



MAHABHARATA

PART 9

TITLE NO. 104



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At the instance of Krishna and king Drupad, a meeting was convened at Viratnagar to discuss the matter of the restoration of the Pandavas' kingdom to them. Opening the discussion, Krishna addressed the participants of the meeting saying, "All of us know that Yudhishtir had been invited for a game of dice and deprived of his kingdom deceitfully through a pre-engineered plot by Duryodhana in complicity with Karna and Shakuni. Not only this, Draupadi was disgraced in the open court in the most ignominious manner. To crown it all, Duryodhana left no stone unturned to harass the Pandavas and Draupadi during their banishment even."

Carrying his contention further, Krishna added, "Who can deny that the Pandavas have duly undergone the penalty imposed on them for losing the game. Now it is their legal right to have their kingdom back because they cannot be punished doubly for a single lapse. But everyone is convinced that Duryodhana is least prepared to part with the Pandava kingdom. He claims to be the legal heir to the entire kingdom of king Vichitravirya contending that Pandu was only a make-shift ruler because of Dhritrashtra's blindness. So, we, in the interest of natural justice, should try to help the Pandavas get their kingdom back which had been given to them by Dhritrashtra himself."



King Drupad seconded what Krishna had said saying, "Krishna has placed the true facts before us in the most impartial manner. Everybody knows that he is an embodiment of justice and never chooses the wrong path, come what may. So, it is the duty of us all that we should try our level best to get justice for the Pandavas."

Hearing Drupad's words, Balrama could not afford to remain silent. He believed that Krishna had a soft corner for the Pandavas because of his untold love for Arjuna. Also, he knew that Drupad's help for his sons-in-law was natural. But he had a rancour against Arjuna who had abducted Subhadra and heaped immense disgrace upon their family.

So, he stood up and said, "I do not contribute to the views expressed by my brother Krishna and supported by king Drupad. Duryodhana rightly believes that he is the natural legal heir to the kingdom of Vichitravirya as Pandu was only a make-shift ruler of Hastinapur. It was really very generous of Dhritrashtra that he gave half the kingdom to the Pandavas in order to decimate the family crisis. Moreover, Yudhishtir lost his kingdom through his own mistake and so Duryodhana is its rightful owner now. Still one thing is possible that Yudhishtir should go in person and beg his kingdom back from Duryodhana pleading his case in the humblest possible manner."



Satyaki, the brave Yadava warrior, felt highly enraged to hear Balrama's view-point. He stood up and remarked in a tough tone, "I am at a loss to understand how Balrama has held the deceitful game to be a just proposition. It was arranged through a studied plan and with the malafide objective of depriving the Pandavas of their kingdom because Duryodhana had not relished the division of the Kaurva kingdom into two parts. Moreover, the Pandavas had to suffer an exile of thirteen years only because Yudhishtir had lost the game. If he was to lose his kingdom, then the banishment of the Pandavas had no meaning. Clearly, the condition of banishment was to penalise the Pandavas for their loss of the game. How can their right to their kingdom become forfeited then?"

Taking into account the various view-points, it was decided that a capable messenger should be sent to the Kaurva court to impress upon Dhritrashtra that he should persuade his son Duryodhana to be just to the Pandavas and return their kingdom to them. At the same time, it was held that preparations for the war, if necessary, should be started in right earnest so that if the situation goes the wrong way, the Pandavas might win their kingdom back after measuring arms with the Kaurvas.



Sanjaya, the royal priest of king Drupad, was deputed to act as the messenger of the Pandavas. So, taking leave of all the kings who had participated in the discussions, he made for Hastinapur in his chariot. Krishna, Balrama and other Yadava warriors also left for Dwarika.

Reaching Hastinapur, Sanjaya sought permission to see Dhritrashtra in his apartment in solitude. After the formal greetings were over, Sanjaya started the topic over which he had come to talk with the king. He said, "Your Majesty! the Pandavas have duly fulfilled the conditions decided upon after the game of dice. They have lived in banishment for thirteen years as penalty for the loss of the game. Now they want their kingdom to be restored back to them. Their demand is justified in every way. I think your sincere affection for your nephews will surely support what I have said and you will be able to bring Duryodhana round for it failing which a destructive war is sure to break out and its results can be well imagined by anyone. The invincible Pandavas are sure to be crowned with a victory and the entire blame for the ruin of the Kaurvas will come on you, sir."

Dhritrashtra realised the gravity of the situation in his heart of hearts and decided to place the matter before his courtiers the next day. So, Sanjaya made for the guest-house to present himself in the court the next morning.



After Sanjaya's departure for the guest-house, Dhritrashtra sent for his prime minister Vidur and apprised him of what Sanjaya had said. He disclosed that Sanjaya's pungent words had upset his mind, and requested Vidur to do something to give him peace of mind. Vidur replied, "Your Majesty! your greed for the kingdom of your nephews is the real cause of your uneasiness. If permitted, I can invoke Saint Sunatsujata who is immortal." Saying so, Vidur invoked the saint who appeared in a moment before them. Both the king and the prime minister greeted the saint most humbly and offered him a high seat.

