was reminded of the insults heaped upon Draupadi and his elder brother by Karna and Duryodhana. So, he made such a fierce attack on Karna that his bow broke into pieces and fell down on the ground. Picking up a new bow Karna was going to shoot an arrow when Bheema broke it too. Seeing Karna under immense pressure, Duryodhana sent his brother Durjaya for Karna's help. How could Bheema brook the very presence of Duryodhana's brother before himself. With one powerful stroke of his mace, Bheema made short work of him. Then came Durmukh, another brother of Duryodhana, but Bheema killed him too. So, Karna was forced to retreat and Bheema advanced further.



Seeing Karna retreating from the battle-field, five other sons of Dhritrashtra came forward and sprang at Bheema. Bheema had been encouraged by his victory over Karna. So, he swooped upon Duryodhana's brothers with a renewed fury and killed them all in the twinkling of an eye. Karna made another trial to stem Bheema's advance but all to no purpose. Finally, he had to run away from the battle-field to save his life.

Now Duryodhana sent his seven other brothers—Chitra, Upchitra, Chitrakash, Charumitra, Chitrayudh, Chitravarma and Sharasana—to deal with Bheema. They tried to checkmate Bheema using different tactics of warfare against Bheema, ocean of might, but none of them could save himself from his wrath. They fell fighting bravely. Not only the Pandava warriors, but the Kauravas also praised Bheema's bravery. How could Duryodhana bear it.

Duryodhana was non-plussed to see Karna unable to do anything. He sent another seven brothers of his to attack Bheema. They surrounded Bheema and began to shoot arrows at him. But Bheema killed them one by one. The last of these seven brothers to be killed was Vikarna who was known for his love of justice. As soon as Vikarna fell down, even Bheema could not help shedding tears because he loved him very much. Bheema had broken Karna's bow eighteen times since morning.



Karna now decided to fight relentlessly. So, he came forward with a renewed determination and began to shower arrows at Bheema. But the mighty Pandava broke his bow once again. Bheema gave out a loud roar hearing which the Kaurava soldiers trembled all over. Karna shrewdly attacked Bheema, broke his bow and killed the horses of his chariot. So, Bheema picked up his sword and shield but Karna broke them too.

Bheema jumped onto Karna's chariot and broke his bow with his hands. With great difficulty, Karna was able to save himself from coming into Bheema's grips. He stood behind the flag-mast and shot arrows at Bheema who at once jumped down and began to fling broken wheels of chariots upon Karna. Karna could have killed Bheema but he well remembered the promise given to Kunti that he would not kill any Pandava except Arjuna.

Meanwhile Krishna had seen Bheema unarmed and Karna attacking him. So, he asked Arjuna to help his brother. Arjuna's eyes grew red in anger and he shot such arrows at Karna as forced him to flee the battle-field in order to save his life. Just then, Arjuna saw Satyaki fighting against Bhurishrava, an old seasoned warrior. Seeing Satyaki there, Arjuna grew anxious about Yudhishtir's safety.



A long and bitter fight went on between Satyaki and Bhurishrava. At first they were fighting with bows and arrows but later on they came to be engaged in a fierce sword-duel. When both of them were deprived of their swords, they began a wrestling bout. The scuffle going on between the two warriors was worth seeing indeed. Neither of them showed any sign of fatigue but they displayed wonderful feats of wrestling.

On the other hand, Arjuna was trying his level best to kill Jaidrath. All of a sudden Krishna asked Arjuna to help Satyaki because he looked tired while Bhurishrava was quite fresh. Just then Bhurishrava lifted Satyaki above his head and flung him down with a thud. Throwing all norms of warfare to the winds, Bhurishrava was going to kill Satyaki with his sword when Arjuna shot an arrow at him. It cut Bhurishrava's right arm and threw it at a distance.

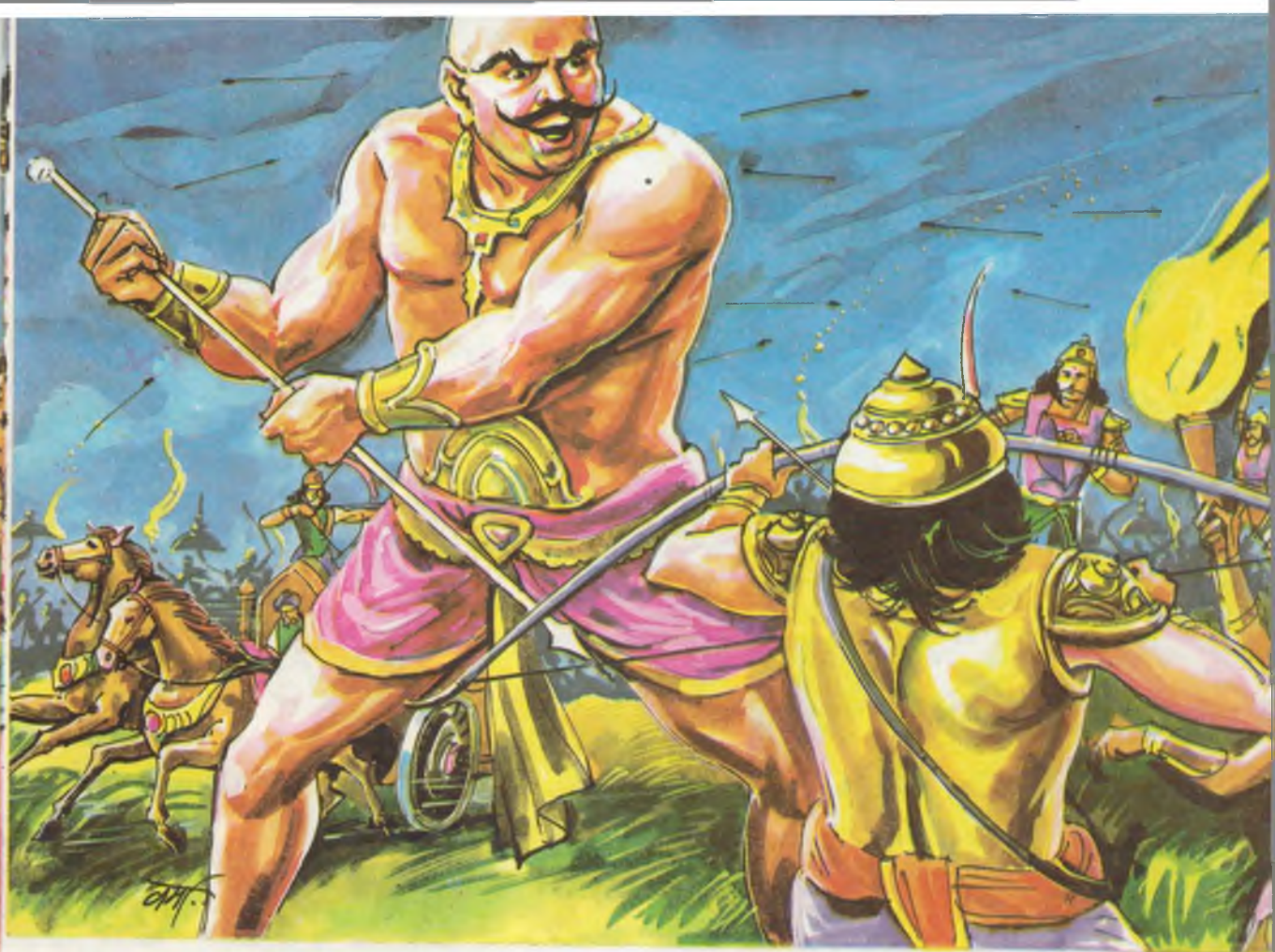
Bhurishrava objected to Arjuna's shooting of an arrow at him when he was going to kill unarmed Satyaki. But Arjuna made him realise that to attack a tired and unarmed foe was against the norms of warfare. Suffering acute pain because of his cut arm, Bhurishrava had sat down on the ground. In the twinkling of an eye, Satyaki got up, picked up Bhurishrava's sword and killed him instantly. This act of Satyaki was condemned by one and all.



