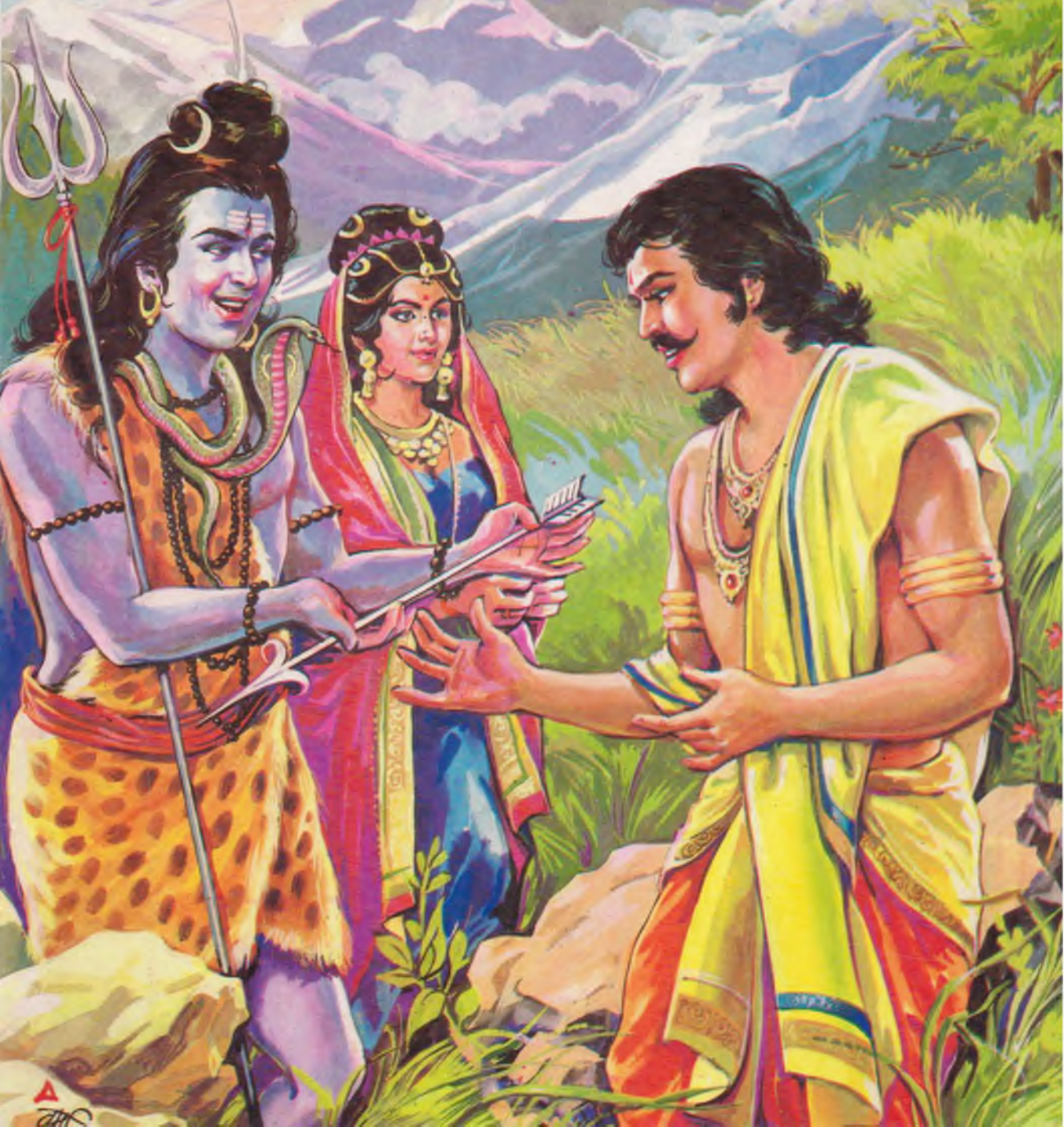




MAHABHARATA

TITLE NO. 101

PART 6



MAHABHARATA



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After getting back whatever Yudhishtir had lost in gambling, the Pandavas returned to their capital—Indraprastha. Dhritrashtra had returned everything to the Pandavas fearing a horrible reprisal from Bheema, ocean of might. Duryodhana and Dushasan felt highly hurt at the sudden turn of affairs. Dushasan was particularly frightened because for him Bheema was another name for a horrible death. He felt very uneasy so much so that he was never able to sleep in peace and walk but in sorrow.

Dushasan went to Duryodhana and said, "Brother dear! our father has spoiled the entire game. Do something, otherwise the Pandavas are sure to hit back in a big way. You know that Bheema and Arjuna are invincible warriors and we can never match them in terms of force." Duryodhana agreed to what Dushasan had said.

Duryodhana went to Dhritrashtra who was in the palace sitting with queen Gandhari. He said, "Dad! you have spoiled the game and allowed the enemy to get out of my trap. Everybody knows we cannot match the Pandavas in force. But I am bent upon depriving them of the kingdom that they have got. It really belongs to us because Pandu was a mere make-shift king. In fact, the throne was yours and after you it is mine. Be it clear that we can overthrow the Pandavas only through some fraud and deception."



As mentioned earlier, Dhritrashtra didn't have the guts to put Duryodhana off. So, he gave his consent and allowed Duryodhana to act as he liked. But Gandhari at once interrupted saying, "Your Majesty! do not add fuel to the fire. This son of yours is a dirty stain on the fair name of Kuru dynasty. Take courage to say 'no' whenever he comes with some evil plan. I fear that Duryodhana would cause you to be blamed by the coming generations for the destruction of the Kauravas."

