



TITLE No. 99

MAHABHARATA

PART 4



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We have read in the previous book of this series that Arjuna had to go into exile for twelve years for violating the arrangement agreed upon by all the five brothers in regard to their company with Draupadi in the palace. A good many admirers of Arjuna had accompanied him to the forest. Journeying through dense forests and crossing several streams, the party finally reached the bank of the Ganga and camped there for a few days.

Arjuna was passing his time mostly in religious discourses in the company of scholarly Brahamans and saints. Off and on, he performed a yajna as well to propitiate the gods. Thus Arjuna was passing his time smoothly without any tension on his mind. On the other hand, he was adding to his wisdom and becoming more and more virtuous. As a result, he enjoyed perfect peace of mind and his face came to put on an exceptional glow.

One day Arjuna was busy performing a yajna along with his companions when suddenly a beautiful maiden chanced to see him. Caught up by his glowing face and muscular body, the damsel fell in love with him at the very first sight.

She was Ulupi, daughter of the Naga king. She had made up her mind to marry Arjuna. Next day, when Arjuna went into the river for a bath, she gripped him and took him straight to his father's palace.



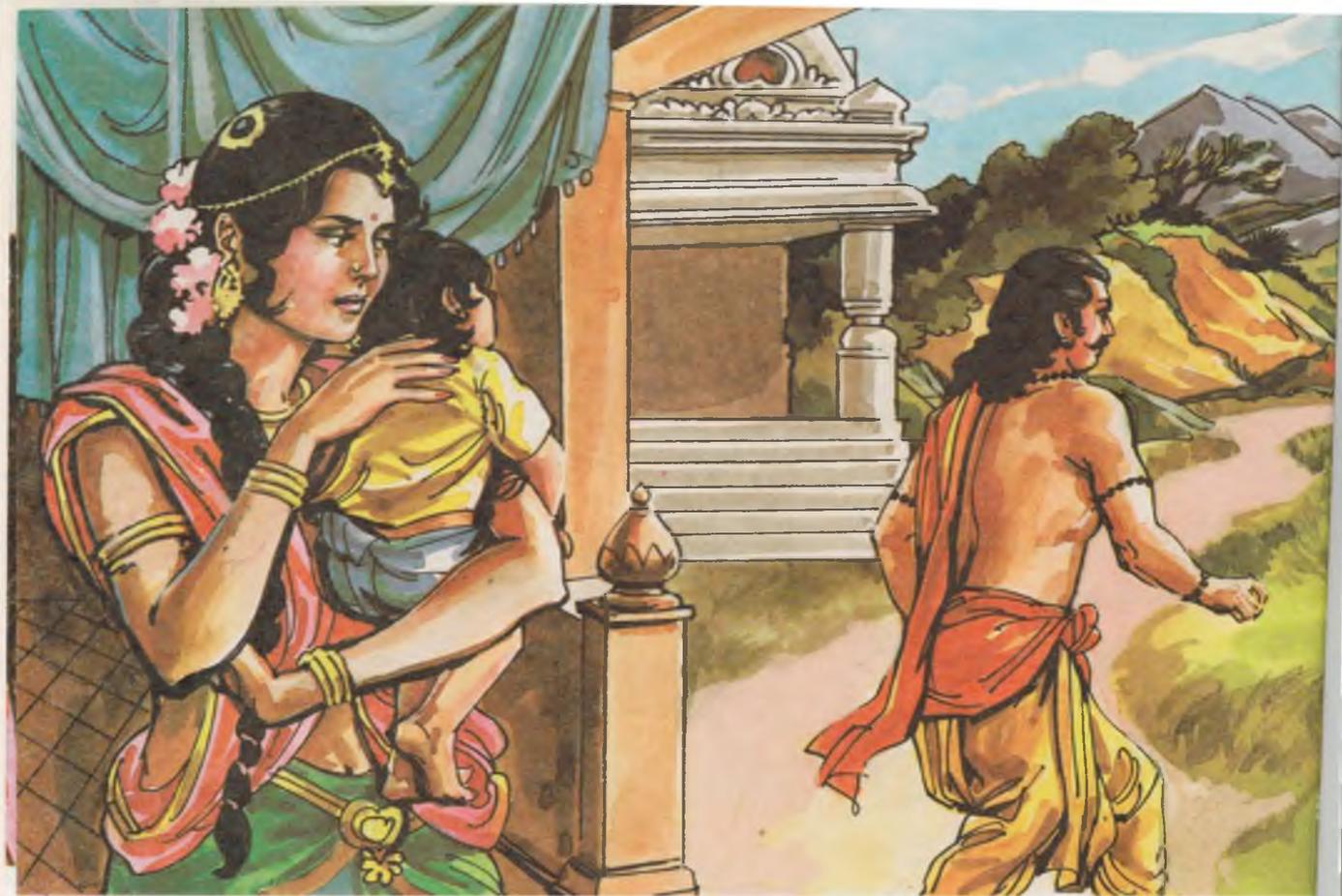
Arjuna was non-plussed to find himself in the land of the Nagas. He asked Ulupi, "O self-willed damsel ! who are you and why have you brought me here forcibly ?"

" Darling ! you are in the palace of the Naga king and I am the princess here. I am still a virgin and I have brought you here to make you my husband," replied Ulupi.

Arjuna had no other choice but to accept the proposal. So, he agreed to it and both of them revelled in each other's company after the marriage had been duly performed. Arjuna then expressed a desire to go back to his companions and convey them the good news of the marriage. So, Ulupi returned to the river-bank with Arjuna.

Before leaving him she conferred a boon on him, "From now on, all water-creatures will be your friends and guards. You will ever remain invincible in water."

Arjuna went to his companions and told them all what had happened. They now bade him farewell and returned to Hastinapur leaving him alone. Arjuna went on a long journey towards the east and reached Manipur. Having visited all the places of pilgrimage in the area, he went to the court of Chitravahana, king of Manipur. The king, having known about his identity, accorded him a warm welcome.