The fourteenth day of the war had entered its last phase. Duryodhana said to Karna, "Dear friend! this day is very significant indeed. If Arjuna fails to kill Jaidrath by sunset, he is sure to commit suicide out of shame. As a result, the Pandavas will lose half their power and we will surely gain a victory. Let us not let this opportunity slip and try our level best to render Arjuna unable to fulfil his vow."

Karna was awfully tired of his fierce engagement against Bheema and did not feel like fighting any more. On the other hand, Arjuna was playing havoc with the Kaurava army so that he should be able to get near Jaidrath and kill him. At last he was able to pierce through the Kaurava defence and reached near Jaidrath. Soon he defeated all the warriors protecting Jaidrath and a straight fight began between the two. Either of them looked at the sinking sun time and again. All of a sudden darkness prevailed and the Kauravas began to jump in joy.

Arjuna lost heart and did not know what to do. But Krishna told him that this darkness had been created by him by his supernatural power and so he should kill Jaidrath who had become inactive. At the same time, he asked him to strike such an arrow that Jaidrath's head should fall in his father's lap who was meditating for his son's safety. Arjuna was quite aware of the boon that Jaidrath had got from his father. So, he killed Jaidrath then and there causing his head to fall in his father's lap.



Jaidrath's murder changed the very colour of the war. Mutual jealousy rose to the highest and the code of war came to be altogether ignored. Whereas the Pandavas expressed their joy over Jaidrath's end by sounding their shells, the Kauravas were not ready to close the day's battle even after sunset. Hundreds of torches were lighted and the warriors on both sides got engaged in pitched battles.

On the Pandava's side Ghatotkachh advanced to attack the Kauravas and killed their soldiers in very large numbers. Duryodhana was horrified to see it and requested Karna to deal with this son of Bheema from Hidimba the demoness. During an earlier day's battle, Ghatotkachh had troubled Karna so much that he trembled to hear his name. But he was a true Kshatriya and so he could not afford to remain silent when challenged. He advanced to face Ghatotkachh who began to shower arrows at him instantly.

Karna had preserved a divine weapon with exceptional care for using against Arjuna as the last resort. But Ghatotkachh troubled him so much that he could not help using this divine weapon at him. As soon as Karna shot the divine weapon (Shakti) at Bheema's son he fell down lifeless on the ground.



Dronacharya did not allow the battle of the fourteenth day to be closed even after Ghatotkacha had died. He was, indeed, very furious because he had not been able to save Jaidrath. So, he fell upon the Pandava soldiers like a hungry lion and began to butcher them mercilessly. Shri Krishna asked the Pandavas to kill Drona through some trick otherwise he was sure to wipe out the entire Pandava army.

"What should we do?" asked the Pandava brothers.

"Let the news be noised abroad that Ashwathama has been killed," replied Krishna. He further added that hearing this news, Dronacharya was sure to throw away his weapons and be lost in grief. Dhritishthya could then kill him. At first, everybody condemned this proposal but when Krishna cited an example from the Ramayana regarding Vali's murder by Rama, Yudhishtira got ready to carry out the proposal.

Bheema killed an elephant named Ashwathama with his mace and shouted, "I have killed Ashwathama." Hearing these words, Drona was stunned but he wanted to know whether it was really true. He knew that Yudhishtira would never tell a lie. So, he asked him about the veracity of the news. Yudhishtira said, "Yes, Ashwathama is dead but the elephant not your son." Krishna had managed a loud noise to be raised as soon as the first half of Yudhishtira's reply was over. So, Drona could not hear its latter half. Hearing Yudhishtira's words, Drona threw away his weapons and sat down in his chariot. Dhritishthya lost no time and severed his head from his body with one stroke of his sword.



The fourteenth day's battle had been very crucial and three great warriors of the Kaurava army had fallen fighting the Pandavas. They were Bhurishrava, Jaidrath and Dronacharya. So, on the fifteenth day, Karna came to be the general of the Kaurava army while Shalya acted as his charioteer. Evidently, the battle of the fifteenth day was again going to be extremely fierce as well as dreadful.

The Pandavas got calculated the best time of the day for Arjuna to face Karna by scholarly astrologers. At this time, Arjuna attacked Karna backed by a regiment led by his elder brother Bheema. Seeing this, Dushashan came for Karna's help and showered arrows at Bheema. Seeing Dushashan before his eyes, Bheema's blood boiled. Roaring as a lion, he sprang at Dushashan and flung him down. Giving him no chance to get up Bheema pounded his body with a mace and cut his right arm off.

Bheema looked like a fearful demon at that time. Draupadi's face was flashing across his mind time and again. So, he began to suck Dushashan's blood like a cannibal. Then Bheema began to dance and jump roaring aloud and challenging Duryodhana to come before him so that he should also be forced to meet with the same fate. Seeing Bheema in this dreadful form, every onlooker including Karna began to tremble from head to foot out of fear.



Shalya consoled Karna and encouraged him to discharge his responsibility like a true Kshtriya. So, Karna began to shower arrows at Arjuna in violent rage. As far as Duryodhana was concerned, Dushashan's death had broken his heart. Seeing him in this condition, Ashwathama, Drona's son, consoled him and suggested to him to sue for peace with the Pandavas. But Duryodhana was an evil soul. Losing his calm and forgetting his sorrow, he organised a large regiment of soldiers and attacked the Pandavas.