"Gandhari! I was deprived of the throne because of my eyes. But Duryodhana is not blind. The throne belonged to me and Pandu was only a make-shift ruler. Duryodhana is rightly trying to get the throne back. Let the dynasty go to the dogs. I can't snub the wishes of my sons," retorted Dhritrashtra curtly.

As it was a custom for the Kshatriyas not to decline an invitation for a dice-game, Yudhishtira was again invited and once again he came to Hastinapur for gambling. This time it was decided that the loser will have to remain in exile for a period of thirteen years, the last year of which he was to remain under-ground and untraced. If traced, he would go into exile for another twelve years.

Everybody tried his level best to dissuade Yudhishtira not to repeat his mistake anymore. But *what is to be must be*. Innocent Yudhishtira never knew that Shakuni used charmed dice and they always turned out as he wanted them to. So, the Pandava king was again defeated. Dushasan and Duryodhana were beside themselves with joy.



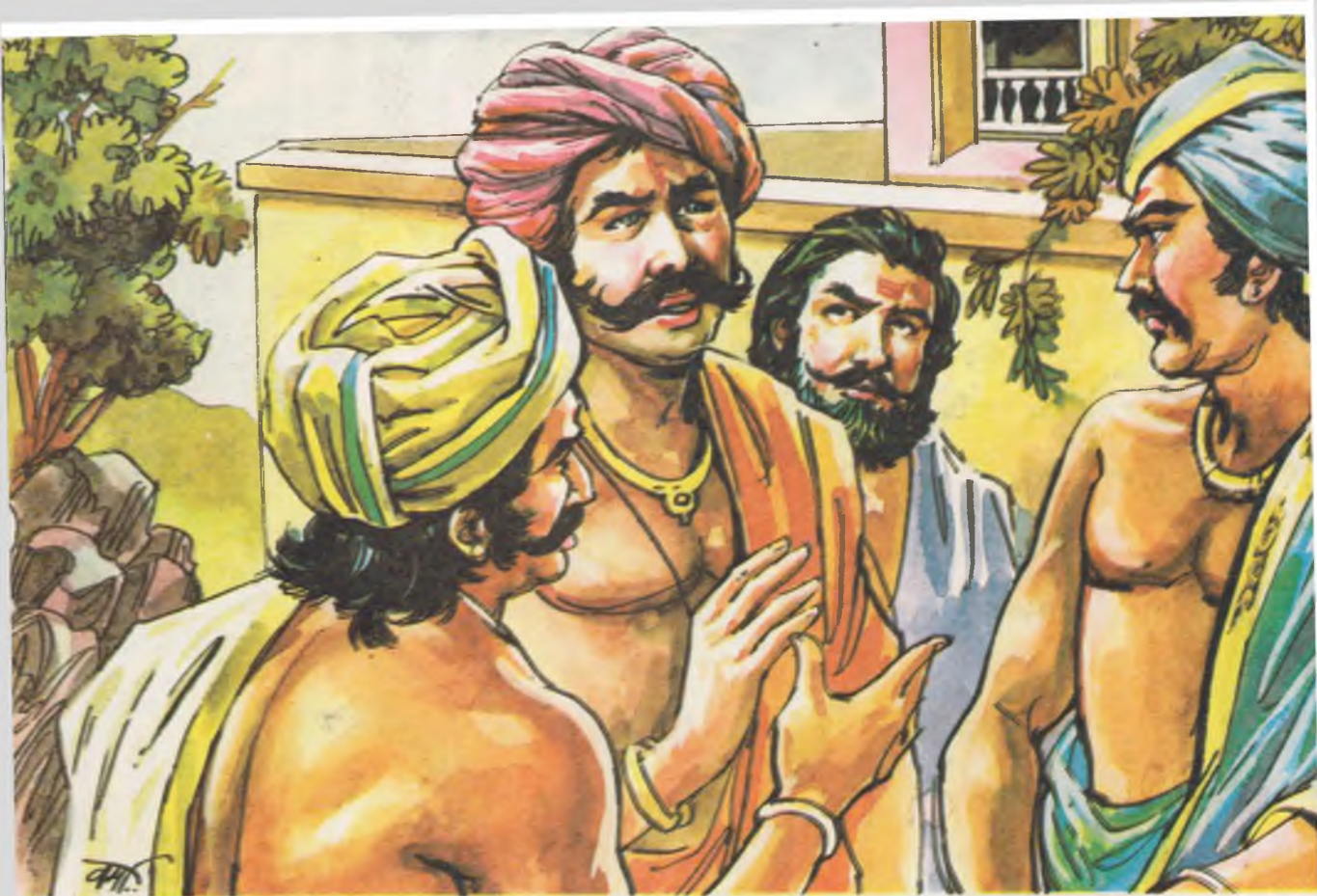
Duryodhana began to mock at Bheema who could not put up with it. He thundered, "Listen, O Duryodhana! the day is not far when Arjuna will kill Karna, Sahdev shall kill Shakuni and I shall crush your and Dushasan's heads with my mace and trample your bodies under my feet."

The Pandavas were, now, condition-bound to go into exile for thirteen years. But Kunti had grown too weak to bear the sufferings of exile. So, Vidur took her to his own house while the Pandava brothers proceeded to the forest along with Draupadi.

