Introduction to MAHABHARATA

- Vedas which are considered as the most ancient scriptures in the entire world, form the substratum of our culture, "Sanathana Dharma".
- These Vedas branched out into
    1. Smritis
    2. Puranas
    3. Itihasas.
- This Vedic connection makes these compositions all the more authentic and acceptable.

- The seers of past have gifted us two great Itihasas or epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata.
- Famous as the first poetic expression, Itihasa Ramayana is considered as Vedas themselves being manifested through Sage Valmiki.
- While the second Itihasa Mahabharata is often glorified as the fifth Veda following the four Vedas.

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How could Mahabharata have attained a crown status, on par with the Vedas? Mahabharata the scripture itself reveals on how it gained it's name.

"Mahatwaad Bharavatvaaccha
Mahabharatamuchyathe“

Because of its Glory and Profundity, this is known as "Mahabharata". Indeed it's Glory goes beyond articulation.

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There is a popular saying extolling the content of this epic that "Whatever is here, may be found elsewhere but whatever isn't here can never be found anywhere".

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What about its Profundity?

- Though the main storyline narrates the history of Kauravas and Pandavas, through this story and a hundred other sub stories, Mahabharata beautifully portrays deep insightful life lessons, for its reader.
- Bhagavad Gita which is one amongst the three principle scriptures of Vedanta, takes place inside Mahabharata

Also the 'Anugita' where Lord Krishna retell the essence of Gita to Arjuna, the erudite advice of mighty Bhishma to Prince Yudhisthira on Dharmasamhitas, the famous dictums "ViduraNeethi" comprising of Vidura's advices to the blind King Dhritharashtra, in depth philosophical exposition of SanathSujaatheeyam, the reflections of values and life principles from a conversation between the death God Yamadharma Raja and Yudhisthira, the Rajaneethi through the words of Kanika and innumerable diverse subjects are dealt very intelligently, in this epic.

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The sagacity of Mahabharata gets reflected in the very first episode "Adiparva" itself. Sage Vyasa went into contemplation after having composed this grand epic in his mind. How to spread this through his disciples, was the matter of his contemplation. It was then, Lord Brahma himself appeared before him and adviced him to think of lord Ganesha. The Maharshi obeyed the Lord creator and Ganesha revealed himself in front of him.

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Vyasa then prayed to Lord Ganesha to listen and write the Mahabharata as Vyasa would dictate it from his mind. The lord accepted the request but insisted on a condition. "You will have to keep reciting in such a way that my pen should not stop a moment" which implied that Vyasa would have to continuously dictate the verses without a break. He accepted the condition but put forth another condition that, Ganesha should understand the verse before writing it and any time if he doesn't understand, he should stop writing.

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The elephant headed God also nodded, accepting this counter condition. Thus started the grant process of Vyasa reciting and Ganesha writing them down. However at frequent intervals, the sage recited slokas known as "Grandhagrandhi"s which are essentially tangled and complex verses.

It seems even Ganesha had to slow down and think some moments in order to untangle and comprehend the meaning of such verses. During such slow down time, the intelligent sage would compose and align more verses in his mind to narrate.

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The first section Adiparva rendering this anecdotal story unveils the unfathomable depth of this work. These Grandhagrandhis are, inaddition to all the different wisdom conversations which were referred at the beginning of this talk. It is also proclaimed that their hidden meanings will remain unfathomable at all times.

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From the most ancient time, Mahabharata has served as the source of inspiration for a thousand other works. As predicted in this work itself that this magnanimous gem of a literature will always remain a nourishing life force to many a poets across the world, there have evolved countless works in Sanskrit and other languages based on Mahabharata over last thousands of years.

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Translations and commentaries have been attempted in many languages! Sabal Singh Chouhan, Villipputhooran, Ezhuthachan et al wrote independant translations of Mahabharata in Hindi, Tamil and Malayalam respectively. Kodungalloor Kunjikuttan thamburan, a great scholar of Kerala has also done a Verse by Verse translation of this grand Itihasa. Based on this, renowned poets like Kalidasa and Bhasa composed Sanskrit drama's, in the classical age of literature.

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Kalidasa's Abhijnanashakunthalam and Vikramorvasheeyam and Bhasa's Oorubhangam and Karnabharam are even considered as some of the greatest drama works. Out the five exemplary poems in Sanskrit, three are based on Mahabharata. Harsha's Naishadham, Magha's Sisupalavadham and Bharavi’s Kirathaarjuneeyam. This flow of creative compositions based on Mahabharata has happened till the present century, without an interruption.

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The famous Atakatha's from Kerala which are basically a dance performance have Mahabharata stories like Nalacharitham, Utharaswayamvaram, Duryodhanavadham, Kirmeeravadham etc as it's main story lines. Even the modern poets have continued this legacy.

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In Hindi there are popular works like Dinkar's "Kurukshetra", Naresh Mehta’s “Rashmi Rathi”, Naresh Mehta's "Mahaprasthan", Dharma veer Bharathi's "Andhayug" etc are some of such examples. Marathi has V. S. Khandekar's "Yayathi" and Shivaji Savant’s “Mrityumjaya" while Oriya has Prathibha Rai’s “Yajnaseni" and Malayalam has P. K. Balakrishnan's "ini njan urangatte".

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Even in this technological era, Mahabharata has not lost its newness and capacity to inspire new age writers, as evidently seen. From the time of its conception, it has always remained a work of paramount importance, till date.

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No doubt, it would remain such in the future years too. Because it presents the eternal truths which stands beyond the test of time. Will there be any time when spiritual principles, secrets of the universe, social issues and matters, family values, ecological problems solutions and human psychology, become utterly unimportant! Till then, Mahabharata which deals with all the above will remain of utmost significance as the fifth Veda, no doubt.

As the one which could solve most of our present day intrinsic crises and problems, let this Lotus of Bharatham, lead us to Glory and Liberation.

"Bhooyat Bharata Pankajam,

Kalimala Pradhvamsi na: Sreyase"

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Namah Shivaya

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Argument and Design; Relevance of Mahabharata

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What would be the first thought which will come to your mind when you hear about the *Itihasas* “Mahabaratha”?

Is it not the grant canvas where Krishna and Arjuna standing in the middle of a war?

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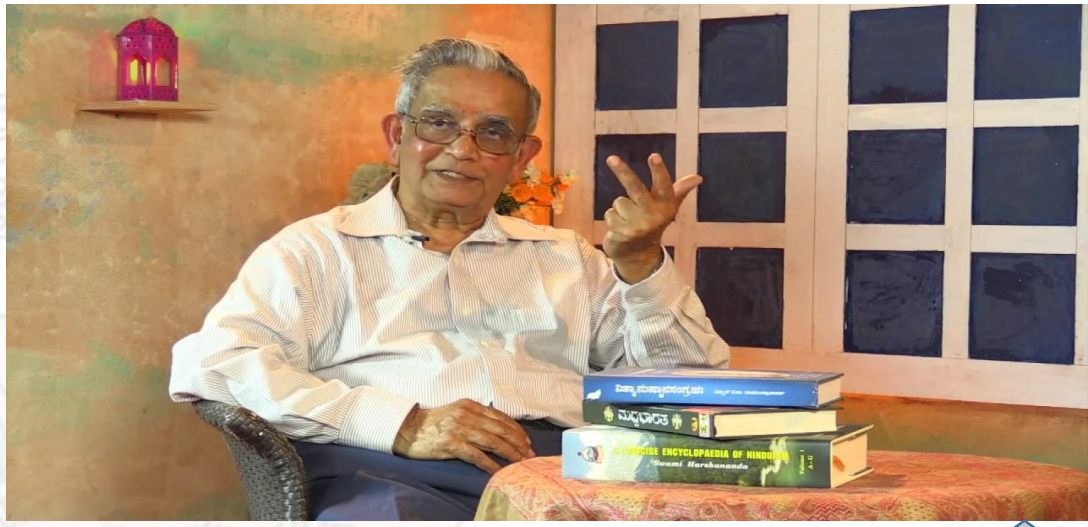
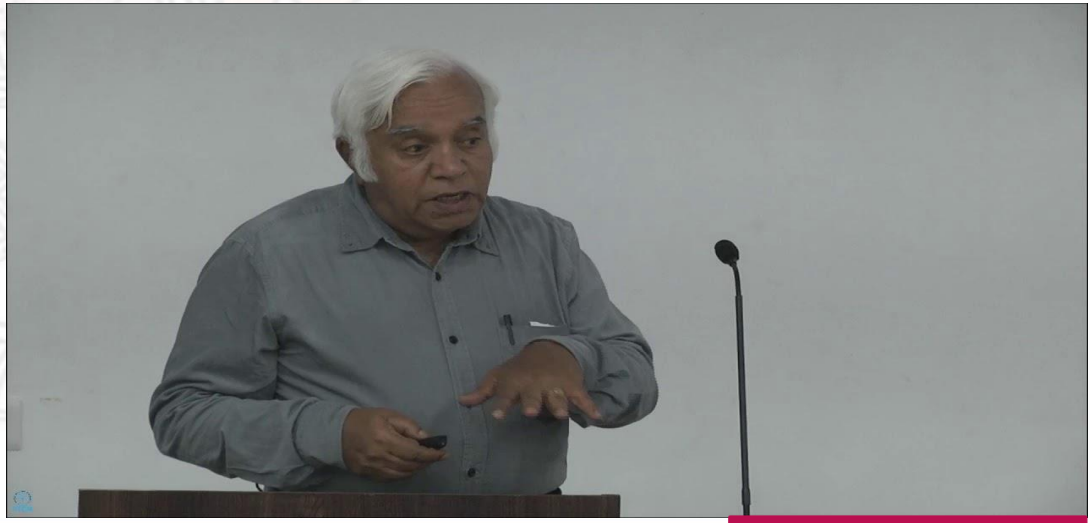
Indian academicians working on the Historicity of Mahabharata

Nilesh Oak



R N Iyengar

Dr *Narahari Achar*



The actual idea is to make you think to go beyond the historical facts of Mahabharata and look for its relevance in day to day life and in our social life.

But before moving ahead let us try to understand what exactly is the stream of study called "Historicism" means in academia ?

Historicism simply means an '***accurate recording of the past***'.

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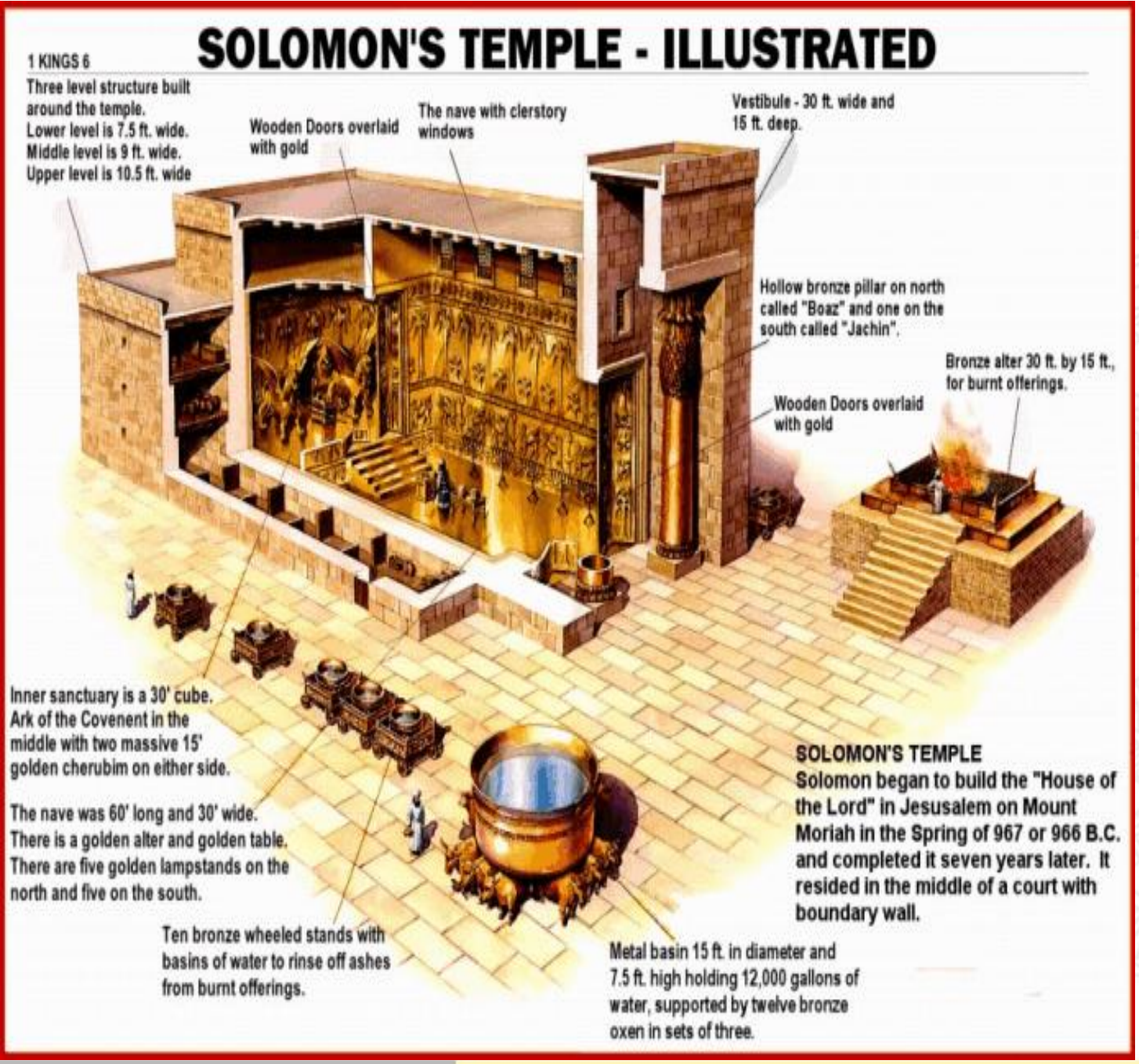
Colonial India has seen the emergence of an intellectual trend: based on painstaking research, to find Historical Facts from whatever things they found in this very land. This trend continues even now in this Post-colonial time. This is where we see a number of articles written on the Historicism of our "***Itihasas***".

Actual root of this Methodology lies in the western culture



In the western intellectual tradition, there is an obsessive need for collecting “facts” about the past.

This is partly the result of how the West look at themselves and their own past: everything they claim about their past, example ***the temple of Solomon***, should not only be true but proven so beyond all doubt.

They have to be true because these ***western cultures live or die accordingly***. Means if their stories have no historicity then that will be the dead end of that culture.

Is the *Historicism* framework good enough to evaluate or analyse our Itihasas?

No

- **Because our Ithihasas would not fit into the Western theological framework.**

- ***Our Ithihasas are written with a different perspective.***

Ithihasa ?

- The sanskrit word ithihasa, *ithi iha aasa* simply means "*Here it happened*".

- And beyond giving a chronological order of events, *Itihasas* tries to do something entirely different, namely, can we talk about the past in such a way that it helps us to live better today and tomorrow. That's *Itihasa* in simplest terms.

Relevance of Mahabharata : day-to-day life

- This incident occurs at a time when Duryodhana sought in various ways to kill the Pandavas.

- Duryodhana compelled Dhritarashtra to send Pandavas to a city called Varanavata.

- One day, following Dhritarashtra's instructions, his ministers began to describe the beautiful city called "Varanavata". **When Pandavas heard these stories about the beautiful city of Varanavata, they wished to go there.**

- Dhritarashtra realized that the Pandavas were curious.

- Dhritarashtra told the Pandavas,“”. **The city of Varanavata is the most charming in the world. If you wish to witness the festival in the city of Varanavata, go there with your soldiers and enjoy yourselves like the gods**.”

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- He continued, "**Spend as much time as you want there and when you have enjoyed yourselves completely, happily return to Hastinapura.**"

- **Yudhisthira agreed.**

- **Before Pandavas started to Varanavata, Duryodhana gave his minister Purochana the responsibility of building a house at Varanavata before the Pandavas' arrival.**

- **Purochana with the help of** skilled artisans under Duryodhana's control, built a house made of inflammable materials.

- The Plan was to burn pandavas to death.

- Padavas understood the trap set by Duryodhana's trusted minister Purochana. They made a **tunnel** from the house and escaped.

- Like this **there were many incidents in Pandavas life which were life threatening. But they faced it boldly, courageously.** Amma also says this "Bhagavan Krishna showed us how to face problems with Viveka, instead of running away from them."

- Pandavas faced every situation with uttermost confidence.
- This is a great life lesson for all of us.
- It motivates us to live a brave and fearless life.

1. Relevance : Lead a courageous life

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Mahabharata Incident 2

- This incident is after Kauravas came to know that Padavas are alive after their plan flopped in **Varanavata.**

- After many years the spies brought the news to king Dhritarashtra that the Pandavas are alive.

