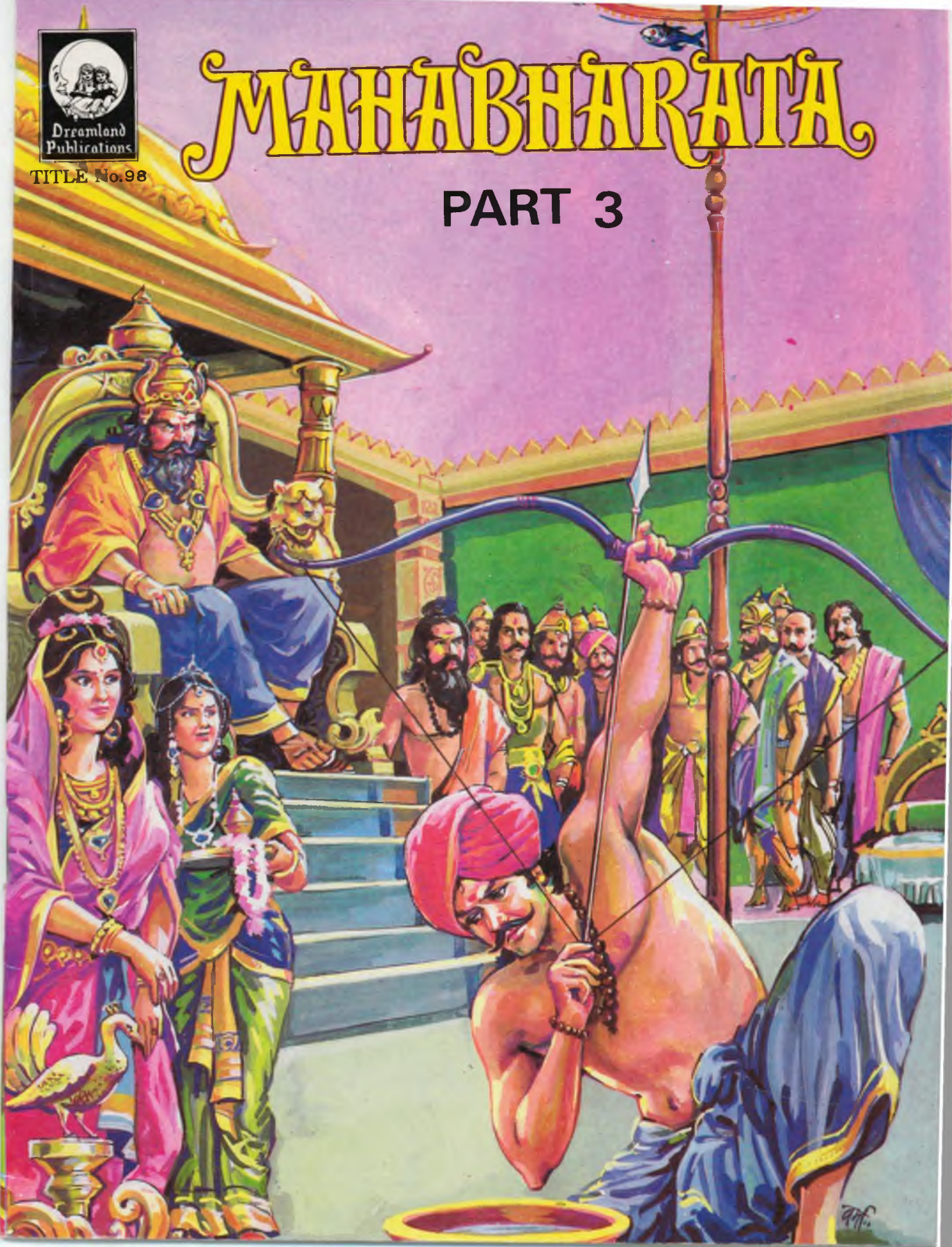




TITLE No.98

MAHABHARATA

PART 3



MAHABHARATA



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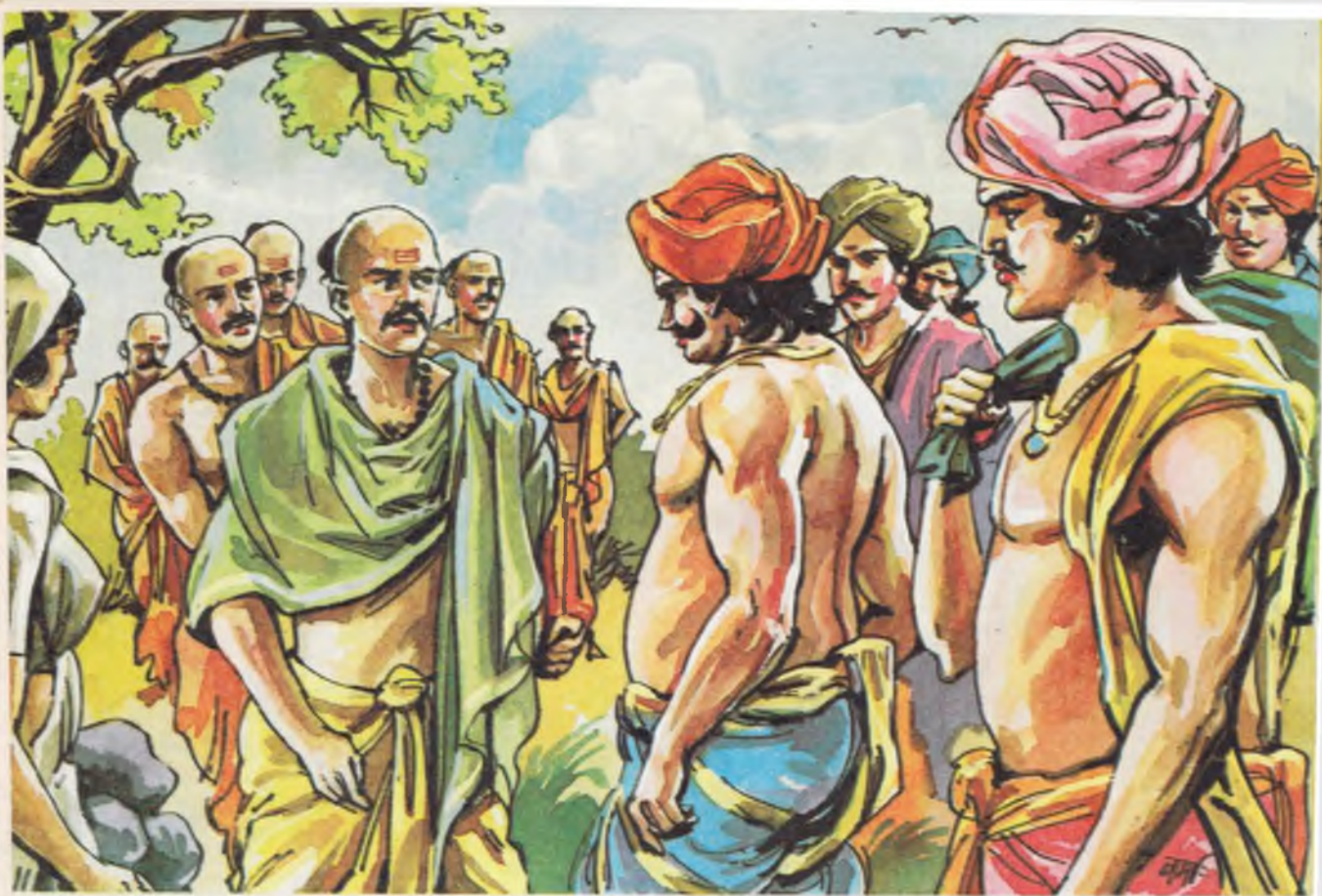
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We have read in the foregoing book of this series that the Pandavas, having left the town of Ekchakra, came to the bank of the river Ganga where they had to confront and checkmate Angaarparva who gave two very useful presents to Arjuna—the first being *Chakshushee* (the power to see anything at any time and at any place in all the three worlds) and the second being one hundred heavenly horses of the gandharvas.

Leaving the horses in the custody of Angaarparva and to demand them when required, the Pandavas advanced on their way.

Roaming about here and there the Pandavas came to know that Drupad, king of Panchal, was going to hold the *swayamvar* of his daughter. So they set out for Panchal along with their mother Kunti to take part in the royal event.

As the Pandavas were disguised as Brahmins, a number of other Brahmins joined them to reach Panchal. They knew that the princes coming to participate in the *swayamvar* will give food and clothes in charity to them in order to win the goodwill of Drupad and his daughter.

The Brahmanas did not know at all about the identity of the Pandavas except sage Ayudhaumya who had agreed to act as the priest of the Pandavas.



After a long and tiring journey of several days, the party reached Panchal. The Pandavas went about the capital town that was beautifully decorated with reception-gates at every step. They came to hear of the divine beauty of the princess, especially of her locks of hair. The day for the swayamvar approached and the suitors assembled in the pandal.