Draupadi's hair were still dishevelled because she had taken a vow not to dress them until and unless Dushasan was killed.

After the departure of the Pandavas, Saint Narad appeared in the court of Hastinapur. He said to Dhritrashtra, "I have come to inform you, that you will repent of what you have done. After about fourteen years from today, the entire dynasty of the kauravas shall be destroyed and the Pandavas will come out victorious."

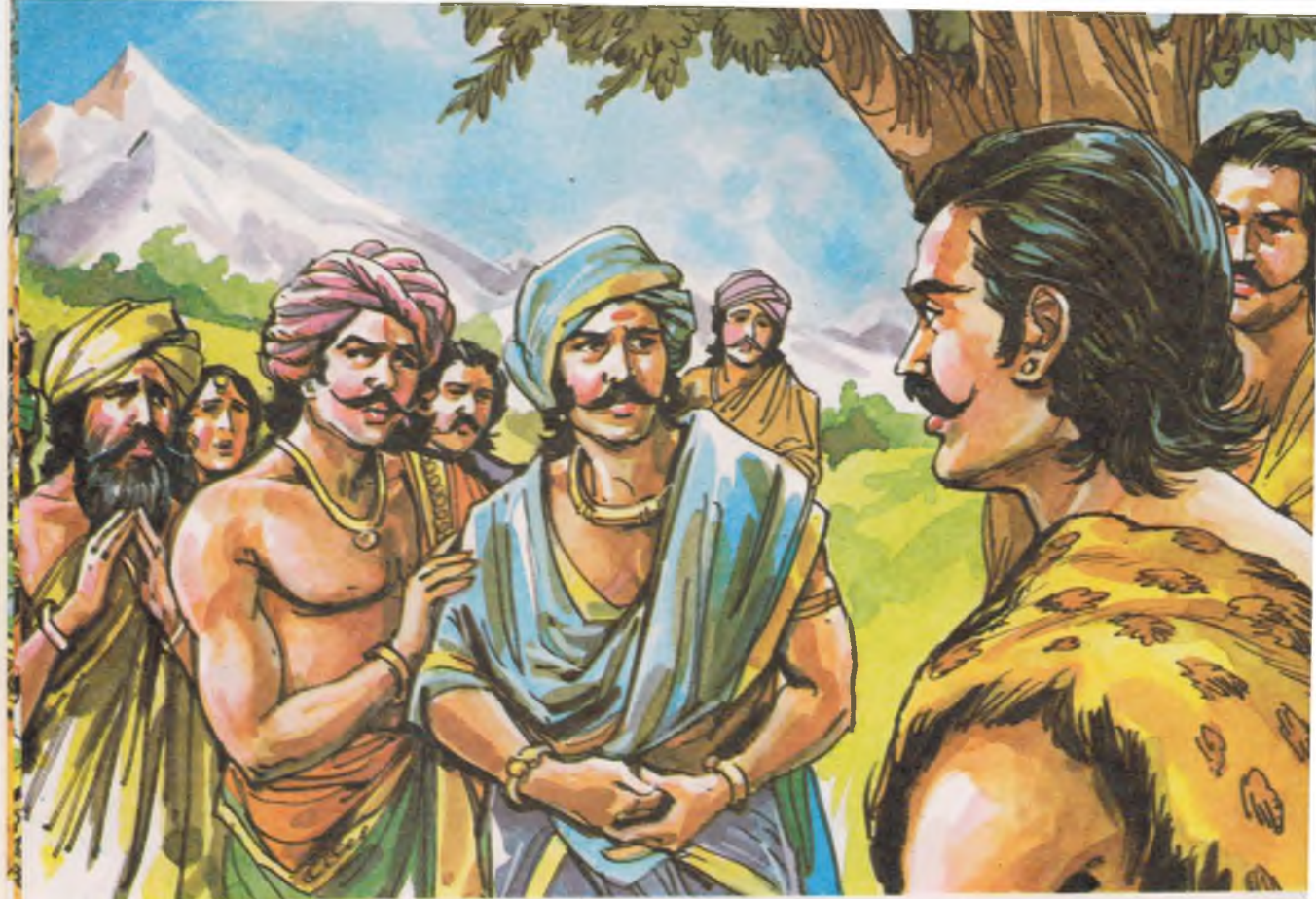
Hearing the words of Narad, the entire court including the king got frightened. Dhritrashtra was so scared that he entrusted the entire kingdom to Dronacharya.



The Pandavas, along with Draupadi, had left for the forest while Kunti stayed with Vidur. Moreover, Subhadra, her son Abhimanyu and five sons of Draupadi were sent to Dwarika to live in Krishna's care. As for the people of Hastinapur, they were condemning Duryodhana and Dhritrashtra for what they had done. They apprehended that they could not live in peace and safety under Dhritrashtra who was always guided by his son Duryodhana and his evil brother-in-law Shakuni.

Not only this, the people denounced Bheeshma, Dronacharya and other elders who had allowed such a serious thing to happen. Most women opined, "When Dhritrashtra and Bheeshma could not guard the grace of Draupadi even who are we for them? How can we hope to be safe under the rule of such a ruler?"

Most of the people were of the opinion that the evil brain working behind all the untoward happenings was that of Shakuni, Gandhari's brother. So, they demanded that Shakuni be ordered to leave Hastinapur in no time. They also wanted that Dhritrashtra, Bheeshma and Dronacharya should exercise such a check on Duryodhana and his brother Dushasan that they should not be able to do any such thing as was sure to bring trouble and plunge the Kuru dynasty into chaos.