- Dhritarashtra said to Vidura “Pandu’s sons are dearer to me than they were to Pandu. O Vidura! My joy is greater, now that I know that those brave Pandavas are in good health”.

- After this conversation Duryodhana and Karna came close to Dhritarashtra and whispered “***We cannot speak in Vidura’s presence. We wish to speak to you in private.***

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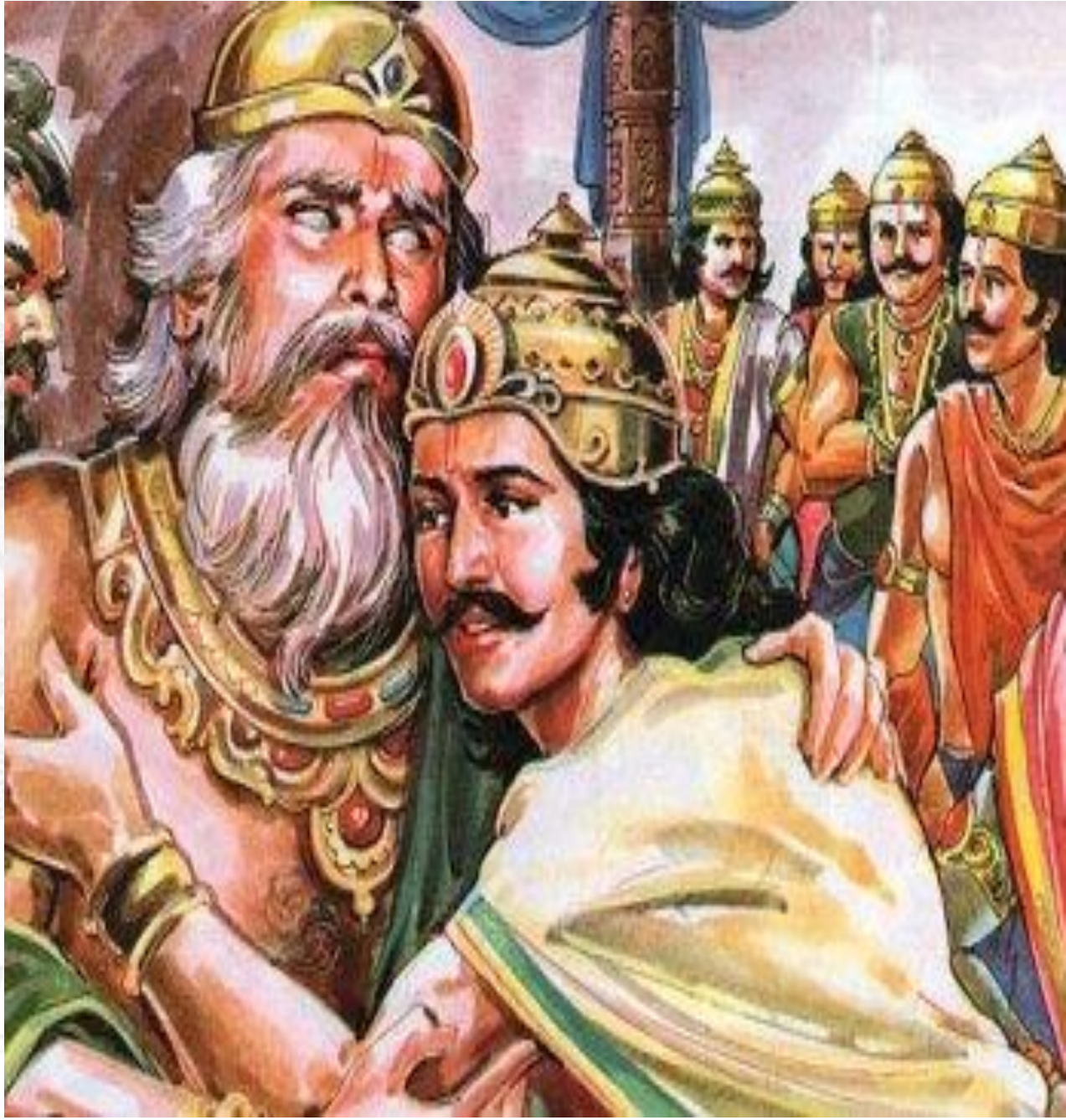
- Then they said to Dhritarashtra " What do you want to do now? Do you take the prosperity of your rivals to be that of your own? We must always act in a way so as to weaken Pandavas strength."

- Dhritarashtra replied,"I myself have the worries that you do. But I do not wish to reveal my attitude to Vidura. Therefore, I particularly praised their qualities, so that Vidura does not know my true wishes, even though a gesture. "

- Duryodhana said, "Let us now try to create conflict among the Pandavas". This dialogue between them goes on ……

This conversation between Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana is a classic example which showcases the motives of Dhritarashtra and his blind affections towards his crooked son Duryodhana. We could easily find these kinds of incidents from present day life. Many such parents are there who are mindlessly attached to their children. This Mahabharata episode gives us the message **that blind love is always harmful to the core.**



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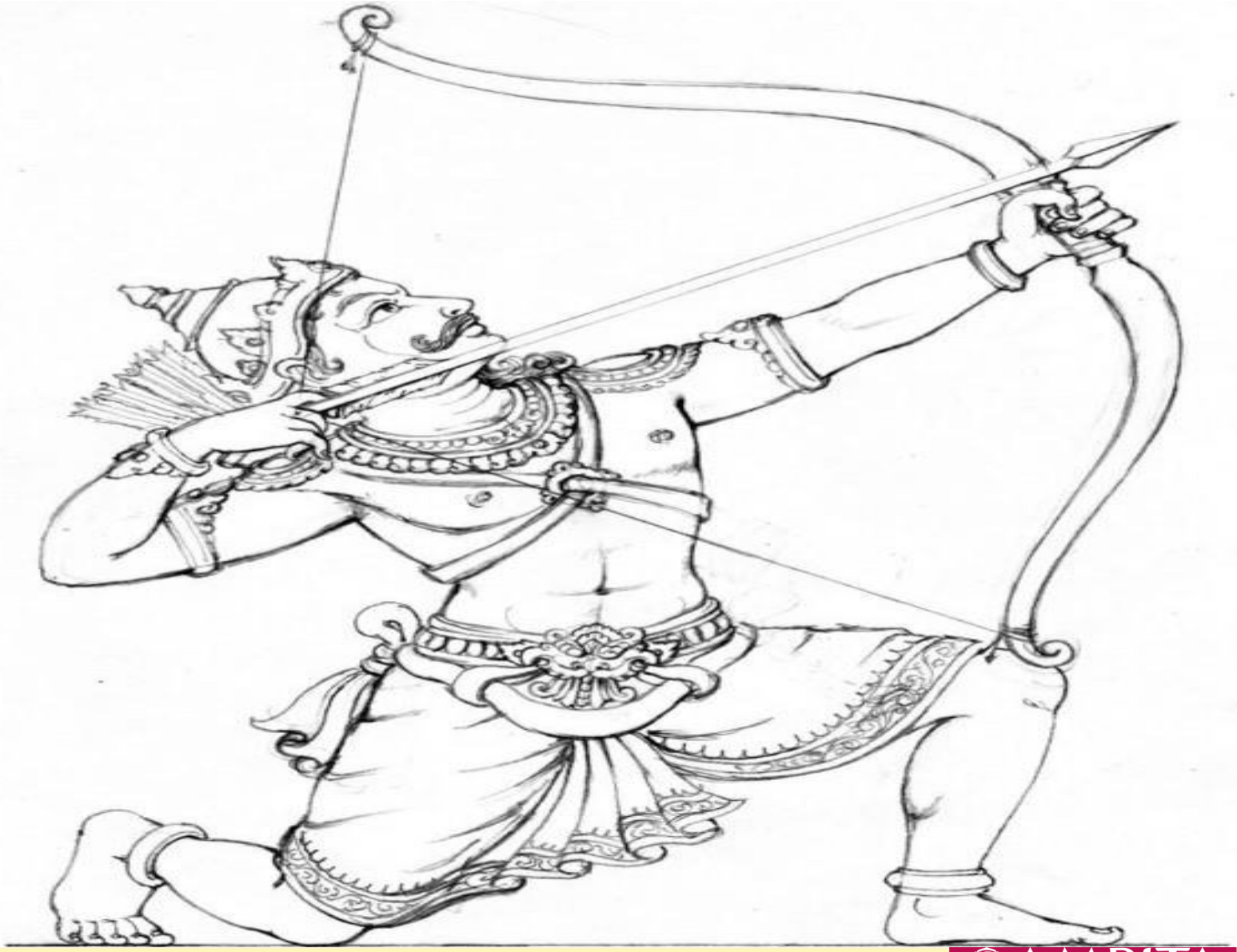
Mahabharata Incident 3

When we analyse Arjun of Mahabaratha, he is a good example of someone who keeps on learning new skills throughout his life. Arjun grasped whatever came his way. He learned the archery skills from Drona, he grasped divine weapons from Indra. He learnt about Pashupatastra from Mahadeva as well.

This character of Arjuna is truly worth emulating in our life.



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Mahabharata Incident 4 : Friendship between Karna and Duryodhana

- This conversation between Duryodhana and Karna happened when Karna came to know that Pandavas did not die in Varanavata.
- Karna started pressurizing Duryodhana to fight against Pandavas and kill them.
- Karna Said ‘“The Pandavas can be struck down as long as they have not established their roots. Agree to smite them with arms. As long as our side is strong and that of the Panchalas is weak, we should strike them with arms, without hesitation.”

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- Karna continued “Therefore, without any more delay, let us defeat Pandavas with a large army. After defeating them through your valour rule over the extensive earth.”

- Karna was trying hard to fight with the pandavas.

- Now when we look at the friendship between Karna and Duryodhana it gives us an idea **how a bad company can ruin our life beyond imagination**. In fact, he often instigated Duryodhana to commit evil deeds, along with Shakuni.

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5. Dharma in Mahabharata

- The great souled Vidura was always on guard to neutralize the evil plans of Kauravas and save pandavas from oppression.

- Vidura always ensured happiness for the Pandava. **Vidura always stood with Dharma**. During pandavas visit to Varanavatha it was Vidura who informed them about the plans of adarmic Duryodhana. This helped pandavas to plan and escape from Varanavatha.

- Vidura shows as the message **that even if our circumstances are not favourable, we can lead a righteous life, a life with high moral values and dignity.**

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- *When it comes to Gandhari, She was approached by her son for her blessings.*
- ***She said, "yato dharmaha tato jaya ha"*** .
- *She **didn't say, "may you be victorious**."*
- *Mahabharata clearly shows the reader all the Dharma Conflicts and the need to Uphold Dharma.*

The notion of dharma is what Mahabharat continues to motivate the civilisation.

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Theological Tropes in Mahabharata

Also there is much more in **Mahabharata** than what we normally read and understand. There are many subtle portrayals. There is a story in Adi Parva, the story is about two sisters, Kadru and Vinata.

Kadru had a thousand serpents as her sons with incomparable strength and valor. Vinata had two sons, one was Aruna, the Sun's charioteer and other was Garuda, King of birds.

The 1000 snakes of Kadru will often give routine jobs to Garuda, and Vinata his mother would ask her son to duly oblige.

Garuda wondered why he had to fulfil the orders of the snakes ? He soon learnt that his mother Vinata was spending her life in servitude due to a lost wager. Garuḍa join with his mother and serves Kadrū and her 1000 snakes from pleasure island to pleasure island.

Wanting to set his mother free, Garuda went to the snakes and put forth his request.

The snakes agreed to free his mother, provided Garuda fetched them a pot of divine nectar (Amrita) in return.
Garuda agreed and obtained Soma rasa from heaven. Garuda, without consuming even a drop of Amrit, rushed back to the place of the Snakes.

Observing his selfless act, lord Vishnu became appeased. He appeared before the bird Garuda and offered him a boon of his choice. Garuda asked for immortality, also Vishnu called Garuda to become his vehicle.

This story portrays the life of Garuda, who wanted to break the cycle of life and death and become immortal. Garuḍa wished for release from this life of bondage.

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Renowned scholar ***Vishwa Adluri, Hunter college USA*** puts in, “The story of Garuda found in the Adiparva, is a version of the Rig Veda story which is again about the theft of soma in chapter 4(verse 26-27), details about the concept of Moksha.”

He further states “The Garuḍa narrative, is thus crucial to understanding the epic’s status both as a work that address the goal of mokṣa and as the earliest philosophical exposition of bhakti”.

And also, the glorification of the Vedas begins with Mahabaratha.

Vishwa Adluri

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Amma on Mahabharata

Amma Says " Bhagavan Krishna stood with Pandavas. Pandavas obeyed Krishna during the war. Thus they became victorious.

But there is a present day trend of romanticizing the wrong doers, be it Duryodhana or be it Karna and hand picking incidents from the lives of Pandavas to prove that they weren't perfect.

These people even portray Kauravas in good light. We should always remember that the rule of Dharma is not decided on the basis of a single incident. Dharma is decided holistically on the basis of different things that happened during one's lifetime".

Mahabharata itself reveals million dollar statements like Wherever there is Dharma, Krishna will take that side and wherever the Lord has taken the side, Victory happens for sure.

Om Namah Shivaya

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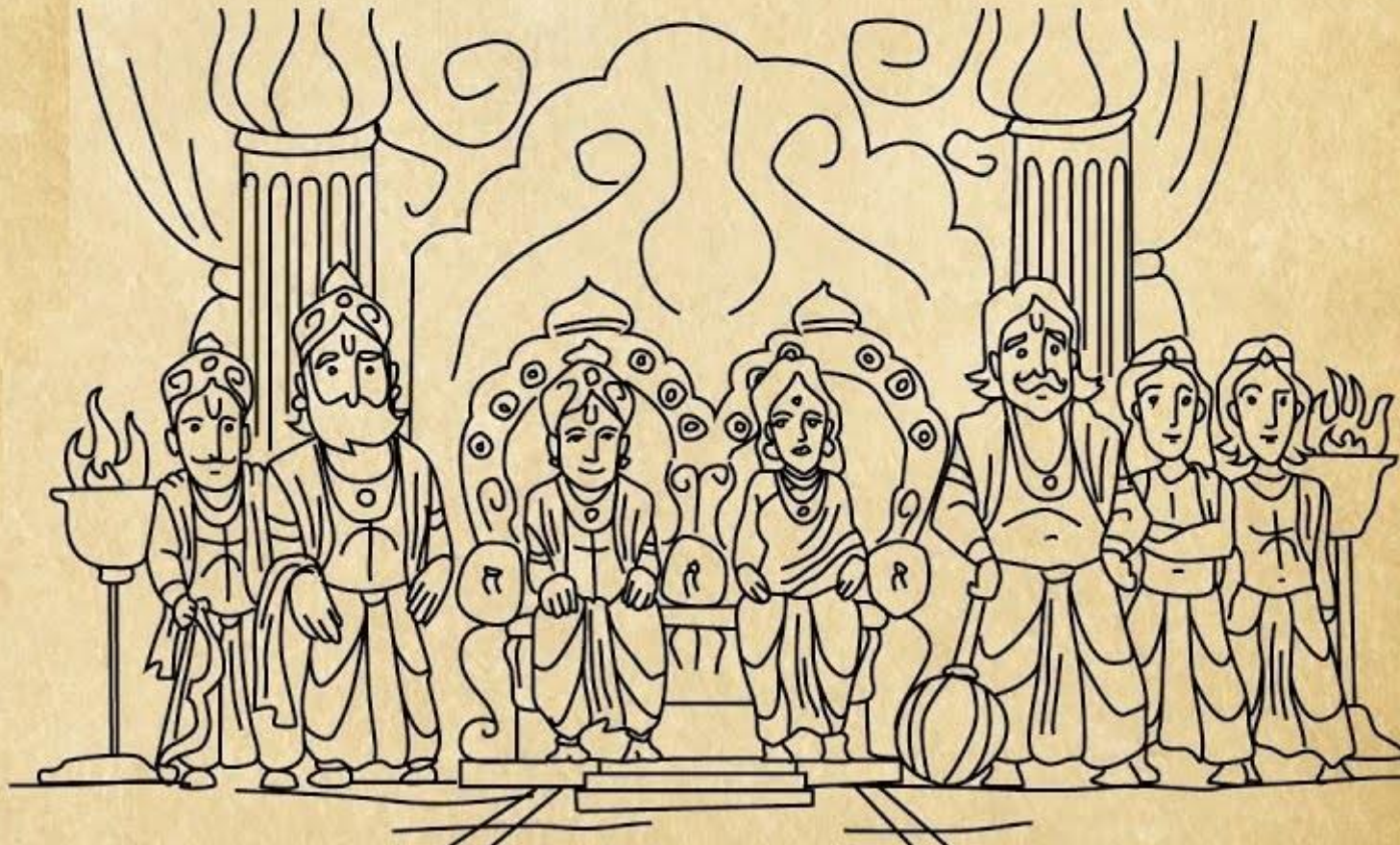
Mahabharata Impact: Influencing India at large



Introduction : Impact of Mahabharata

Mahabharata has played a major role in preserving the culture of our country at every level.