The Pandavas also reached the venue at the appointed time and took their seats among the Brahmans.

The gathering consisted of princes and kings of various kingdoms and sages known for their wisdom and learning. Every participant was being properly greeted and honoured by king Drupad. When everybody had taken his seat, king Drupad stood up and announced that his daughter, Draupadi, was going to enter the venue. Bugles and drums started playing and strains of melodious music filled the atmosphere to mark the entry of the princess accompanied by her brother Dhrishtadyumna. Adorned exquisitely from top to toe, she looked no less than a heavenly nymph. At once all eyes were turned to her.

As for the Pandavas, nobody could take notice of their presence except Krishna, ruler of Dwarika, who had come there with his brother Balrama. He told him about the escape of the Pandavas and their presence in the swayamvar as well.



There was dead silence in the pandal. Dhrishtadyumna stood up and addressed the gathering in a loud voice, "I crave your attention, please. You can see a fish hanging from a revolving wheel fixed on top of a post standing in a wide pan full of oil in which the image of the revolving fish can be clearly seen. The suitor, who looking down at the image of the fish in the oil, hits the eye of the fish hanging above shall win my sister Draupadi as his bride."

Then the prince turned to his sister and said, "Draupadi ! a large number of kings and princes including Duryodhana, Karna, Shakuni, Shalya, Krishna, Balrama, Jaidrath, Yuyutsu etc. have come to win your hand. Whosoever succeeds in fulfilling the condition that I have just stated shall be garlanded by you as your husband."

