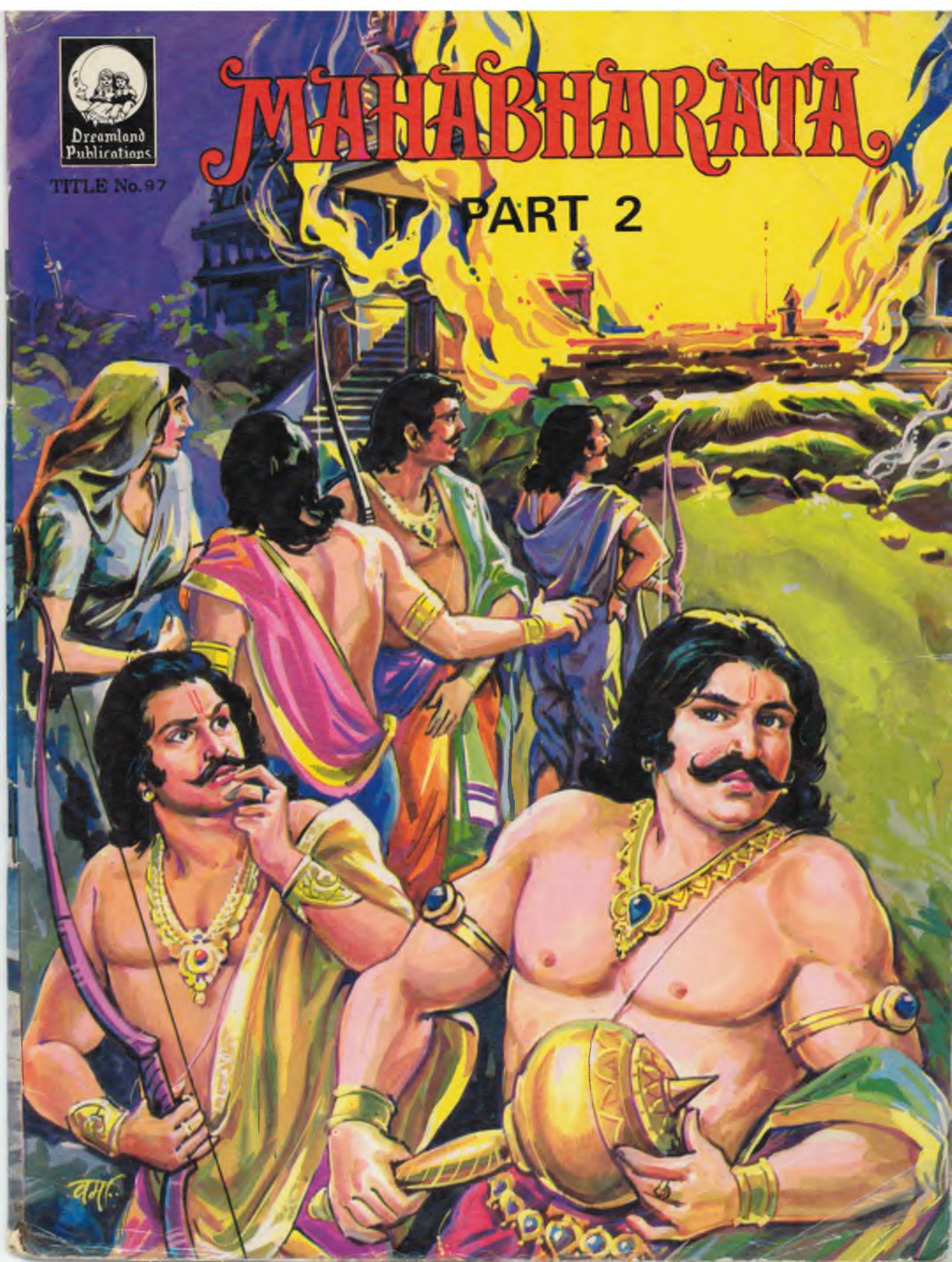




TITLE No. 97

MAHABHARATA

PART 2



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MAHABHARATA

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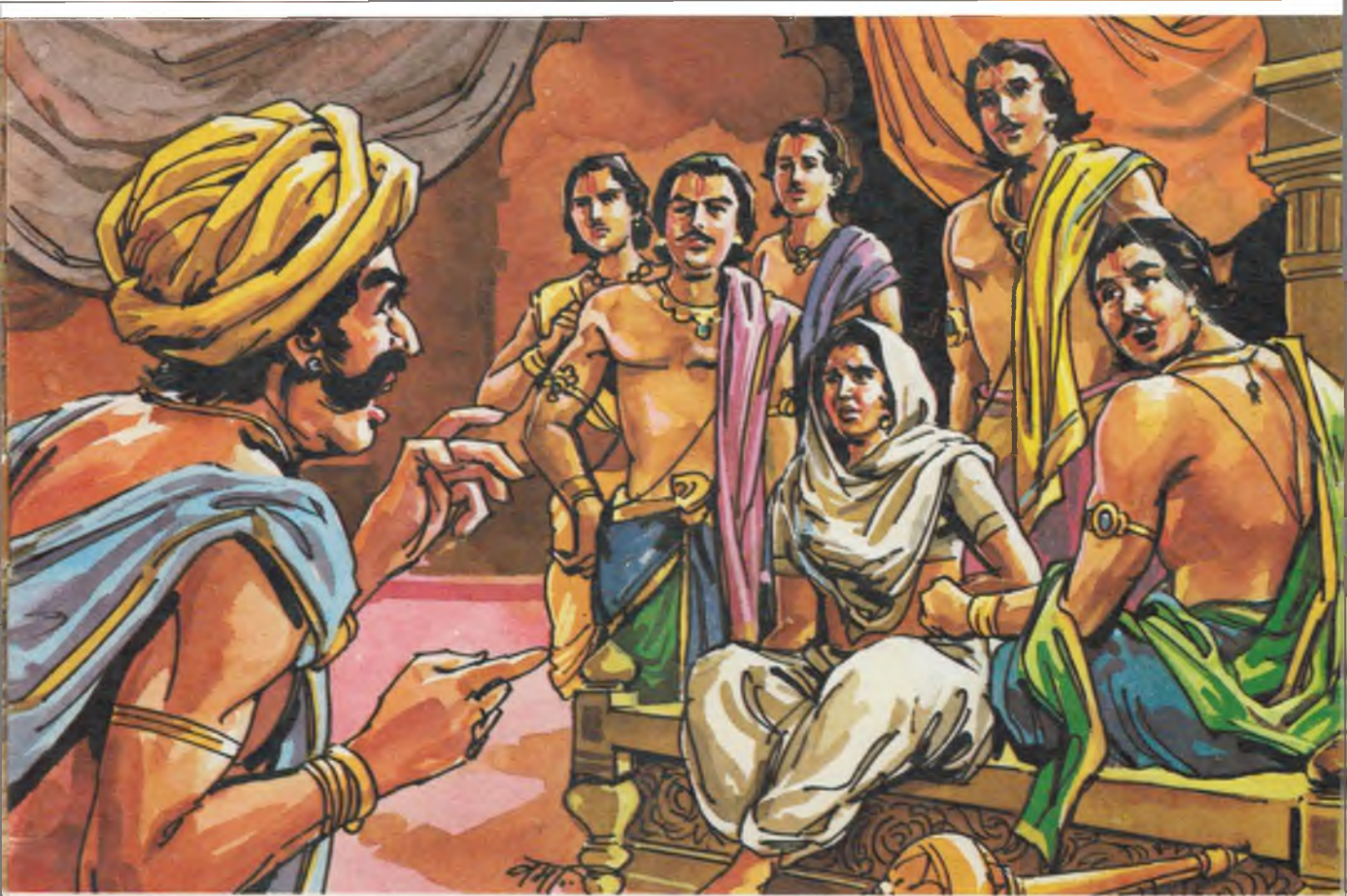


The Pandavas had proved their excellence and superiority to the Kauravas in the display of various martial skills. Bhishma was very pleased with them on this account. Besides, their innate noble qualities were a source of wide popularity not only with the elders of the family but among the common people as well.