Vidur folded his hands and said to the saint, "My Master, the king, is gripped with some doubts. Be kind enough to set them at rest."

"Ask what you want and I am here to answer it," said the saint.

"We have heard you do not believe in death while the gods suggest the path of celibacy for conquering death. Which of the two is the right belief?" asked the king.

"Both the things are right. Attachment to wordly things is another name for death. So, the people, who are weak, believe the death to be the most powerful. But I believe that detachment, truth, simplicity, humility and self-control are the weapons that keep away death." Saying so, the saint vanished and the king felt calm and satisfied.



The next morning, Sanjaya, the messenger of the Pandavas, appeared in the Kaurva court where all the nobles and ministers were sitting. He delivered the message of the Pandavas to the king and then addressing the crown prince Duryodhana, he said, "Duryodhana! I suggest that you should give up the path of injustice and restore the kingdom of the Pandavas back to them because Yudhishtir's loss of game has been duly penalised by their thirteen-year exile. Now it will be sheer injustice to keep their kingdom in your possession."

Hearing Sanjaya's words, Bhishma too warned Duryodhana saying, "Duryodhana! you are well aware of the fact that the Pandavas are invincible. It is very wise of them to ask for their kingdom in a friendly way through this messenger. If you turn a deaf ear to their cordial demand and my warning, you will have to repent of your obstinacy. The Pandavas are not going to sit at ease. They will take recourse to war and win back not only their own kingdom but yours also. I can well foresee that the war, if it took place, between the Pandavas and the Kaurvas will certainly wipe out the Kaurva dynasty from the surface of the earth. It is for you now to choose the way you like."



Hearing the words of Bhishma, Karna flared up and said, "Grandpa! it doesn't become you to say so. According to your own pledge, you are bound to be faithful to the Kaurva throne. Moreover, your words manifest as if you were afraid of war. Does it behove a matchless warrior like you to be afraid of wars?"

"Karna, it is uncivilised to indulge in tall talk specially in the presence of elders. You have perhaps become unduly proud of yourself despite the fact that only a few months ago you fled the battle-field to save your life leaving Duryodhana alone to face the Gandharvas. Who does not know that it was the Pandavas who got Duryodhana free from Chitrasen, chief of the Gandharvas. Apart from it, you must think twice before using the words—fear—in my connection. It is you and Shakuni both who have pushed the Kaurva prince, Duryodhana, on the wrong path. I still maintain that if Duryodhana gets into some trouble, the Pandavas will rush to his help but as far as you are concerned, you will run for your own life leaving him in the lurch. There is no denying the fact that the Pandavas are invincible. Truly speaking, Bheema and Arjuna are peerless warriors in their respective fields," argued Bhishma.



Bhishma's words had cut Karna to the quick but he thought it wise not to reply back because the great old man had touched upon the true facts. So, he chose to leave the court saying, "I beg your pardon, grandpa; I shall come back when you are calm."

Dhritrashtra supported what Bhishma had said. He admitted that all the five Pandavas were indomitable warriors. He had untold fear from Bheema alone, who according to him, was another name for death. He knew well that his sons Duryodhana and Dushasan often passed sleepless nights out of Bheema's fear. He held that nobody on earth could dare to remain alive after having been hit by his mace.

Hearing his father's words, Duryodhana stood up and said, "Father dear ! I don't see any reason for you to feel worried. True, the Pandavas are peerless warriors. But we too have such warriors on our side who can face the Pandavas in no mean way. Which of the Pandavas can face grandpa Bhishma who has pledged to live only for the Kaurva throne ? Moreover, he has a boon from his revered father (our great-grandpa Shantanu) to breathe his last at will. Secondly, can you name any warrior who can face our revered guru Dronacharya? Our royal priest, Kripacharya, is another matchless fighter worth the name."