A bow and arrow had been placed at the stage to be used by each suitor for the feat mentioned above.

Then the prince requested the suitors to come forward and try their luck one by one.

The event began and a number of kings and princes came forward, each with his bow and arrow, but none of them could be successful. Most of them, having failed, were sitting with their heads hung low out of shame.



It was now Karna's turn. He came forward and was getting ready for the feat when a few princes shouted, "How is it that the son of a charioteer has been allowed to participate in this royal event when it is meant for only princes?"

Draupadi heard these words and said to her brother, "I will never marry the son of a coachman even if he is able to perform the feat."

So, Karna had to withdraw leaving the bow and the arrow on the ground.

Karna was cut to the quick by the insult that he had suffered at the hands of some princes and Draupadi herself. So, he chose to walk out of the venue in great resentment despite Droyadhna's consolation. After the exit of Karna, other princes to try were Shishupal, Jarasandh, Shalya and Yuyutsu but all of them miserably failed to perform the difficult feat.

Drupad and his son Dhrishtadyumna were highly worried to see that all the princes known for their skill of archery had failed to fulfil the condition of the swayamvar. The feat seemed almost impossible to be performed by anyone now.

Someone was heard to say from among the gathering, "Had Arjuna been alive, he would have certainly done it."



As for the crest-fallen princes, they indulged in bickerings over the permission granted to a Brahmana to participate in the royal event. Arjuna, looking down at the image of the fish in the oil pan, drew the cord of the bow and shot the arrow. In a flash, the arrow darted with a twang and pierced the eye of the fish. Everybody clapped and princess Draupadi's face bloomed like a lotus. Loud shouts of appreciation rose from the Brahmins who were cheering Arjuna up.

As for the kings and princes, they doubted Arjuna's skill saying that his success was a mere chance. So, Arjuna shot another arrow and brought down the fish itself along with the first arrow still fixed in its eye. Draupadi walked gracefully up to Arjuna and put the *Jayamala* (bridal garland) around Arjuna's neck much to the humiliation of the princes.

Some of the princes felt so jealous that they blamed king Drupad and his son for the insult heaped upon them by marrying off their princess to a Brahman. One of them spoke out, "How can we brook this gross humiliation? We must teach Drupad a bitter lesson by killing him and his son and by burning his daughter alive."

So, all the princes were up in arms and made a bid on the lives of king Drupad and his son.



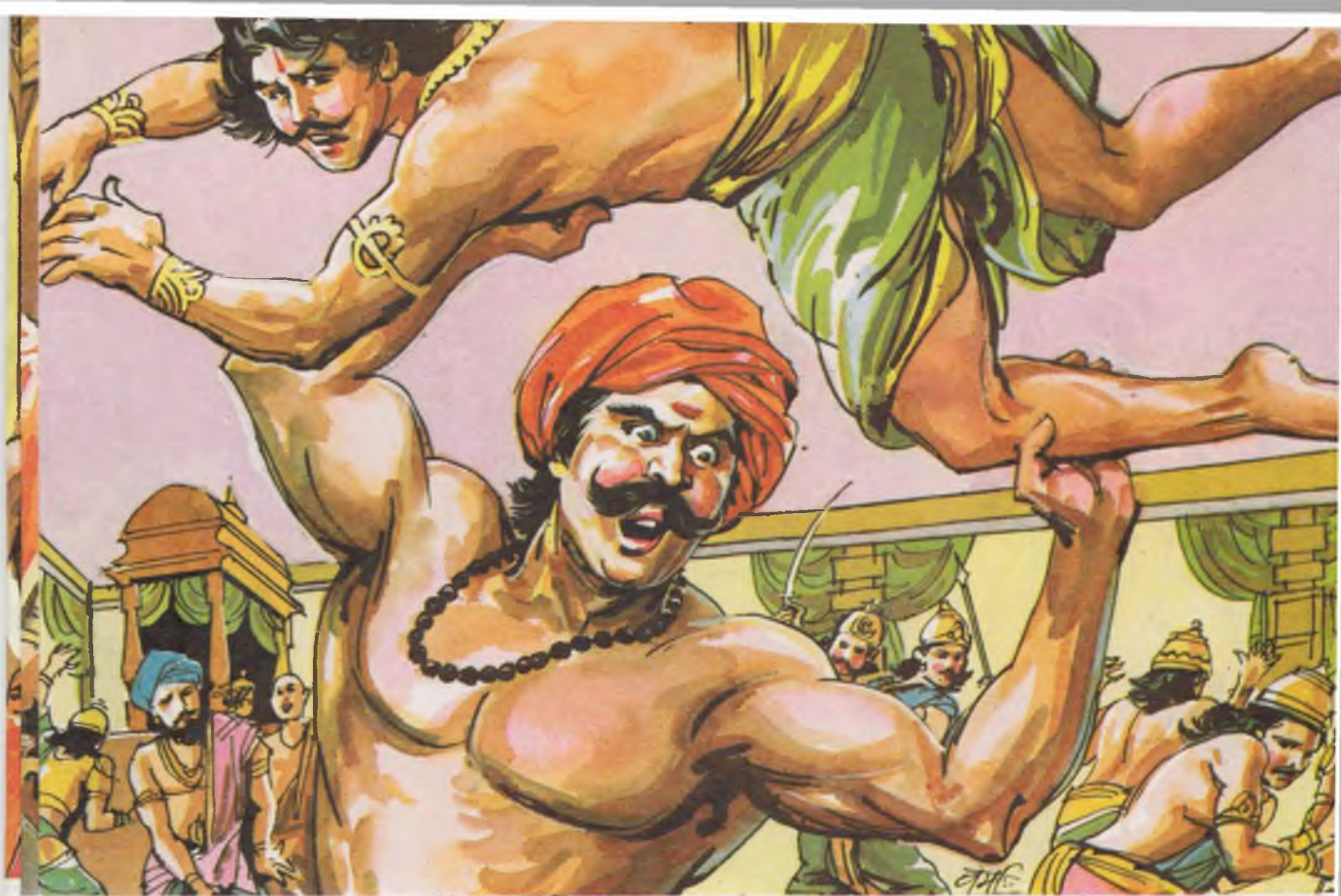
How could Arjuna remain a silent spectator to the grave situation. Grabbing his bow and the quiver of arrows, he took position with a view to facing the onslaught of the haughty princes. The Brahmanas stood up with their *trishuls* aimed at the advancing kings giving out a loud war-cry—*Jai Shankar*— and assuring Arjuna that they were with him.