Dhritrashtra, advised by Bhishma, proclaimed Yudhishtir to be the crown-prince of Hastinapur. He was the eldest of all the princes. God had endowed him with fine qualities of tolerance, benevolence, beneficence, perseverance, truthfulness and selflessness.

How could Duryodhana brook it? Burning with jealousy, he began to chalk out plans to do away with the Pandavas and safeguard the throne for himself. All his earlier intrigues had miserably failed but he was not ready to give up his efforts. So, one day he went up to his father and said, "Dad ! I request you to send the Pandavas along with aunt Kunti to witness the annual fair to be held at Varnavat."

Dhritrashtra could not smell any intrigue in it and gladly allowed the Pandavas to go to the fair. In fact, Duryodhana wanted to consolidate his position at Hastinapur in the absence of the Pandavas so that he might build up sufficient support for himself as a rival claimant to the throne.



Vidur, the prime minister, had got wind of Duryodhana's evil design and so he alerted the Pandavas well in time. Yudhishthir, seeking permission of Dhritrashtra, left for Varnavat along with his brothers and mother Kunti. Reaching there, they were made to stay in a new-built palace.

As for Duryodhana, he had made a secret plan to liquidate the Pandavas along with their mother. He had sought help of one of the ministers named Purochan.

The palace at Varnavat had been built under strict supervision of the afore-said minister. Its walls were made of lac, a highly inflammable substance while its roofs were thatched. So, it could catch fire at the slightest contact with a single spark of fire.

Duryodhana wanted to set the palace ablaze when the Pandavas were asleep in it at night.

Vidur had wisely taken into confidence an engineer involved in the construction of the palace. He had got dug a secret tunnel that led from the palace to an opening on the river-side. Not only this, Vidur had sent instructions to the Pandavas to escape through the tunnel whenever they realised any danger to their lives.



The engineer had managed the task of digging the tunnel so tactfully that Purochen, the minister who was an ally of Duryodhana, could not know about the underground escape-way at all. He was fully confident of the success of Duryodhana's evil plan. Duryodhana was equally sure that the Pandavas would not be able to remain alive and reach back Hastinapur.

The fair went on and the Pandavas used to attend it by day. At nightfall, they would return to the palace and pass the night there. Nobody knew that they slept in the tunnel itself and not inside the palace. Yudhishtir was keeping a very strict eye on Purochan's movements that were very dubious.

On the last day of the fair, the Pandavas performed a yajna and Kunti gave away alms to the poor after feeding the Brahmanas and the saints.

Unluckily a jungle-woman about the age of Kunti had attended the feeding ceremony along with her five grown-up sons at the end of the yajna. Her village, being a long way off, she had managed to stay in the lac palace with the connivance of the palace-guard that very night. It was a moonless dark night.

Purochan, the minister, was sleeping in the outer room of the palace. With a view to having an upper hand, Bheema got up at midnight and set fire to the palace at different places. Then he escaped through the tunnel along with his brothers and mother Kunti. In no time, the palace was engulfed in horrible flames and reduced to ashes.



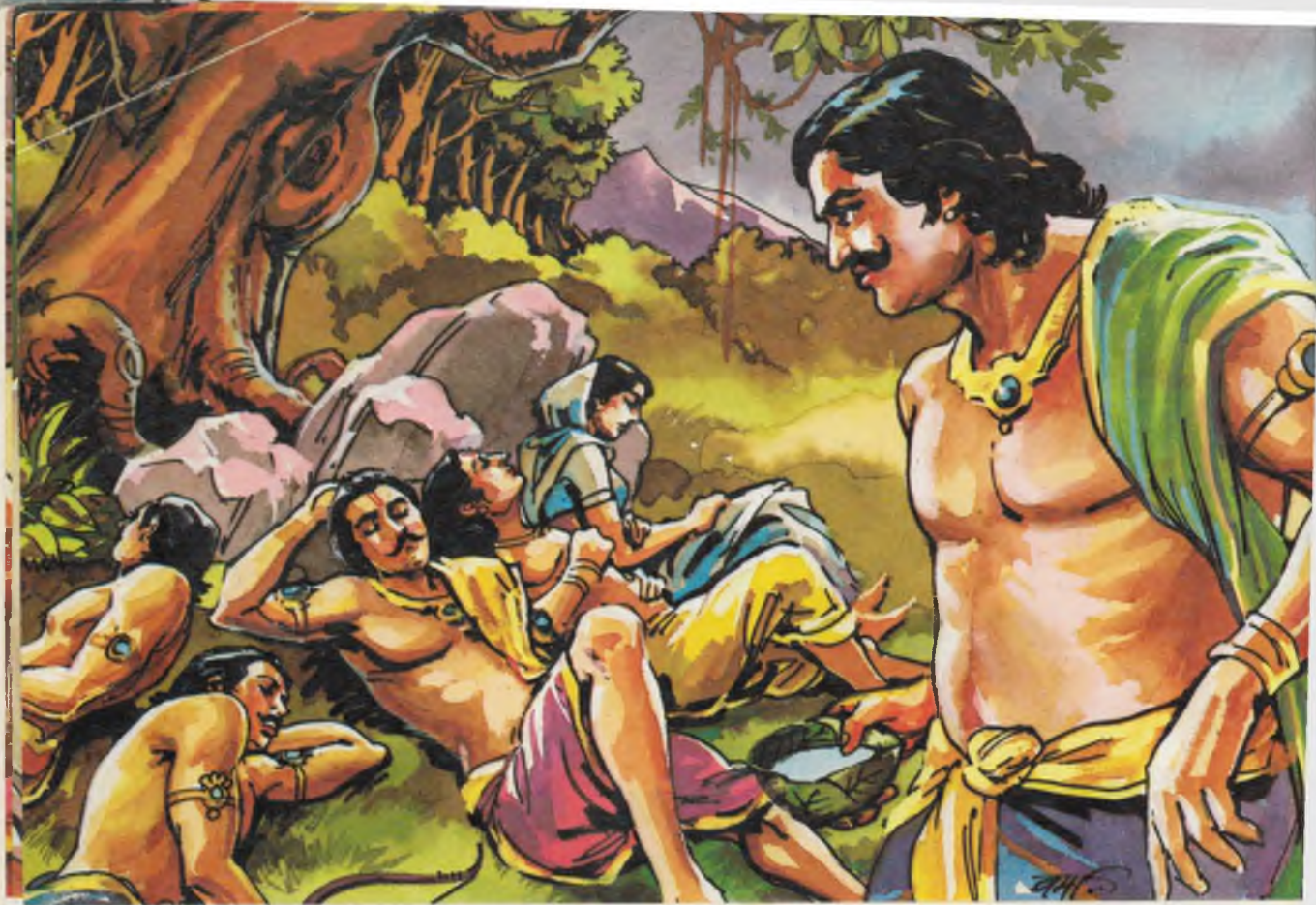
The news of the catastrophe reached Hastinapur and Duryodhana ran to Varnavat showing deep concern at the accident, though only apparently. Reaching there he found the bodies of Purochan and the jungle woman with her five sons completely charred. Some other unfortunate persons had also fell victims to the horrible fire. The Pandavas had got out of the tunnel quite safe and sound.

Though Dhritrashtra and Duryodhana were pretending to be very sorrowful outwardly, they were extremely delighted in their heart of hearts. They had become sure that the path to the Kaurava throne was now clear for Duryodhana.