It is considered to be the **longest** and the **most complex epic that humanity has ever seen** and it has prominently influenced the psychology, culture and philosophy of this land.

Some of the regional versions of Mahabharata:

- **Malayalam Mahabharata**, *'Sri Mahabharatam Kilipaattu'* by Thunchath Ezhuthachan, *'Cherusseri Bharatam'* by Cherusseri and *'Bharatamala'* by Niranath Shankara Panicker.

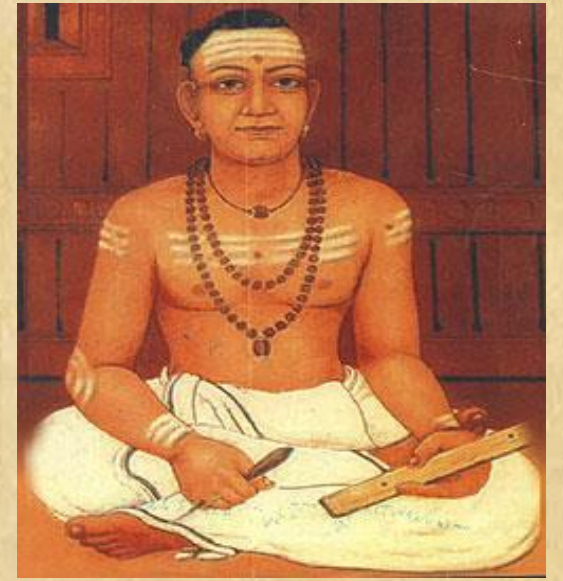
- **Odia Mahabharata** by Sarala Das.

- **Bengali Mahabharata** by Kavi Sanjay.

- **Hindi Mahabharata** by Sabal Singh Chauhan.

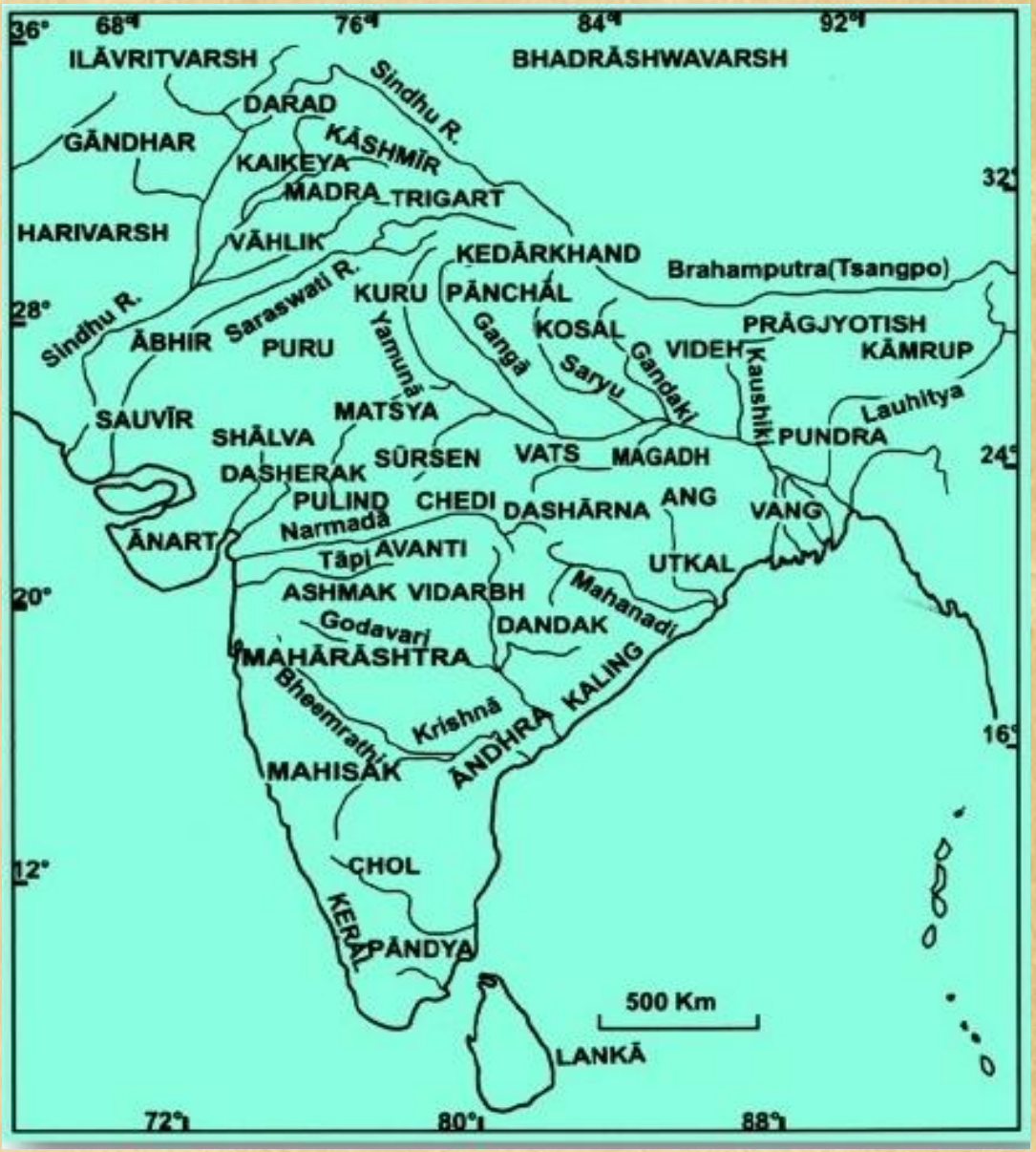
- **Assamese Mahabharata** by Rama Saraswati.

- **Tamil Mahabharata,** *'Villibharatham'* by Villiputhuran.



Thunchath Ezhuthachan

Sage Vedavyasa has covered the **huge geographical area** through epic Mahabharata. That shows the **ruling area or kingdom of different kings** with the name of particular space. That helped readers and scholars to study through the geographical content of the country.



Festivals associated with Mahabharata :

- ***Karaga*** is one of the oldest festivals of Karnataka. It is celebrated in honour of **Draupadi**. The festival is held at the famous Dharmarayaswami temple in Bengaluru.

Karaga Festival, Bengaluru

- ***Koovagam Festival*** is held to commemorate a story from the Mahabharata, where **Iravan**, one of the sons of Arjuna, offers himself as sacrifice to ensure victory for the Pandava army in the battle of Kurukshetra.

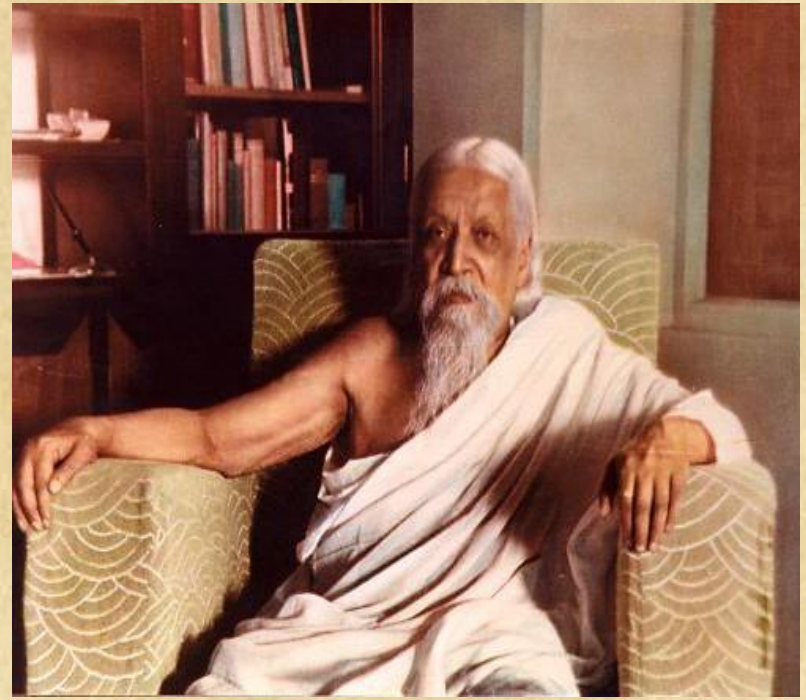
Koovagam Festival, Tamil Nadu

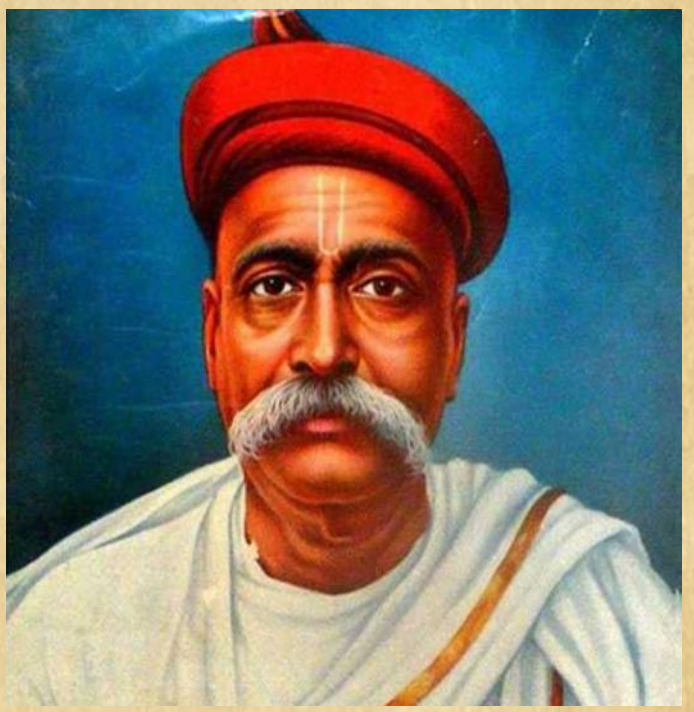
- ***Dhungri Mela*** at **Manali** is absolutely an astounding festival which is commemorated at the **Hidimba Temple** in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh.

- ***Bheeshma Ekadasi*** - In honour of Bheeshma Pitamaha (Great son of King Shanthanu & Ganga Devi) people celebrate Bheeshma Ekadasi in the month of Magha.

Dhungri Mela, Manali

Leaders who were been inspired by Mahabharata:





Shri Aurobindo Ghosh, Lokmanya Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, Annie Besant, C. Rajagopalachari, Bankim Chandra Chatterji, K.M. Munshi are some of the eminent personalities who were inspired by *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*.

- **Mahatma Gandhi** : Gandhiji has often acknowledged **Mahabaratha's profound effect on his life**. He once wrote in Harijan "***My notions were an outcome of a study of the Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata and Upanishads***." [Source : Harijan, 3rd October, 1936].

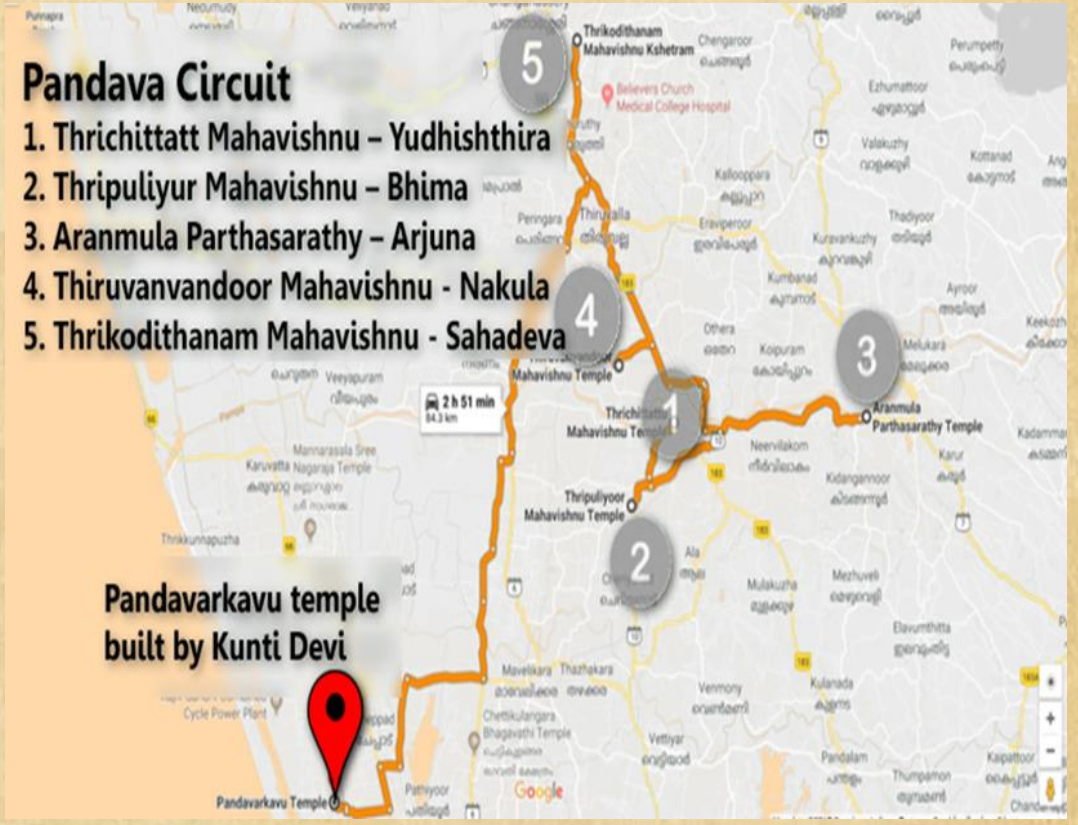
- **Lokmanya Tilak** - "The most practical teaching of the Gita, and one for which it is of abiding interest and value to the men of the world with whom life is a series of struggles, is not to give way to any morbid sentimentality when duty demands sternness and the boldness to face terrible things." And, "***It is my firm conviction that it is of utmost importance that every man, woman and child of India understands the message of the Gita***."

Kalamkari : *An Ancient Style of Hand Painting*

Kalamkari is a type of hand painted cotton or silk fabric, produced mainly in Andhra Pradhesh and Telangana. This ancient craft of hand painting has been around for nearly **1500 years** in India. The *Srikalahasti Kalamkari style* involves the depiction of scenes from **Mahabharata.**

Temples associated with Mahabharata:

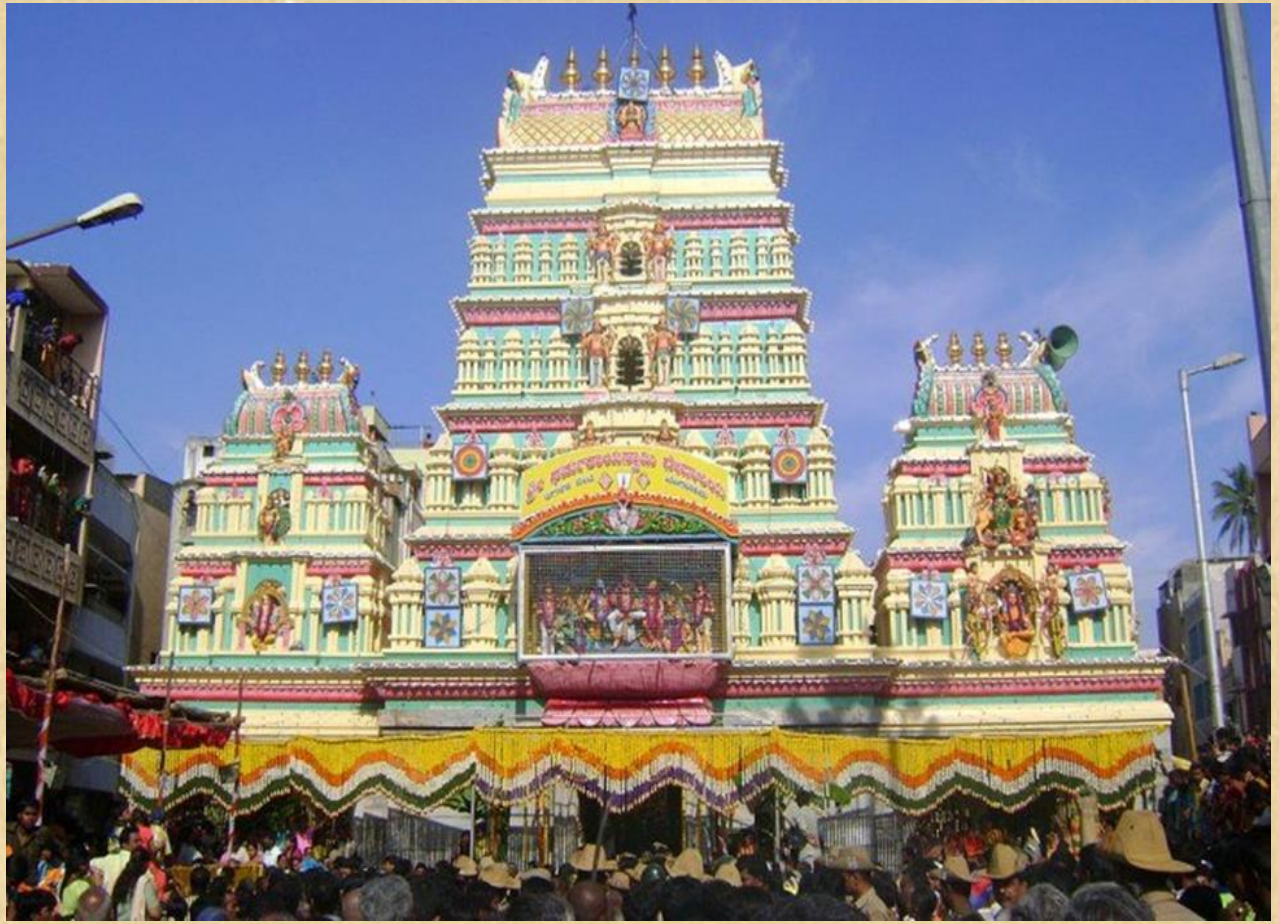
Pancha Pandava Temples in Kerala - These are the five temples in Chengannur area, it is believed that **each temple was built by one Pandava brother**. Devotees are supposed to start their pilgrim by visiting the temple built by Yudhishthira first.