On the other hand, a furious battle was going on between Karna and Arjuna. Karna was fighting with a vengeance and he shot an arrow that emitted fire at Arjuna. Seeing this, Krishna felt worried for Arjuna and conducted the horses in such a way that the chariot went down about a foot. As a result, Arjuna was saved and the arrow struck his helmet and blew it away.

This narrow escape caused Arjuna to be mad in anger and he rained innumerable arrows at Karna. As ill luck would have it, the left wheel of Karna's chariot got struck up and Karna felt highly worried. So, he said to Arjuna in a loud voice, "Wait! let me get the wheel out of mud. It will not be fair on your part to attack me in this position."



Hearing Karna's words, Krishna retorted, "Karna! it is so strange that you are thinking of what is fair and what is foul now when your life is in danger. Did you ever object to the disgrace heaped upon Draupadi in the open court? Did you object to or oppose the conspiracy to burn the Pandavas alive in the lac-palace? Did you ever condemn Duryodhana when he tried to poison Bheema to death? Were you not a party to each of these dirty moves? Don't you feel ashamed to talk of fair and foul now? Did you hesitate while killing Abhimanyu when he was quite unarmed?"

Karna had no answer to any of these questions. So, he mounted his stuck-up chariot and shot a fierce arrow at Arjuna. This arrow staggered Arjuna for some time and Karna came down and began to heave at the wheel of his chariot. But he failed to get it out. Then he tried to recall the incantations that he had learnt from Parsurama deceptively. But he could not recall them because of Parsurama's curse uttered on him.

Krishna incited Arjuna to kill Karna instantly. Arjuna shot such an arrow at Karna as severed his head from the rest of his body and he fell down lifeless.



When Duryodhana came to know of Karna's fall he was extremely disappointed. His sorrow knew no bounds as he was unable to understand what to do now. Then he went to Kripacharya, the royal priest, who consoled him saying, "You have lost all your near-and-dear ones. Each of them did his best for you but all to no purpose because you are fighting for an evil cause. So, you had better go and make peace with the Pandavas."

Hearing the words of the royal priest, Duryodhana flew into a rage and said, "Is it proper for me to sue for peace now like a coward when all my faithful companions and soldiers have laid down their lives for me? Even if the Pandavas accept my request, will the people not condemn me? Moreover, shall I be able to enjoy peace of mind even as a king of my part of the kingdom?" Everybody praised Duryodhana for what he had said.

So, on the sixteenth day, king Shalya was appointed general of the Kaurava army. He was known for his bravery and war strategy. He was a past master in wielding mace. As for the Pandavas, Yudhishtir himself decided to lead his army against Shalya. He led a fierce attack on Shalya and a dreadful battle took place. Towards the end of the day, Shalya and Yudhishtir got engaged in a sword duel and Yudhishtir killed him with a powerful stroke of his sword.



After the fall of Shalya, Duryodhana's brothers who were still alive advanced in a body to deal with the Pandavas. They surrounded Bheema and began to shower arrows at him. But Bheema was more than a match for them all. He killed all of them one by one and began to roar like a lion challenging Duryodhana to come out and face him. The fire of revenge in his mind was till raging as before. The disgrace heaped by Duryodhana on Draupadi and Yudhishtir was goading him to look for Duryodhana and kill him with his mace accordingly to his vow.

On another front a fierce battle was going on between Nakul and Shakuni. Shakuni was not only an evil brain but a brave fighter also though he believed in foul moves much more than fair ones. He was going to overpower Nakul when Sahdev came for his brother's help. Sahdev roared in anger and challenged Shakuni saying, "Evil Soul! you have committed untold sins in your life. This battle is the result of your evil designs. You are responsible for decimating the Kaurava dynasty. Be ready to meet with your end."

Then Sahdev shot a dreadful arrow at Shakuni and he fell down dead then and there. The arrow had severed his head from the rest of his body. In this way, all the warriors of the Kaurava army, except Duryodhana, were killed.



Duryodhana was all alone now. He had nobody to help him and his position was extremely miserable. He was feeling tired and broken also. So, he lifted his mace and made for a tank full of water silently. Setting there he began to think over what had happened. He said to himself, "Vidur the Wise, was right when he repeatedly advised me to come to the right path. But I did not heed his words. It is no use crying over spilt milk now. I must pay for my misdeeds now."

The next day was the seventeenth day of the war and Duryodhana was nowhere to be seen. So, Yudhishtir and his brothers began to look for him. They come to know that he was hiding in the tank. They went there and asked Duryodhana to come out. Duryodhana could not control himself and came out of the water with his mace in his hands. He challenged the five Pandavas to come and face him one by one.

Hearing Duryodhana's words, Bheema could not control himself and came forward to have a mace-duel with him. the battle began and lasted for a long time. At last Duryodhana began to feel tired. Krishna struck his hand on his thigh to attract Bheema and to remind him of his promise. Losing no time, Bheema gave a staggering blow on Duryodhana's thigh and broke its bone. As a result, Duryodhana fell down on the ground. Bheema went near him and hit his head with his foot.



Leaving Duryodhana badly wounded, the Pandavas were about to go when Balrama reached there. He had returned from his pilgrimage. When he came to know that Bheema had hit Duryodhana on his thigh, he flew into a rage. Looking at Bheema with hateful eyes, he said, "Cursed you be, Bheema! why did you hit Duryodhana below the belt? Isn't it against the code of warfare." Saying these words Balrama got ready to attack Bheema.

Krishna came between Balrama and Bheema and began to pacify his elder brother. He said, "Brother dear! just recall the excesses that Duryodhana did to the Pandavas and to Draupadi in special. When Duryodhana had asked Draupadi to sit on his thigh in the open court, Bheema had taken a vow to break his thigh with his mace. Bheema has simply fulfilled his vow." But Balrama did not feel convinced and left for Dwarka condemning Bheema for what he had done.

Duryodhana also blamed Krishna on several accounts. He opined that the Pandavas were not at all ready to leave the path of Dharma. He held that whenever any Pandava did any wrong, it was because of Krishna. He styled Krishna as a cunning person who could go to any length in order to serve his purpose. Then he said to Krishna, "Remember that I have died a hero and the doors of heaven are open for me. But these Pandavas have still to suffer a lot in the years to come."



The Seventeenth day of the war was almost over. Ashwathama, Drona's son had come to know how Bheema had hit Duryodhana below the belt. This foul deed of Bheema reminded Aswathama of the plot through which his dear father had been killed. So, he was beside himself with rage and rushed to where Duryodhana was lying half-dead. He addressed him and said, "O Crown Prince!! I take a vow to kill all the Pandavas tonight."