The people of Hastinapur went to Yudhishthir in a body and said, "Your Majesty ! we see in you the image of our just and brave king Pandu. We are pained to see that Dhritrashtra and his sons have deceitfully deprived you of your kingdom through dishonest Shakuni who used enchanted dice in the game. But we don't want to be ruled by such vicious rulers. So, we have come to you to stand by you and serve you in your adversity."

Yudhishthir felt very obliged to the people of Hastinapur and said, "Your overwhelming affection has really glorified me and my brothers. Don't forget that our well-wishers like grandpa Bheeshma, guru Drona, prime minister Vidur and mother Kunti are all here. Leaving us to the care of God, you should take care of them only. They are equally pained at what has happened.'

Consoling them in every way, Yudhishthir persuaded them to return to their homes.

They all bade good-bye to the Pandavas with tearful eyes and the Pandavas advanced on their way to the forests along with their wife Draupadi.

By now, their royal priest, Ayudhaumya had also learnt about their exile and reached the forest to join them. They decided to build a hut at a suitable place and put up there.



On the advice of the royal priest, the Pandavas began to worship the sun-god. Yudhishtira carried out the worship so devotionally that the sun-god was soon pleased with him. One day when he was offering his prayers standing in water, the god appeared before him and asked him to demand what he liked.

Yudhishtira folded his hands and said, "O God of Light ! give me such a boon as should enable me to feed Draupadi, my brothers and the guests who visit me in a nice way."

The sun-god, giving a bowl to Yudhishtira, said, "Your wish may come out to be true, O Yudhishtira. Have this vessel and give it to Draupadi. It will go on giving you your choicest dishes every day till Draupadi finishes her meal in the morning and at night. Rest assured ! you will also get back your kingdom after thirteen years."

Yudhishtira, returning after his daily worship, handed over the bowl to Draupadi and told her everything what the sun-god had said. Draupadi was very pleased to hear of the boon and took the bowl to his kitchen with great reverence as well as astonishment.

Having been care-free on the food-front, the Pandavas fed the Brahmans and saints every day before they dined themselves.



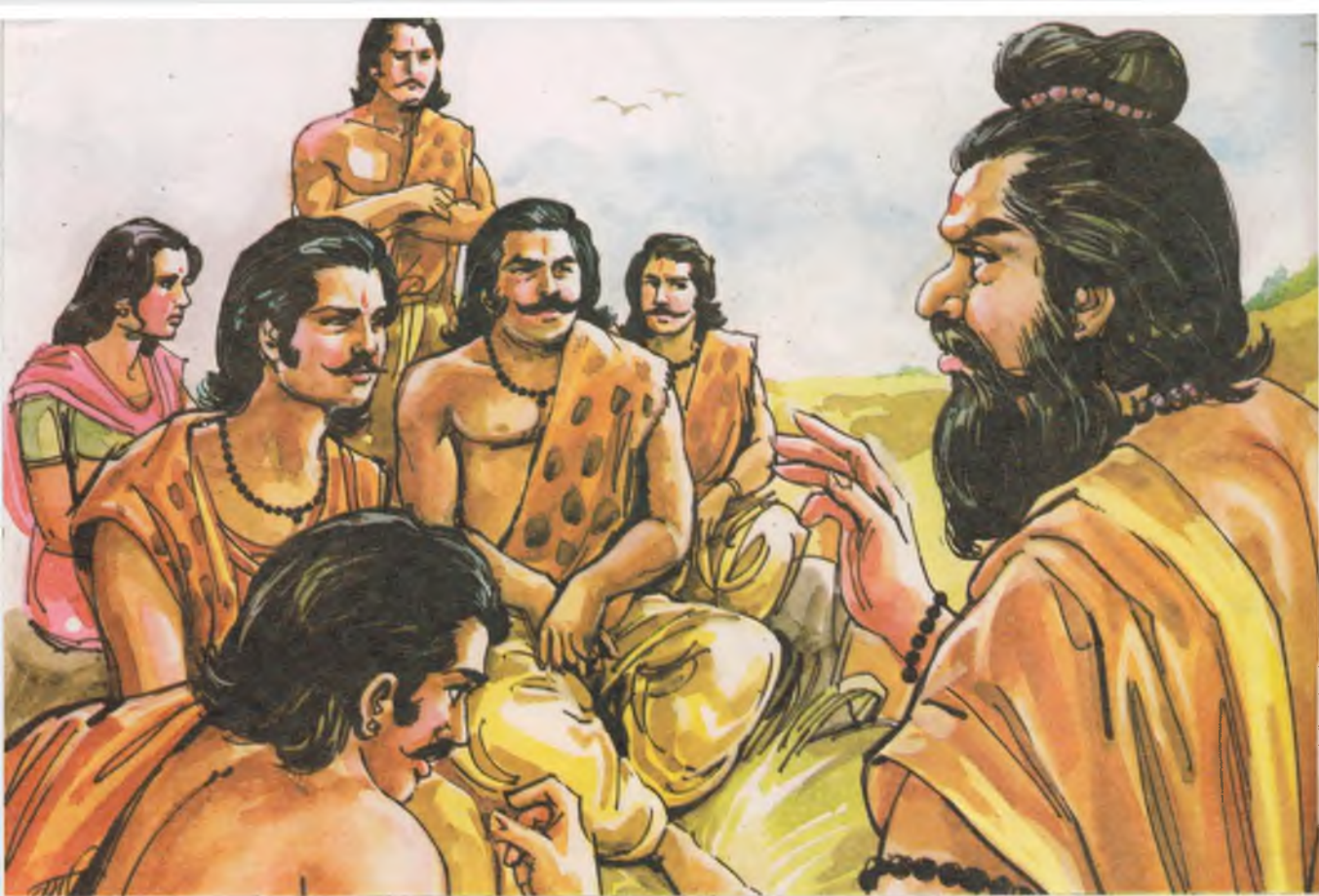
Soon the Pandavas moved to a new forest called *Kamyak Van*. As soon as they entered this new forest, a huge horrible demon blocked their way with a burning torch in his right hand.