As for Bhishma and other like-minded royal dignitaries, they were really very shocked at the sad happening. Their sorrow was indescribable indeed.

As for the Pandavas, they had come out of the tunnel which opened near the bank of the Ganga. Vidur had already arranged for a boat for them. So, when they came to the river bank, they found a boatman waiting for them and ready to ferry them across the river.

So, they boarded the boat and off it went with them towards the opposite bank of the Ganga.



Reaching the southern bank of Ganga, the five Pandavas, along with their mother, marched on and on. They crossed several hurdles and at last reached the thick of the forest. Hungry and thirsty, they decided to rest under a banyan tree that stood close by. Kunti, being advanced in age, was feeling heavily tired as well. So, they all sat down in the thick shade of the tree.

Having been weary after the long journey they had covered, all of them lay down and fell fast asleep except Bheema.

Bheema was fully aware that his brothers and mother were hungry as well as thirsty. So, he set out in search of a pool wherefrom he could bring water for them. Hardly had he covered a short distance, when he heard the twitter of birds in a grove of trees. He advanced towards it and soon found himself at the side of a pool of clear water.

Bheema quenched his thirst and then, making a big jug out of lotus leaves, he filled it with water. He returned to the banyan tree where the members of his family were lost in deep slumber. Bheema did not think it desirable to wake them up lest they should feel disturbed. So, he stood aside keeping watch over them after placing the jug full of water on the ground and covering it duly with a broad leaf.

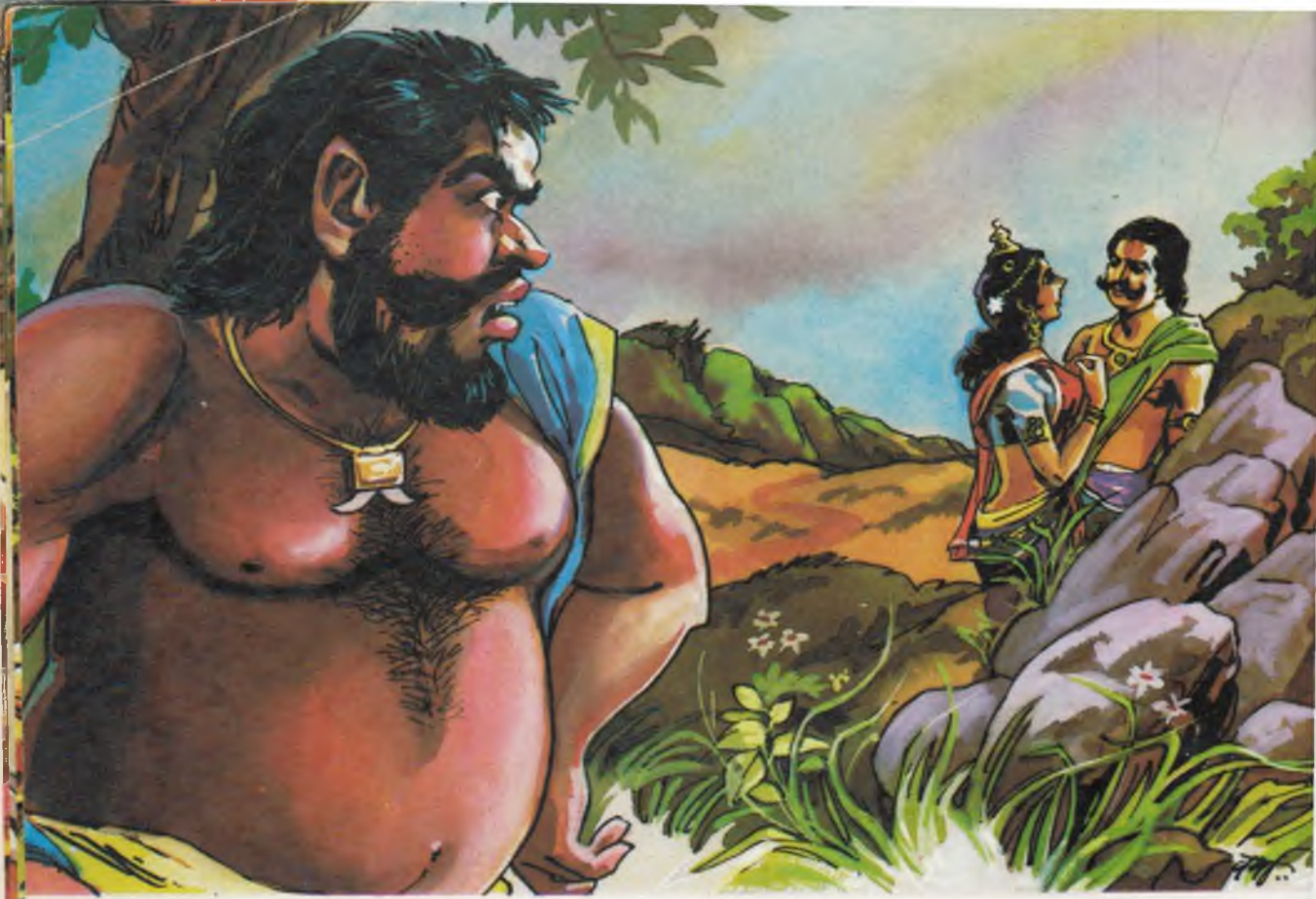


The forest wherein the Pandavas were sleeping was the hunting preserve of a fearful demon named Hidimb. He lived on a tall tree along with his sister Hidimba. While roaming in search of a victim, Hidimb sensed the presence of human-beings just near by. He asked his sister to go, look for the human-beings and inform him back about them. Following the human smell, Hidimba reached the banyan tree and saw the sleeping Pandavas with Bheema on guard.

As soon as she saw the muscular body of Bheema, she took fancy to him. An ardent desire to marry Bheema overwhelmed her and she decided not to go back to her brother.

So, with a view to attracting Bheema's attention, she transformed herself into a maiden of exceptional charm. Not only this, she adorned her body with valuable jewellery and walked upto Bheema gracefully.

Addressing the hefty Pandava, she said, "Who are you, dear? What a muscular body and handsome looks you have got! Are all these sleeping persons with you? I am really bewitched and want to be your wife. This forest is a hunting preserve of my brother Hidimb by name. He is a cannibal and if he comes here, he will devour all of you. So, wake them up and escape to safety before he comes. I will use my witch-craft for this purpose."



Bheema retorted, "Don't worry, I will deal with your brother if he happens to come here. I will see how cruel and powerful he is. But I am not going to disturb the sleep of my brothers and my revered mother in any case." Unluckily Hidimb appeared on the scene just at that moment.

Seeing his sister talking to Bheema lovingly, he was beside himself with rage and his eyes began to emit fire.

Not only this, seeing her sister transformed into a charming maiden indulging in amorous conversation with burly Bheema, his fury transgressed all limits and he thundered, "Wait, you mean bitch! You are up to bring disgrace to the entire race of demons. You have fallen so low as to revel with a mere human-being. Can't you find a demon to satisfy your lust? I will kill you right now and here along with your paramour."

Then Hidimb advanced to grab his sister clenching his fist and grinning his teeth in rage.

When he was going to lay hands on Hidimba, Bheema intervened, held him by the wrist and shouted, "Hold yourself, you rascal! You can't lay hands on a woman in my presence. Come on; face me if you dare. Don't you know, only cowards choose to attack women? Get away from here or I shall knock you down so that you may never rise again."



How could the fearful demon—Hindimb—brook such insulting words and that even from a mere human-being? So, he sprang at Bheema and gave a staggering blow on the back of his neck. Bheema was not to be frightened at all. So, a fearful duel followed seeing which even the animals of the forest ran pell-mell in panic. Also, the commotion caused Kunti and her four sons to wake up.