Arjuna was staying in the royal palace with the royal family. There he chanced to have a glimpse of Chitrangada, the daughter, of the king. Her bewitching beauty caught his fancy and he came to lose his heart to her.

Being unable to control himself, he went to the king and said, "Your Majesty! I have a request to make."

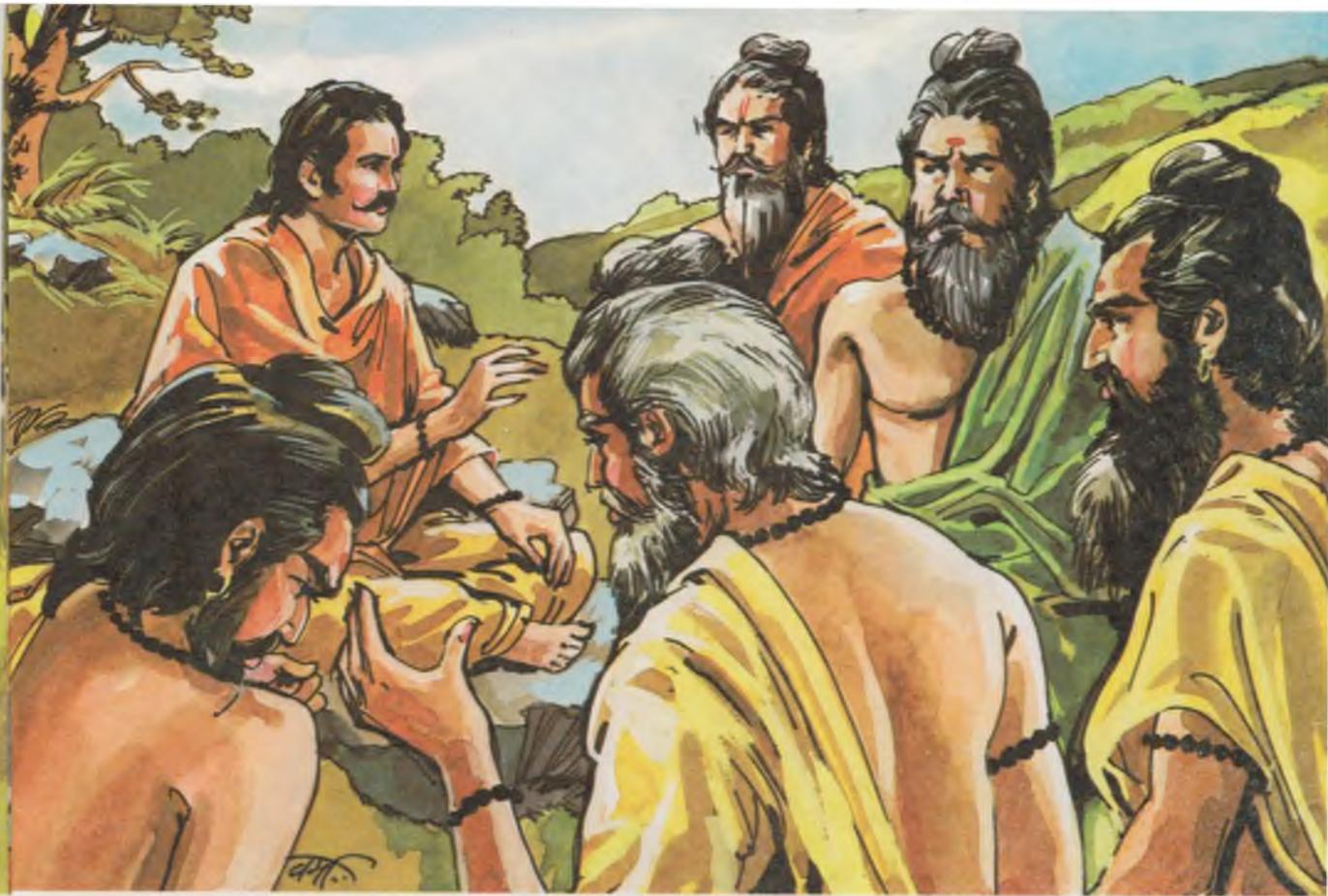
"Come on with it without any hesitation," replied Chitravahana.

"I have been greatly impressed by your daughter and so I want to marry her. I request you to grant your permission for it," remarked Arjuna.

King Chitravahana said, "Chitrangada is my only child and she is supposed to continue my dynasty. So, I have decided to adopt her son and appoint him the crown-prince of my kingdom. If you are ready to accept this condition, I may permit you to marry her."

Arjuna accepted the condition and married Chitrangada. He stayed there for about three years when Chitrangada gave birth to a son.

King Chitravahana adopted the boy as his son and Arjuna advanced on his journey leaving Chitrangada there.



Covering a long journey towards the south, Arjuna reached the sea-shore. This land was beset with hermitages of sages and saints. Arjuna met many of them and had their sermons. In due course of time, he came to know of five pools full of the back-waters of the sea. All the sages were afraid of going near any of these pools because each of them was the abode of a fearful and ferocious crocodile.

Arjuna asked the sages why they avoided to go near these pools. One of the hermits replied, "O Mighty Pandava ! these crocodiles devour the person who goes for a bath in these pools. So, we have no alternative to avoiding them."

Arjuna consoled the sages saying that he would do away with the fierce crocodiles. The sages were very delighted to hear Arjuna's assurance.

Next day, Arjuna went to one of the pools and jumped fearlessly into it. Ulupi's boon was there to safeguard him from every water creature. As soon as Arjuna entered the pool, a huge crocodile tried to eat him up from the side of his legs. But Arjuna caught it by the tail, dragged it out of the pool and flung it on the ground outside the pool. His amazement knew no bounds to see that the crocodile, as soon as it touched the ground, transformed into a heavenly nymph adorned with jewels and ornaments all over.