Duryodhana was highly pleased to hear the words of Ashwathama. He appointed Ashwathama as the general of the Kaurava army and said, "I was looking forward to your arrival. I am sure you will fulfil your vow and give me peace of mind." The night had fallen and the armies had returned to their camps to rest for the night. The battle was to be resumed next morning—the eighteenth day.

Everybody was asleep but Ashwathama was awake. Burning with a fire of revenge, he was planning his action. He came out of his camp and went near a tree in which several gentle birds had made their nests. Suddenly Ashwathama saw that an owl got to a nest silently and killed the birds that were sleeping in it. At once Ashwathama decided upon what he was to do. He decided to make short work of the Pandavas while they were asleep.



Ashwathama disclosed his plan to his maternal uncle—Kripacharya who condemned him saying, "How shameful of you! what made you think in these terms after all? Give up this idea and let us go to Dhritrashtra and Vidur to seek their advice." But Ashwathama got even more enraged and said, "Uncle! the Pandavas killed my father in an unfair way. Also, Bheema hit Duryodhana with his mace below his belt which is against the norms of warfare. So, I must do as I have planned."

Kripacharya tried his level best to dissuade Ashwathama from doing the wrong but he did not heed what he said. So, Ashwathama made for the Pandava camp. Seeing him going alone, Kripacharya and Kritvarma also accompanied him. Everyone was fast asleep in the Pandava camp. Ashwathama got into Dhrishtadyumna's tent and killed him instantly. Then he killed all the warriors who had come from Panchal with Dhrishtadyumna.

Next, Ashwathama went to where the Pandavas were supposed to be sleeping but luckily they were not there. Krishna had taken them away to some other place. So, Ashwathama killed all the sons of Draupadi one by one in cold blood. Then the three accomplices played havoc in the entire camp killing mercilessly whoever they could lay their hands on. Then they set the entire camp on fire. The Pandava warriors got up with a start but most of them fell victims to the swords of Ashwathama and his two companions.



Ashwathama and his two companions returned to the place where Duryodhana was lying, waiting for his end to come about. He told Duryodhana that he had done away with all the sons of Draupadi though the Pandavas were still alive. Duryodhana was very pleased to hear what Ashwathama had said and soon died a happy death. In all, the seven Pandavas had escaped alive. They were Kunti, Draupadi and her five husbands.

Next morning, Yudhishtir and his brothers came to know of what had happened during the night. The miserable condition of Draupadi was just indescribable. She was lost in grief and bewailed loudly. Consoling her to be pacified, the five Pandavas set out in search of Ashwathama. They looked for him high and low and at last succeeded in finding him in the hermitage of saint Vyasa. Seeing the Pandavas Ashwathama got frightened. In order to fulfill his vow, he uttered an incantation on a piece of straw and shot it in the air saying, "Go and do away with the baby-in-womb, if any, belonging to the Pandava blood."

The enchanted straw took the shape of a sword and darted to where Abhimanyu's expectant wife (Uttara) was sitting. It would have killed the baby to-be, but for Krishna's presence there. Krishna defused the enchanted sword and let no harm come to Uttara and her baby.



At the hermitage of Vyasa a fierce battle began between Ashwathama and Bheema. The long bitter fight ended with Ashwathama's defeat who was forced to hand over the precious stone lodged inside his forehead to the Pandavas. Bheema offered the precious stone to Draupadi who further presented it to Yudhishtira. When Dhritrashtra heard of Duryodhana's death and the murder of Draupadi's sons, he cried in sorrow, "Ashwathama has done away with the sons of Draupadi and thus ended the line of Hastinapur."

Vidur began consoling Dhritrashtra in various ways. Just then Saint Vya reached there and he also began to pacify the Kaurava king. He said to him, "My son! this war was inevitable. So, be patient and accept Yudhishtira as your son. Lead your life in peace showering affection on the Pandavas." Just then the Pandavas along with Krishna reached there. Dhritrashtra embraced them, though it was only a pretension. Taking leave of the king, the Pandavas went to queen Gandhari.

Gandhari, though in deep sorrow, showered blessings on the Pandavas and laid the entire blame on Dushasan and Shakuni. Then the Pandavas went to the bank of the Ganga and stayed there for over a month performing various religious rites in the name of those near and dear ones who had fallen fighting in the war.



Despite the fact that Yudhishtir was the unquestioned king of the entire kingdom of Hastinapur, he was gripped with untold grief. Suddenly saint Narda happened to come to Hastinapur. Yudhishtir opened his heart before the saint. Yudhishtir was especially grieved at Karna's death because he had come to know that Karna was Kunti's son. Saint Narda and Kunti told Yudhishtir the entire story about Karna's birth and the curses uttered upon him by a Brahmana and by Parsurama, his own guru.

Hearing everything about Karna, Yudhishtir said to Kunti, "Mother dear! you kept Karna's birth a secret from us. That is why I am feeling so sorry for him. In other words, your act of concealing the facts is at the root of my sorrow. I curse the entire world of women that no lady shall be able to keep any secret in the time to come." But Yudhishtir could get rid of his sorrow and decided to renounce the world once for all.