Seeing Bheema pitched against a dreadful demon, his brothers rushed for his help. But to their surprise he had already got over the demon and raised him well above his head.

In no time, Bheema whirled Hidimb around and hurled him down violently. The huge demon fell down with a heavy thud and was no more. All the on-lookers including Hidimba, were very delighted to see him dead.

Arjuna, then, suggested to Yudhishtir that they should move further and reach some town lest they should be overtaken by Duryodhana's men. Everybody supported the suggestion and they decided to leave the place.

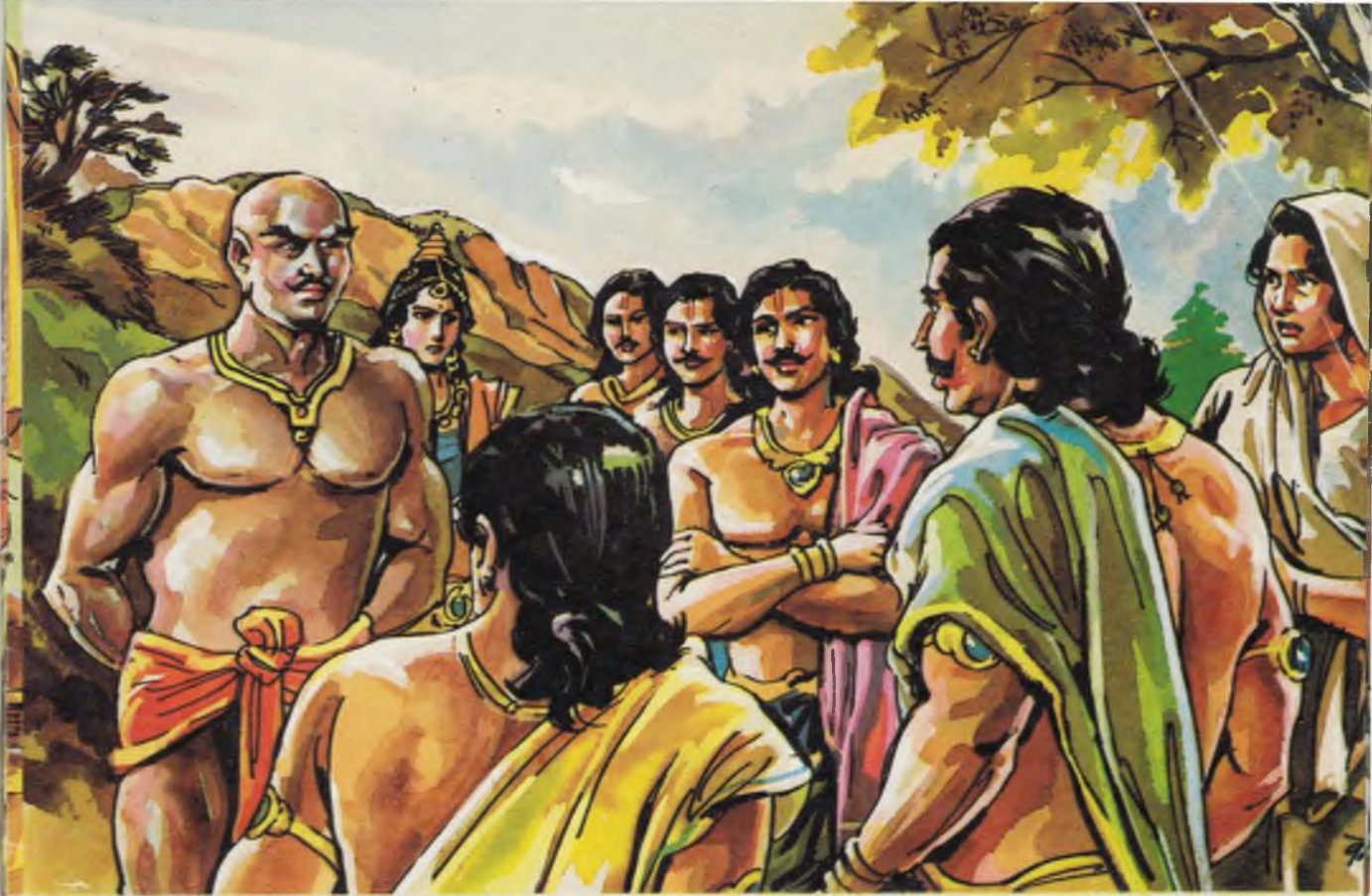
So, after quenching their thirst, the party moved on with Hidimba following at their heels as well.



The party had covered only a short distance when Kunti chanced to look behind. She was dumb-founded to see a fairy-like damsel following them. She stopped short and addressed the maiden, "Fair Girl!" who are you and why are you following us? Your appearance speaks very high of you. You can be either a fairy or a divine deity. Isn't it? Come on; say something about yourself and your purpose to follow us."

Touching Kunti's feet, the maiden remarked, "Mother! I am Hidimba, the demoness, and a sister to the huge demon whom your valiant son has put to death." Then Hidimba disclosed everything and admitted that she was in love with Bheema and wanted to be his bride. She implored Kunti for her permission to allow her to carry out her desire. Kunti was so charmed by Hidimba's loveliness that she could not afford to refuse her the company of Bheema.

Kunti went up to Hidimba and showered benedictions on her hugging her closely and patting her on the back. Then she lovingly remarked, "With great delight, you can live with Bheema and carry him with you wherever you like. Who am I to come between you when you love each other so dearly? But daughter! one thing is there. You must leave him free at nightfall so that he comes to us because we need him most for our own safety especially at night."



Then Kunti turned to Bheema and asked him if he was ready to give company to Hidimba. Bheema hung his head bashfully though a light smile appeared on his lips. Kunti, his mother, and his brothers lost no time to follow that Bheema was impatient to enjoy the company of Hidimba. Kunti blessed him and urged him to go with Hidimba to have a ripping time in her company.

Bheema kept revelling in the company of Hidimba every day but as soon as darkness prevailed after sunset, he used to come back to his family. Days passed followed by weeks and months and things went on quite smoothly for them.

In due course, Hidimba gave birth to a male child who was just a true copy of his father, Bheema. He was named Ghatotkach. He grew up to be a mighty warrior gifted with magical powers and immense physical strength. All the Pandavas were very happy to see him doing wonderful things.

At last the day approached when the Pandvas decided to leave the forest and move to some new place. Hidimba felt sad to lose the company of Bheema but Kunti was not ready to take her with them. So, on the eve of their departure, Ghatotkach said to Bheema, "Dad! I shall stay with my mother as the grandma wants me to do so. But never forget us. If at any time you are in trouble, just remember me and I will reach wherever you are."



The Pandavas accompanied by their mother went on and on through the forest facing all types of hardships smilingly. One day they came across Saint Vyasa on the way. Though the five brothers did not know who he was, yet they saluted him most humbly and respectfully. The saint uttered blessings on each of them.

Gazing fixedly at the saint's face, Kunti recognised him. She had seen him when he came to the palace to take queen Satyawati with him to his hermitage.

Feeling sure that he was none else but Saint Vyasa, Kunti burst into tears.

The saint consoled her saying, "Keep patience, daughter! *Every dark cloud has a silver lining.* Weal and woe go together. Stick to the path of righteousness keeping patience in adversity. Prosperity is bound to follow.

On the advice of Saint Vyasa, Kunti and her sons went to a nearby town named Ekchakra and started living in disguise there in the house of a Brahmana. They used to go begging alms in the town by day.

In due course of time, they became popular among the people of the town because of their virtuous habits.



During their stay with the Brahamana family at Ekchakra, the five Pandava brothers started living as Brahamanas. Every morning they would go begging alms. Whatever they brought, they would place before their mother.

Kunti would divide it into two equal parts. One half was given to Bheema alone while the other half was shared by the mother with her other four sons.