Struck with the matchless beauty of the heavenly maiden, Arjuna asked her, "Who are you, O Heavenly Beauty? What is the secret behind your emerging out of the body of the ferocious crocodile which I had dragged out of the pool and flung down?"

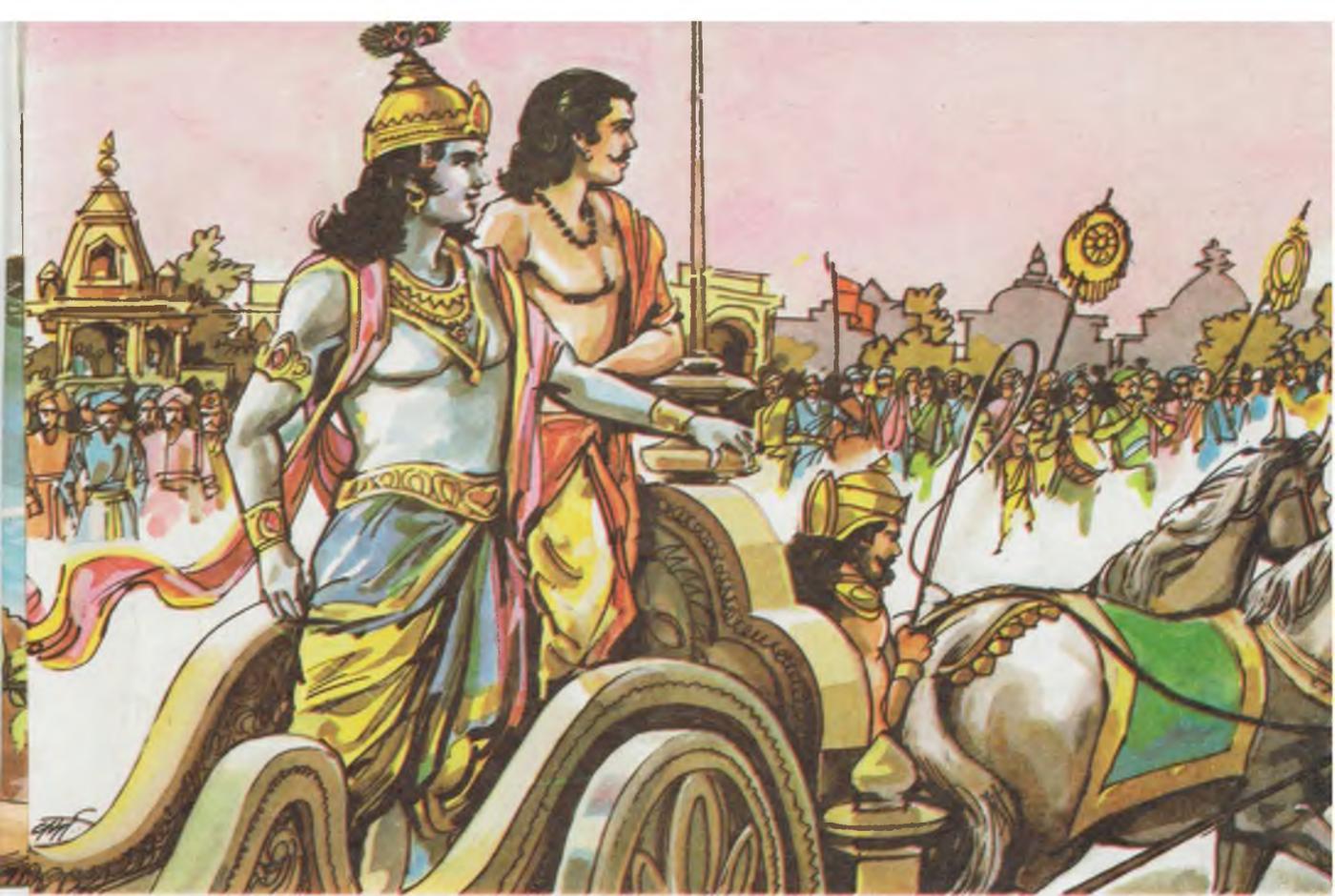
"I am a fairy and like me, the four crocodiles in the other four pools are also fairies. Long ago we, the five friends, chanced to offend a sage. He was so cross with us that he uttered a curse upon us and we were changed into crocodiles," replied the fairy.

"What else did the sage say to you?" enquired Arjuna.

"He said that we would live as crocodiles for a hundred years to be transformed into our original forms when a virtuous warrior dragged us one by one out of water and flung on the ground. So, I request you, O Valiant Youth, to salvage my four friends as well by dragging them out of the pools and flinging them on the ground," said the fairy.

Arjuna agreed to comply with the fairy's request. Soon he dragged the remaining four fierce crocodiles out of the pools one by one and flung each of them on the ground. As a result, all of them got changed to their real forms.

The fairies were very delighted to get rid of the curse. Thanking heartily Arjuna for liberating them, they departed to their heavenly abode.



Journeying north-wards again, Arjuna reached Prabhas via Gokarn where he came across Krishna who knew about his self-imposed banishment. So, he seated Arjuna in his chariot and made for Dwarika, his capital.

Before their departure from Prabhas, a message had been sent by Krishna to Balrama to make due arrangements for a royal welcome to Arjuna.

When Arjuna and Krishna reached Dwarika, they found all the roads and streets crowded with men, women and children to give a rousing welcome to Arjuna. Arjuna waved his hands in gratitude for the warm welcome extended to him.

After a few days, the grand festival at Raivatika was held and Arjuna was honoured as the chief guest there.

Arjuna stayed at Dwarika for a few days. One day he chanced to catch sight of Subhadra, Balrama's sister. Bewitched by her beauty, Arjuna fell in love with her at the first sight.