Arjuna, waving his hand to check the Brahmanas from being agitated, said "Rest assured; I alone am more than a match for them all. You have got to simply wait and watch.

Saying so, Arjuna began shooting arrows at the advancing princes and most of them fell senseless on the ground.

Arjuna's brothers, Krishna and Balrama were smiling to see what was happening. Arjuna was showering volleys of arrows ruthlessly at the kings who either took to their heels or fell down unconscious. Duryodhana then sent someone to call Karna who had left the venue out of resentment.

When Karna had come, Duryodhana instigated him saying, "Karna! kill him; it is not a sin to kill a Brahmana in a war." Karna got ready with his bow and arrows.



Setting arrows to his bow, Karna began to shoot at Arjuna. But Arjuna was so furious that his arrows soon sent Karna out of wits and he fell down senseless.

When he came to himself, he said, "O valiant youngman ! I am very impressed with your skill at archery. It was only Arjuna who could face me. But you have not only done it but beaten me as well. You can be none else but Lord Indra or Lord Vishnu in disguise."

"I am neither of these; I am a humble Brahman and the credit of my skill goes to my great guru who has taught me the use of heavenly weapons like *Indrastra* and *Brahmastra*," retorted Arjuna.

Hearing these words, Karna stopped fighting with high words of applause for his opponent.

Seeing the princes taking up a wrong course, Bheema's blood had boiled and he, uprooting a thick post, had been ready to charge at the advancing princes. It was king Shalya who came first of all to face Bheema. Throwing his post aside, Bheema lifted Shalya above his head and flung him down with a thud.

Seeing the fall of Shalya and finding Karna hesitant of facing the valiant Brahmana, the panicked princes thought it better to flee the venue.



Arjuna, then, cleared the way from among the confused gathering and made for the place where his mother Kunti had been waiting for them. Evidently his brothers and Draupadi followed him.

Soon they reached the place to find Kunti busy in prayers. Draupadi's brother, prince Dhrishtadyumna, had secretly followed the Pandavas.

Entering Kunti's room, all the five brothers shouted in joy, "Look mother! what have we brought today?" Kunti had her back towards them as she was sitting facing the idol of Shiva. Without turning her face to them, she said, "Divide it equally among yourselves all the five of you."

She never knew that her sons were talking of Draupadi whom Arjuna had won in the swayamvar. She thought that they were talking of the alms which they usually brought after their daily round.

But soon she took notice of Draupadi and felt highly embarrassed at what she had said. So, she said, "My sons, I was under an impression that you had brought something special by way of alms from some charitable wealthy person. That was why I directed you to share it equally."



Kunti was really repentant of what she had said because her words could not be fulfilled without forcing Draupadi into a social sin. So, she felt highly worried and ashamed as well.

Draupadi, when she saw her mother-in-law in deep anguish, consoled her saying, Mother dear! don't you worry at all; I was blessed with a boon to have five husbands when sent to this earth from heaven. How can the boon conferred on me by gods be false. It has come true and I have no whims about it."

Just at this moment, Lord Krishna and his brother Balrama reached there. They touched Kunti's feet out of respect and then greeted Yudhishtir. They had recognised the Pandavas at the venue of the swayamvar itself.

Hearing Krishna's words, all the Pandavas were highly astonished. Then taking leave of them, Krishna made for Dwarika along with Balrama.

As for Draupadi, her joy knew no bounds when she came to know that it was valiant Arjuna who had won her fulfilling the condition of the swayamvar. She thanked her stars to become a bride of the royal family of Hastinapur and to be the spouse of the brave Pandavas.