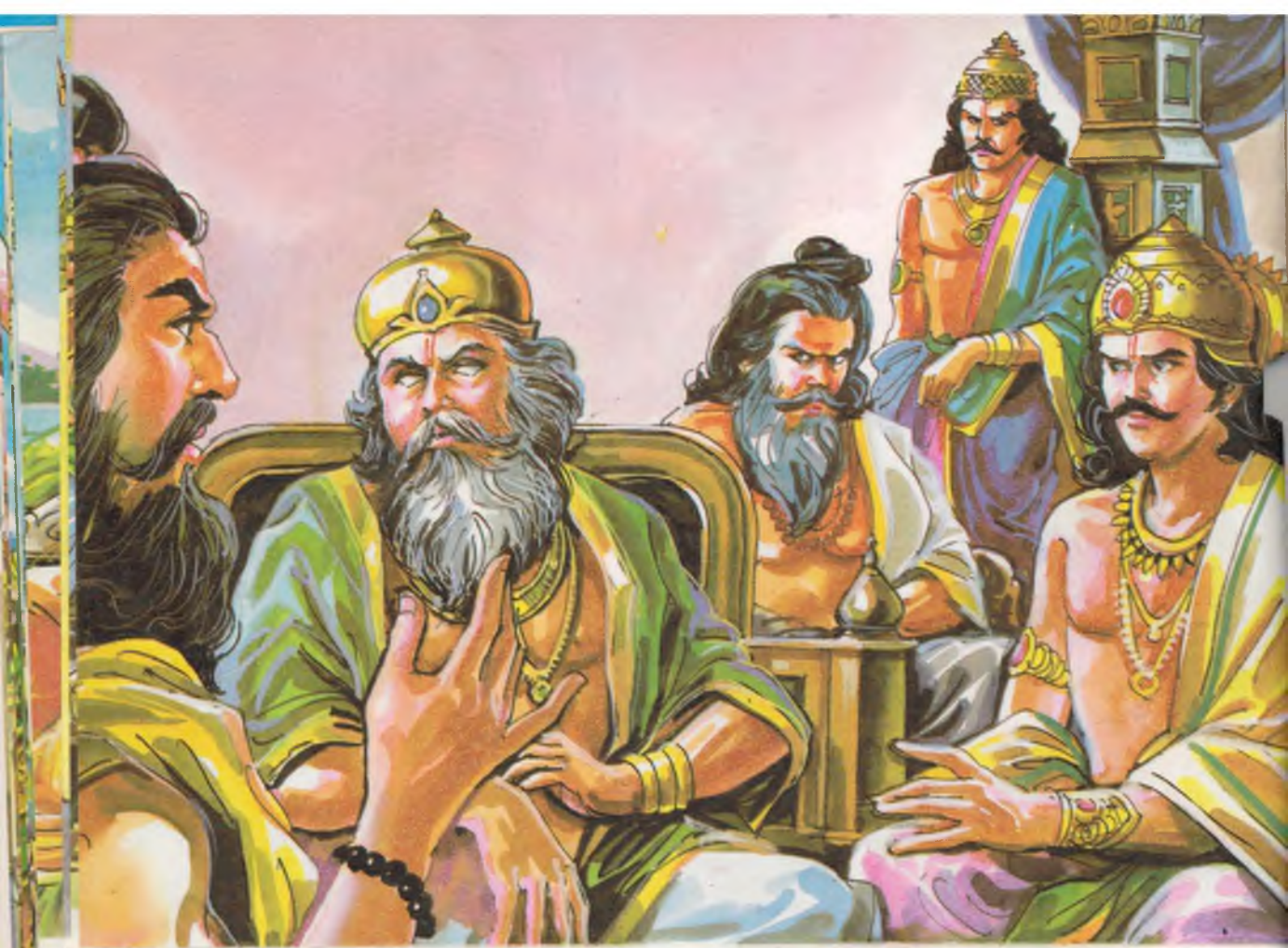
All the four brothers of Yudhishtir and Draupadi tried to dissuade Yudhishtir from renouncing the world and urged him to hold his coronation as king of Hastinapur. Saint Vyasa reached there in the nick of time and on his persuasion Yudhishtir got ready to be the king. So, his coronation was held with pomp and show. Before holding the reins of the government, Yudhishtir went to Bheeshma who was still lying on a bed of arrows waiting for the sun to enter the northern horizon.



Giving a long sermon to Yudhishtir, Bheeshma breathed his last and his last rites were performed with royal honour. As soon as the rites were over, Yudhishtir, once again, got plunged in sorrow on account of the past happenings. He fell down unconscious but Bheema held him in his arms. Dhritrashtra also consoled the new king asking him to fulfil his duty as a true Kshtriya.

After the last rites of Bheeshma, Krishna set out for Dwarika. On the way, he met a saint named Uttank who asked Krishna about the well-being of the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Krishna disclosed him about the war and the decimation of the Kauravas. The saint was extremely enraged and got ready to utter a curse on Krishna but Krishna appeared in his cosmic form. The saint became happy and asked for a boon from Krishna, "Whenever and wherever I need water, it should be available to me."

Krishna granted the boon and went his way. A few days later, the saint, while roaming in the forest, felt extremely thirsty. As soon as he thought of water, a *chandala* appeared with a mussuck of water on his shoulders. He was clothed in dirty rags and had a few hounds with him. When he offered water to the saint, he was red in anger. At this the Chandala disappeared to the amazement of the saint. Just then Krishna appeared before the saint and told him that the *chandala* was in fact, Lord Indra with water of immortality in the mussuck. The saint felt highly sorry at his mistake.



After their victory over the Kauravas, the Pandavas were the unquestioned masters of the Hastinapur kingdom. Not only this, they had performed the Ashwamedha Yajna. As far as Dhritrashtra was concerned, they held him and queen Gandhari in high esteem. Kunti looked after Gandhari with great devotion while Draupadi served both her mothers-in-law with humility.

All the Pandavas served the blind king with devotion but Bheema sometimes could not help directing taunts at him. The king felt deeply hurt but was helpless. As time rolled by, Dhritrashtra and Gandhari decided to renounce the world and step into *sansyas ashram*. So, one day he said to Yudhishtira, "My son! you have served us for fifteen long years. I and Gandhari have a desire to go into the forest and meditate hard there. Rule over the kingdom in peace. I wish you every comfort and success. I assure you that one-sixth of the reward of my meditation will come to you."

Then Dhritrashtra urged Vidur and Kripacharya to ask Yudhishtira to let them go. Just then Saint Vyasa also came there. He persuaded Yudhishtira to let the blind king and his queen go to the forest. So, Yudhishtira had to give his consent.