Temples associated with Mahabharata:

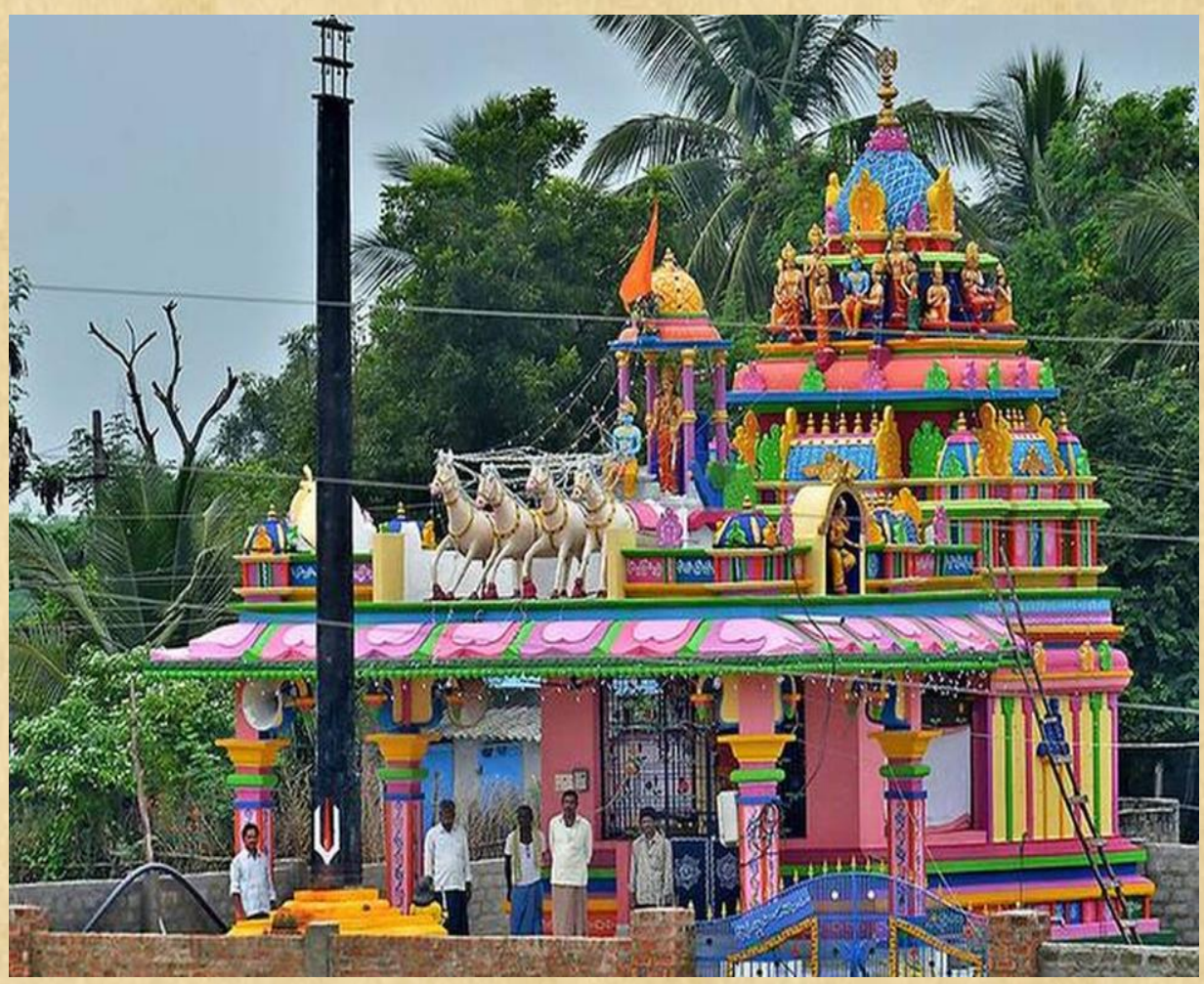
Thripuliyur Mahavishnu Temple by Bheema

Temples associated with Mahabharata:



Dharmarayaswami Temple, Bengaluru

Temples associated with Mahabharata:



Pancha Pandava Temple, Khammam, Telangana

Temples associated with Mahabharata:

Hidimba Temple, Manali, Himachal Pradesh

Art forms which are shaped on account with Mahabharata:

Pandav Lila in Uttarakhand and ***Terukoothu*** in Tamilnadu are two of them. These traditions follow the Mahabharata characters as deities and perform their stories as the devotional offering to them.

Pandav Lila

- ***Kathakali*** is a popular classical traditional theatre of Kerala. It is a blend of dance, music and acting of stories which are mostly chosen from Mahabharata.

- One of the traditional performing art forms, ***Kudiyattam*** has in its repertory episodes absolutely drawn from Mahabharata.

- Mahabharata has also shown a strong presence in the ***Bhaona*** , a traditional theatrical performance of **Assam**.

Art forms which are shaped on account with Mahabharata:

Another popular tradition giving continuity to Mahabharata is ***Chhau dance*** popular in South East India especially Bengal, Bihar and Odisha.

Mahabharata Carvings:

Kailasa temple, Ellora, Maharashtra

Mahabharata Carvings:

Pandavas and Draupadi, Dashavatara Temple, Deogarh, Rajasthan

Mahabharata Carvings:

Chakravyuha, Hoysaleshwara Temple, Halebidu, Karnataka

Anthropological information in Mahabharata:

It presents numerous **languages**, **cultures**, **rulers** and **regions**. When we analyse the ethnographic data in the Mahabharata, we could see that more than 300 people listed on different occasions as ***janas***.

- ***Janas* in the North (Himalayas):** Trigartas, Khasas etc.
- ***Janas* in the South :** Cholas, Pandyas, Dravidas, Keralas, Andhras etc.
- ***Janas* in the West:** Yadavas, Surashtras, Valhikas etc.
- ***Janas* in the Northwest:** Yavanas, Kambojas etc.
- ***Janas* in the East:** Angas, Kiratas, Vangas etc.

Conclusion:

It is absolutely a wonder to notice that the people in this nation continue to identify themselves with the epic traditions, associate places with the visits of Pandavas, worship the qualities in them with reverence.

Mahabharata Story Line

Part 1

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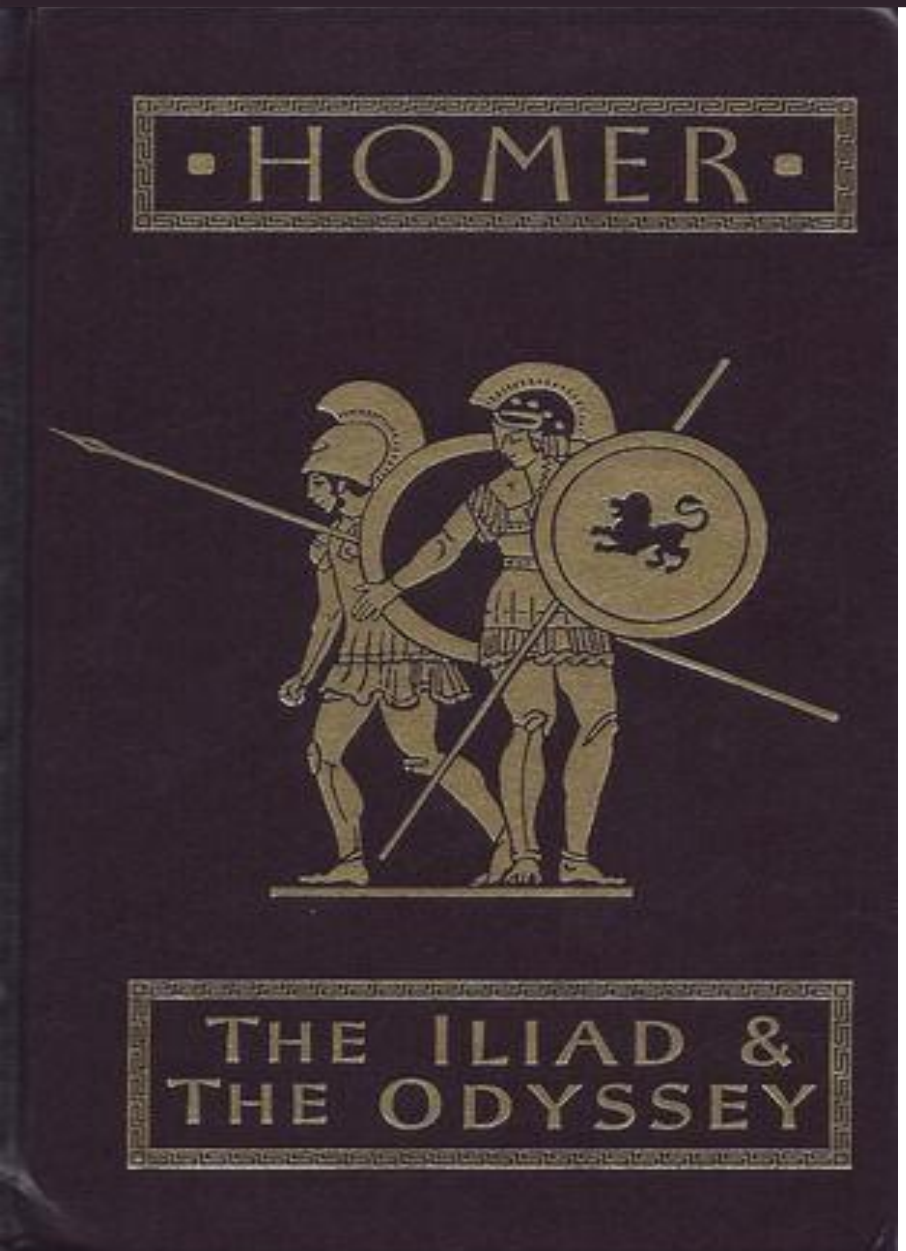
INTRODUCTION



Homer's Iliad and Odyssey which narrates the famous Trojan war is often glorified as a monumental work providing deep insights into the Greek history and civilization. Indeed it is……,

There's no denial! Now imagine a work that is approximately 10 times bigger than Iliad and Odyssey combined?

MahaBharata! The intention here is not to make an undue comparison of both these works but only to reveal the gigantic size of this *itihasa* "Mahabharata"

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INTRODUCTION

In Mahabharata, we will be astonished to see a portrayal cemented very much to reality. Vyasa has no hesitation to mention a wrong doing even if it is done by the most righteous heroic personality and he doesn't even think twice to narrate the good doing of a seemingly unrighteous character. Which is why, many consider Mahabharata as a near to accurate portrayal of human behavior.

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INTRODUCTION

Can any of you guess when was this Mahabharata story narrated for the first time, by whom and to whom?

It is the author Veda Vyasa's disciple Vaishambayana who narrates this complete *itihasa* to a king named Janamejaya. Mind blowingly, this Janamejaya is the grandson of Abhimanyu who gets killed in the Mahabharata war.

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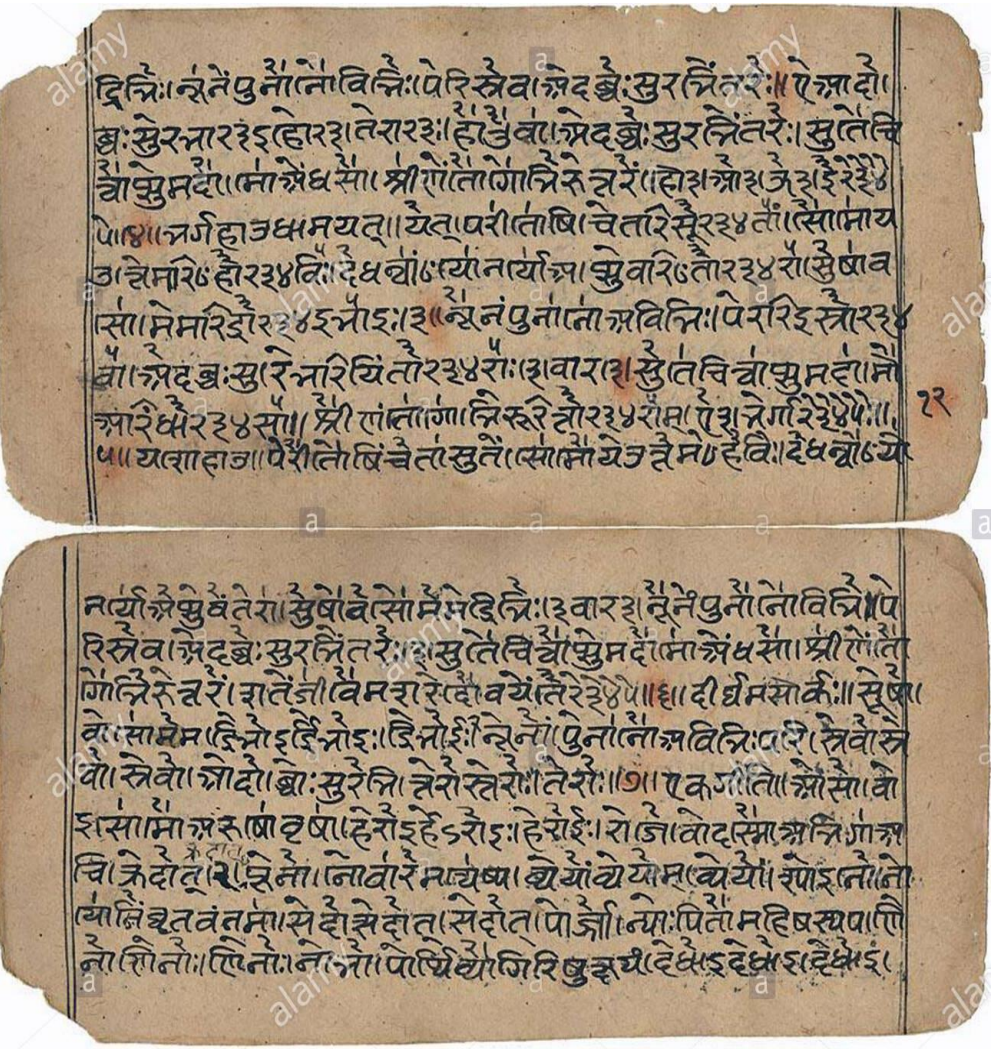
Adi Parva



It is believed that the great Vyasa recited Mahabharata in the form of one hundred parvas.

Parvas can be considered as an equivalent to episodes of a grand chronicle.

Later, Lomaharshana re-narrated the complete story at Naimisha forest (Naimisharanya) and classified them into main 18 parvas, the first being known as "*Adi Parva*".

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First Parva -Adi Parva

Adi Parva – Story of *Bharata*

In the first parva known as Adi parva, apart from such a summarization, most markedly, the story of Bharata is narrated. "*Bharathasya Desam Bharatham*".

It is believed that our Nation derived its name from this valiant King "Bharata", who was born in a forest to Shakunthala and king Dushyanta. Very interestingly, the story of the birth of author Krisna Dwaipayana Vyasa is also recounted here.

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Adi Parva – Bhishma's Vow

The main thread starts when the powerful king Shantanu of Bharata lineage begets a son Devavrata through Ganga.

To allow for his father's desire to marry a fisherwoman, Devavrata took a stern vow that he would never marry and dedicated himself to a life of unbroken chastity. This difficult feat earned him the name "Bhishma" which means one who undertook a terrible vow. This name remained the celebrated epithet henceforth. Also his father blessed him with a boon that he would die only when he wished to.