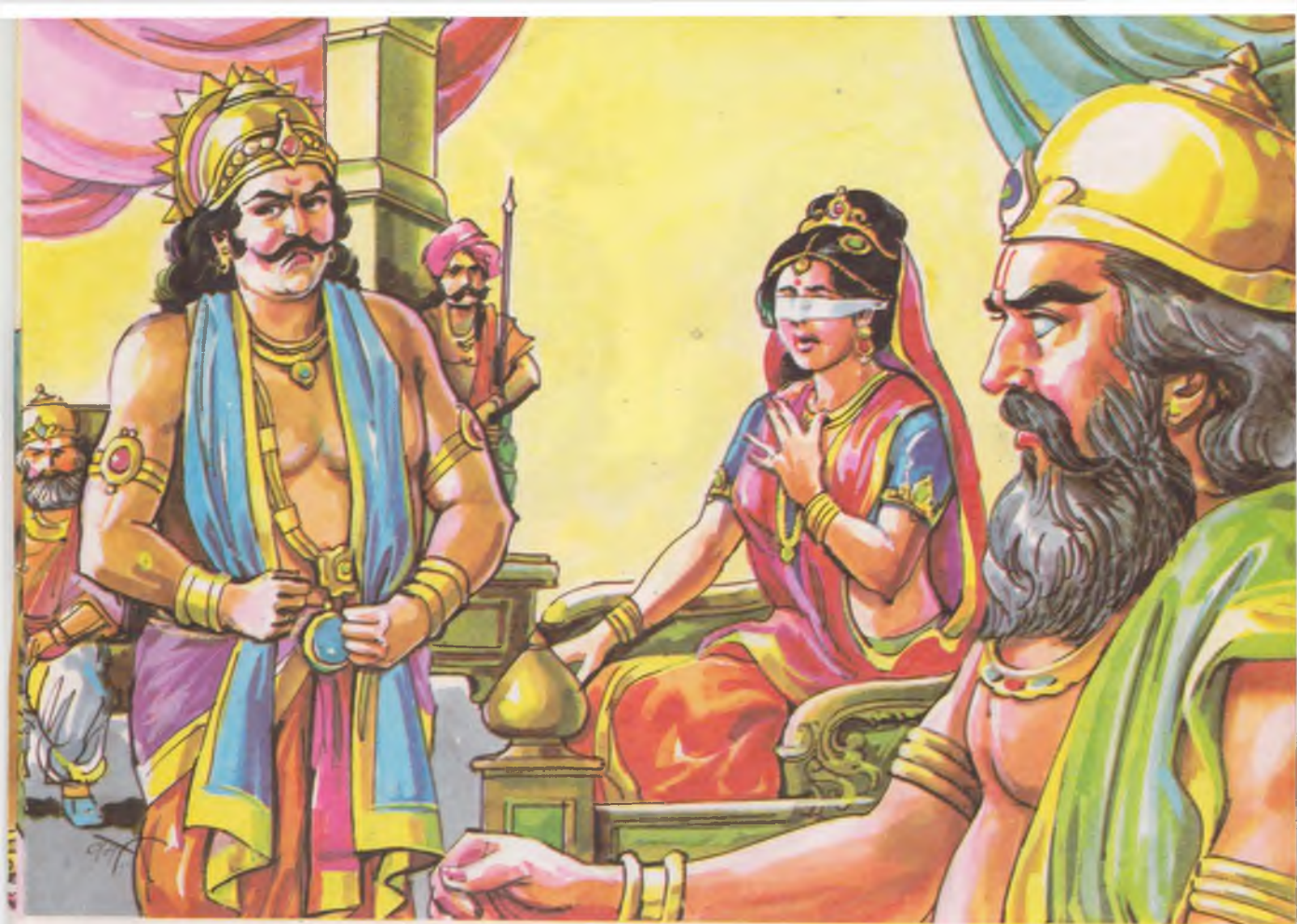


Dhritrashtra struck his hand on his fore-head in distress and addressing Sanjaya said, "What should I do ? This son of mine has gone really mad. But the fault lies with me only. I did not heed the advice of Gandhari, my far-sighted queen, and remained showering indulgence on him. He is bent upon having the Kaurava dynasty destroyed." Then the king tried to persuade Duryodhana to be just to the Pandavas and restore their kingdom back to them.

"I am not going to give them territory equal to the tip of a needle even. I am determined to fight to the last," retorted Duryodhana curtly.

So, Dhritrashtra felt extremely disappointed and remarked, "Sanjaya ! I leave Duryodhana to his fate. But I must feel sorry for those who will be sacrificed in the war against the Pandavas only because of the obstinacy of Duryodhana. I want to know what part is Krishna going to play if a war breaks out between my sons and my nephews."

"Krishna will never do anything unjust and undesirable though everybody knows he is the be-all and end-all of the entire universe. His chakra is the most invincible weapon ever heard or seen. So, Duryodhana must go and seek his advice," replied Sanjaya.



"Duryodhana! Sanjaya is our true well-wisher. Believe what he says and go to Krishna to seek his advice," suggested Dhritrashtra to his son once again.

"Father dear! I admit Krishna is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu Himself but he is a bosom friend of Arjuna. So, I feel it to be beneath my dignity to go to him and seek his advice," argued Duryodhana.

Hearing Duryodhana's words, queen Gandhari burst out, "You evil soul! I curse myself for giving birth to you. You are so shameless and impertinent that you are not going to heed the advice of your father who loves you from the core of his heart. Remember that you will repent when Bheema's mace makes short work of you."

Everybody present in the court felt helpless as Duryodhana was not going to pay heed to any piece of advice given by anybody. *Blind is not he who cannot see but he who can see and does not see*— is a common saying and it held good in the case of Duryodhana. He could see what was going to happen but was not ready to take the right path as if the impending ruin had turned his head. Feeling broken-hearted because of Duryodhana's obstinacy, the king and the queen dismissed the court and left for the palace.