One day a very strange situation arose. Four Pandavas went on their daily begging-round leaving Bheema to take care of Kunti who was unwell. All of a sudden, Kunti heard wails coming out of the Brahamana's house.

Kunti said to Bheema, "My son! something very serious seems to have befallen the Brahamana family. They gave us shelter when we were homeless. Isn't it our duty to stand by them in this time of adversity?"

"You are right, mother," replied Bheema. So, Kunti went inside and saw that the entire family was in tears. The Brahamana, his wife, his son and his daughter were all sitting in a very frightened state. Each of them was sobbing with his or her head hung down in awe-mixed sorrow.

As soon as Kunti stepped in, everyone started looking at her.



Kunti took courage and said to the Brahmana, "Brother! what is the matter? Why do you all look so sorrowful? Let me know, we are obliged to you in many ways. By all means, it is our duty to share your adversity. Let me know without any hesitation how we can help you."

The Brahman was very delighted to hear the consoling words of the Mother of the Pandavas .

"Thank you, sister, for your true sympathy. But the calamity that we are going to face cannot be shared by anyone else. Every family in this town has to face it when its turn comes" remarked the Brahman.

"Even then, I would like to know about it. Consider us to be the members of your family and disclose the reality," insisted Kunti.

The Brahmana said, "Sister! a man-eating demon, named Bakasur, lives on a hill near this town. In order that he should not play havoc in any way in the town and that he should protect the town from ferocious wild beasts, the elders of the town have undertaken to send a human-being along with two buffaloes daily as his food. Every family has to send one of its members when its turn comes."



"Today it seems to be the turn of your family, I think," interrupted Kunti anticipating what the Brahman was going to say further.

"Exactly; it is my turn to arrange for the demon's food today. Each member of my family was insisting on going. But finally we have decided that all of us should go to be devoured by the demon."

Kunti was dumbfounded to hear about the demon for a moment. But then she remarked, "None of you will go to the demon. I have five sons and one of them will go to him."

"No, no; not at all. You are our guests and guests, they say, are no less than gods. How can I push any of your sons into the jaws of death in order to save my family?" argued the Brahman.

"Don't worry at all, brother. My son, Bheema, is strong enough to deal with the demon. He will save not only your family from him but the entire town also for ever," assured Kunti.

The Brahman and the members of his family felt convinced and so they agreed to what Kunti had said.

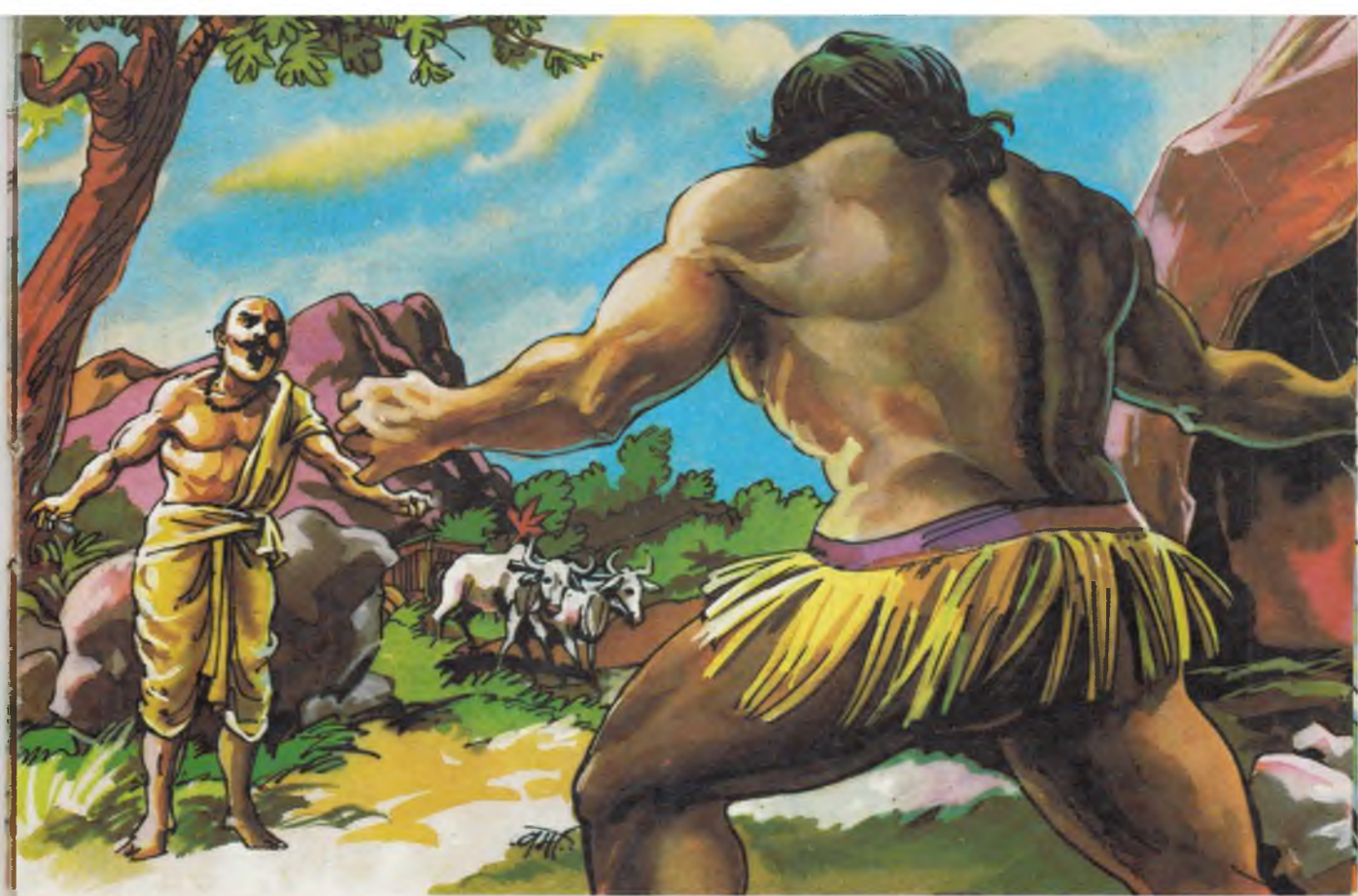


When Yudhishtir and his three brothers returned home with the alms and placed them before Kunti, she told them the entire story.

Yudhishtir felt worried for his brother, Bheema, and said to his mother, "Why have you promised to send Bheema to face such a grave danger?"

"Am I hearing my son who is the gift of Dharamraj himself to me? Don't we owe anything to the Brahamana family? Would you like to have the Brahamana family eliminated by the cruel demon? Isn't it our duty to protect the Brahamanas, Kshatriyas as we are?" retorted Kunti. She further added, "I know Bheema and his indomitable might. Lately, he did away with Hidimb. Who can deny that Duryodhana was forced to pass his nights sleeplessly out of Bheema's fear. Have you forgotten that he, in his infancy, slipped out of my hands when we all were sitting on a hillock? Hadn't the big rock on which he fell broken to pieces causing no harm to him."

Yudhishtir realised his mistake and begged his mother's pardon saying, "Yes, mother! it is right time for us to repay the debt of this family—nay, of the entire town where we have passed our days of adversity. But ask the Brahamana not to disclose our identity to anyone in the town."