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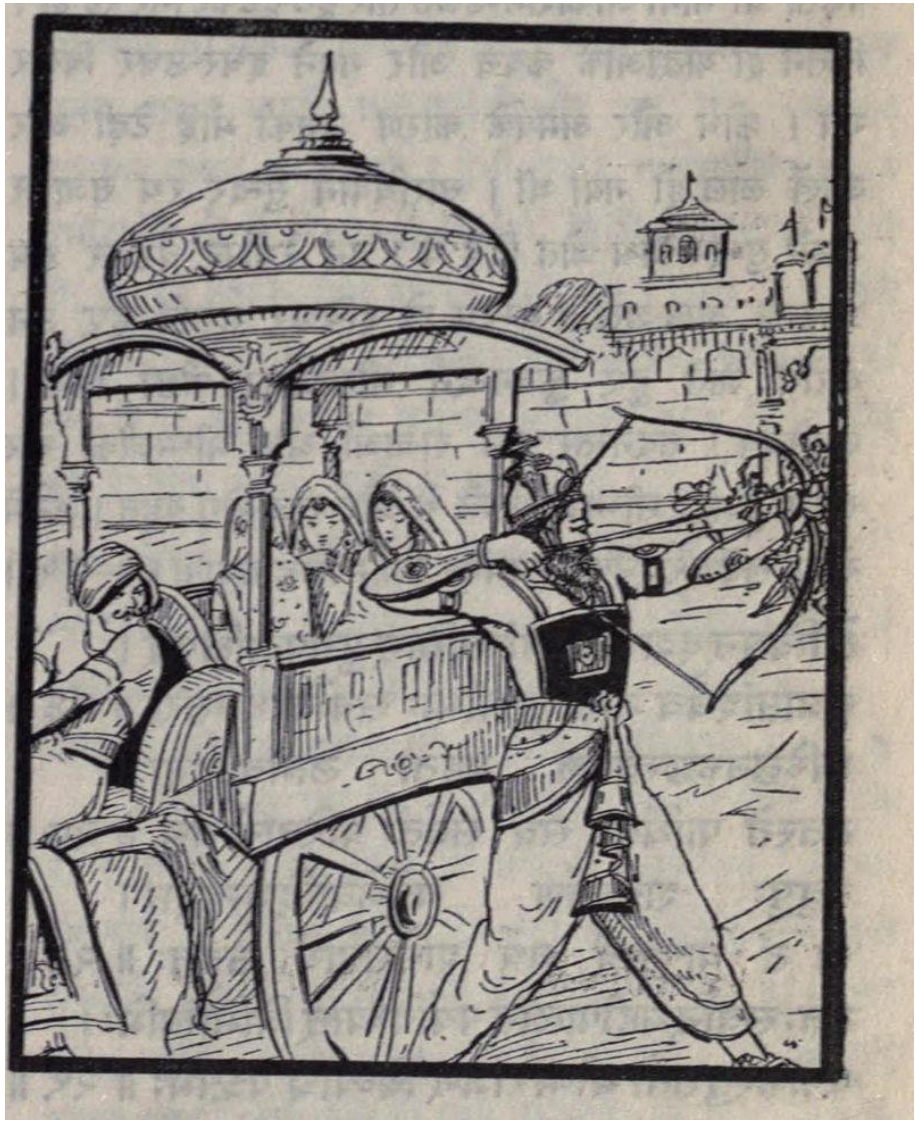
Adi Parva – Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura



Chitrangada and Vichitavirya, the two step brothers of Bhishma, were very brave and ruled the kingdom one after the other.

After the death of Chitrangada by a Gandharva in a battle , Bhishma exhibiting his valour and might at a swayamvara function in Kasi king's palace, in accordance with one of the forms of marriage, abducts Amba, Ambika and Ambalika, daughters of the Kasi King, as brides for Vichitavirya. However Vichitavirya too dies young without leaving a progeny.

The itihasa author who is also a step brother to Bhishma comes on request by their mother and through his grace Dhritharashtra, Pandu and Vidura are born. Dhritharashtra is born blind while Pandu turns out to be pale complexioned.

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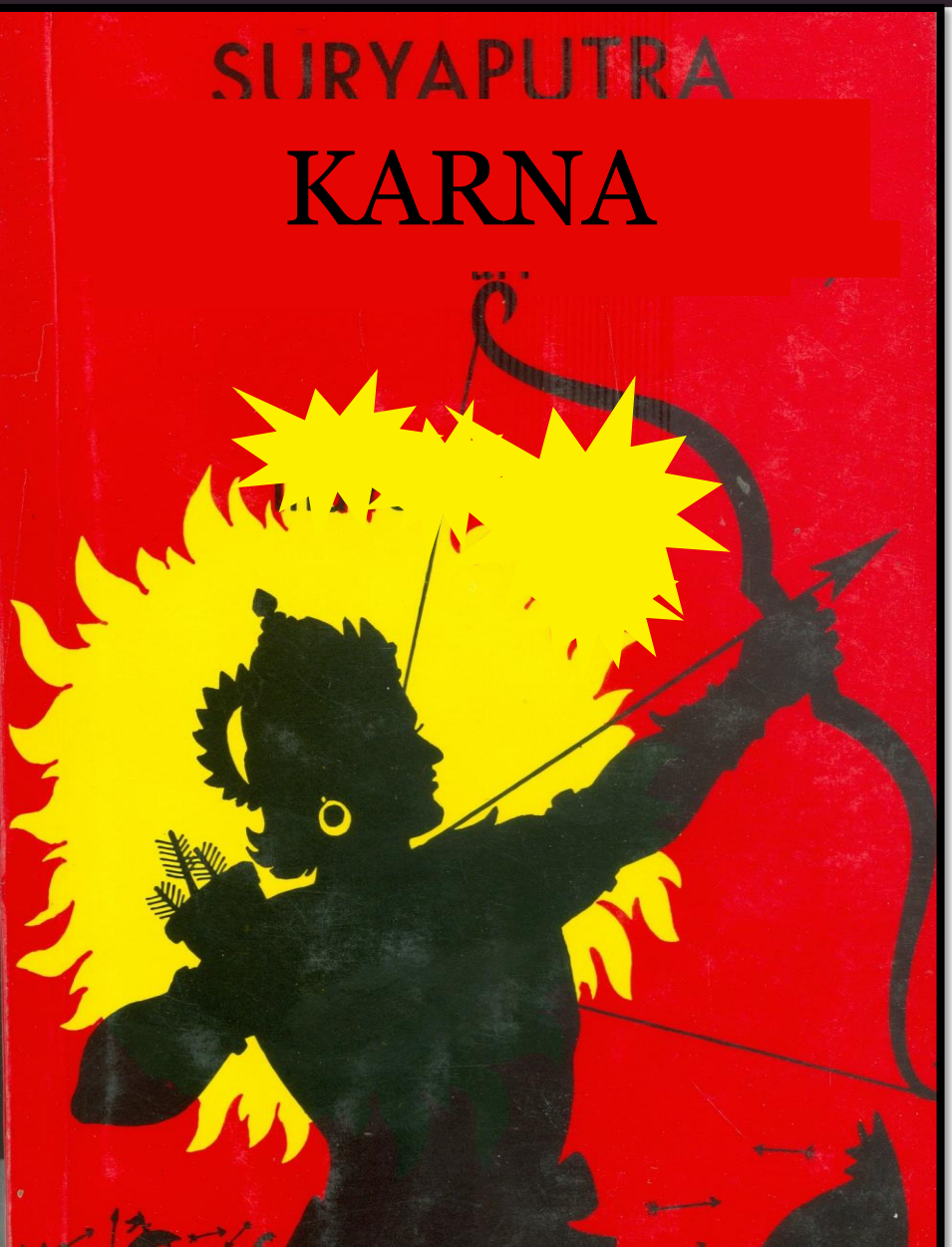
Adi Parva – Birth of Karna



Pandu marries Kunthi and Madri. Kunthi in her childhood days has obtained a divine mantra from a sage for her patience and devotion. Using that mantra she could invoke any God and acquire a son who is equivalent to that God. Out of her childish curiosity she tests the efficacy of mantra by invoking the Sun God and ends up with a child of the Surya Deva. This child who bore divine armour and earrings at the time of birth is “Karna” who was placed inside a box and set afloat in a river, since the unwedded Kunthi was very scared and didn't really know what else to do. A childless charioteer would find and raise this child who in future would be the most sturdy opponent to the rest of Kunthi’s sons. A despicable design of destiny?

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Adi Parva – Gandhari and Kauravas

During this time, the daughter of Gandhara King Subala gets married to the blind king Dhritharashtra. Denying the vision that her husband lacks, this queen ties a cloth around her eyes and remains willingly blinded throughout and this act of her receives plentiful praises. Queen Gandhari's brother Shakuni also shifts himself to Hastinapura who becomes the mastermind behind most of the evil plots of Duryodhana and Karna. Turning out impatient after knowing that Kunthi gave birth to Yudhishtira, a pregnant Gandhari beats her stomach only to give birth to a flesh lump. However the epic author Sage Vyasa intervenes and divides this flesh into 101 equal parts, keep them inside mud pots and with his blessings are born the 100 Kaurava brothers and 1 sister of whom Duryodhana is the eldest.

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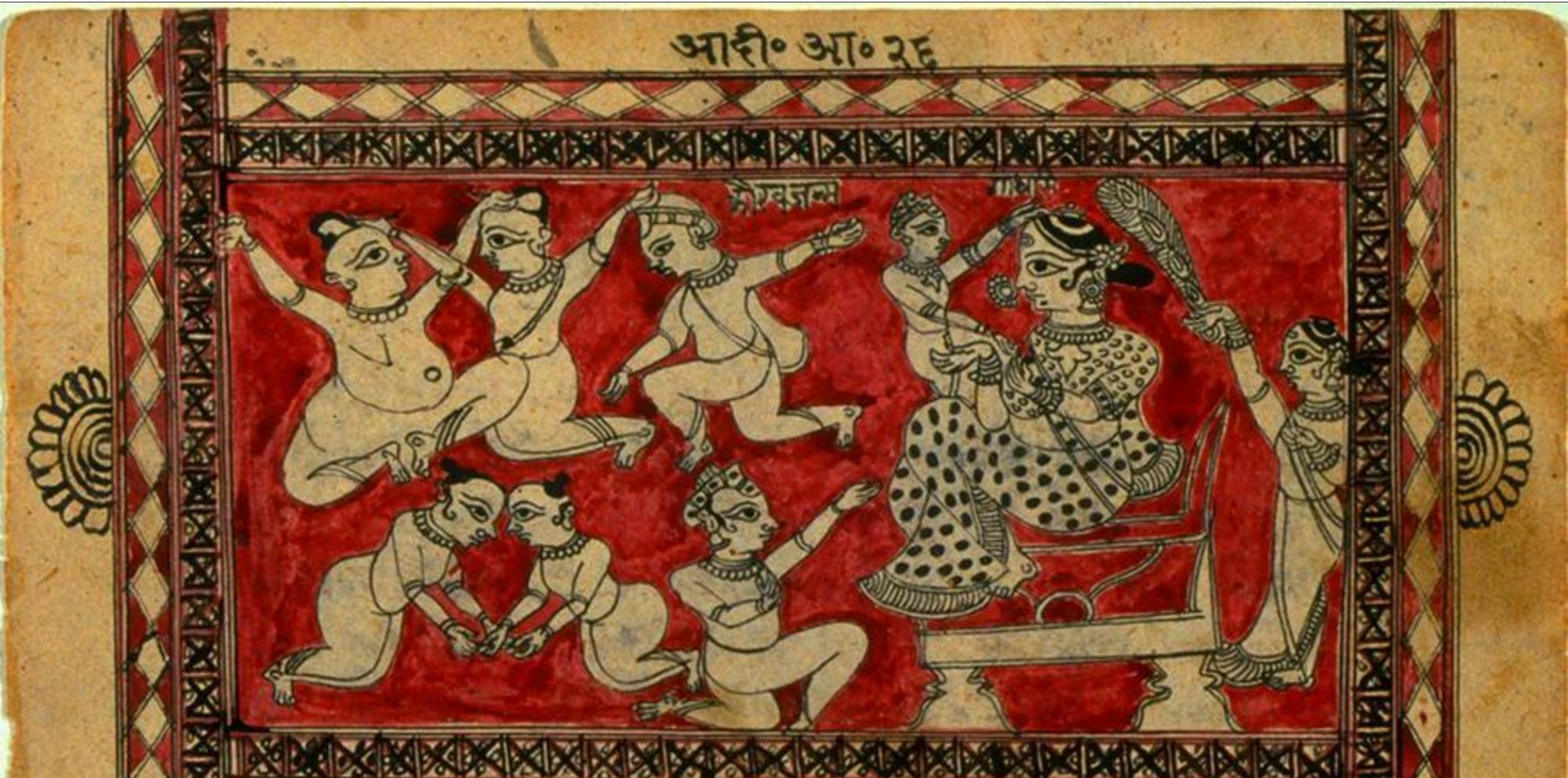
Adi Parva – Pandavas and Kauravas



Adi Parva – Pandavas and Kauravas

The five sons of Pandu were born when they were in the forest and shortly thereafter Pandu departs owing a curse. Kunthi and the five sons return to the kingdom.

These five sons and the hundred sons of Dhritharashtra grow up in mirth and merriment but the practical jokes of the physically powerful Bhima nurtures deep hatred and jealousy in the mind of Duryodhana who tries through many ways to end the life of Bhima.

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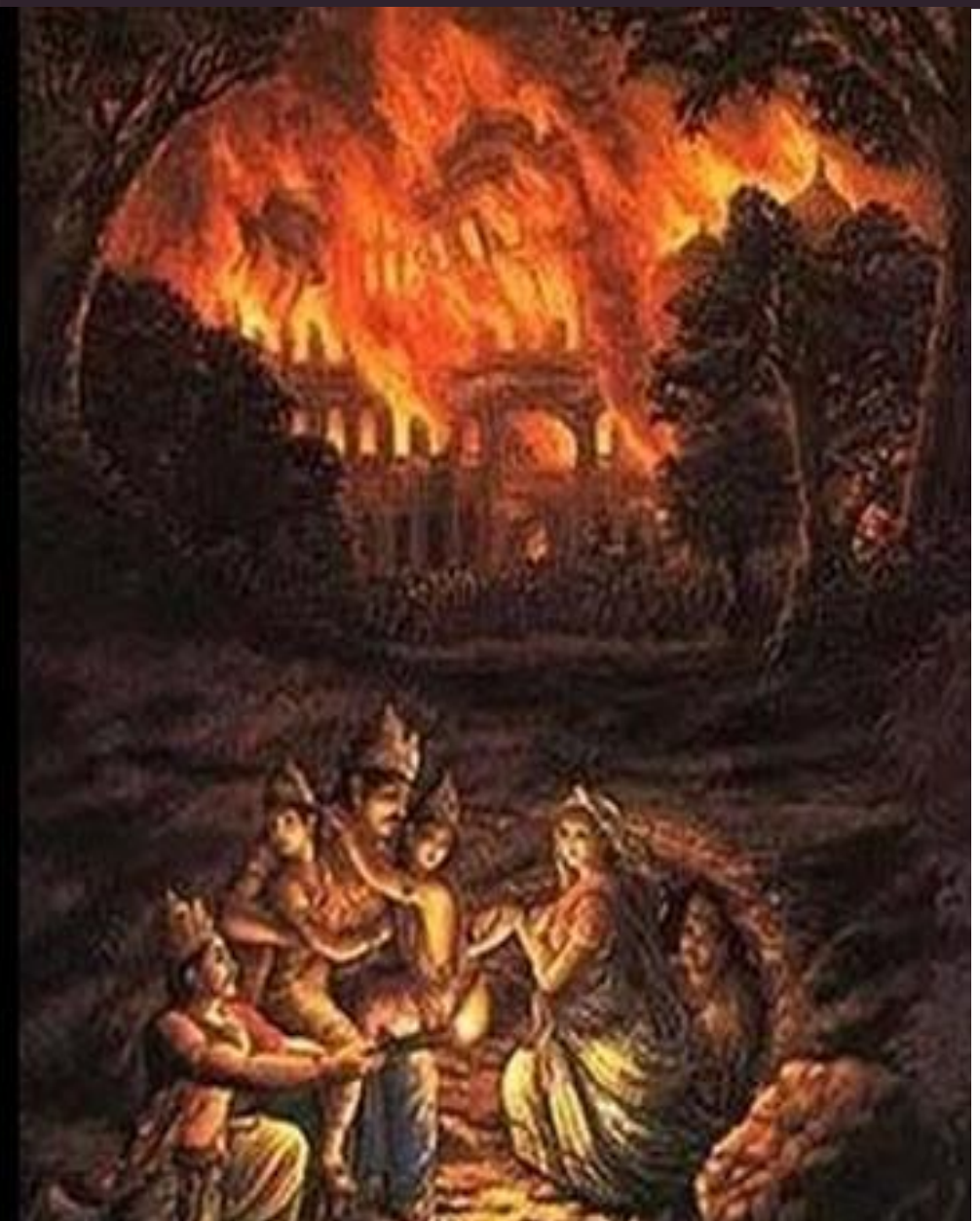
Adi Parva – Wax Palace



As and when Pandavas and Kauravas grow in age, scared of losing the Kingship to Yudhishtira, Duryodhana and Karna plot an evil scheme to end all the five brothers by burning them in a wax palace. Fortunately the pandavas are timely informed of this, thanks to Vidura, and they manage to escape through a hidden tunnel. Retaining an impression that they got killed in the wax palace incident, In the next few years they roam around in the forest killing rakshasas like Baka and Hidimba.