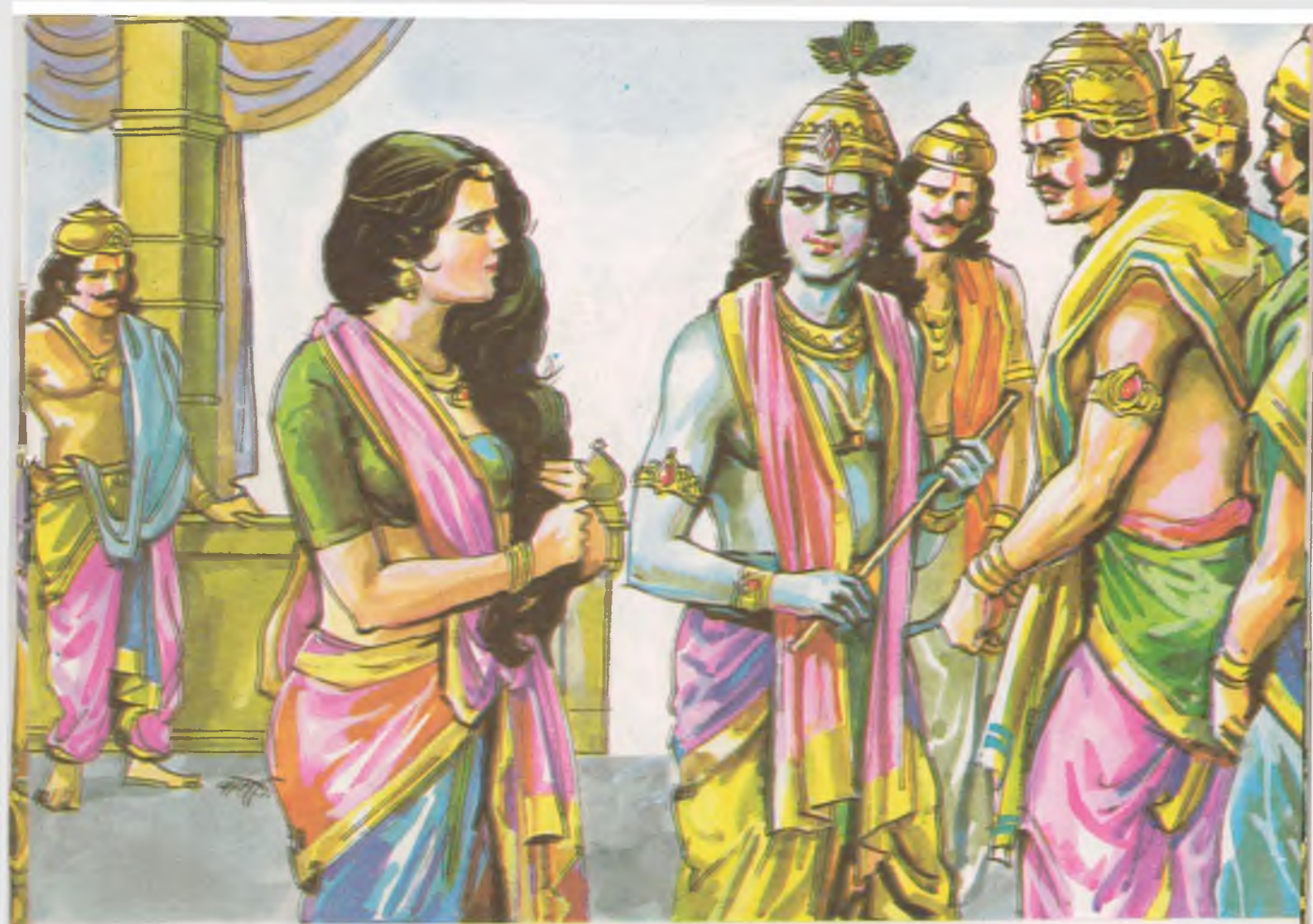
As far as the Pandavas were concerned, they were still trying to find some way out of the crisis. Yudhishtir had curtailed his demand to five villages only. But Duryodhana was adamant not to give them a tract equal to the tip of a needle even. He was sure that the Pandavas would not be able to muster any army and attack him because no king would risk his friendship with the Hastinapur court by helping them openly.

Sanjaya's goodwill mission had miserably failed. Yudhishtir was at a loss to understand what to do. He earnestly wanted to avert the war because he believed that if it broke out, it w'd be highly disastrous. So, he turned to Krishna and said, "Krishna! Duryodhana is bent upon measuring arms with us. But I see that this clash will result in wide-spread destruction. You are our best friend and guide. Kindly show us the way and relieve my distress."

"Yudhishtir ! I want to go and see Duryodhana in person with a view to dissuading him from the war-path," suggested Krishna.

"Krishna ! I don't want to send you there. If anything untoward happens to you there, the situation will worsen even more," argued Yudhishtir.

"Don't worry, brother; none of the Kaurvas has the guts to touch me even," retorted Krishna. So, Yudhishtir agreed to what Krishna had said.



It was decided that Krishna should go to Hastinapur accompanied by Satyaki and prevail upon Duryodhana to agree to some sort of peaceful settlement with the Pandavas.