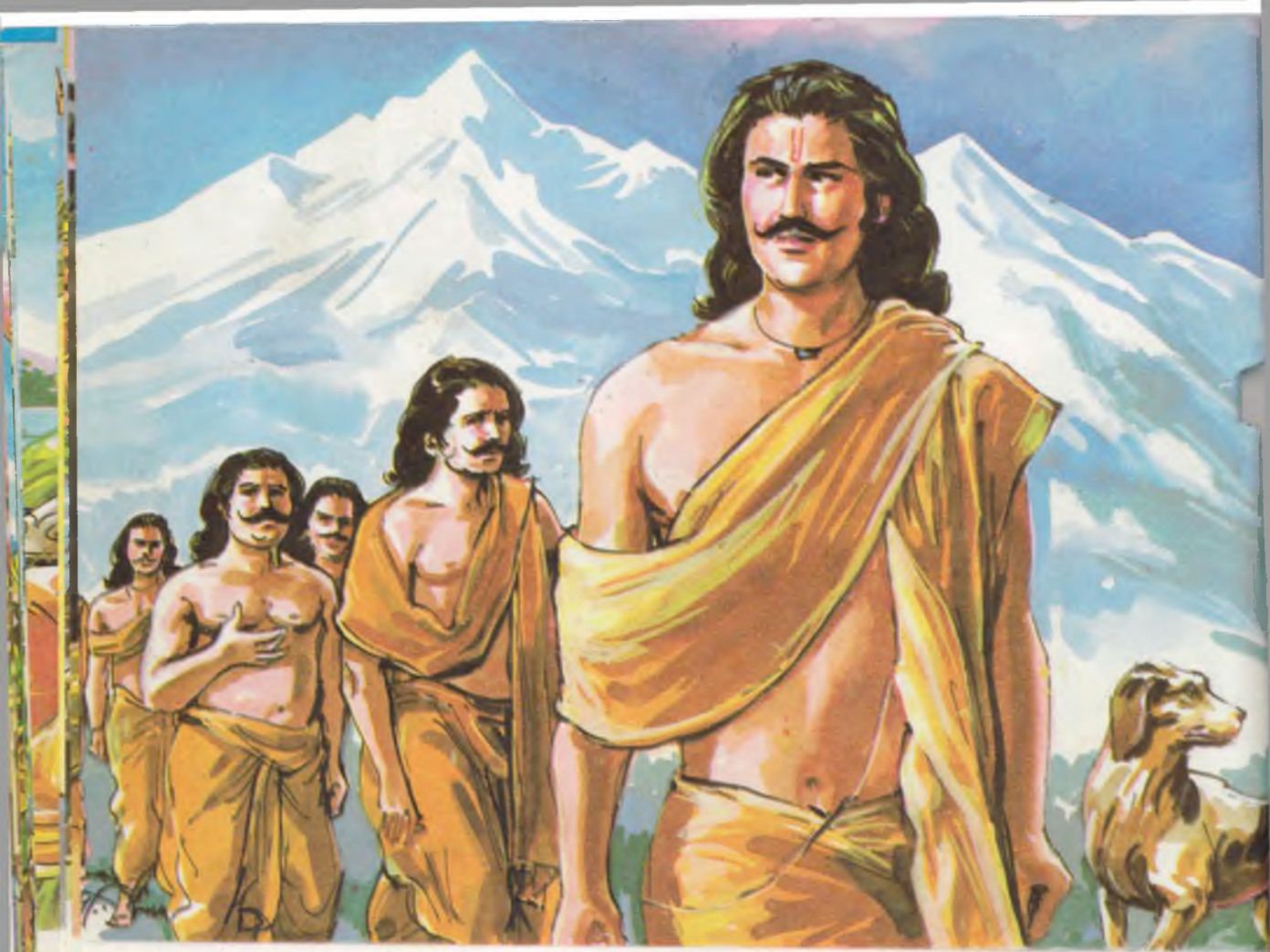
The old blind king and queen Gandhari got ready to go to the forest. Seeing this, Kunti could not control herself and insisted on going with them. Yudhishtir could not take courage to prevent his mother from accompanying the old couple. So, all the three old persons set out for the forest. On the eve of his departure, Kunti advised Yudhishtir, "My son! never forget your deceased brother Karna and never be angry with Nakul and Sahdev."

Yudhishtir asked Kunti why she had decided to accompany the old couple. She said, "I want to serve queen Gandhari and king Dhritrashtra. In due course, I desire to breathe my last and join my husband in heaven."

The three old persons lived in the forest for three years. One day a dreadful jungle fire broke out and they were burnt alive in it.

Lord Krishna ruled in Dwarika for thirty-six years. Once a group of saints happened to come to Dwarika. A prince Samb by name disguised himself as a pregnant lady, went to the saints and asked them whether the baby in womb was a male or a female. The saints got angry and uttered a curse, "You will bear a pestle that will lead to the destruction of the Yadava dynasty."

The Yadavas came to be destroyed due to internicine feuds. Balrama could not brook it and breathed his last. Krishna went to a forest and sat under a tree. Soon he fell fast asleep. A hunter shot an arrow at him and he was no more.



As soon as the news of the destruction of the Yadavas and of Krishna's demise reached Hastinapur, the Pandavas decided to renounce the world. So, they enthroned Parikshit, Abhimanyu's son, as the next king of Hastinapur and set out for visiting various places of pilgrimage along with Draupdi. Having visited a number of holy places, they came to the foot-hills of the Himalayas. A dog had also joined them somewhere on the way.

The Pandavas started ascending the Himalayan ranges now. Crossing several chains of mountains, they reached the Himadri, the highest range of the Himalayas. It remains snow-capped all the year round. And who does know that it is very difficult to walk on snow. In fact, leaving aside Yudhishtir, all the four Pandavas and Draupadi were finding themselves unable to advance on the snowy path.

Draupadi was the first to fall down dead because of intense cold. After that Sahdev fell down and breathed his last followed by Nakul. Having covered some more distance Arjuna and Bheema met with the same fate.

But the truthful and pious Yudhishtir remained unshaken and went on advancing further as before. It was astonishing indeed that the dog too was following him at his heels. The dog was, in fact, Dharamraja, the Death-god, himself. He was following Yudhishtir with a view to testing his steadfastness.