Krishna came to get wind of this fact and smiling mysteriously, he said, "Arjuna!! see you are caught in the trap of some beauty. By the way, she is my cousin, Subhadra."



Arjuna was tickled to hear Krishna's words. Believing that Krishna would never mind his words, he said, "Get me married to her, then."

"Dear friend! a Kshatriya never begs to win his lady-love. Either he wins her through the tradition of swayamvar, or carries her away by force if he is confident of his might to do so." retorted Krishna.

This hint was sufficient for Arjuna to carry away Subhadra.

Arjuna borrowed Krishna's chariot on the pretext of going for a game in the forest and decided to carry away Subhadra. So, he lay in wait with the chariot ready near the temple wherein Subhadra had gone for worship. As soon as she came out, he caught her by the arm and seating her in the chariot drove away.

When the soldiers on duty saw Subhadra being abducted by Arjuna, they ran to the palace and informed Balrama of it.

Balrama flew into a rage and decided to chastise Arjuna for what he had done. It was a question of the honour of the entire race of the Yadavas. But he knew that Arjuna was Krishna's bosom friend and so he suspected that the abduction must have been committed with the connivance of Krishna himself. Therefore he decided to call an emergency meeting before taking any step.



The meeting having been called, Balrama burst out at Krishna, "Why are you silent after all? Have you decided to bear with the misdoing of Arjuna because he happens to be your fast friend? How rousing a reception we accorded him when he came to Dwarika with you! Is that the way to repay our friendship?" Balrama further said "Everybody feels that he has heaped unbearable disgrace upon us. If you are going to ignore it, I will alone go and teach him a lesson. I have checked myself so far from doing anything lest you should blame me later on."

Krishna had given a very patient hearing to Balrama's remarks. He realised in his heart of hearts that he had certainly been instrumental in the abduction of Subhadra by Arjuna. So, he chose to pacify Balrama and give the situation a happy turn.

Krishna said to Balrama, "Brother! be calm and think over the matter coolly. Isn't it a matter of pride for us to be related to Arjuna, the grandson of king Kunti Bhoj and a descendant of Bharata? Moreover, you should not forget that he is invincible. Suppose you make war on him and get defeated and he carries away Subhadra. Where shall we stand then? Won't it be an even bigger disgrace?"

Hearing Krishna's words, Balrama's rage melted away.



"You are perfectly right, Krishna. We should not do anything in haste. It is a delicate situation which can be handled tactfully and with sagacity. Let us decide what should be done now." remarked Balrama.

"We have no choice but to make peace with Arjuna. I suggest to you to go in person and bring him round to come back with Subhadra so that we may perform their marriage according to the prescribed rites to give it a true colour and to make it a socially accepted event." argued Krishna.

Balrama was convinced and he decided to act as advised by Krishna. He went to Arjuna and brought him back along with Subhadra honourably to Dwarika.

Then the marriage was performed according to the religious rites and with great pomp and show.

Arjuna stayed at Dwarika for about a year and then moved to Pushkar, a place of pilgrimage in modern Rajasthan near Ajmer along with Subhadra. There he passed the remaining years of his exile.

Arjuna returned to Indraprastha in the company of Subhadra who was in the guise of a milk-maid. His first concern was to see his brother Yudhishtir and pay respects to him.



As for Subhadra, she went to her mother-in-law Kunti and touched her feet. Next, she went to her co-wife Draupadi and after paying respects to her, remarked, "Sister ! kindly accept me as your maid-in-attendance."

Draupadi was so impressed with Subhadra's humility and simplicity that she held her in embrace and patted her back. Subhadra was beside herself with joy to be welcomed with sincere affection.

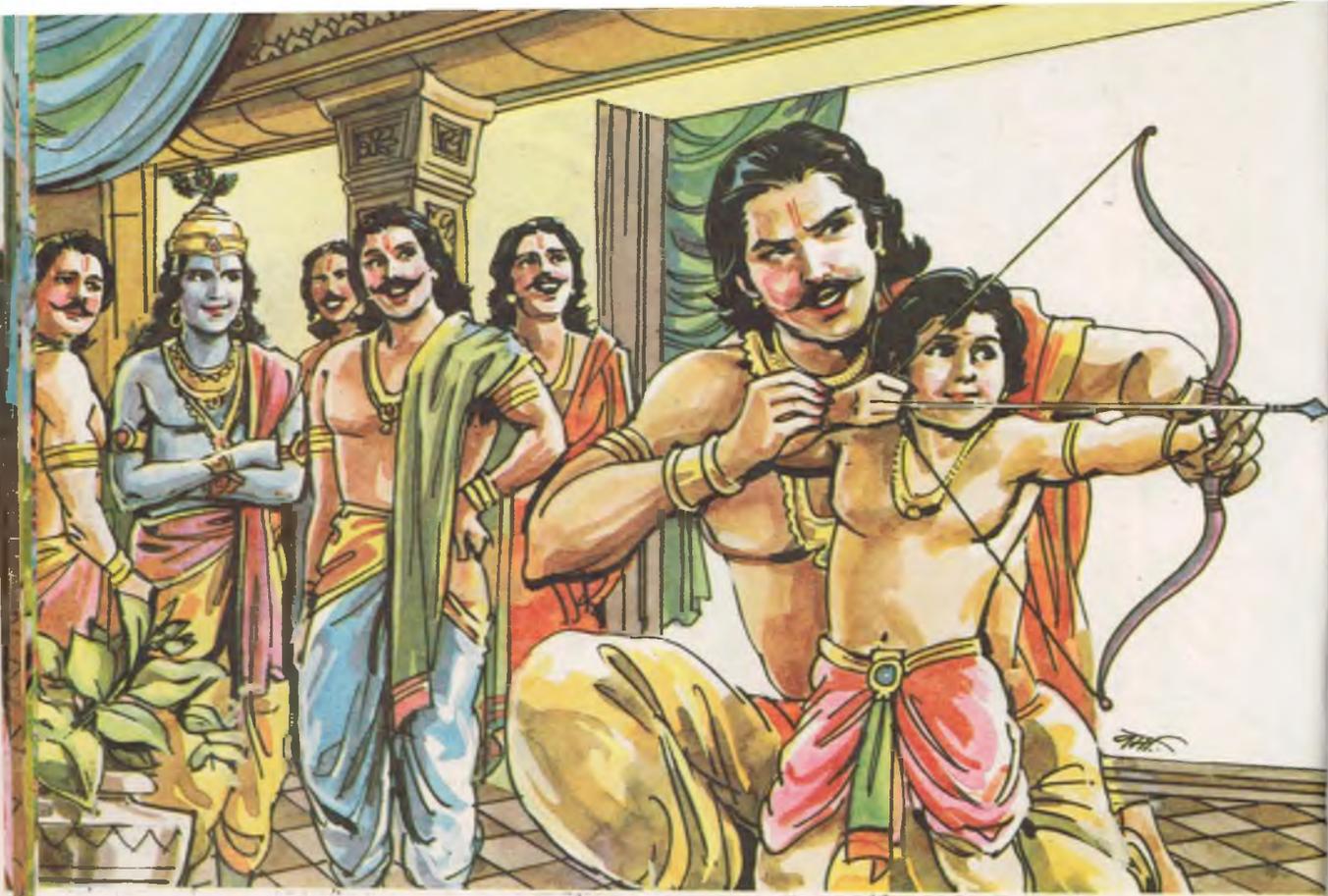
News soon reached Dwarika about Arjuna's safe return to Indraprastha after completing the period of banishment. So, Krishna accompanied by Balrama and several other Yadava chieftains reached Indraprastha with valuable gifts for Arjuna, his relations and for Subhadra as per the custom prevalent in those days.