Giving out a terrible roar, which made Draupadi swoon out of fear, he advanced towards the five brothers. But Yudhishtir thundered, "Who are you and why have you blocked our way?"

The demon retorted, "I am Kimeer, Bakasur's brother. But who are you and who has sent you in my territory to become my food?"

"I am Yudhishtir, the son of king Pandu, and they are my younger brothers—Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahdev. She is my wife Draupadi," explained Yudhishtir.

"Ha... ha... ha! goodluck for me. Who among you is Bheema, the killer of my brother Bakasur and the murderer of my close friend Hidimb? Where is he—Bheema—who abducted Hidimba and tarnished her chastity so much so that she gave birth to a son from him? I will kill him now and here to avenge the disgrace heaped on the entire community of demons by him. How happy all the demons would be to see him dead!" Saying so, the demon brandished the torch high in the air.



Fretting and frowning, Kimeer advanced towards Bheema as he had recognised him from his stature. But Bheema was already ready to face him. A fierce combat followed that was really very dreadful. The reason was that Bheema was smouldering with anger at the insult of Draupadi in the Kaurava court and he had not been able to give vent to it at anyone so far.

So, he gripped the hands of the demon, twisted them round and round and then flung him down with a bang on the ground. Giving him no time to rise again he strangled him to death. Then all the Pandavas made a dwelling in the Kamyak Van and started living there peacefully.

The Pandavas had proceeded to the forest in the absence of Krishna. When Subhadra, Abhimanyu and Draupadi's sons reached Dwarika, Krishna came to know of all what had happened. So, he reached the Kamyak Van along with king Drupad and soothed the Pandavas with sympathetic words. When they had departed with a heavy heart, Sage Vyasa came to visit the Pandavas too.

Vyasa advised them, I see that a fearful war will take place between you and the Kauravas as soon as you return to Hastinapur after thirteen years of your banishment. So, start preparing yourselves for this impending war right now. Meditate hard and acquire as many divine weapons as you can."



Before leaving, Saint Vyasa said to Arjuna, "Arjuna! go to Mount Kailash and see Lord Shiva personally there to procure the divine bow and arrows from him."

Arjuna got ready to go to Mount Kailash as directed by the saint. As he was about to leave, Draupadi said, "Darling! I pray to gods, vasus, rudras and adityas for your success. May your wish be duly fulfilled!"

Arjuna took leave of his brothers and Draupadi and proceeded on the difficult journey. He was the master of a branch of knowledge called *Pratismriti*. This knowledge could help him to move with the speed of thoughts. So, in no time, Arjuna reached the foot of the Himalayas. Then crossing the Gandhmadan Range, he reached Mount Indrakeel.

Suddenly Arjuna heard a voice, "Wait! stop short. Arjuna turned round to see who had asked him to stop. He saw an old sage with long hair sitting under a tree in a meditating posture. Seeing Arjuna armed with a bow and arrows, the sage asked him, "Who are you and why are you roaming here with a bow and a quiver of arrows?"

"I am Arjuna, son of king Pandu of Hastinapur," replied Arjuna bowing his head in reverence.



The sage remarked, "Arjuna! this spot is the abode of those saints that are immortal. So, war is non-existent here. As for you, you also attained salvation as soon as you set your foot here. You should, therefore, throw away your arms at once as they are not at all needed here." But Arjuna did not comply with what the sage had said.

Seeing Arjuna hesitating about throwing his arms, the sage began to disclose his identity, "Arjuna! I am Indra. Listen carefully to what I say. Ask for any boon and I am here to grant it to you."

As soon as Arjuna heard the name, Indra, he was thrilled. Offering his salutations to the rain-god. He said, "Sir, I have come here to gain entire knowledge of all the weapons. Be kind enough to grant me a boon so that I am successful in my mission."

Indra replied, "Look dear! Nobody can give you any knowledge about the divine weapons until and unless you go and see Lord Shiva. Go to Mount Kailash and invoke him so devotionally that he allows yourself to be in his presence. Once you have seen him, I shall give you the entire knowledge about divine weapons on your return here." Saying these words, Indra (the old sage) disappeared.