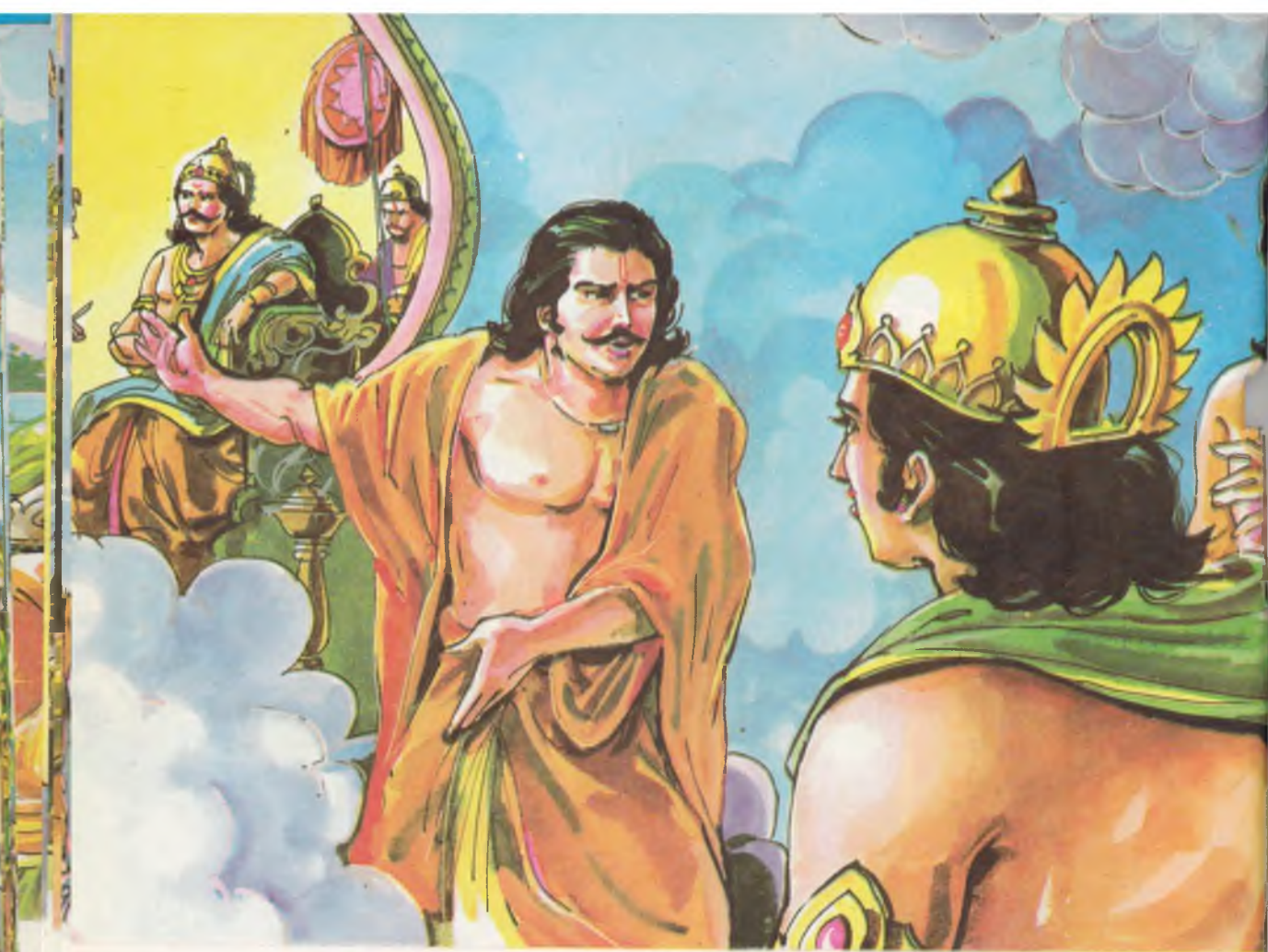


Suddenly Lord Indra appeared there in a divine chariot. Yudhishtir bowed low before the god who blessed him and said, "Yudhishtir! your brothers and Draupadi have reached their places in heaven after their deaths. As you are an embodiment of *dharm*a. I have come to take you to heaven in your worldly form. So, be seated in this divine chariot and accompany me to heaven".

Yudhishtir agreed to go with Lord Indra. As soon as he got ready to get into the chariot the dog also jumped up to mount the vehicle. But Lord Indra scared it away and said, "There is no place for a dog in heaven."

Hearing Indra's words, Yudhishtir said, "This dog is following me for several days. My brothers and wife could not stand the cold of the snowy path and died one by one. But this dog has not deserted me so far. So, I must take it with me. And if there is no place for it in heaven, I have no desire to go there." Saying these words, the pious Pandava turned to get down from the celestial chariot.

Lord Indra argued a lot to persuade Yudhishtir to proceed with him but all in vain. Seeing the eldest Pandava sticking to his point, the dog at once transformed itself into Dharam Dev, god of Death. He was highly pleased at Yudhishtir's steadfastness. Having blessed him in plenty, the god disappeared from there.



Having been blessed by the Death-god, Yudhishtir mounted the divine chariot of Lord Indra and reached the gates of heaven. As soon as he stepped in, he saw Duryodhana sitting on a high seat surrounded by angels.

Seeing this, Yudhishtir got agitated and said to the gods in anger, "I cannot stay for a minute even where this greedy vicious and short-sighted cousin of mine is present. He has inflicted immense cruelty and heaped insults on us at every step. We had to kill our near and dear ones because of him only. He humiliated our wife Draupadi in the open court. I do not want to see his face even. Let me know where my brothers and Draupadi are. I want to be with them." Saying so, Yudhishtir turned back to get out of heaven.

Hearing Yudhishtir's words, Saint Narad said to him, "Listen, O Pandava! you are in heaven where there is no place for ill-will. Duryodhana has won a place for him here because he lived up to the ideals of warriorship. You are thinking in a narrow way because you have come here in your wordly form. Shed your narrowness once for all."

Yudhishtir insisted on seeing his brothers, Draupadi and those kings who had staked their lives for him. So, a messenger of the gods offered to guide him to the place where all these persons were.



Yudhishtir followed the messenger of gods who took him onto a path covered with blood-soaked earth. It was strewn with bones, hair-tufts and cut-off limbs of the body. An extremely foul smell was rising from them and insects were rampant in the blood-soaked earth. Darkness was also prevailing fast and it was difficult to find a clean place to set foot on. Seeing all this, Yudhishtir felt hurt at heart and doubts engulfed his mind about his brothers and Draupadi.

The eldest Pandava said to the guide, "How long have we to traverse this dirty path yet? Where are my dear brothers and Draupadi?"

"Let us return if you don't want to go further," retorted the guide. Yudhishtir was finding it hard to stand the foul smell. So, he decided to turn back. Just at that time, pity-rousing cries were heard from all sides, "Do not turn back, O embodiment of Dharma. Have mercy on us and stay here for an hour at least. Your arrival has set in a fragrant air and we are feeling highly relieved. We are, indeed, enjoying ourselves in your presence. Don't leave this place for God's sake."

Yudhishtir was moved with pity to hear the entreaties and he said to his guide, "These creatures are in grave trouble. If my presence provides them relief, I will stay here."

Yudhishtir realized as if he could locate some of the crying creatures. So, he felt pinched and asked them, "Who are you all and how have you got to this place?"



Several answers followed Yudhisnthir's question. One of the voices said, "I am Bheemana," while the other said, "I am Karna." Then a heart-rending voice moaned, "I am Sahdeva," "I am Abhimanyu" and "We are Draupadi's sons."

These voices overwhelmed the eldest Pandava with grief. The unbearable agony enraged him immensely and he thundered, "What wrongs have these near-and-dear ones of mine done after all? Why are they undergoing this acute suffering in this hell? What good have the sons of Dhritrashtra done to deserve the luxuries of heaven," Saying so, Yudhisnthir began to condemn God's justice.

Then Yudhisnthir said to his guide, "Go back to those, who have sent you to guide me, and tell them that I will never leave this place. My dear brothers and my dear wife, Draupadi, are suffering in this hell. How can I go back to live in heaven. It is because of me only that they have been sent to hell. So, I must stay with them."

The guide moved off with Yudhisnthir's message while the Pandava stuck to his place. He stood there for full one hour, though with-deep worry in mind and pain at heart. He was at a loss to understand why his dear ones had been sentenced to suffering in hell.



Yudhishtir kept standing motionless in hell for full one hour. Then, all of a sudden, Lord Indra and the Death-god appeared on the scene. Their arrival did away with all darkness and also the entire heart-rending sight. There were no bewailings anywhere and the foul smell had given place to fragrance on all sides.

The Death-god said to Yudhishtir, "My son! we put you to severe tests at every step but you came out successful every time. I gave you the first test in the form of a dog while your second test was when you chose to stay on here at the request of creatures suffering in hell. Your toughest test was the third test when you were shown your near-and-dear ones suffering in hell. But you again stuck to your guns and decided to give up heaven to stay with them in hell. And when your guide informed us of this decision of yours, we could not but come here in person."