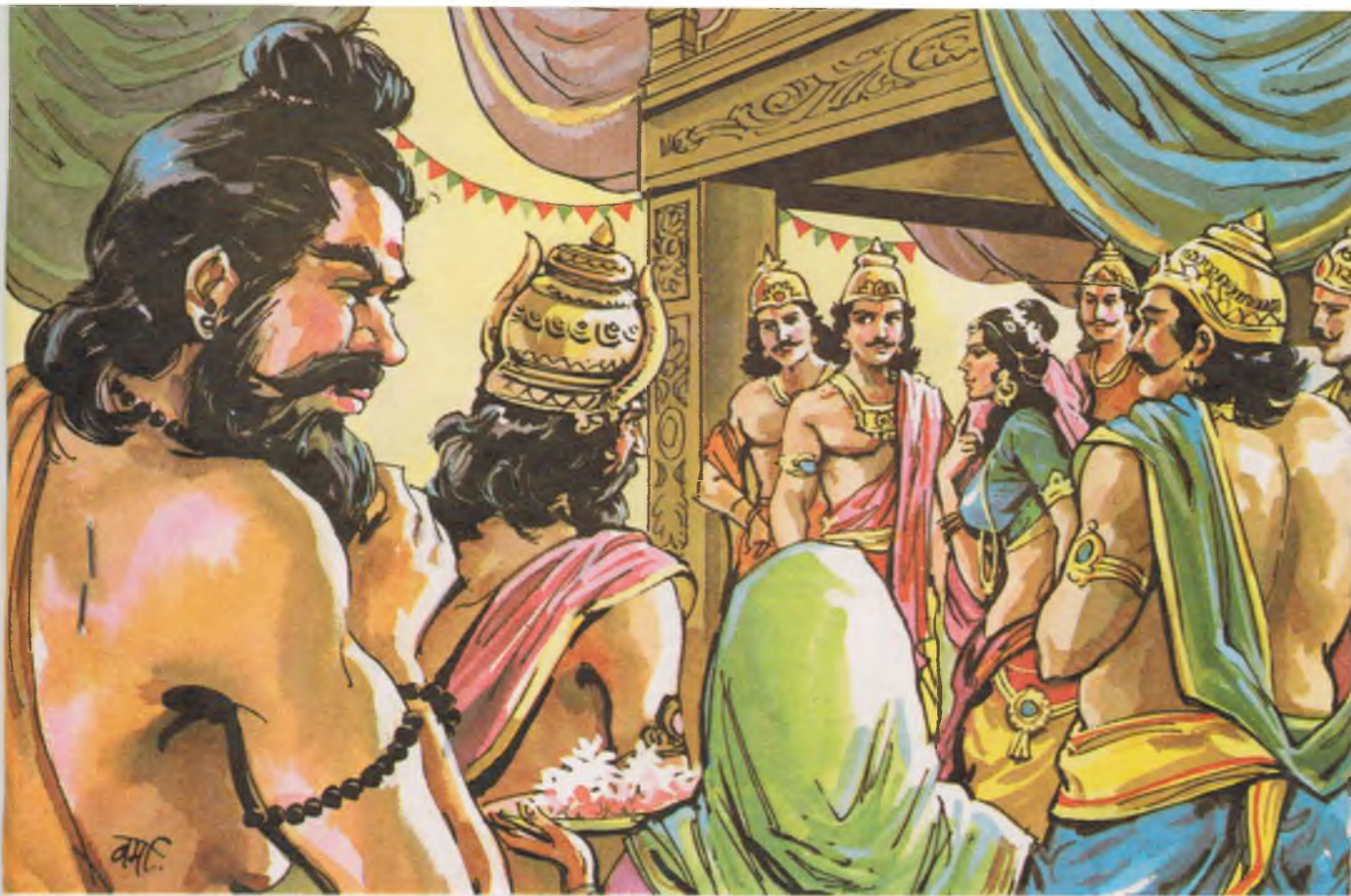
As already mentioned, Dhrishtadyumna, Draupadi's brother had stealthily followed the Pandavas and his sister. He had heard the conversation between Kunti and the Pandavas as well as that between Krishna and Yudhishtir. So, he had become fully aware of the reality. Bubbling with delight, he rushed to the palace to disclose the pleasant news to his father.

As soon as he came face to face with king Drupad, he was asked about the young man who had won Draupadi.

"There is nothing to worry at all, father dear. My sister has gone as a bride to the famous royal family of Hastinapur. The brave youth who is your son-in-law is none else but Arjuna, the famous archer," replied Dhrishtadyumna.

"Are you in yourself indeed? All the Pandavas had been burnt alive by wicked Duryodhana in the lac-palace. How is it possible then that my daughter has been won as a bride by Arjuna?" argued king Drupad.

"Nay, dad! the Pandavas had escaped the death-trap through a tunnel from the lac-palace. They had been living in disguise since then. They came to our capital to take part in the swayamvar. They are staying in a potter's house in our city at this time," explained the prince.



King Drupad, when he came to know the reality about the Pandavas, was beside himself with joy. At once he ordered that stately arrangements be made for according a royal reception to them and their dear mother Kunti. The palace was bedecked with flowers, perfumes, bunting and other decorative articles. It was profusely illuminated at night too. Then the Pandavas were invited so that the marriage of Draupadi be performed according to prescribed rites.

Just when the king was busy welcoming the Pandavas, Saint Vyasa happened to reach there. The king, touching the feet of the saint, welcomed him too.