As for Yudhishtir, he held a grand reception in honour of Arjuna's marriage with Subhadra.

After a few days' stay at Indraprastha, Balrama and all the Yadava chieftains returned to Dwarika after receiving precious return-gifts from the Pandavas.

But Lord Krishna chose to stay at Indraprastha for some time more.

In due course of time, Subhadra gave birth to a lovely son who was named Abhimanyu.



Right from the beginning, Abhimanyu was very promising. He showed signs to grow up into a courageous, brave, virtuous and gracefully handsome warrior.

Arjuna's son was the favourite of not only his father but also of his uncles and Krishna. In due course of time, his *namkaran* (christening) ceremony was performed according to the religious rites.

When Abhimanyu was about seven years old, Arjuna began to give him lessons in shooting arrows. By the time he grew up to his mid-teens, Abhimanyu was a full-fledged warrior.

Even famous warriors of the day trembled out of fear at the very mention of Abhimanyu's name. The entire Pandava clan was indeed proud of his strength and valour.

As for Draupadi, she bore five sons—one from each of her husbands. They were Prativindhya, Sutsaam, Shrutkarma, Shataneek and Shrutsen. When all the princes grew up a little, their *mundan* (hair-removing) ceremony and *upnayan* (sacred thread) ceremony were performed by the family priest.

All the five Pandavas felt delighted to see the young princes growing up to manhood gradually.



We have read on an earlier page that Krishna had chosen to stay at Indraprastha while his brother Balrama had returned to Dwarika along with other Yadava chieftains after receiving valuable return-gifts from the Pandavas. In fact, Krishna always felt delighted to spend more and more of his time in the company of Arjuna whom he loved most dearly. A very strange thing happened when Krishna was still at Indraprastha.

It was high summer and the day was extremely hot. So, Krishna felt like going to the bank of the Yamuna and pass some time there in order to beat the unbearable heat. He went upto Arjuna and said, "Let us go to the river-bank and pass some time there."

Arjuna liked the idea and both of them proceeded towards the river after seeking permission of Yudhishtir.

Reaching the river bank, both of them sat in the thick shade of a grove of trees and felt relieved of the cruel heat.

After some time, a Brahman approached them and asked for their help.

"What can we do for you, sir?" asked Krishna.

"I am awfully hungry and beg you to arrange for my food. Mind that I need a lot of food to stay my stomach," replied the Brahman.

"What would you like to have as food and how much?" asked Arjuna.



The Brahman at once came to his real form and said, "In fact, I am not a Brahman but god of fire. Needless to say, my food consists of fire on a very large scale. I want to eat up this entire forest named *Khandav Van* burning it through a terrible jungle-fire. But Indra, god of rain, does not let me do it only because his friend Takshak, king of serpents, lives in this forest. So, whenever I ignite the jungle-fire, he comes with a heavy downpour and puts it out. As a result, I remain as hungry as ever."

The fire-god further added, "I know that both of you possess wonderful supernatural powers and are in a position to help me. Be kind enough to check the rain using your miraculous weapons so that I may burn the forest completely and my hunger may be fully satisfied."

"We are ready to do whatever is possible with our human might. But we don't have any such miraculous weapons that can be used against the rain-god. Be kind enough to procure such weapons for us," said Arjuna.

So, the fire-god invoked Varuna, the water-god, and asked him for some weapons that could be used for safety against the rain-god



Varuna gave the fire-god two special quivers that were to remain always full of arrows. He also gave him a chariot which had a flag bearing the impression of a monkey. The fire-god passed on both these things to Arjuna.

As for Krishna, the fire-god gave him a chakra which had a diamond studded in its centre. Because of its beauty, it came to be known as *Sudarshan Chakra*.

Describing the qualities of chakra, the fire-god said, "Krishna ! you can defeat fearful demons and gods as well with it. Moreover, it will return to you after striking the enemy on whom you throw it." Along with the chakra, the fire-god gave Krishna a mace called *Kaumodaki*, which equalled Indra's *Vajra* in sound and striking-power.