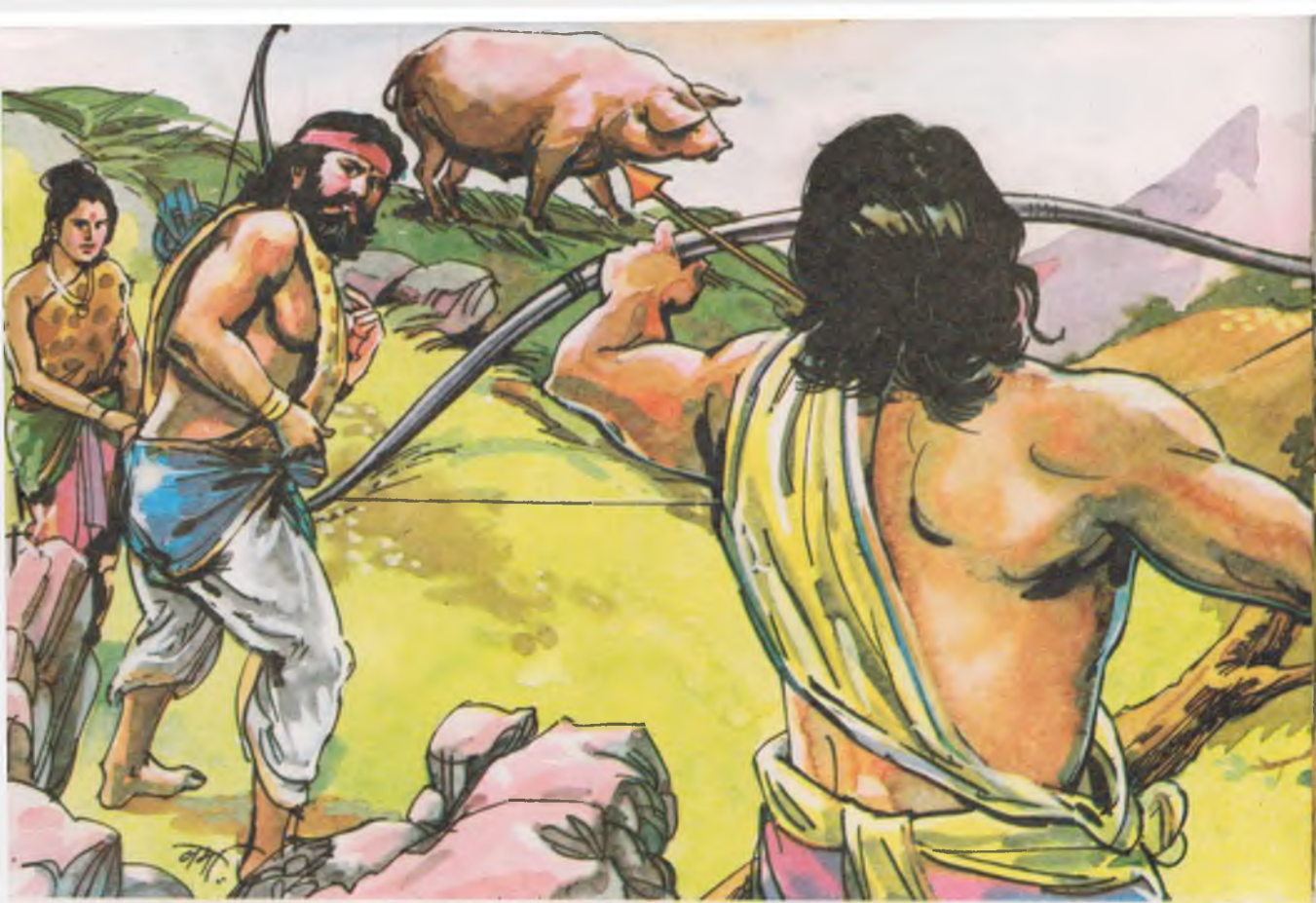


At the advice of Indra, Arjuna went to Mount Kailash and settled down upon a wide rock. He started meditating hard with deep devotion to invoke Lord Shiva.

Seeing Arjuna lost in deep meditation, the ascetics and sages living near by got afraid. They ran to Lord Shiva and after offering their salutations implored him, "O Lord of Lords! a human-being has trespassed into this land of immortality and started meditating hard on a rock just near by from here. He is performing yajnas that have made the entire area profusely smoky. Be kind enough to check him before it becomes unbearable and we get choked."

"Why should you be afraid? That human-being is Arjuna who was born to the Pandava queen, Kunti, as a result of Indra's boon. Don't worry; he has not come here for a permanent stay. I know what he has come for. So, I will go to him and grant his wish just today. He is invoking me to have a boon from me. Indra has also assured him on the way that he would grant him a boon only after he has seen me." replied Lord Shiva.

Hearing Lord Shiva's words and getting his assurance not to be harmed, all the ascetics and sages went back happy and satisfied. As for Lord Shiva, he transformed himself into a hunter and proceeded to where Arjuna was performing a yajna.



Disguised as a hunter and taking Parvati with him as his wife, Lord Shiva reached the site where Arjuna was performing a yajna. Hundreds of disciples of Lord Shiva, called *ganas* also followed the Lord and Parvati.

As soon as they reached near Arjuna, they saw that a fearful demon named Mook, was rushing at him assuming the form of a ferocious wild boar.

Arjuna had seen the boar heading towards him in an aggressive mood. At once, he picked up his bow and set an arrow at it saying, "You mean beast! you are upto kill even a person who is busy performing a religious ceremony. How have I harmed you? Wait! I just send you to the land of death-god." It was now time for Lord Shiva to act.

Lord Shiva (the hunter) shot an arrow simultaneously such that both the arrows struck the boar at one and the same time. As a result, the beast fell down dead instantly.

Arjuna ran to the boar and seeing the other arrow in the body of the boar turned red in anger. He thundered, "Who has dared to shoot an arrow at my prey. Come before me if you dare. I shall instantly make short work of you even. You perhaps don't know who I am. I am Arjuna, son of Pandu, the brave king of Hastinapur."