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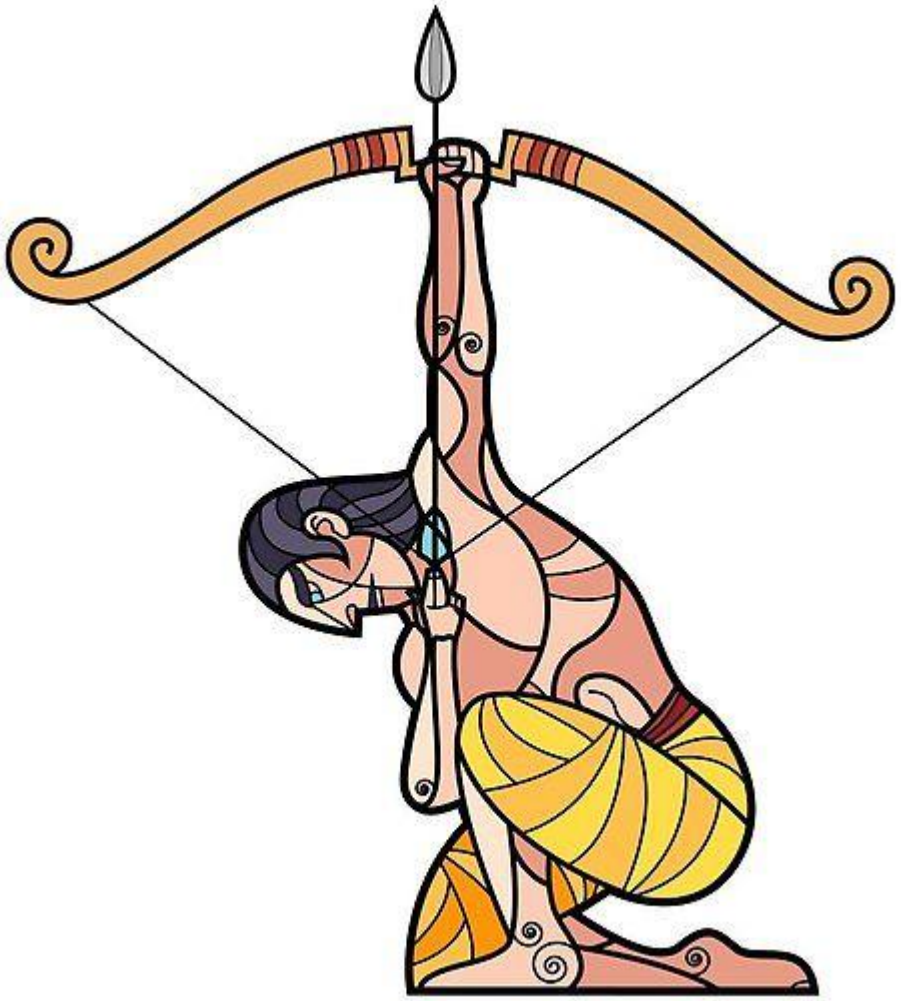
Adi Parva – Droupadi Swayamvara



This adventure trip culminates in a swayamvara at Panchala Desa, where Arjuna disguised as a brahmin shoots down a mechanised moving target. As Arjuna wins over Droupadi in the Swayamvara, rest of the kings succumb to jealousy and start fighting the Pandava.

For the first time in the epic, Lord Krishna enters the scene, settling the dispute with his diplomatic skills and charisma. As a stroke of destiny connected to previous birth, Droupadi is married to all the five brothers and shortly all of them together return to their paternal kingdom. Dhritharashtra offers half the kingdom back, as suggested by Bhisma, Drona and Vidura and Pandavas move to Khandava forest where they burn the forest in order to build a huge palace.

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Sabha Parva – Game of Dice

The second parva- Sabha parva starts with the building of a huge palatial court/Sabha by Pandavas. Thereafter they do a Rajasuya Yajna and expand their empire. Duryodhana bedazzled by the beauty of the new palace of Pandavas at Indraprastha and their unprecedented wealth, grows jealous and plots a new plan. They invite Pandavas for a game of dice in which Yudhishtira loses everything betting, to the deceitful games of Shakuni.

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Sabha Parva – Dishonouring Droupadi

Even he would go to the extent of betting all his siblings, himself and their wife Droupadi. There occurs one of the most heinous and disgraceful incident, "dishonouring Droupadi". Having obtained Droupadi as a bet win, provoked by words of Karna, Dushyasana, a younger brother of Duryodhana drags her onto the court even when she resists. In front of a court disgraced with the silence of powerful men, Dushyasana tries disrobing Droupadi.

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Sabha Parva – Bhima's Vow

She pleads and receiving no help, prays and surrenders herself to lord Krishna. A divine intervention from Krishna enables a continuous flow of dresses one after another saving her honour. Realizing the Adharma that happened, the blind king Dhritharashtra repents and offers boons to Droupadi and accordingly all the pandavas were set free of the bet. Bhima out of rage takes an oath to pierce the chest of Dushyasana and break the thighs of Duryodhana.

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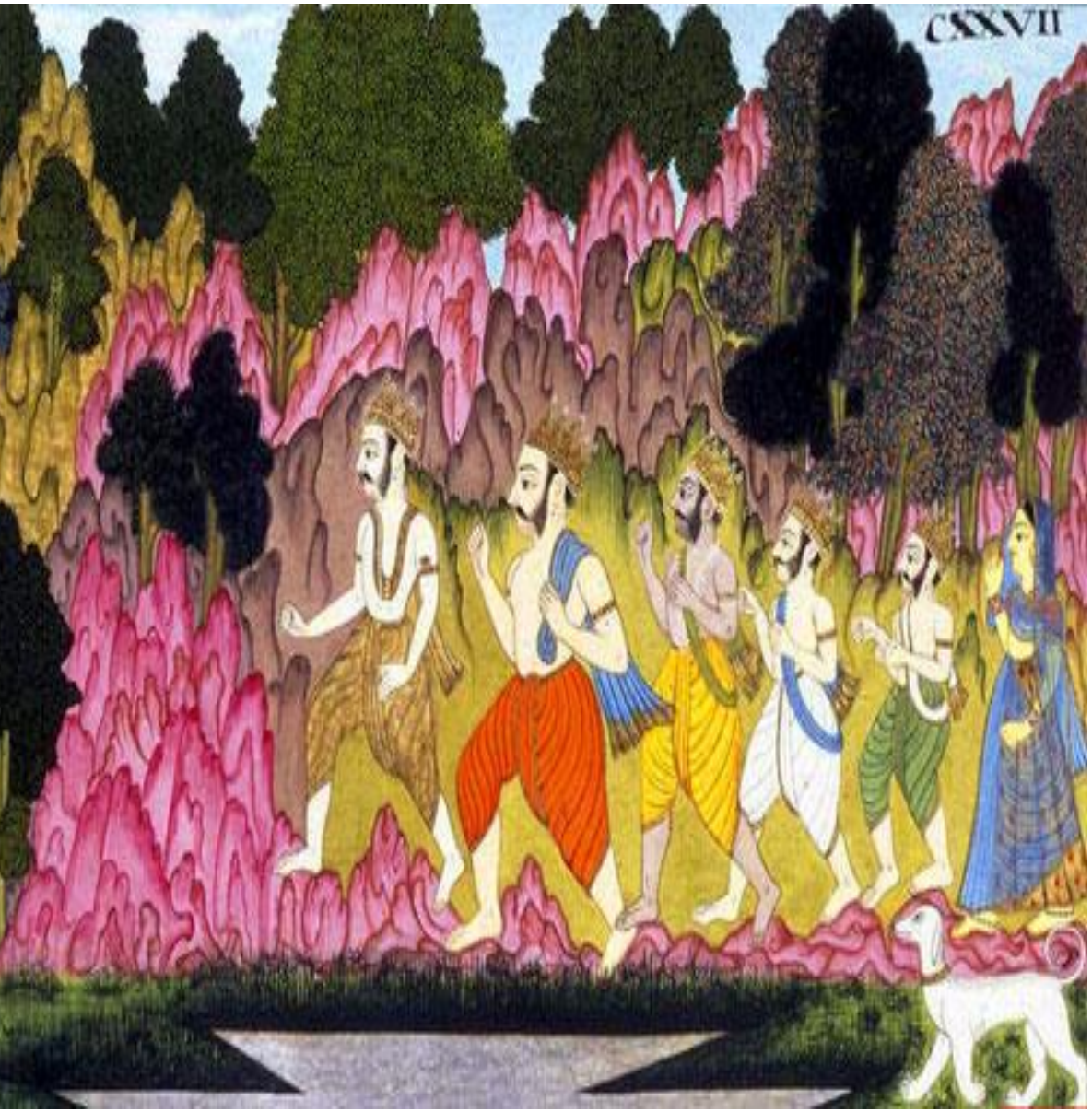
Sabha Parva – Bhima's Vow



Even before the Pandavas reach back their kingdom, Duryodhana and accomplices convince Dhritharashtra to call them back for another round of dice game, this time with a new gamble. The losers have to stay in forest for 12 years and 1 year in disguise. In accordance with Kshatriya Dharma, Yudhishtira accepts the challenge even knowing that Shakuni would resort to deceit. The expected outcome happens and the bet losers pandavas along with Droupadi had to leave to forest for 12 years.

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Aranya Parva and Viraat Parva

There begins the third parva Aaranya parva 'Aranya' meaning forest. In those years in exile, they kill many evil beings, earn many divine weapons like Pasupathaastra and spend the last one year in the land of king Virata, each of them disguised. This would be the Viraat parva.

The daughter of Virat King gets married to Abhimanyu, the son of Arjuna. They successfully complete their stipulated time period and return while Duryodhana has no intention to give back their rightful kingdom. War becomes inevitable.

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Mahabharata Story Line

To be continued in part 2.....

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Topic 6

To know and analyse Mahabharata Characters : Part 1 [Bhishma and Krishna]

18AVP201, Amrita Values Programme I

Bhishma - The Great Soul

Bhishma was the son of King Shantanu, a descendant of the Kurus, and goddess Ganga. Bhishma is believed to be Prabhasa, the Vasu, who descended upon the earth in consequence of the curse invoked by the great Rishi Vasishtha. He was called as Devavrata in his childhood who once intercepted the flow of the Ganges with his arrows. Goddess Ganga left King Shantanu after he questioned her about her actions of throwing their seven sons in to the Ganges.

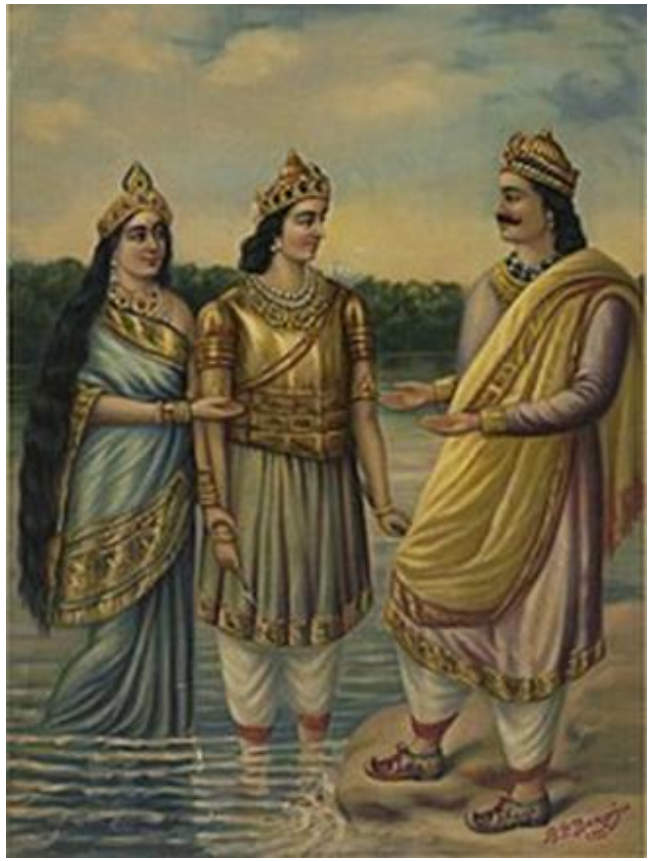


Fig. 1: Ganga Devi handing over Devavrata to King Shantanu.

Even as a boy, Devavrata had studied the Vedas along with their corollaries and also learnt, through repeated practices, the use of divine weapons.

Fig. 2: Devavrata had mastered the use of divine weapons.

Once while strolling in the forest, King Shantanu saw a beautiful woman named Satyavati, the daughter of the king of Kaivartas, and wanted to marry her. However, Satyavati's father put forth the condition that her son should be entitled to the kingdom. The king could not accept this condition but could also not remove Satyavati from his mind.

Fig. 3: King Shantanu and Satyavati.

When Devavrata came to know of the king's sadness, he begged the king of the Kaivartas for the girl's hand for his father's sake and took a pledge, in the presence of all, that the son born to her would be sole heir apparent. He also took another terrible pledge that he would never marry. People thereafter began to call the adolescent Devavrata as Bhishma (one who takes a terrible vow and fulfils it). Pleased with the pledge, King Shantanu granted his son the boon to die at his will.

Fig. 4: Devavrata takes the terrible oath and becomes Bhishma.

King Shantanu married Satyavati and two sons were born to them - Chitrangada and Vichitravirya. After King Shantanu passed away, the elder son Chitrangada ascended the throne but was soon killed in a battle with the Gandharvas.

Vichitravirya then became king. Bhishma abducted the three daughters of the king of Kashi, Amba, Ambika and Ambalika, from their Svayamvara and started towards Hastinapura. He defeated all the opposing kings single handedly and handed the women over to Vichitravirya. This was the first occasion when the world came to know of his matchless might and skill in the use of weapons.

Fig. 5: Bhishma abducting the princesses of Kashi, Amba, Ambika and Ambalika.

Amba desired to marry king Shalva to which Bhishma consented. Ambika and Ambalika were married to Vichitravirya. Soon after, Vichitravirya too passed away without any off springs. Bhishma could have easily controlled the kingdom now, but he didn't.

Now, king Shalva refused to marry Amba. Due to this insult, Amba devised plans to avenge Bhishma.

Fig. 6: Amba furious at Bhishma for her insult.

She took refuge in Parashurama, the son of Jamadagni, who was claimed to have rid the earth of Kshatriyas twenty one times. Parashurama challenged Bhishma to a fight if he did not accept Amba as his wife. Bhishma refused to break his vow and agreed to fight his preceptor, Lord Parashurama. It is believed that the fight, between the two, lasted for twenty three days after which Parashurama accepted defeat.

Fig. 7: Fight between Bhishma and his preceptor, Lord Parashurama.

In the battle of Mahabharata, Bhishma was the best warrior on the Kauravas' side and hence was made the first commander of the battle. He had sympathy for the Pandavas and desired their victory but did not grant them any concession and tried to defeat them in the battle. During the ten days during which he was the commander of the Kaurava army, he slaughtered a large part of the Pandava armies.

Fig. 8: Bhishma was the first commander of the Kaurava army.

Even Sri Krishna, who had pledged not to take up arms, had to take up arms two times to defend his disciple Arjuna from the arrows of Bhishma.

Fig. 9: Sri Krishna taking up arms to protect his devotee Arjuna.

The Pandavas soon realized that it was impossible to win the battle when Bhishma was alive. So they went to Bhishma pitamaha himself and asked for the way to win the war. Taking pity on them, he revealed the method to get killed. He told that if Shikhandi, being born as a female to King Drupada, faced him in battle, he would lay down his arms and Arjuna could then kill him. He thus exemplified valour while at the same time carried out his duties also as the protector of Hastinapura.

Fig. 10: Bhishma stopping his fight on facing Shikhandi.

When Bhishma fell, his body did not touch the ground due to the numerous arrows that had pierced his body. In spite of intense pain, he did not wish death till Uttarayan began and the sun started the northward journey. To support his head, he requested for arrows to which Arjuna obliged. He refused treatment as he felt it as an insult to be treated.