The Khandav Van had become a hiding place for dangerous criminals since long. After the construction of Indraprastha, it had become necessary to eliminate these criminals in the interest of public good. So, Arjuna and Krishna wanted the fire-god to engulf the forest in a jungle-fire and make it his food.

Getting a green signal, the fire-god did the needful and at the same time his appetite was also appeased.

All the criminals were roasted alive in the jungle-fire much to the relief of the common people.



The ferocious flames leapt to the sky rising out of the jungle-fire of the Khandav Van. Seeing them, the gods were highly panicked and ran to their chief Indra. They said, "O Rain-god! the fire-god is playing havoc indeed. He has engulfed entire Khandav Van in fearful flames and all its plants and creatures are being burnt to ashes. Your bosom friend, Takshak, must also be in serious trouble. So, do something to check the fire-god from his wayward action immediately."

Indra cast a glance at the Khandav Van through his divine sight and flew into a rage to see the sky-touching flames. He felt worried for his friend Takshak and at once let loose a heavy downpour on the forest. But so great was the heat of the rising flames that the rain-drops got evaporated at a considerable height from the earth.

As a result, the jungle-fire kept burning as before. This infuriated the rain-god all the more. So, he mounted his white elephant—*Airavat*— with his *vajra* (thunderbolt) and marched to the Khandav Van followed by an army of duly armed gods.

Indra was highly astonished to find Krishna and Arjuna guarding the forest from all sides with their supernatural weapons. He was sure that he would not be able to face Krishna and Arjuna. He well remembered the confrontation with Krishna at Gokul when he had to lick the dust.



All the gods also came to realise that their efforts to check-mate the fire-god were not going to bear fruit because of the presence of Krishna and Arjuna. So, they thought it in their interest to flee for their lives.

But Indra was not going to give up the fight. He chopped off a peak called Mount Mandar and hurled it at Krishna and Arjuna. But Arjuna, quite actively, broke the mountain peak into pieces with his divine arrows obtained from the water-god.

Just then a heavenly voice resounded, "Listen, O Indra ! your friend Takshak has left the forest to a place of safety. Don't worry for him. Let the forest be burnt to ashes along with all the criminals hiding in it. It is next to impossible for you to match Krishna and Arjuna in a battle. You had better beg Krishna's pardon and return to your heavenly abode."

Hearing the heavenly voice, Indra came to realise the gravity of the situation. Moreover, his worry regarding the safety of his friend, Takshak, was over.

So, he begged Krishna's pardon, showered blessings on Krishna and Arjuna and returned to his abode.



Just then Krishna caught sight of Mairavan, chief of the demons, escaping out of the jungle-fire and running in fright followed by the fire-god in human form to capture and burn him. Just in front, the demon found Krishna standing with his chakra ready to kill him. So, he turned to Arjuna and fell on his feet requesting to be saved from Krishna's attack.

Arjuna consoled him assuring that he would not let him be killed by the fire-god or Krishna.

Hearing Arjuna's assurance, the fire-god turned back to the forest which remained in flames for fifteen days. Having his hunger fully satisfied, he returned to his heavenly abode after thanking Krishna and Arjuna for their help.

After his departure, Arjuna and Krishna came to the bank of the Yamuna along with Mairavan, the demon. All the three sat down under a tree in order to take rest.

Mairavan was all thanks to Arjuna for saving his life from the fire-god and Krishna. So, he folded his hands and said, "Let me know, please, what I can do for you. I possess a special miraculous skill in architecture."

"Good! then prepare a beautiful palace for the Pandava king, Yudhishtir. It should be beyond the human effort," replied Arjuna and Krishna together.