The king put forward a query before the saint, "Sir, I am puzzled to think how it will be possible for my daughter to have five husbands without violating the religious as well as the social codes."

The saint asked the king not to feel perturbed because it was to happen inevitably because of the boon granted by Lord Shiva to Draupadi on the eve of sending her to this earth.

So, the king's doubts came to be set at rest and Draupadi's marriage was performed with all the five Pandavas.



News about the Pandavas was constantly reaching Vidur, prime minister of Hastinapur, through his spies. But Duryodhana and Dhritrashtra believed that the Pandavas had been burnt alive along with their mother Kunti. Now that the marriage of Draupadi with the Pandavas had exposed them, Vidur thought it desirable to inform Dhritrashtra of it.

Vidur went to Dhritrashtra and said, "Your Majesty ! the Pandavas are alive along with their mother. The young man, who fulfilled the condition of the swayamvar at Panchal, was none else but your nephew Arjuna. According to the boon conferred on Draupadi by Lord Shiva, Drupad has married off her to all the five Pandavas through a royal ceremony.

Hearing this, Dhritrashtra put on a broad smile to express his joy though it was only fake and apparent.

Dhritrashtra asked Vidur to prepare beautiful garments and valuable ornaments for Draupadi as well as for his nephews. The king further asked Vidur to ask Duryodhana to go to Panchal and escort the Pandavas back to Hastinapur along with Kunti and Draupadi. Vidur bowed low before the king and went away.



Just then Duryodhana came there along with Karna. In fact, they had overheard what Vidur had told the king and also what the king had asked him to do. Duryodhana said to Dhritrashtra, "Dad ! I have heard everything. I will request you not to make the mistake of giving any lift to the Pandavas. It is sure to prove suicidal one day."

Karna forcefully seconded what Duryodhana had said.

"My son ! don't take me to be a child. I realise the danger equally well. But you know that Vidur is a staunch supporter of the Pandavas. So, it was advisable on my part to say so. Should we disclose our real feelings to him ? Let me know what your plans are ? We must do something so that the Pandavas are not able to raise the question of demanding their father's kingdom back for themselves," argued Dhritrashtra.

Duryodhana said, "I wish that Bheema must be killed somehow or other. He is the mightiest of all the Pandavas. With his death, half their strength will be gone and they would never take courage to raise their eyes towards the throne of Hastinapur. Another step worth taking is that we should instigate Drupad and his son against the Pandavas for forcing Draupadi to marry all of them through their mother Kunti."



Hearing Duryodhana's words, Karna reacted saying, "Duryodhana ! your plan in regard to Bheema is all right. But as far as Drupad is concerned, he is a man of very strong character. He would never go against the Pandavas even for your entire kingdom. Why can't you follow that he did not hesitate to give his daughter to them though they were paupers at that time ?"

"What should we do then , Karna ?" asked Duryodhana and his father together.

Karna replied, "The only choice left with us now is to make war on Panchal, defeat the forces of Drupad and capture Drupad, his son along with the Pandavas, their mother and Draupadi herself. This step is sure to dash all their hopes of regaining the throne of Hastinapur to the ground. Not only this, their supporter, king of Panchal, will have to accept our overlordship too."

"Karna ! your wisdom is really matchless and as for your strategic sense, it is unique too. But we must consult uncle Bhishma, Dronacharya and Vidur also. Having known their views, we shall be in a better position to plan our action," argued Dhritrashtra.

Dhritrashtra asked Duryodhana to direct the prime minister for arranging a meeting of the high-ups.



The meeting was arranged and discussions started. Dhritrashtra laid Karna's plan before the cabinet and asked Bhishma to express his opinion about it. Bhishma at once turned it down saying, "The Pandavas are as dear to me as you are. Yudhishtir has come of age and it is high time to give his father's throne back to him. The plan of invading Panchal is certainly an evil one. Duryodhana has already tried to liquidate the Pandavas in the lac-palace with the help of Purochan who fell a victim to his own misdeed. It should be an eye-opener for Duryodhana. He should come to the right path otherwise he too is sure to meet with a similar fate."

Hearing Bhishma's words, Dhritrashtra hung his head down out of shame. But then he requested Bhishma to do something for Duryodhana's interests also as he was his eldest son and had always been dreaming of succeeding to the throne of Hastinapur.

Dronacharya also supported the view-point of Bhishma and asked Dhritrashtra to be just to his nephews. Discussions went on with Vidur participating actively in them.

Atlast it was decided that half the kingdom should be given to the Pandavas to avert the family crisis. Duryodhana and Dhritrashtra were made fully alive to the fact that the Pandavas were invincible.