Just on the eve of Krishna's departure, Draupadi came there and stood before him saying, "Vasudeva! look at my dishevelled locks ; never forget them while talking to Duryodhana. I have not dressed them for thirteen long years. I have kept my feeling of revenge snubbed for such a long time but I can't do so any more now. If the Pandavas are going to avoid war, I will have to go to my old father and ask him to avenge my insult in a befitting manner. My father and my brother would not hesitate to fall fighting even for the sake of their daughter's honour. Truly speaking, I will not feel satisfied until and unless I wash my hair with Dushashan's blood."

Krishna consoled Draupadi saying, "Dear sister ! don't worry at all; the war is inevitable. My mission aims at a different thing and not at averting the war. The conditions I shall place before the Kaurvas will never be acceptable to them. And so the entire blame for the impending horrible war will lay with the Kaurvas. Rest assured, you will have your revenge in the most befitting manner."



The next day Krishna and Satyaki left for Hastinapur in a chariot. As a precautionary measure, Krishna had placed his arms in his chariot so that in case of any mishap, he should be able to give a good account of himself. On the other hand, spies of the Kaurva court informed Duryodhana and Dhritrashtra that Krishna was coming to them for talks.

Dhritrashtra held his court and put forward a suggestion before his courtiers, "We should give a rousing welcome to Krishna and heap so many presents on him that he should be compelled to change sides and be our ally." But Vidur and Bhishma both turned down the suggestion saying, "Your Majesty ! you are mistaken. Krishna will never change sides, come what may."

Hearing the words of Vidur and Bhishma, Duryodhana got enraged and said, "My suggestion is that we should not try to win over Krishna because this effort is not going to work. On the other hand, we should take him prisoner and keep him in our prison till we have won the war. I am sure that in his absence, the Pandavas will lose heart and drop the idea of plunging into a war with us."

Hearing these words , Bhishma was so angry that he left the court at once.



Next day Krishna reached Hastinapur and was accorded a warm welcome. Having seen Dhritrashtra and Duryodhana, Krishna went to Vidur's house to see Kunti. Kunti enquired about the welfare of her sons and Draupadi with tearful eyes.

Krishna consoled her saying, "Auntie ! you are a brave mother and your sons are invincible. Before long they will defeat the Kaurvas and avenge the insult heaped on Draupadi. Not only this, they will decimate the Kaurvas and seize the throne of Hastinapur too."

Krishna then went to Duryodhana who received him with open arms and invited him to meals. But Krishna said, "O Prince ! I have come to you as a messenger of the Pandavas and cannot dine with you until and unless I have succeeded in my mission as it is an accepted practice." Then Krishna returned to Vidur's house to stay for the night. Vidur apprised Krishna of the situation at the Kaurva court. He told him that Duryodhana was not going to accept any peace settlement because he was sure of Bhishma's and Drona's faithfulness to the Kaurva throne. He was sure that both of them were invincible.

So, Vidur dissuaded Krishna from opening any peace-talks at the court.



Next day, Krishna was invited to the court by Dhritrashtra. So, he made for the court in the company of Vidur, the prime minister of Hastinapur kingdom. Krishna was duly received and given a high seat in the court. Acting as the messenger of the Pandavas, Krishna placed the demands of the Pandavas before Dhritrashtra saying, "Your Majesty ! I would request you to shun the war-path because the Pandavas do not want unnecessary bloodshed at all. You must exercise a desirable check on your sons and look after the interests of the Pandavas as well, because they respect you as their father. They want to live peacefully under your affectionate care. So, I would again request you to be just to them and give them their due."