Fig. 11: Bhishma on the bed of arrows.

He refused to drink water from the jars and Arjuna used a shining arrow along with the Parjanya astra that caused a stream of water from the earth directly into the mouth of the pitamaha. After this, Bhishma refused to eat and drink and also suffered the pain due to the pierced arrows. Today, this place is known by the name of Bhishma Kund at Narkatari in Kurukshetra, Haryana.

Fig. 12: Bhishma Kund at Narkatari, Kurukshetra.

In spite of the intense pain along with hunger and thirst, Bhishma advised Yudhistra on various important subjects, necessary for a king, for several days, such as duties of a king, duties for crisis period, duties for attaining salvation, duties for offering charities, duties for women folk, etc. These exhortations are found in the Shanti parva and Anushasana parva of the Mahabharata. Even great sages such as Veda Vyasa had gathered to listen to his exhortations.

Fig. 13: Sculpture at Angkor Wat, Cambodia, of Bhishma on a bed of arrows.

Bhishma is an epitome of devotion, knowledge, righteous conduct and valour. Though Bhishma died heirless, the Hindus offer him water along with the water offered to their Manes. No Indian has received such an honour and he is regarded as the 'Grandfather' of all. This is an envy even for a person having many sons.

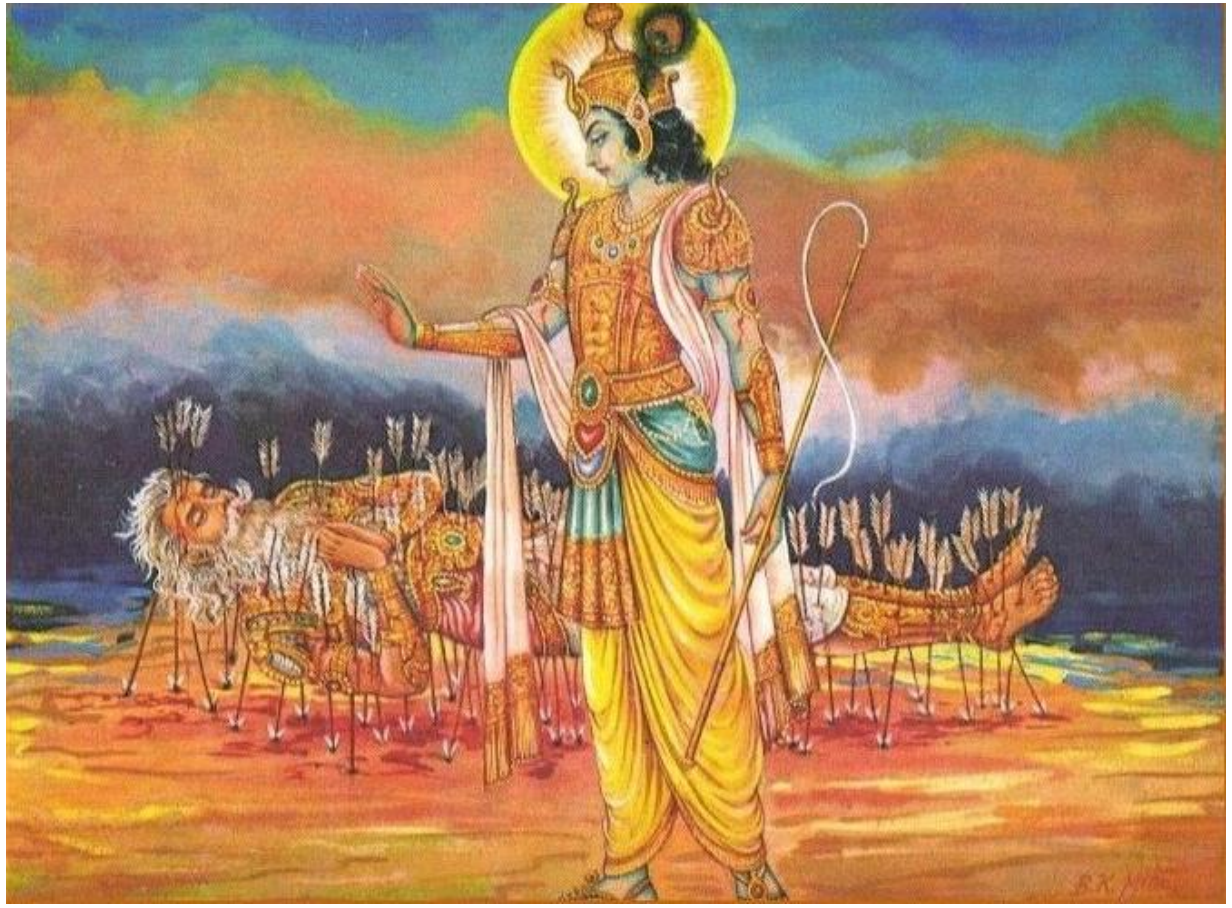


Fig. 14: Sri Krishna blessing Bhishma.

Namah Shivaya

Topic 6

To know and analyse Mahabharata Characters : Part 1 [Bhishma and Krishna]

18AVP201, Amrita Values Programme I

SRI KRISHNA –THE EMBODIMENT OF KNOWLEDGE

Krishna was born in the Yadava clan of Mathura to Queen Devaki and her husband, King Vasudeva on the eighth day or ashtami of the Bhadrapada month as per Hindu lunar calendar. Janmashtami, also known as Gokulashtami, is a major Hindu festival in India and celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna, who happened to be the eighth incarnation or avatar of Lord Vishnu.

Fig.1: The birth of Sri Krishna.

The controller of the world, the god of gods and the master of the entire universe, Lord Narayana, had descended upon the earth as Sri Krishna (Mahabharata, Adi Parva, chapter 64).

In the Rajasuya Yajna, performed by Dharmaraja Yudhisthira, the high souled Bhishma said: Vaasudeva himself is the cause of creation and dissolution of the world and hence is supremely worthy of adoration. (Sabha Parva, 36.12).

Sishupala, the king of Chedi, an antagonist of Sri Krishna, mentions the events of Krishna's childhood in a view to censure him but admittedly accepts their veracity – the killing of Putana, Bakasura, Keshi, Vrshasura and Kamsa, the over turning of the cart and the lifting up of the Govardhana mountain.

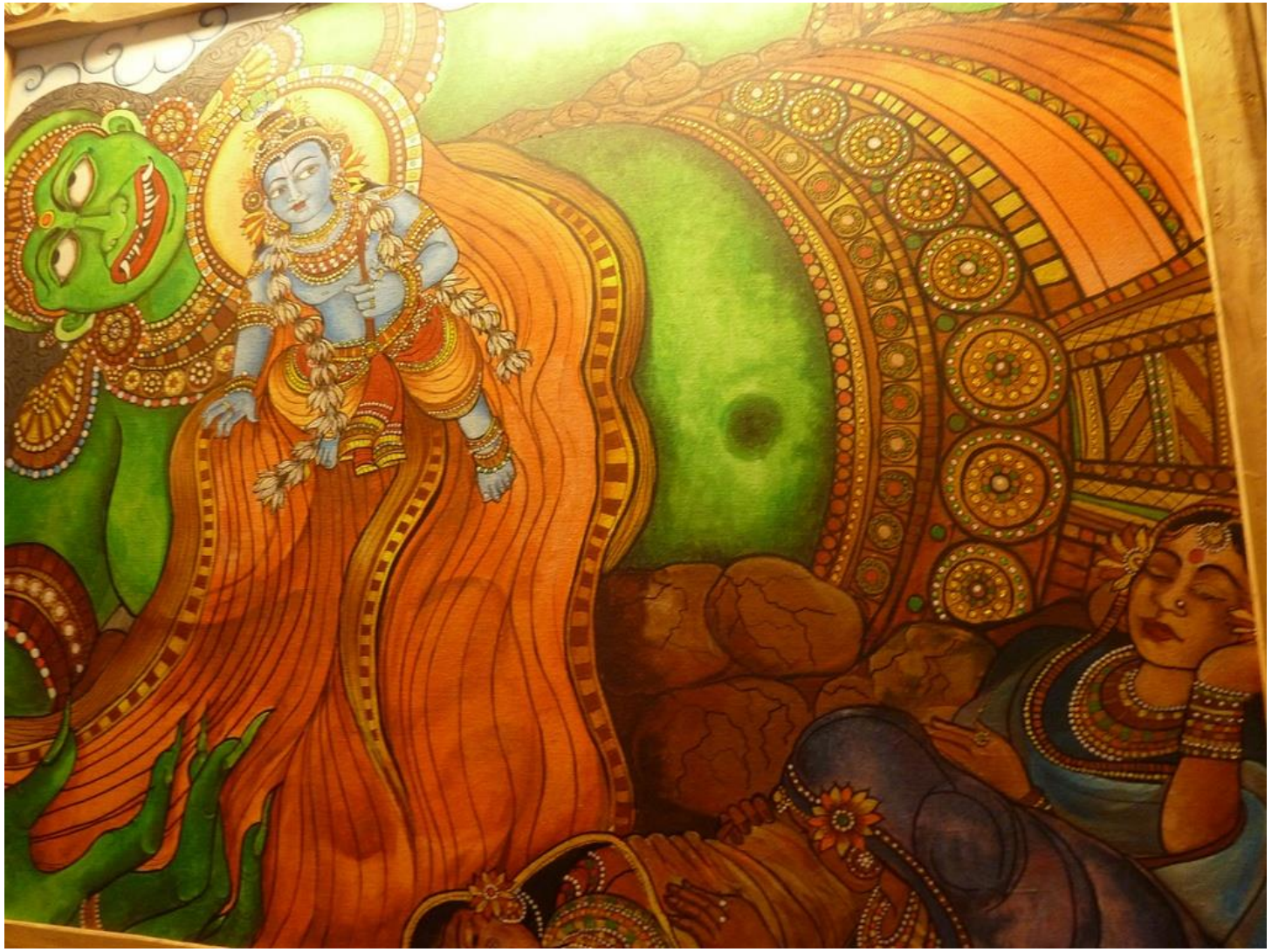


Fig. 2: The killing of Putana by Sri Krishna as a child.

Fig. 3: The killing of Bakasura.

Fig. 4: The killing of Vatsasura.

Fig. 5: The killing of Keshi.

Fig. 6: The killing of Shakatasura.

The people were in great despair and turned to Lord Krishna for help. He lifted the entire Govardhan mountain on his left hand's little finger and people of Braj took shelter under it for seven days, unaffected by hunger and thirst. Since then, devotees of Lord Krishna worship him on the day of Govardhan Puja.

Fig. 7: The lifting of the Govardhana mountain.

Fig. 8: The killing of Kamsa, the ruler of Mathura.

Fig. 9: The killing of Shishupala, the king of Chedi.

After Yudhishthira lost his kingdom, his brothers and his wife Draupadi, in a game of dice with Shakuni, Duhshasana dragged Draupadi by the hair into the assembly, at the behest of his brother Duryodhana, and tried to disrobe her. Draupadi, gets saved by Sri Krishna, who was physically at Dwaraka at that time. (Sabha Parva)

Fig. 10: Sri Krishna, the savior of Draupadi.

After losing the game of dice a second time, the Pandavas were banished to the forest for 12 years and a year as incognito. In the forest, the Pandavas meet Sage Markandeya, who says that his vision of the wondrous child on a banyan leaf in the unfathomable depth of water was none other than Sri Krishna. (Vana Parva)

Fig. 11: Sage Markandeya with the Pandavas in the forest.

Fig. 12: The vision of sage Markandeya.

Duryodhana conspired and sent sage Durvasa to the Pandavas, along with many disciples, for dinner, when Draupadi had finished her meal after feeding all the others. Sage Durvasa was expected to dine with the Pandavas after their bath and rituals on the banks of the river Ganga. Draupadi was worried and cried to Krishna for help. Krishna came and ate a vegetable leaf sticking at the neck of the pot.

Suddenly Durvasa and his disciples felt their bellies loaded with food up to the throat. For fear of angering the Pandavas due to the wastage of food, the Sage and his disciples quietly slipped away and thus the Pandavas were saved from great embarrassment and possible curse from the sage.

Fig.13: Krishna eating the left over from the pot.

Sanjaya, the favourite minister of Dhritarashtra, told him that " if Sri Krishna so desires, He can reduce the entire world to ashes simply by His resolve, but the entire world together cannot reduce Sri Krishna to ashes. Where there is truth, there is righteousness and where there is righteousness, there is Sri Krishna and where there is Sri Krishna, there is victory." Veda Vyasa who was also present, agreed to this.

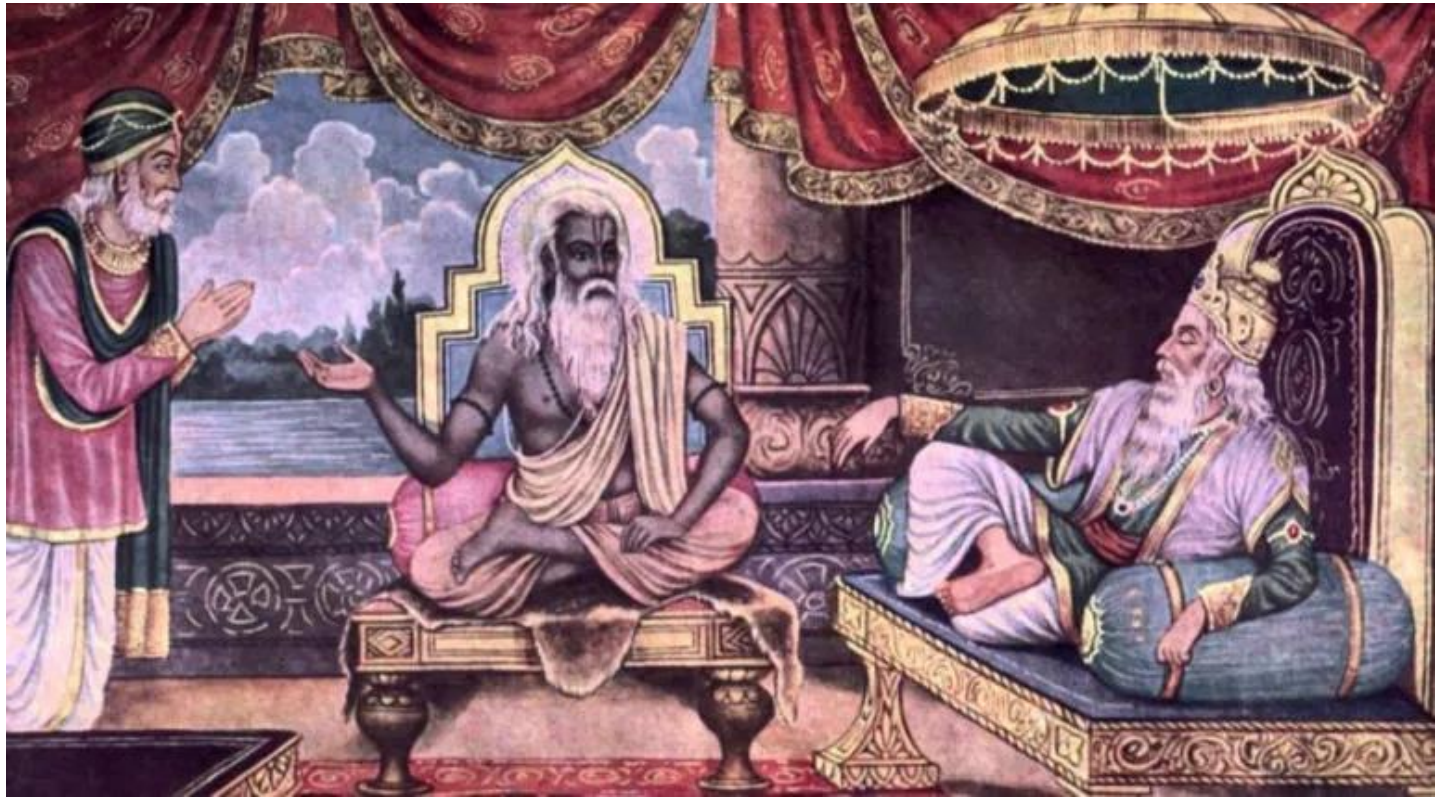


Fig. 14: Sanjaya with Dhritarashtra and Veda Vyasa.