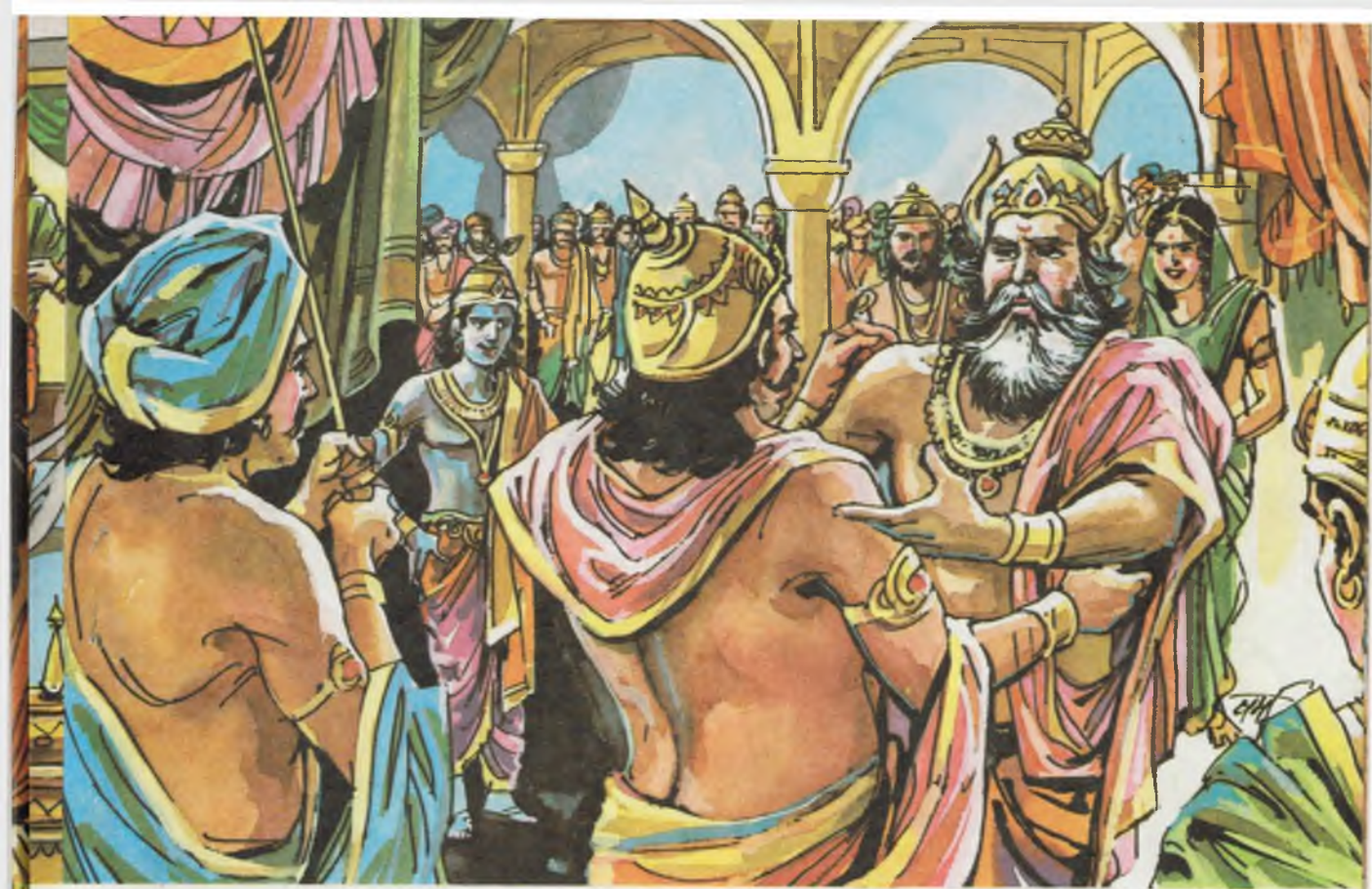
Dhritrashtra had realised that the plans chalked out by Duryodhana and Karna could not be carried out in the face of opposition from the elders like Bhishma and Drona. He had also followed that it was impossible to defeat the Pandavas who had Krishna and Balrama at their back and the powerful kingdom of Panchal bound to them through a matrimonial alliance.

Not only this, he had become aware that the approach of Duryodhana, Karna and Shakuni was sure to prove destructive for Hastinapur itself.

So, he decided to clean his hands from the stains of the misdeed of his son and to follow the advice of Bhishma.

So, Dhritrashtra said to Vidur, "Vidur ! I am not now going to be misled by Duryodhana and Shakuni any more. My brother's sons are just my sons too. They deserve half the kingdom by all means. So, you should proceed to Panchal at once and bring my nephews, my daughter-in-law Draupadi and my sister-in-law Kunti with full state honours."

Vidur, prime minister of Hastinapur, taking valuable presents for the Pandavas along with a suite of attendants proceeded to Panchal with a view to bringing the Pandavas back to Hastinapur.



When Vidur got to the court of king Drupad, he was given a warm welcome. Formalities over, Vidur laid all the presents that he had brought from Hastinapur before the Pandavas .

The prime minister said, "Dhritrashtra, Bhishma, Drona and all the ladies of Hastinapur palace are very glad to know of the matrimonial alliance. Feeling sorry for what Duryodhana had done, they now crave the return of the Pandavas to Hastinapur. Gandhari is so curious to see Draupadi as soon as possible. So, I beg you to allow the Pandavas to leave for Hastinapur."

Luckily for the Pandavas, Krishna and Balrama had also reached Panchal a short time before the arrival of Vidur. So, king Drupad said to him, "It is not for me to ask my sons-in-law to leave for Hastinapur, especially when I doubt their safety there. Who is ready to take the responsibility that Duryodhana would not harm them in any way there ? Even then, I leave it to Krishna, the best known well-wisher of my sons-in-law, to decide what to do."