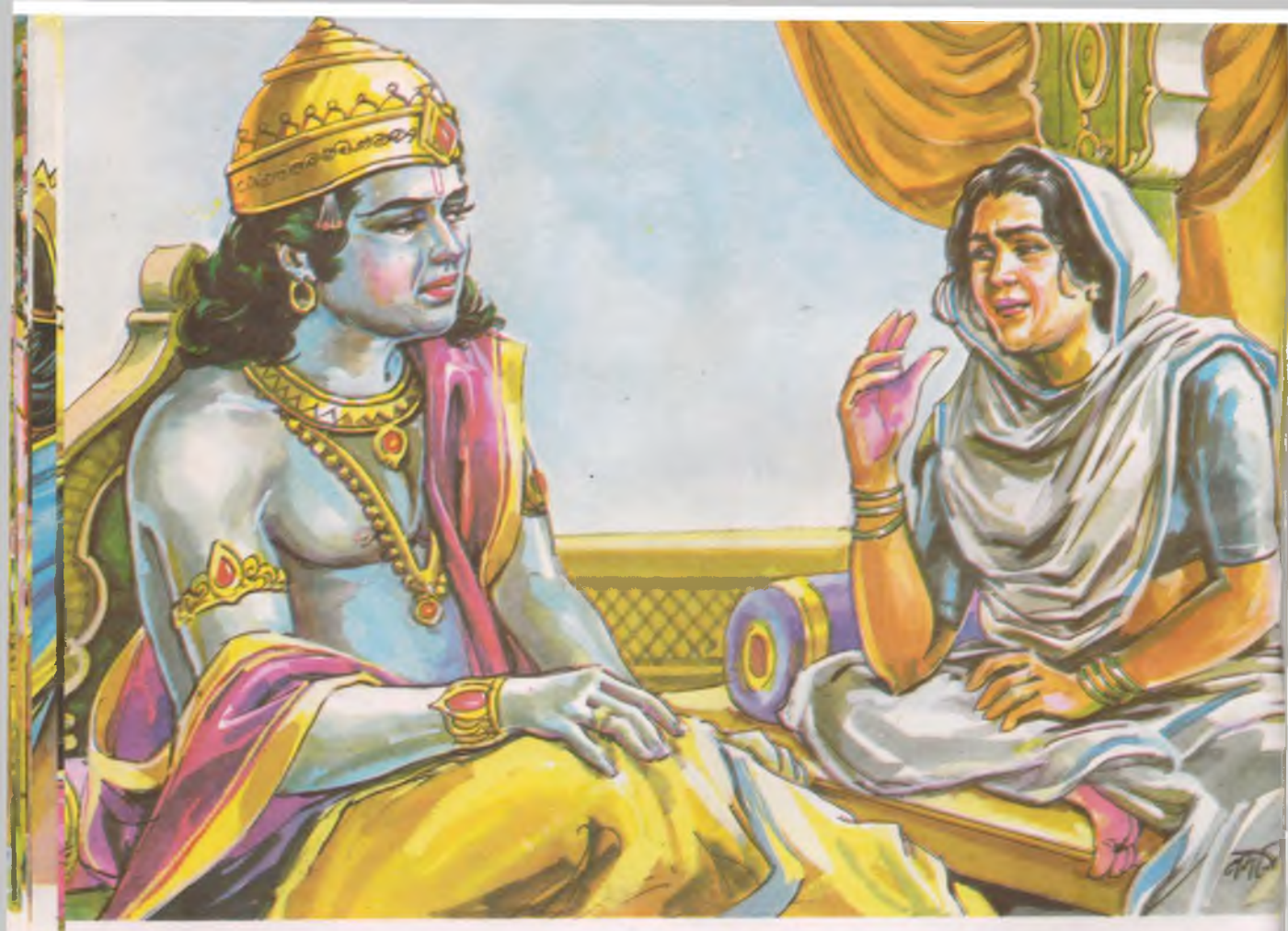
Dhritrashtra remarked, "Krishna ! I also earnestly want what you have said. But at the same time I am unable to impose my will on my sons who are led by evil Shakuni." At this, Krishna turned to Duryodhana and said, "Brother dear ! you must carry out the will of your father and return the kingdom of the Pandavas to them." Bhishma and Drona also supported what Krishna had said. But Duryodhana was not ready to budge even an inch from his stand-point. He said, "Krishna ! you are unduly siding with the Pandavas and that is why everyone is laying blame on me. Be it known to all once for all that the only way for the Pandavas is to win back their kingdom through war."



Krishna addressed the meeting and said, "Respectable sirs, sometimes it is advisable to amputate a limb to save the rest of the body or I can say one person has to be sacrificed in order to save the rest of the family. The examples of the elimination of Kansa and Shishupal are before us. Duryodhana is bent upon plunging almost the entire country into the furnace of a bloody war. So it is desirable that he should be ignored in the interest of peace and justice for all."

Hearing these words, Dushasan got enraged and worried as well. He said to Duryodhana, "Brother dear! it seems these people are going to imprison you and me to hand us over to the Pandavas. We must leave this place at once." So both the brothers left the court instantly.

Dhritrashtra asked Vidur to bring queen Gandhari to the court believing that Duryodhana might be ready to comply with what she would say. When the queen had reached the court, Duryodhana was sent for once again. His mother tried to advise him hard but all to no purpose. He again left the court and hatched a conspiracy to imprison Krishna who was already alive to it. Krishna assumed his colossal universal form (Virata Roopa).



Everybody present in the court got afraid to see Krishna's cosmic form. Just then Satyaki stood up and said, "I have come to know that Duryodhana along with Dushasan, Shakuni and Karna has decided to imprison Krishna." Hearing this, Krishna smiled and said, "Your Majesty! your son, Duryodhana, is really very short-sighted. He believes that he will be successful in taking me prisoner. Little does he realise that I can decimate the entire Kaurava dynasty single-handed in no time and make Yudhishtir the king of Hastinapur."

Hearing Krishna's words, Dhritrashtra got afraid. But Krishna left the court and made for Vidur's house to see Kunti and tell her all that had happened in the court. Reaching there, he touched Kunti's feet and took her leave to go back to the Pandavas. Before leaving, he asked Kunti if she liked to send any message to his sons and Draupadi.

Kunti gave her message to Krishna in these words—"Krishna! ask Yudhishtir to think over the matter with a cool head keeping justice steadily in view. Ask him not to be unjust to anyone but at the same time not to forego his right. He is a Kshatriya and his brothers are his arms. If all other methods prove of no avail, he must not fear to resort to war in order to get his right. Also, assure him that my blessings are always with him and his brothers. Do assure Draupadi that her disgrace will be duly vindicated to her satisfaction."