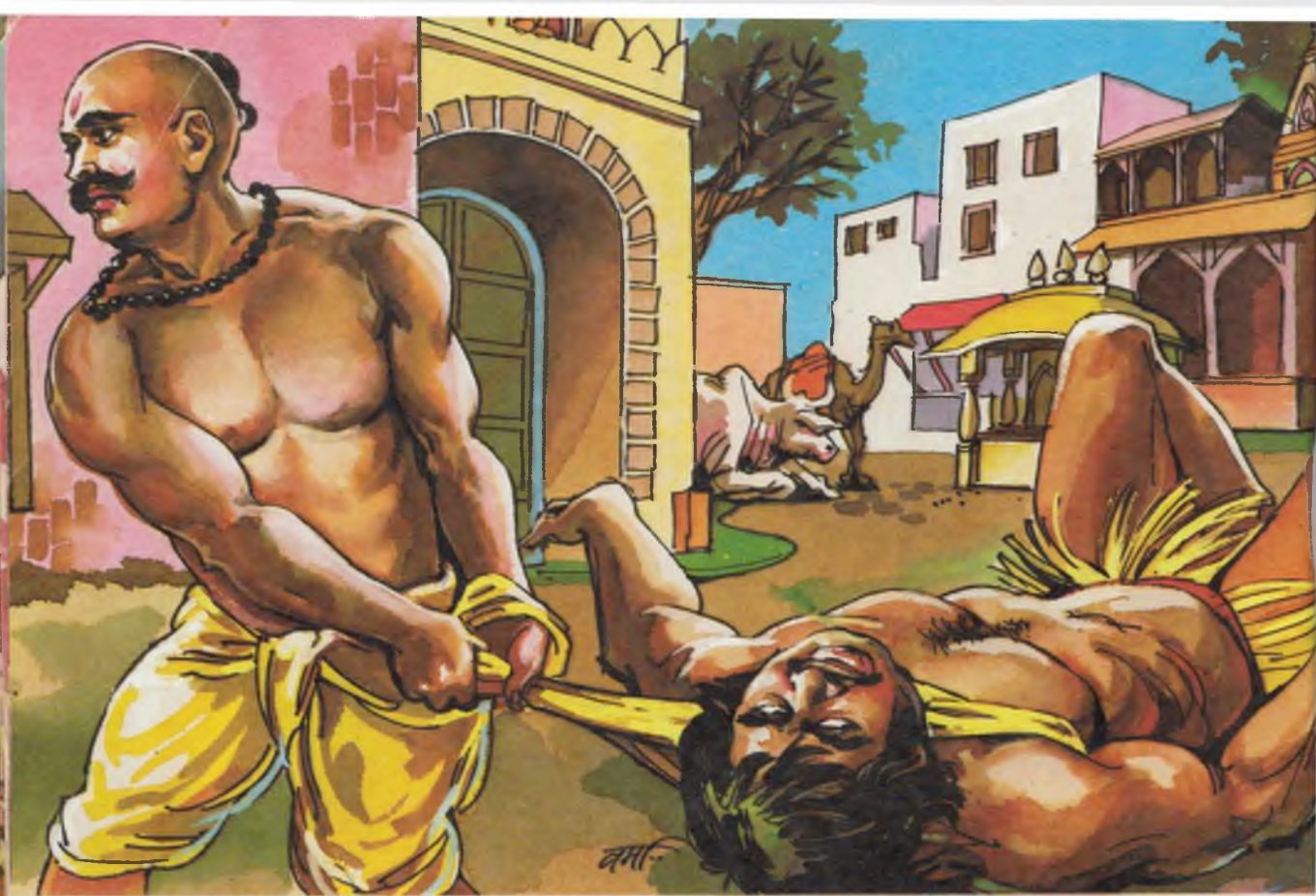


Next morning Bheema set out towards the demon's dwelling with a cart loaded with food-stuffs. Reaching in front of the hill where the demon lived, Bheema unloosed the bullocks and started helping himself with the food which was meant for the demon. When he had had his fill, he could not help grunting aloud and challenging the demon.

Bakasur was an awfully ferocious demon with a wide mouth, big teeth and fiery eyes. He was waiting for his daily food as usual. When he heard a human voice, he came out of his dwelling and was non-plussed to see his victim eating his food and roaring aloud and challenging him to get out. So, his fury knew no bounds and giving out a loud roar, he thundered, "You scoundrel! how dare you touch my food and challenge me like that? It seems you have got fed up with your life." Saying so, Bakasur advanced towards Bheema.

Bheema pretended as if he had heard nothing and went on with his roars. The demon, unable to hold his anger, attacked Bheema. He was surprised to find the mighty Pandava not even shaken at all.

In order to tease the demon even more, Bheema advanced towards the food once again much to the chagrin of his opponent who could do nothing but grin his teeth in helplessness.

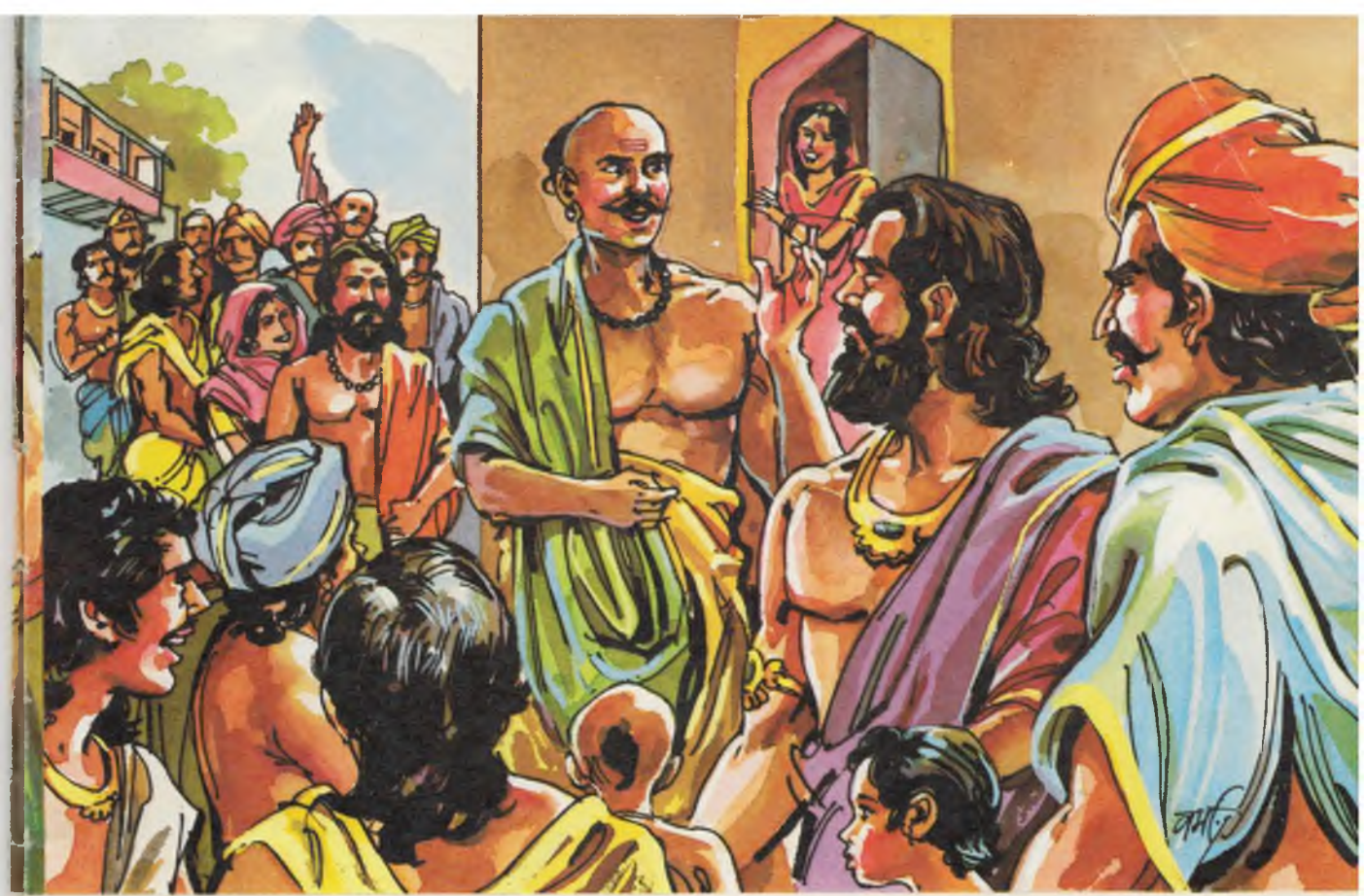


Now it was Bheema's turn. Remembering his mother, who had blessed him to be victorious over the cruel demon, Bheema sprang at his opponent in full force. So great was his charge that the demon could not stand it and fell down on the ground with a heavy thud. But Bheema was not going to give him any chance to rise and face him again. He stamped his right foot on the demon's chest so heavily that Bakasur gave out a loud yell and became silent for ever.