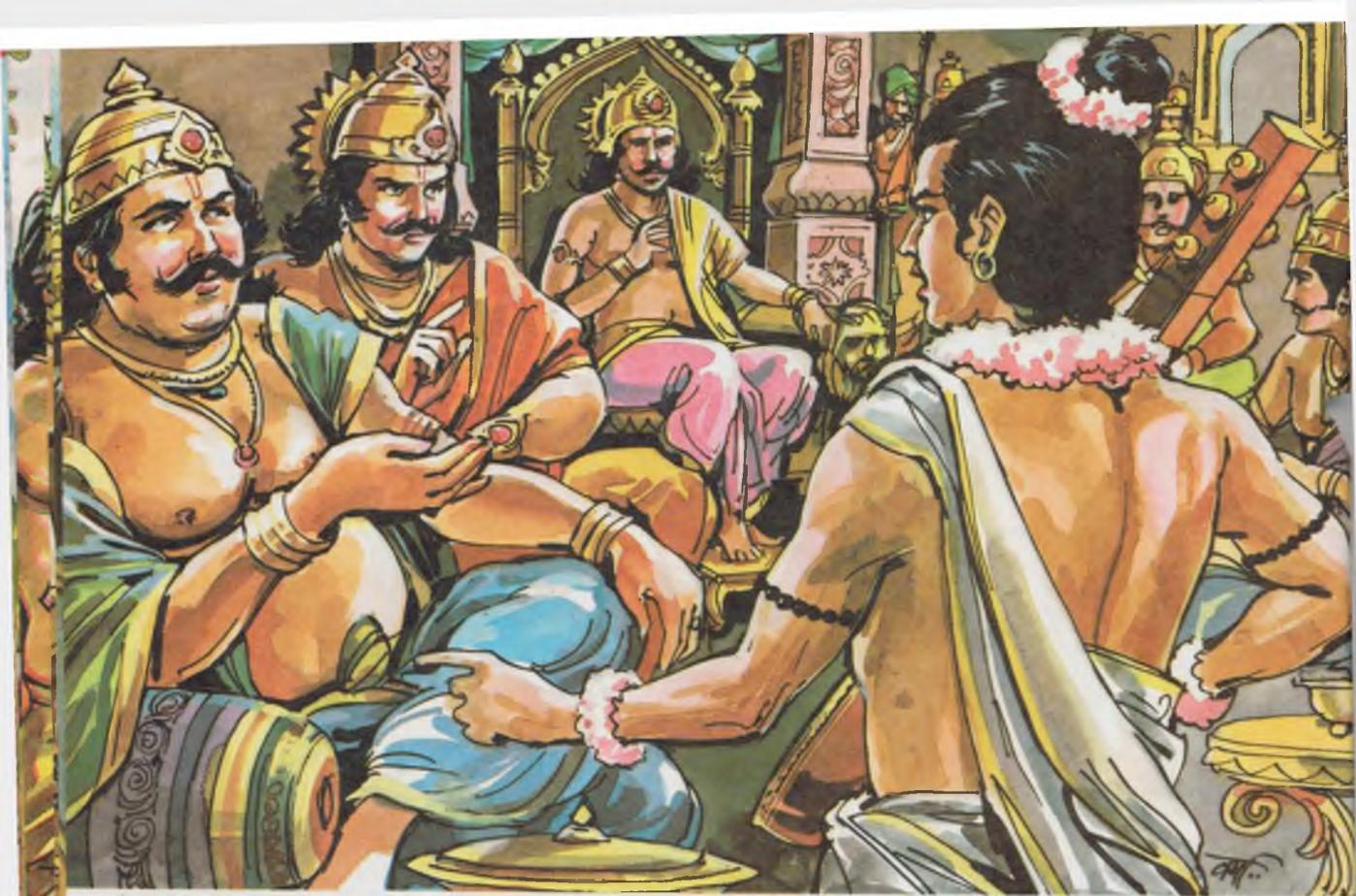


Maidanav set about the task of constructing the palace for the Pandavas. Soon he built a unique huge palace which had an auditorium built around a beautiful pool of water with marble flooring studded with costly pearls. On one side of the pool was transparent floor made of crystal stone in level with the surface of water in the pool. As a result, this dry floor also gave the appearance of a pool. Anyone could mistake it for water.

The Pandavas were very pleased to see the wonderful palace and thanked Maidanav. But the demon was so obliged to Arjuna that he begged him to accept his offer of a few more things. When permitted, he asked Arjuna to be allowed to go to Kairnass to bring the gold studded mace which equals a thousand maces in weight. The demon wanted to offer it as a present to Bheema. Besides, he intended to bring a high-sounding conch-shell, called Devdutt, to present it to Arjuna.

Arjuna allowed the demon to go and bring the two things named above. So, he proceeded to Kairnass at a fast speed and reached there in just two days.

Collecting the mace and the shell from there he returned to Indraprastha and offered them to Arjuna as presents in token of his gratitude for saving his life.



The crystal-stone floor had lotus flowers, turtles, fish and other water creatures made of precious gems studded in it. So, it created an illusion of being a pool full of water with the above-named things in it.

It was decided after consultation with the royal priest that the Pandavas should enter the palace after performing a ceremonious inauguration of it.

The ceremony over, the Pandavas started living in the palace.

One day saint Narda happened to visit Indraprastha. He was duly received by Yudhisthir. Narda said, "Yudhisthir you are a powerful king capable of making the world-conquest even. Your brothers are your invincible lieutenants. I would like you to fulfil a wish which your father disclosed to me. I have come simply to inform you of it."

"Let me know, revered saint, what the wish of my dear father was. I must fulfil it," replied Yudhisthir with folded hands.

"You must perform the *Rajsuya Yajna* to establish your superiority to all other kings," disclosed Narda.



Yudhishthir at once called the royal priest Ayudhaumya and asked him to make arrangements for the Yajna. Also, he held consultations with Krishna about it.

Krishna thought over the matter for a while and said, "Yudhishthir! you must perform the yajna but after doing one thing. I apprehend that Jarasandh, ruler of Magadha must create trouble during the yajna because of me. You know that he is bitterly against me for the murder of Kansa, his son-in-law, So, it will be wise of you to eliminate Jarasandh before starting the performance of the yajna.

"How can we do that? They say, he is gifted with matchless strength by Lord Shiva and thus has become almost invincible. Not only this, he has captured a large number of kings on unfounded charges and imprisoned them. He wants to sacrifice them to Lord Rudra (Ferocious Form of Lord Shiva). He will perform this sacrifice when he has captured one hundred and one kings in all," argued Yudhishthir.

Krishna said, "Don't you worry, dear brother. Leave it to me. Simply send Bheema and Arjuna with me. I will have him killed by Bheema. And his defeat at your hands will establish you as the mightiest king capable of performing the Rajsuya Yajna."



Yudhishthir felt highly worried and found himself in a fix as to what to do. No doubt, Krishna was their true well-wisher and he had no fear for his brothers if he was with them.

But still Jarasandh was not an ordinary king. He was considered to be the mightiest king in north India. Several doubts crossed Yudhishthir's mind and he was really very upset.

Yudhishthir said to Krishna, "What shall I do without you three. You know Krishna, that you are our best guide while Bheema and Arjuna are my two eyes. I have great fear from the side of Jarasandh whom even gods dread."

Krishna consoled Yudhishthir saying, "Don't lose heart, O Yudhishthir. What is to be must be. Nobody can stand in the way of what time intends to befall a man.

As for Jarasandh, I can clearly visualise that his end is imminent because his misdoings have crossed all limits. Nature never spares a man whose excesses exceed the appropriate norms. Listen to my plan of putting an end to his life."

Krishna explained, "Bheema will challenge Jarasandh for a wrestling duel. He will surely accept the challenge and Bheema will get a chance to kill him by dint of his matchless prowess."