Lord Shiva, (the hunter) marched forward and stood defiantly before Arjuna retorting in a tough tone, "It is I who have shot the arrow. It is my prey as I had shot it first while you have committed an offence by shooting an arrow at my prey." Feeling even more enraged, Arjuna burst out, "So, it is you who has done it. And upon that you are blaming me for committing an offence which you yourself committed. You don't look to be a Kshatriya otherwise you would not have gone against the code set for the Kshatriyas. I won't leave you alive now." Saying these words, Arjuna showered a volley of arrows at the hunter (Lord Shiva).

The hunter kept nullifying Arjuna's arrows cutting them mid-way. The combat went on for a long time and at last Arjuna grew badly tired. So, he addressed the hunter and said, "Who are you, O Brave Man? Why are you roaming in the company of women like that?"

"I think you have accepted your defeat. Never be over-confident of yourself. Really brave people are always polite, not haughty. You are still a milksop as far as the skill of archery is concerned. Go and play with toys." argued the hunter.

Being unable to tolerate the bitter taunt, Arjuna got infuriated once again and said, "Wait! let me worship Lord Shiva first and then I will serve you right."



Arjuna placed his bow and the quiver of arrows aside and formed Lord Shiva's image (*Shiva-ling*) out of snow and sat down worshipping it with profound devotion. Then he collected some wild flowers, made them into a garland and put it round the image. When he raised his eyes he was dumbfounded to see a miracle.

The garland that he had put round Shiva's image was there round the neck of the hunter now whereas it had disappeared from upon the Lord's image.

Arjuna lost no time to understand that the hunter was Lord Shiva himself. So, he folded his hands and bowed low before the hunter saying, "O Lord! now I have followed that I was being put to a test. I am overwhelmed with joy to be in your feet. Needless to say, the purpose of my visit is not a secret from you as you are omniscient. I beg you, O Lord, to come to your real form."

Lord Shiva came to his real form and blessed Arjuna saying, "Get up Arjuna! Your extraordinary valour had really pleased me. I was really so happy to find you facing me dauntlessly. I grant you the power of divine vision. You will defeat all your enemies in the war."

Then Arjuna went upto Parvati and paid obeisance to her most humbly. She also blessed him affectionately.



Having been highly pleased at Arjuna's devotion, Lord Shiva asked him to demand whatever he wanted as a boon. Arjuna requested the lord, "Be kind enough to give me thy mightiest weapon—*Pashupat Astra*—which emits thousands of arrows, spears and maces like poisonous snakes at one and the same time."

"Be it so ; I hereby give you the Pashupat Astra and bless you with the capacity to use it and withdraw it at will. But you will have to take one precaution while using it. Never use it on somebody all of a sudden unmindfully, otherwise, it shall reduce the entire universe to ashes." Saying these words, Lord Shiva handed over the Pashupat Astra to Arjuna and explained everything regarding its operation to him as well.

Having given the Pashupat Astra to Arjuna, Lord Shiva disappeared along with Parvati. Before leaving, he had commanded Arjuna to go back having no worry in his mind. He had also told him that all other gods will also give him their divine weapons even without his asking for them. So, as soon as Lord Shiva disappeared, all other gods appeared before Arjuna with their respective divine weapons. These gods included *Yama, Varuna, Kubera, Lord Indra* who was accompanied by his wife, *Indrani* also. Arjuna was so pleased to see all the gods before him.



Having been received by the charming nymphs of heaven, Arjuna was led to Lord Indra's court. There he was received with due honour and was given an honourable seat. During his stay at Amaravati, Arjuna learnt music and dance from Chitransen, chief of Gandharvas. Arjuna stayed for five long years at Amaravati. He was indeed charmed with the luxuries and the beauty of the things there.

One night when Arjuna was lying in his bed, strange ideas flashed across his mind. he, in his fancy, began to compare the luxuries of heavenly life with the sufferings of man's life on the earth. Suddenly, the chief nymph of paradise and the most beautiful among all the nymphs— Urvashi— entered Arjuna's bed-room and sat beside him on his cot. Arjuna was overwhelmed with amazement and got up with a start.

Folding his hands, he said very modestly, "Revered Mother! what made you take the trouble of coming over to me? You could have ordered me to appear in your presence."

"O Arjuna! don't put me to shame like that. A nymph can never be anybody's mother or sister. I have come over to you wishing for your love," remarked Urvashi amorously with eyes that displayed her love-sickness vividly.



“What do you say, O goddess? You are worth worshipping for me because you are a fairy of Lord Indra’s court and mother to the race of the Kurus. You are also the wife of the sage who happens to be our guru. How can I afford to commit a deed that will tarnish not only me but the fair name of my great dynasty as well. I beg you to bless me so that I may enjoy welfare and well-being in every way,” argued Arjuna.

Urvashi tried her level best to allure Arjuna towards herself through her grace, captivating gestures and demonstrative postures but all to no purpose. Arjuna, a man of iron will, proved quite unshakable. So, Urvashi got offended.

She instantly cursed Arjuna saying, “You have kicked my offer like a eunuch. I, inflict a curse on you that you will have to remain like a eunuch among charming ladies for a period of one year.

At the same time, Urvashi was highly pleased at the self-control of Arjuna though he was in the prime of his life. So, she conferred a boon also on him.

She said, “The one year during which you shall act as a eunuch, will be a boon for you as it will help you keep yourself untraced and unrecognised.”