Bheema put a cloth round the neck of the dead demon and dragged his body to the gate of the town. Leaving it there to be viewed by the people of the town, he slunk home silently.

Soon the people of the town came to know of the demon's death and assembled to see his dead body lying at the outer gate of the town. Not only this, the news spread like wild fire in the entire neighbouring area and people began to dance in joy.

The entire area had been rid of the fearful demon and all the people could expect to live in peace now. But everybody was ashtonished to think how after all it had come about. Who had killed the demon and dragged his body to the gate was indeed a puzzle for them. Though the Brahmana knew everything, yet he was not ready to open his lips in this regard.



The people of the town, highly ashtonished as they were at the mysterious death of the demon, smelt a rat in the matter. They insisted that the Brahamana must be knowing about the secret of the demon's death.

The Brahamana tried his level best to put the people off with excuses so that he didn't have to disclose the reality, but all to no purpose. The people forced him to come up with the actuality.

Finding no alternative, the Brahamana said, "Listen all of you! I tell you the reality. When I and other members of my family were weeping over our misfortune, an elderly Brahamana came and knocked at my door. When brought in, he insisted on knowing the cause of our sorrow. Naturally, I explained everything to him. Hearing about the demon, the Brahamana said, "Don't worry at all; I will go with the food for the demon and deal with him through my miracles . " I agreed and he carried the cart loaded with food to the demon's dwelling. So, I am sure it is that very Brahamana who has done away with the demon as an act of common good."

The people felt satisfied and expressed their gratitude to the Brahamana who had relieved them of an everlasting calamity.



Drupad, the king of Panchal, was without a child so far. So, he performed a yajna to this effect on the advice of a saint. The king was burning with a fire of revenge against Dronacharya who had made him a captive with the help of the Pandavas. He had been cherishing a desire that the son born to him as a result of the *Putreshti yajna* should avenge his insult.

At the completion of the yajna a divine being emerged out of the sacred fire. He was glowing like a flame and his looks spoke of his valour and great warriorship. At the same time, a divine voice spoke from the heavens, "This divine being is your son. Name him Dhrishtadyumna. He has been sent to do away with you feeling of remorse and avenge your insult done by Dronacharya."

All those present at the yajna were very pleased to hear the divine voice. They were sure that Drupad's divine son would increase the glory of the kingdom of Panchal.

Just then, a beautiful but dark-skinned maiden also emerged out of the sacred fire. She had captivating looks and lovely long hair that gave out sweet fragrance.

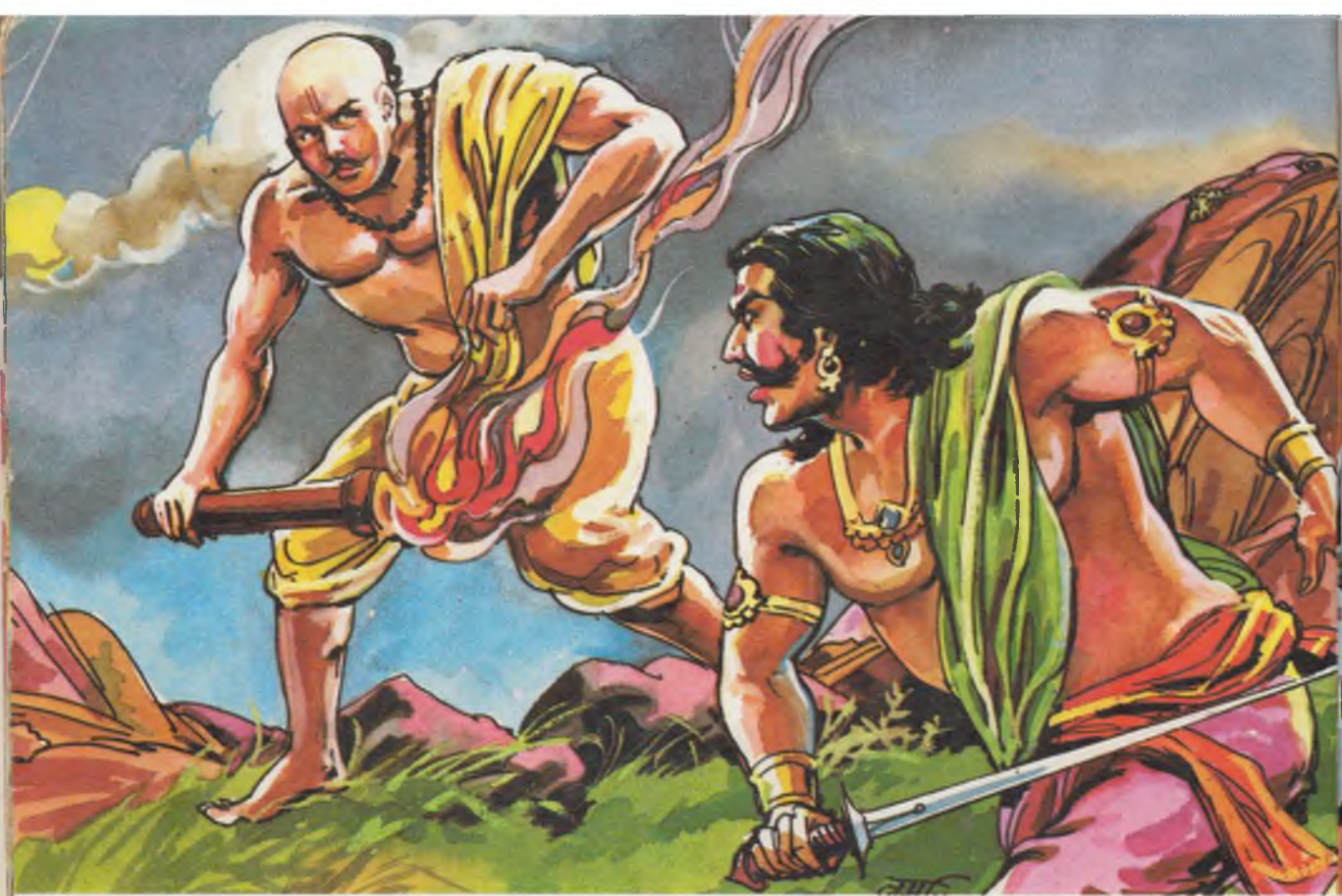
King Drupad felt highly proud of being gifted with two divine children—a son and a daughter, whom he named Krishna though later on, she came to be popularly known as Draupadi.



The Pandavas had been staying at Ekchakra for long. So, Kunti thought of moving to a new place lest Druyodhana should come to know of them because of Bakasur's murder by Bheema. She said to her sons, "We must go to a new place now. It is dangerous to stay here any longer." All the five brothers agreed to what their mother had said. So, they left for Panchal after taking leave of the Brahmana in whose house they had been staying.