So, Vidur turned to Krishna and Balrama to ask for their opinion.

Krishna opined that it was advisable to go and possess half the kingdom of Pandu and rule in peace building their capital at a different place and hoped that this step would end the bad blood between the Kauravas and the Pandavas as well.



Seeking permission of king Drupad duly, the Pandavas proceeded to Hastinapur along with Kunti and Draupadi escorted by Vidur and Krishna. When they reached near Hastinapur, Drona, Kripacharya, Vikarna and other dignitaries came to receive them. A grand welcome was accorded to the princes whom people believed to have died in the lac-palace.

The residents of Hastinapur were no less delighted to see the Pandavas, queen-mother Kunti and Draupadi. They raised slogans in their glory and made merry in various ways. Yudhishtir, the eldest Pandava was the main focus of people's attention. They saw in him an image of their old king Pandu famous for his bravery and justice. They had full faith that Yudhishtir, when enthroned, would revive the old glory of Hastinapur.

The Pandavas touched the feet of Bhishma, Dronacharya, Dhritrashtra and other elders out of profound respect and they, in return, showered their heartiest benedictions upon them.

Gandhari was highly impatient to see Kunti, her sons and Draupadi. When they all entered the palace, her joy knew no bounds. She hugged each of them out of sincere affection feeling sorry for what her son Duryodhana had done.



Next day, a meeting of Hastinapur cabinet was held and the Pandavas went to the court on the invitation of Bhishma. They had been called to be informed that half the kingdom of Hastinapur was being given to them to end all the differences that had cropped up between them and the Kaurava princes due to some misunderstandings.

Unritrashtra said to Yudhishtir, "My son ! you are very wise and tolerant as well. There is no denying the fact that the throne of Hastinapur belongs solely to you. But my make-shift possession of it due to my brother's untimely death, has incited Duryodhana to develop a longing to be the next ruler of Hastinapur. The family elders have decided to divide the kingdom into two parts and hand over one part to you and the other to Duryodhana. I am sure that you will not disappoint me accepting this arrangement in the interest of the Kuru dynasty. It is sure to end all differences between you and Duryodhana as well. So, I would like you to proceed to *Khandavpratha* and make it the capital of your part of the kingdom."

Yudhishtir, modest and accommodating as he was, gave his assent to the satisfaction of everybody present in the court.

Bhishma and Dronacharya praised Yudhishtir for his accommodating nature and showered blessing on him



So, Yudhishtir proceeded to Khandavprastha along with his brothers, mother and Draupadi. People of Khandavprastha received them with open arms.

In due course of time, Khandavprastha took the shape of a beautiful township which was named *Indraprastha*.

The Pandavas built a beautiful palace in their new capital. Within a short span of time, Indraprastha was glittering with glamour and soon excelled the grandeur of Hastinapur.

One day when Yudhishtir was holding his court, Saint Narad happened to come there. He had come with the definite purpose of advising the five brothers regarding their common bride Draupadi. He told them the story of two demon brothers—*Sund* and *Upsund*—who loved each other most dearly. But they quarrelled over a fairy-like damsel, *Tilottama*, and fought ferociously to be killed by each other.

So, the Pandavas drew up a code of conduct whereby each brother was to enjoy Draupadi's company for a month in his turn. Anybody violating the arrangement was to go into exile for 12 years.



Everything was going on smoothly at Indraprastha. But one day, a Brahman came wailing bitterly to the court. His cows had been stolen by thieves at night. So, he had come to seek help of the king for the restoration of his cows.

Arjuna consoled the Brahmana promising that his cows would soon be restored to him.

Arjuna got ready to go in pursuit of the thieves. But lo! his bow and arrows had been left in Draupadi's bed-chamber and now it was Yudhishtir who was enjoying Draupadi's company. It was a great problem and Arjuna was at a loss to understand what to do.

Arjuna was caught in a fix. If he refused redressal to the Brahman, he apprehended a curse for his brother Yudhishtir, the king. But if he violated the code agreed upon by all the five brothers, he would be liable to be exiled.

At last, Arjuna chose to violate the code and be exiled in order to restore the Brahmana's cows after getting his bow and arrows from inside the palace. And this he did at the cost of banishment for himself.

What a glorious example of dutifulness !



Restoring the cows to the Brahmana, Arjuna returned to the court and offering respects to his elder brother, Yudhishtir, he said, "I am guilty of violating the arrangement agreed upon by all of us. So, I seek your permission to go into exile."

"How brother?" asked Yudhishtir

"I have entered the palace when I should not have done so," said Arjuna.

"No, not at all; my dear brother. You have committed no violation at all!"

It would have been a violation if you had entered the palace for a personal end. You did it to perform the duty which is, in fact, mine because I, as king, am duty-bound to protect my subjects. So, take it easy; I and Draupadi have no complaint against you," argued Yudhishtir.

But Arjuna retorted, "Brother dear! it is your own teaching that one should not be dishonest in any way. So, permit me to atone for my sin."

Being answerless, Yudhishtir had to allow Arjuna to go into exile.

Knowing Arjuna's decision, a number of his admirers also accompanied him to the forest.