Krishna mounted his chariot and made for Up-plavya to inform the Pandavas that a war between them and the Kaurvas had become inevitable. As for Kunti, she had sent a message to her five sons through Krishna, yet she was feeling highly worried. The very thought of Bhishma's, Drona's and Karna's bravery was shaking her. No doubt, her sons were extremely brave, yet she thought that they could not face these three warriors.

As for Drona, Kunti believed he would not kill her sons because they were his favourite disciples. Regarding Bhishma too, she had the same idea that he would not kill his grandsons come what may. But she had an inherent fear from the side of Karna who had always supported Duryodhana in his evil designs. Not only this, he had taken a vow to kill Arjuna whom he considered to be his arch rival.

So, Kunti decided to see Karna and persuade him to change sides and join his brothers—the Pandavas. She decided to reveal to him that he was her son born to her as an unwed mother. Kunti was, in fact, engaged in an inner conflict between her filial affection and feelings of a brave Kshatriani.

So, Kunti went to the bank of the Ganga where Karna used to say his prayers every morning.



Karna was saying his prayers with his face towards the rising sun. He was standing in deep meditation when Kunti reached there. She stood close to Karna's back and raised his mantle over her head so that it should serve as a cover against the hot sun. Karna remained absorbed in his prayer till about mid-day caring little for the hot sun. When he had finished his prayer, he opened his eyes and felt that somebody was standing behind his back.

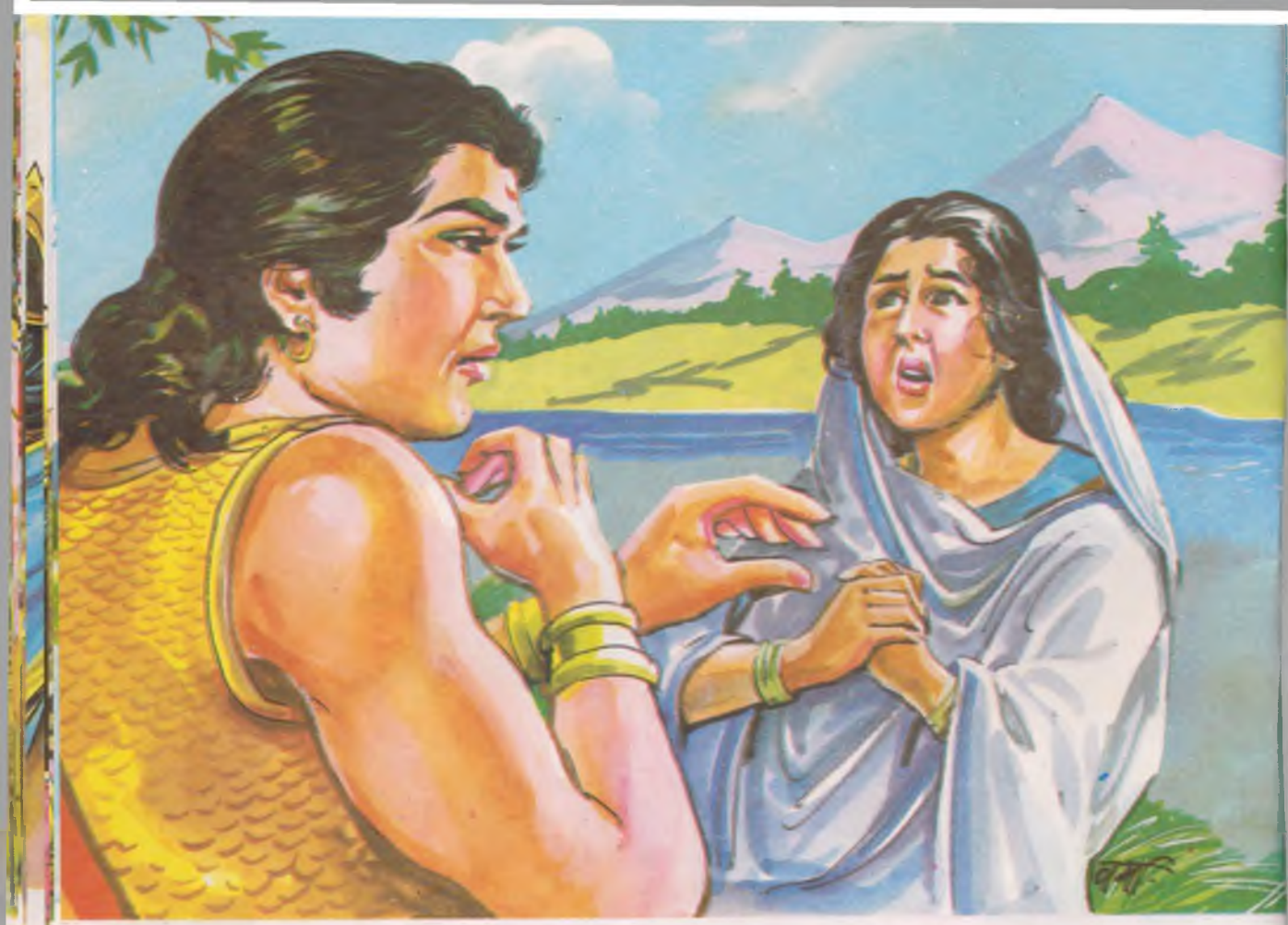
Looking closely at Kunti, he recognised her and said, "I salute you, O queen ! what can I do for you ?"