Five years had passed and there was no news regarding Arjuna. So, his brothers and Draupadi felt worried for him. They often kept thinking about his safety as ominous ideas sometimes flashed across their minds. Yudhishtir would often curse himself for creating trouble for all his brothers and Draupadi and sadness would overwhelm him at such a time. But his brothers and Draupadi did their best to cheer him up convincing him of Arjuna's bravery and tactfulness.

One day sage Lomush happened to come where the Pandavas were staying in the Kamyak Van. He was able to see Arjuna through his divine vision. So, he informed Yudhishtir of Arjuna's success in obtaining the divine weapons from Lord Shiva and other gods of paradise. He also told him about his training in music and dance in heaven. At the same time, he told that he was now missing you all very much.

"How long will it take Arjuna to come back?" asked Yudhishtir.

"He will take quite some time to reach here," replied the sage.

So, Yudhishtir requested the sage to escort them to various places of pilgrimage till Arjuna's return. The sage was highly pleased and escorted them to many sacred places. When the party reached Badrika Ashram, they decided to stay there for some time.



The Pandavas were staying at Badrika Ashram hoping that Arjuna would reach there one day because this holy place was located on the way that led to Mount Kailash where Arjuna had gone to see Lord Shiva.

One day Bheema and Draupadi were wandering in the forest enjoying the beauty of nature. Suddenly Draupadi caught sight of a beautiful lotus flower. She was captivated by its beauty and so she picked it up. Then she said to Bheema, "Darling ! how beautiful this flower looks. I want to present it to Dharmraj. But this single flower won't do. Some more flowers like it should be presented to him. So, get a few more flowers of this kind."

Draupadi returned to the *ashram* while Bheema set out in search of the place where more lotus flowers could be got. Journeying on and on, Bheema reached Mount Gandh Mardan whose sides were covered with banana plantations, beautiful springs and noisy brooks. Bheema looked about so that he might be able to spot the lotus plants anywhere but he could not be successful. Instead, he came across a big monkey lying on the ground. Its tail had stretched across the path.

Bheema was astonished and stamped his foot on the ground with a view to startling the monkey so that it should curl its tail away from the path.



To Bheema's amazement, the monkey did not move at all. So, Bheema got enraged and remarked threateningly, "Get away from the path, O fool."

"I am old and sick and so I cannot move at all. I would request you to push my tail aside and go your way," replied the monkey.

Bheema put his hands to the monkey's tail and tried to push it aside. But he failed to displace it even a little. He was struck with wonder and said to himself, "What has happened to me that I cannot displace the tail of an ordinary monkey even. This monkey must be some supernatural being."

So, Bheema folded his hands and said to the monkey, "I bow to thee, O Mighty One! Let me know who you are. I request you to come to your real form."

"I am Hanumana, the devotee of Lord Rama. I am lying here just to have a little respite." Saying these words, Hanumana came to his real mighty form and embraced Bheema closely. He disclosed to Bheema that he was his (Bheema's) elder brother as both of them were sons of the wind-god.

Bheema was highly surprised to see the ordinary monkey transformed into mighty Hanumana, known for his strength and true devotion to Lord Rama.



Hearing Hanumana's words, Bheema felt very pleased and paid his respects to him. Hanumana blessed him and assured him that he would help him in the war. "Whenever you charge an enemy, I shall mount his chariot and frighten your enemy with my humming sound," said Hanumana.

"I feel glorified with this boon of yours, O Revered Brother! Now I am sure of our victory over vicious Duryodhana." Saying so, Bheema asked Hanumana where he could find beautiful lotus flowers. Hanumana explained to Bheema which way to go to reach the garden of Lord Kubera on Mount Saugandhik. He told Bheema that lotus flowers would be found in abundance there.

Thanking Hanumana from the core of his heart, Bheema took his leave and hurried to the garden of Kubera. Reaching there, Bheema was pleased to see that the garden abounded with lotus flowers. This garden was near a beautiful lake in the lap of Mount Saugandhik. Bheema was highly pleased to see the flowers. He was happy that he would be able to fulfil the wish of his dear wife Draupadi.

But as soon as he advanced towards the lake, a large number of guards warned him in one voice, "Check your feet and stop short. Who are you to trespass into this territory of Lord Kubera? We won't allow you to come near the lake."



Bheema was wonder-struck as well as enraged to hear the warning of Kubera's soldiers. He said to them, "I haven't come here to cause any harm to your lake. I simply want to have a few lotus flowers for my elder brother whom I worship no less than a god. I will feel obliged if you let me pick a few flowers and go back to my place."

"Hold your tongue and feet as well, you fool! Don't you know that this lake and the garden around it belongs to Lord Kubera? Human-beings are not allowed to enter the Lord's territory. Who are you and why have you trespassed in to our land?" thundered the chief guard.

"I am Bheema, son of Pandu, the king of Hastinapur. I have told you that I want only a few lotus flowers for my elder brother. It should be none the worse for you or your lord if I take them," argued Bheema in a comparatively tough tone. But Kubera's soldiers did not heed his request and again rebuked him for coming there. At the same time, they threatened him with dire consequences.

How could Bheema tolerate all this? He challenged them with a roar. So, they attacked him in a body but he repulsed their attack with a single blow of his mace. They ran to Kubera and informed him of Bheema's action. Kubera knew why Bheema had come there. So, he commanded his soldiers to let him have the flowers. Bheema plucked some of them and returned to the Kamyak Van.

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