

## MAHABHARATA

*Mahabharata is a sacred epic poem that tells about the struggles faced between two groups of cousins to gain supreme power. One of them was the Kauravas (hundred sons of King Dhritarashtra), and the other group was the Pandavas (five sons of Pandu). These two rival families opposed each other in a war to gain possession of their ancestral Bharata kingdom and also the capital, Hastinapur. The story begins with Pandu, as the king, who was skilled in warfare and archery. His cousin-brother, Dhritarashtra, was the eldest, and was barred from being the king because he was blind. When the political and social affairs of the kingdom were running smoothly under the power of Pandu, he decided to hand over the state affairs to his blind brother Dhritarashtra and retreated into the forest with his two wives for some time. When they returned, Pandu and his wife Madri were not alive. Kunti, Pandu's other wife returned to the kingdom with her five sons called the **Pandavas**. The sons were fathered by five gods since a curse prevented Pandu from being a father. On the other hand, King Dhritarashtra had 100 sons called the [Kauravas](#), and were considered human incarnations of demons, according to the text. The Kauravas were jealous and treated their cousins (the Pandavas) brutally. Yudhisthira, the eldest of the Pandavas was the next king to the throne since he was older than Duryodhana. Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kauravas did not approve of this decision. Hostility and enmity started developing among the cousins which compelled the Pandavas to leave the kingdom. During their first exile, the Kauravas conspired and plotted a plan*

*to kill the Pandavas by setting up fire in a mansion made with highly flammable materials. Although this plan failed, the Kauravas were desperate to destroy the Pandavas.*

*The Pandavas were tricked by Duryodhana's uncle, Shakuni in a gambling game of dice, called Chaturanga. Yudhisthira was invited to play and failed the game miserably by losing his possessions and kingdom. Therefore, the Kauravas viciously took advantage of the Pandavas and sent them on exile for 12 years. This event prompted the war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. When the Pandavas returned from their exile to the kingdom, Duryodhan (the eldest son of the Kauravas) refused to restore the kingdom to his cousins (the Pandavas) and was ready to battle for it. Although the Pandavas requested a peace treaty, the Kauravas disagreed with all their requests. This gives rise to the battle of Kurukshetra, where the cousins fight each other. Many kingdoms were allied with the Pandavas and with the Kauravas in this battle. After 18 gruesome days of slaughter, the Pandavas survived, and won the battle, but had lost their near and dear ones too. After the war, Yudhishtira was tested when he reached the gates of Heaven. He was asked to choose between blissful eternity in Heaven, without his brothers, or join his brothers in hell. Unaware of the fact that his brothers were already in Heaven, it was a trick to test the character of Yudhisthira. He chose to stay with his brothers, wherever they were.*