"Karna! I have come to reveal to you that I am your mother. You were born to me before my marriage as a result of the boon given to me by the Sun-god. I bless you for a long and happy life. You must have followed that you are a brother to the Pandavas and not to Duryodhana. Having lived in dependence on the Kaurvas you have always been inimical to your own brothers. I feel I have been very unjust to you for fear of social infamy, yet now it is high time for you to join your own brothers. You are the eldest and so after defeating the Kauravas, you will be the legal heir to the throne of Hastinapur. Your five younger brothers will be at your command," retorted Kunti.



Karna argued, "Mother ! I already knew the fact that you have revealed. Today a long cherished desire of mine has come to be fulfilled. I have been craving for long to hear the word—son—from your mouth for myself. But one thing is there. I am a Kshatriya though I have always been styled as the son of a charioteer and scorned on that account too. I have no whims while complaining that you did not think of caring for me when I needed your love the most. Instead, you put me in a box and handed me over to the flowing currents of the river Ganga. It was Radha, my foster-mother, who gave me a mother's love and brought me up. What has now goaded you to come to me and reveal the reality of my birth ?"

Kunti replied, "Karna why don't you realise that I am after all your mother—real mother. I have already confessed that for fear of infamy I failed to own you when you were born. But that does not and cannot change the feelings of a mother towards her son. You are my first-born while the Pandavas are your younger brothers. How shall I see a brother trying to kill his own brothers before my very own eyes. Everybody knows that war is inevitable because Duryodhana has flatly refused to accept any peaceful settlement reached through bilateral negotiations. Not only this, he has turned down the pleas of his father and other family elders as well."



Karna argued further, "Mother dear ! you are a Kshatrani and are well aware of the norms that a Kshatriya must observe. Though the family elders like Bhishma and Drona have been trying to prevail upon Duryodhana to leave the war-path, yet they are bound to fight from his side because they have got to be true to their salt. Grandpa Bhishma has taken a vow to be loyal to the Kaurva throne while Dronacharya has been dependent on the Kauravas right from the beginning. So, he cannot go against the interests of the Kauravas in any case. As for me, I too have to be true to my salt. You knew my foster-father has been the royal charioteer for a long time and I have been in Duryodhana's company for quite some time. Not only this, when the royal priest Kripacharya forbade me to take part in the competition because I was not a prince, it was Duryodhana who declared me to be the king of Anga. How can I betray Duryodhana in such a case. I will have to repay his debt even if I have to sacrifice my life fighting for his sake otherwise the coming generations will spit on me. So, the suggestion given by you is altogether irreligious and improper from every angle. I am sorry I cannot comply with what you say."



The curt reply given by Karna dashed Kunti's all hopes to the ground and she felt very dejected. But what could she do? Karna lost no time to see through his mother's feelings and felt hurt in his heart of hearts. After all he was her son and she had come to him with some hope in her mind. So, Karna decided to console her somehow or other.

Karna said, "But mother, I cannot turn down your plea at all. I promise you that I will not kill any of my brothers except Arjuna. He is my bitter rival and a fight between us is inevitable. One of the two will certainly fall fighting—either he or I. Don't worry at all; you will continue to have five sons whether he dies or I. Rest assured I will not harm Yudhishtir, Bheema, Nakula and Sahdev."

The promise given by Karna not to kill the four Pandavas pleased Kunti very much. Her throat was choked with emotion and tears welled up in her eyes. Karna too looked at her with tearful eyes and she embraced him closely.

Controlling herself she remarked, "What is to be must be, my son. You have promised not to kill four of your brothers and it is really a matter of great delight for me. God be with you. My blessings are also with you."



Sri Krishna returned from Hastinapur and explained the situation to the Pandavas. At the the same time he delivered the message of their mother, Kunti, to them.

Hearing what Krishna had said, Yudhishtir said to his brothers, "All hopes of peace and settlement are gone now. So, we must start preparations for the war and organise our army.

The entire Pandava army was divided into seven divisions and each division was placed under Drupad, Virata, Dhrishtadyumna, Shikhandi, Chekitan, Bhimsen and Satyaki. But the question was that of the choice of the general of the entire army. So, Yudhishtir asked for the opinion of each of his brothers.

Sahdev gave his opinion in favour of King Virata while Nakul spoke in favour of King Drupad. Arjuna proposed the name of Dhrishtadyumna, son of King Drupad, but Bheema opined in favour of Shikhandi.

But when Krishna was consulted, he supported Arjuna's choice. So, everybody seconded what Krishna had said and Dhrishtadyumna was appointed over-all general of the Pandava army. Soon he came to be invested with this high rank as per the custom of those days.