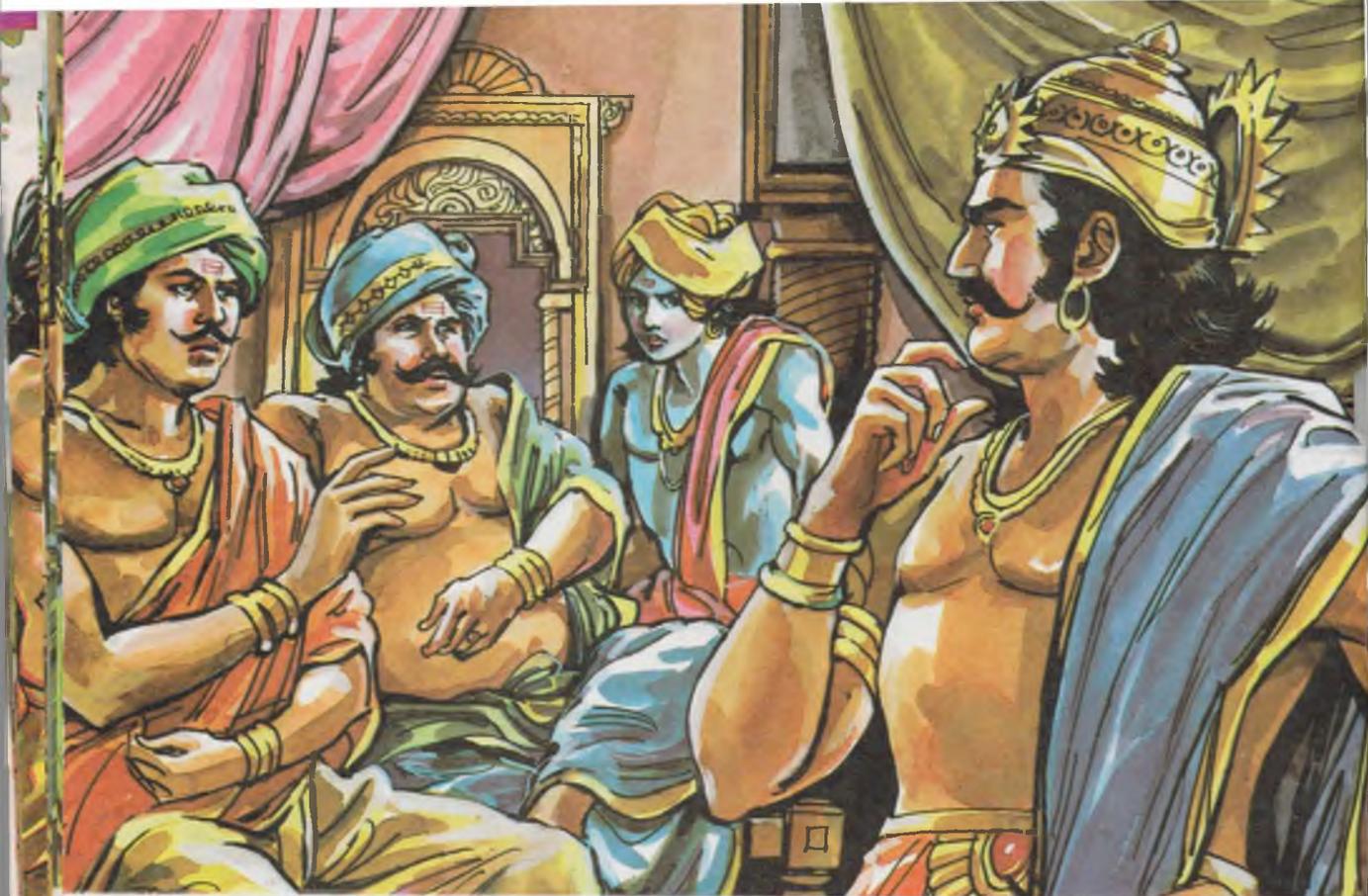


Yudhisthir said to Krishna, "I am fully confident now that with your help and guidance my brother Bheema will come out victorious. Moreover Arjuna, the invincible archer, is also with you. Still more gods must be on our side because by killing Jarasandh, we will be rescuing the kings who have been imprisoned by Jarasandh for sacrifice."

Having been permitted, Krishna, Arjuna and Bheema set out to Magadha in the guise of Brahmans. Crossing several rivers, forests and mountains, they reached the city of Girivraj, the capital of king Jarasandh. On the way, they had destroyed Mount Chaitryak sacred to the people of Magadha. The Brahmans of this mount took it as an ill omen for Jarasandh and informed him of what had happened.

Jarasandh, advised by his priest, started a yajna to liquidate the effect of the ill omen and to avert the calamities that looked looming large on him and his kingdom.

Just at this moment Krishna, Arjuna and Bheema elbowed their way to the venue of the yajna and presented themselves before king Jarasandh who got up to welcome them taking them to be Brahmans coming for participating in the yajna.



Bheema and Arjuna kept mum while Krishna said to Jarasandh, "Your Majesty! both of them are observing a silence-fast today. So, they will not speak till midnight."

"All right !! I shall request you to have rest till then. I shall present myself before you after midnight again," remarked mighty Jarasandh and then he made for his palace.

Exactly at midnight, Jarasandh came to where Krishna, Arjuna and Bheema were staying, and offered his salutations to them. Bheema and Arjuna blessed him saying, "May God grant you prosperity." Then they asked him to take a seat before them. While sitting Jarasandh gazed carefully at Bheema and Arjuna.

He grew suspicious of them. Then he asked them to disclose their identity and the purpose of their visit to his capital.

Krishna disclosed their identity and threw a challenge to Jarasandh who became red in anger. How could he afford not to accept the challenge.

So, a day was fixed for the duel to begin. It was to be a ferocious duel indeed. We shall read about it in the next book of the series.