The Death-god continued to say, O King of intellectuals! express the doubts, if you have any in your mind. I am here to set them at rest."

Yudhishtir felt highly delighted to hear the words of the Death-god. Still he remarked, "Why was, put to these stiff tests, O Father? There must have been some purpose behind them."

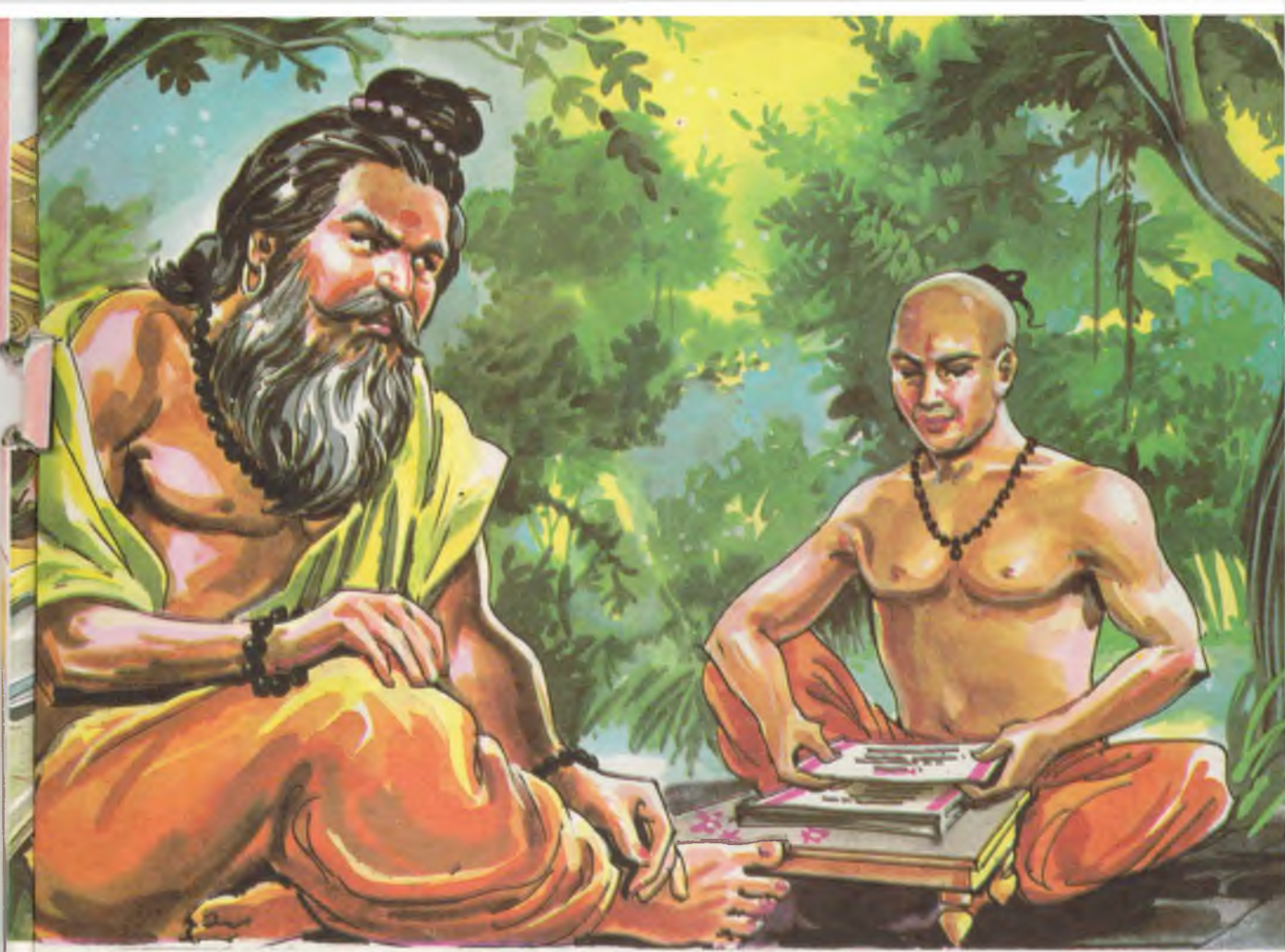


The Death-god explained, "You were an ideal king on the earth. It is highly desirable, rather essential, for God-fearing rulers that they should know the pangs of suffering in hell lest they should tread the path of evil. That was why I gave you the opportunity to experience this suffering.

The Death-god continued to say, "None of your near-and-dear ones—Draupadi, Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula, Sahdev, Karna, mother Kunti—are in hell. It was just an illusion created to test your love for *dharma*. In fact, we are standing in heaven itself. Just look there! Saint Narada is also here."

Yudhishtir felt extremely happy to hear and to see all this. So, he gave up his worldly body to assume a divine one. This transformation of the body did away with all the human weaknesses—enmity, jealousy, anger, worry etc.—for Yudhishtir.

Yudhishtir enjoyed perfect peace of mind to see his elder brother Karna, younger brothers, sons of Gandhari—everyone in a divine form. He too joined them and was served by angels just as they were.



Whenever virtue declines and vice become prevalent everywhere, God embodies Himself in the human form and comes to the earth to destroy the vice and the vicious and to establish the virtue once again. But it does not happen all at once.

We know that no justice can be done with a job if a plan is not carefully drawn up for it. So, God, too, has to chalk out a detailed plan before being born on the earth as a human-being so that the purpose of His incarnation may be fulfilled in the right way.

God seeks help from gods and angels to carry out the chalked-out programme. They are born as different persons and other creatures and play their roles strictly according to the set plan after God's embodiment on the earth. But all this goes on so naturally and smoothly that nothing sounds dramatic about it.

Mahabharata is a unique epic written by Saint Vyasa. After its completion, he got it read out to him by his son Shukdeva. He summed up its gist as under—

“Only *Dharma* is the highest thing in the world. It leads not only to salvation, but brings in prosperity and success also.



So, we should never give up the path of dharma—neither of our own accord nor out of fear or greed and nor for saving our life either. Dharma is immortal while pain and pleasure are mortal just as the soul is everlasting while the body is perishable."

This gist of the Mahabharata has been given the name—**Bharat Savitri**. A person who recites this gist after taking a bath in the morning is entitled to the reward that follows the recitation of the entire epic.

This epic is a store-house of various diamonds—ideals that it upholds. That is why the Mahabharata has been styled as the Fifth Veda. He or she who reads it out to others is blessed with prosperity while the hearer deserves the reward which follows the pilgrimage to various holy places along with that which is there as a result of giving one hundred cows in charity.

ISBN 81-7301-051-X