By nightfall, the Pandavas had reached the bank of the Ganga. Arjuna had a torch-light in his hands. He was leading the party in darkness. Suddenly they saw a chariot advancing towards them. The warrior in the chariot shouted, "Stop all of you where you are; don't you know that this is time for the *yakshas*, *gandharvas* and other heavenly-beings to bathe in the river? Turn your backs and be off otherwise you will be killed instantly."

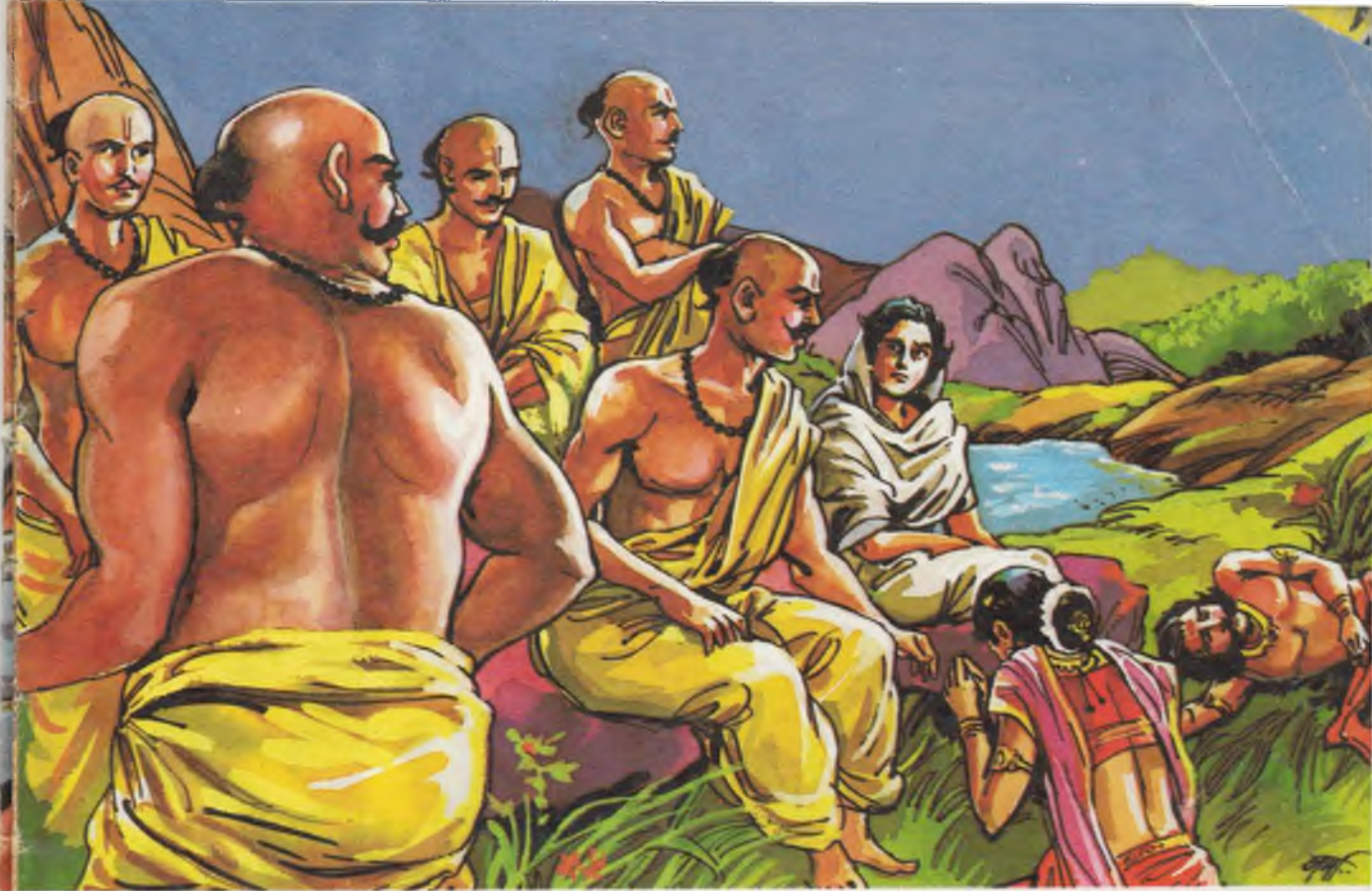
The Pandavas were stunned to hear the words. But they didn't know who the speaker was. It was Angaarparva, chief of *gandharvas*, revelling in the river in the company of his wives. Having seen the party approaching the river, he had mounted his chariot and challenged the Pandavas. Arjuna could not remain silent and retorted, "O Heavenly Being! Ganga is the most sacred river. It is not **the** ancestral property of anybody. Anyone can come to Mother Ganga at any time."



The Gandharva Chief flew into a rage and thundered. "You stupid human-being! perhaps you don't know that I am Angaarparva, chief of gandharvas. My valour and physical might is well known. The forest in the vicinity of this river belongs to me only. Much less men, even gods and other heavenly-beings cannot dare to set foot in my territory. I warn you once again to stop short and turn back otherwise you will have to repent of your folly."

Arjuna's blood boiled to hear the proud claims of Angaarparva. He replied in a tough tone. "It is not worthy of a heavenly-being to indulge in false pride. Bear in mind that it is a folly to consider others weaker without knowing about their might. This universe is not devoid of warriors. Only the weak may have been afraid of you. Your haughty words have forced me to challenge you for a fight even at this odd hour."

Arjuna's fearless reply caused Angaarparva to be reborn in anger. So, he drew out his sword and fell upon Arjuna. The brave Pandava brushed his attack aside with the burning torch he had in his hand. Not being able to control his rage, Arjuna thundered "Save yourself O Gandharva! Your jackal-threats cannot frighten a mighty warrior like me. I know how to wield arms and deal with opponents like you. I am sure you have never measured arms with a true warrior so far otherwise your language would not have been so loose."



With these words, Arjuna chanted an incantation on the torch-light and aiming it at Angaarparva shot it at him as a fire-arm. The torch-light set fire to Angaarparva's chariot and he was forced to jump down. While doing so, he fell down and became senseless.

Arjuna at once held him by the hair and dragged him to his eldest brother Yudhishtir.

The wives of Angaarparva got out of the river and ran to Yudhishtir begging mercy for their husband. They implored, "Spare his life for God's sake, otherwise we will be left widows." Yudhishtir was moved with pity at this request and he said to Arjuna. "Brother! leave him free. It is not becoming of us to kill a person who has been already defeated and insulted in the very presence of his wives."

By now, Angaarparva had regained consciousness. He was panting for breath. Seeing his wives standing with folded hands before Yudhishtir, he felt highly ashamed and hung his head down. Arjuna addressed him and said, "Listen, O Gandharva! never commit the folly of boasting of yourself again. I am leaving you as directed by my brother because it is not proper to kill you when your wives are imploring for mercy on you. Leave this place in no time never to be seen here again.



Angaarparva thanked his stars and expressing his gratitude to the Pandavas, he remarked, "I request you to accept a humble present from me in return for sparing my life. From now on, you will be possessing a heavenly art named *Chakshushee* that will enable you to see anything at any time at any place in all the three worlds—*Akasha, Prithvi and Patala* —with your earthly eyes. Apart from it, I present to you a hundred heavenly horses of the gandharvas. These horses can put on any desired colour and can move with any speed desired by their master. They will never grow old nor will their speed ever slow down. Besides their bodies will always be emitting sweet fragrance."

Arjuna and his brothers were very pleased to have the presents from Angaarparva.

After consulting Yudhisthir, Arjuna said to him, "We accept very gladly both your presents as a token of friendship. But we would like you to keep them with you till we require them. We will consider you as one of our close friends from now onwards. Accept our heartiest thanks for these valuable presents."

Angaarparva assured the Pandavas of his services whenever required and left for his heavenly abode along with his wives.