When Sri Krishna arrives in the assembly of the Kauravas, with the truce proposal of the Pandavas, great Rishis gather there in order to listen to the divine and prudent speech of Sri Krishna. After hearing the speech, they all try to persuade Duryodhana to give the Pandavas their due and by telling that Sri Krishna is Lord Narayana incarnate. However, Duryodhana gets irritated and tries to imprison Sri Krishna. (Udyoga Parva)

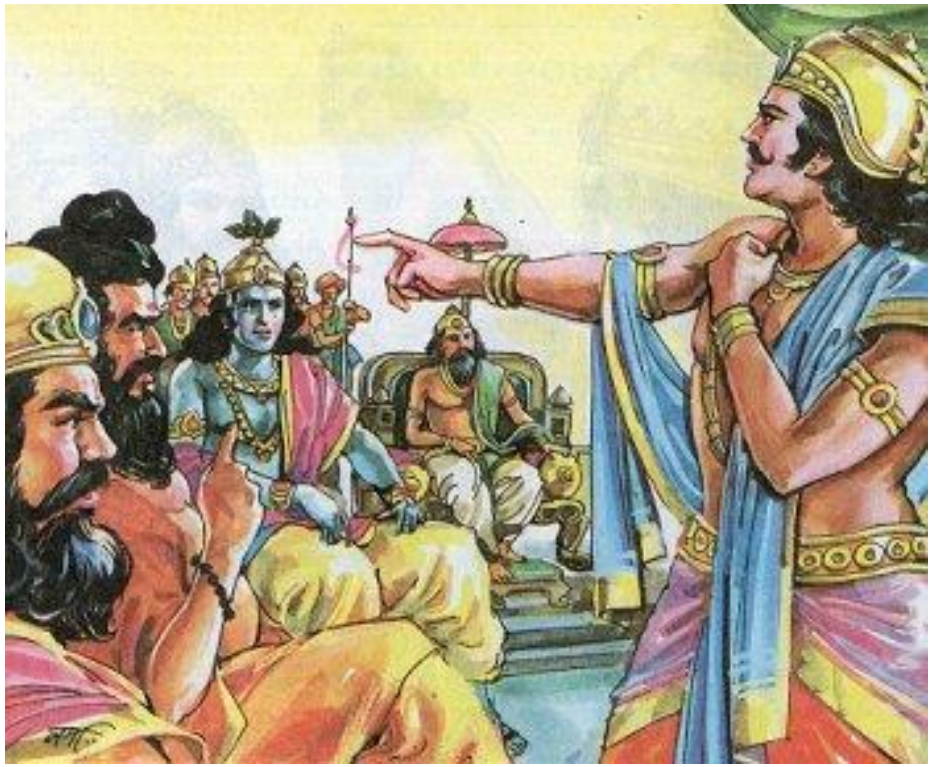


Fig. 15: Duryodhana tries to imprison Sri Krishna.

Lord Krishna mocked Duryodhana and laughed heartily. From his eyes, nostrils and ears came out terrible flames and from the pores of his body streamed forth rays like that of the sun.

The assembled kings trembled with fear and only Drona, Bhishma, Vidura, Sanjaya and the Rishis sat there unmoved. (Udyoga Parva)

Fig. 16: Sri Krishna shows his ferocious form.

Through the Bhagavad Gita, Sri Krishna explains to Arjuna that he is the birthless and deathless Lord of all beings. He takes birth for the protection of the virtuous and the extirpation of the evil doers.

He motivates Arjuna to take up arms in the Mahabharata war for the sake of Dharma. (Bhishma Parva)

Fig. 17: Sri Krishna shows his Vishwarupa or cosmic form to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Sri Krishna tells Arjuna that He is the source of all creation and in Him it dissolves. Veiled by His divine potency, He keeps His divinity hidden from others.

Noticing Arjuna frightened, He again manifests Himself as Shyamasundara to Arjuna.

Fig. 18: Sri Krishna advising Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Sri Krishna exhorts Arjuna thus: You should meditate on Me alone, love Me, adore Me and practice My remembrance and relinquishing all other shelters, take refuge in Me.

So to know Sri Krishna, we have to take refuge in Him (being devoid of pride of wisdom).

Fig. 19: Sri Krishna advising Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Though engaged in all sorts of activities, actually we will be doing nothing. This is freedom from the bondage of actions as propounded in the Gita.

The Lord said that even having slaughtered all these creatures, he does not really slay. They simply become an instrument in the hands of the Lord.

Fig. 20: Sri Krishna motivating Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Bhishma, while he lay on the bed of arrows, told Sri Krishna: Just as a disciple cannot arrogate to himself the task of instructing others in the presence of his preceptor (guru), so also a man like myself cannot instruct others in your presence (Shanti Parva).

At this, Sri Krishna blessed that thenceforth he (Bhishma) would neither feel remorse, nor feel senselessness nor burning sensation nor pain, nor shall be tormented by hunger and thirst.

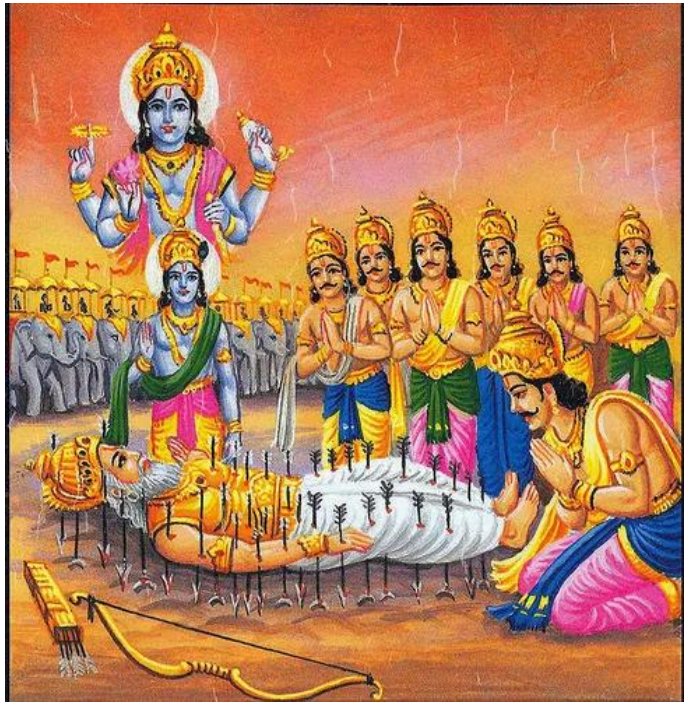


Fig. 21: Sri Krishna blessing pitamaha Bhishma on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Sri Krishna said to Bhishma: Through My grace, enlightenment shall dawn upon you unsolicited and your intellect shall ever be established in the Sattva mode. Vyasa and many other great Rishis were present there on that occasion.

Next day, Bhishma started giving sermons. Through the grace of Sri Krishna, his burning sensation, stupor, tiresomeness, remorse and pain were simultaneously eradicated. He regained the power of mind and speech. His sermons are contained in the Shanti and Anushasana Parvas.

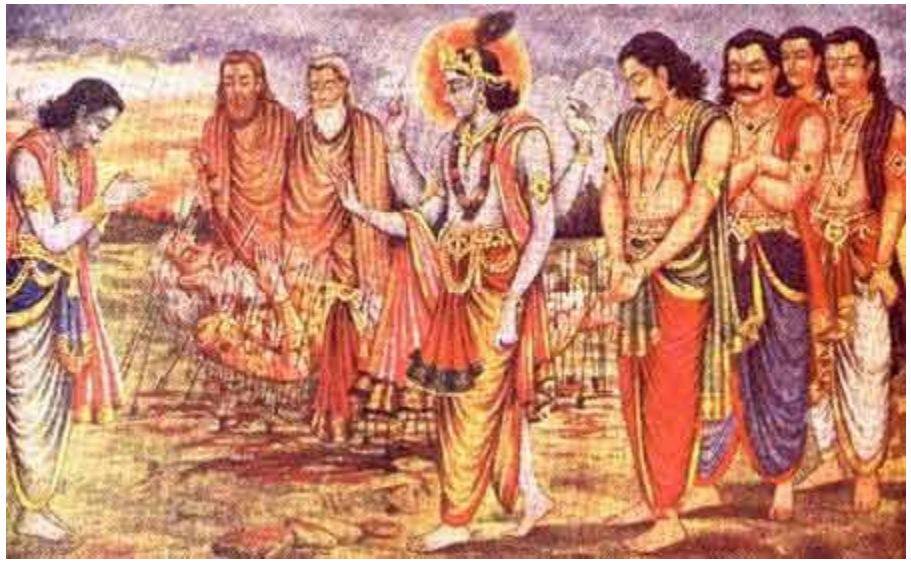


Fig. 22: Sri Krishna blessing pitamaha Bhishma on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Sri Krishna then installed Yudhisthira as the king of Hastinapura and returned to Dwaraka. (Ashwamedhika Parva)

Fig. 23: Yudhisthira as the king of Hastinapura.

On the way to Dwaraka, Sri Krishna met Rishi Uttanka, who wanted to curse Sri Krishna for killing the Kauravas. However, Sri Krishna told him to control his anger and explained the reasons for the killing of the Kauravas and their subsequent attainment of heaven.

He then revealed His cosmic form to the Rishi.

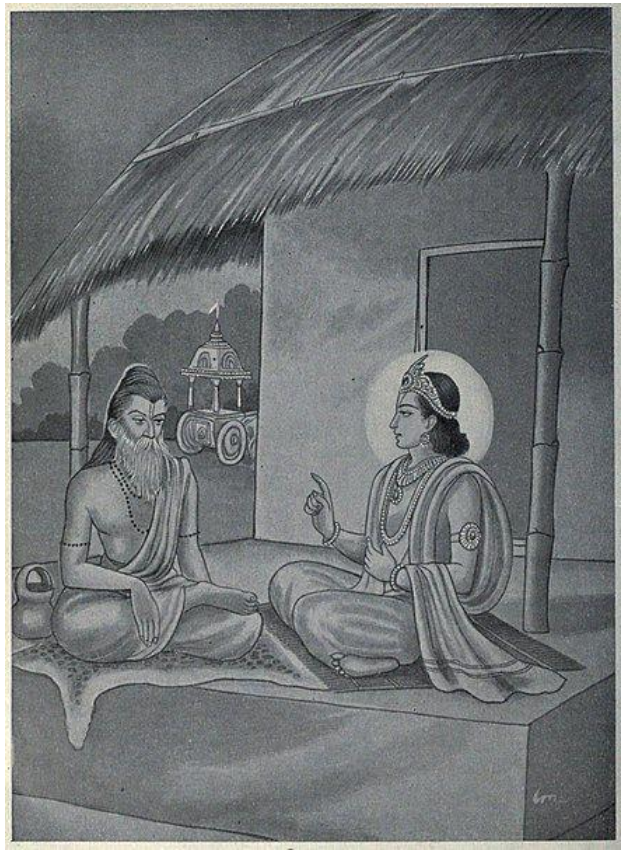


Fig. 24: Sri Krishna with Rishi Uttanka.

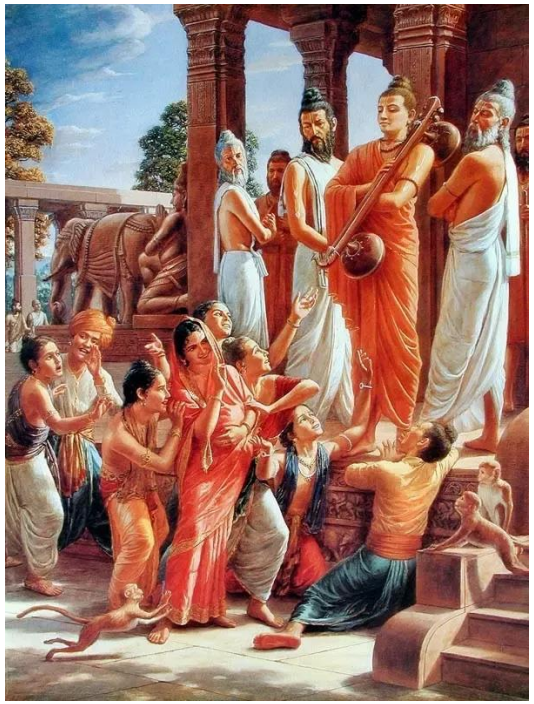
On seeing the corpses of the fallen soldiers being eaten by vultures and other carnivorous animals, Gandhari cursed Sri Krishna: In spite of your capabilities, you did not prevent this terrible slaughter of mankind. In the thirty sixth year from now, your ministers and sons shall meet their doom and You also shall be killed in an ordinary manner. (Stri Parva)

Sri Krishna accepted this curse willingly, in spite of the ability to make the curse ineffective.

Fig. 25: Gandhari cursing Sri Krishna.

So long as He lived, none could inflict harm on the Yadavas. So Sri Krishna made Gandhari's curse the chief cause to bring about the destruction of his own kinsmen through mutual conflicts.

Krishna's son Samba dresses up as a woman and his friends meet Rishi Vishwamitra, Durvasa, Vashista, Narada and other rishis, who were visiting Dwaraka for an audience with Krishna. One rishi sees through the prank. In a fit of rage, he curses Samba will give birth to an iron bolt that will destroy his entire race. (Mausala Parva)



Figs. 26, 27: Gandhari's curse taking effect.

In the Bhagavata Purana, it is described that after Balarama took part in the battle causing the destruction of the remainder of the Yadu dynasty and witnessing the disappearance of Krishna, he sat down in a meditative state and departed from this world.

Mistaking Sri Krishna, who was in a state of Samadhi, for a deer, a hunter named Jara shoots an arrow that fatally injures Him. Krishna forgives Jara and dies.

Figs. 28, 29: Passing away of Balarama and Sri Krishna.

Namah Shivaya

Mahabharata Story Summary – part 2

Mahabharata Panel, Ellora Caves

Mahabharata, as a complete work, is a *moksha sastra* intended for the common man. Irrespective of one's social status and literacy level, Mahabharata provides an opportunity to explore the deep philosophical principles of Sanatana Dharma.

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In the first part, we saw various situations that lead to the Great War between Pandavas and Kauravas.
In the next parva, Udyoga Parva, Sri Krishna takes an extraordinary step to stop the war by going on for a peace mission. Duryodhana makes his clear stance that not even a pinch of space will be given to pandavas. The peace mission fails desperately when the wicked Duryodhana even tries to capture Sri Krishna while the Lord reveals his Viswarupa, the all-encompassing divine form.

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Mahabharata Panel, Halebidu

The preparations for war begin. The whole of Krishna's army (Yadava sainya) fight for the Kauravas while Krisnna unarmed serves as the charioteer of Arjuna in the pandava side. Bhishma leads the Kaurava army while Dhrishtadhyumna leads the Pandavas side.

The next ten days till the fall of Bhishma, is the Bhishma Parva. Through a flashback narration of Sanjaya to Dhritharashtra on the war accounts, he says that when both the armies have arrayed against each other, Arjuna falls in a dilemma out of attachment. There happens one of the most profound conversations in Mahabharata- The Bhagavad Gita. A quintessence of life, it's problems and solutions. A motivated Arjuna picks up his Gandeeva and the war begins.

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Chakravyuha Panel, Halebeedu

The following parva is named after Drona, who is appointed as the new General of Kauravas after Bhisma.

Drona constructs the chakra vyuha and Abhimanyu alone knows how to penetrate it, Arjuna having been summoned away by the other Kauravas. When Abhimanyu penetrates the vyuha, the others on the Pandava side are supposed to follow and protect him. However, they are restrained by Jayadratha, who has obtained a boon from Shiva. Abhimanyu kills many princes on the other sides and ultimately got killed by Duhshasana's son. On return, Arjuna takes an oath to kill Jayadratha on the next day and accomplishes it with the help of his brothers and Sri Krishna.

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Arjuna Karna Duel Panel, Halebeedu

Then, after the death of Drona, Karna assumes the leadership of the Kaurava army and the war continues. Shalya, the charioteer of Karna rebuked him for his adamancy and foolishness of thinking to kill Arjuna. Between them, there happens a strong exchange of words. A great warrior himself, Shalya advises Karna, and the arrogant Karna ignores it.

The greatest Duel of the Mahabharata war is fought between Karna and Arjuna and finally Arjuna slays Karna with the help of his (Arjuna's) charioteer Krishna Vasudeva.

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Bhima Duryodana Duel Panel, Halebeedu

The next parva is the Shalya Parva. After the deaths of the chief warriors, the king of Madra became the General of the Army. Dharmaraja Yudhistira killed Shalya. The furious *gadayuddha* between Bhima and Duryodhana is described in this parva. Unable to watch the fight between his own students, Balarama started the holy pilgrimage of the Sarasvati River during this time. At the end of the duel, Duryodhana suffers a major injury and collapses in the field.

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Then comes Souptika Parva. Once the sons of Kunti had withdrawn, the warriors Kritavarma, Kripa and the son of Drona came to the field of battle in the evening and saw the King Duryodhana lying on the ground, his thighs broken and his body covered with blood. Firm in his anger, the great warrior, Aswathama, , vowed that he would not take off his armour without killing all the Panchalas led by Dhrishtadyumna, the Pandavas and their allies. That night they conducted a surprise raid at Pandava barracks and killed everyone except the Pandava brothers and Satyaki.

Grief-stricken because of her son's death, and mourning the deaths of her father and brother, Droupadi sat before her husbands, resolving to die of fasting. Moved by Droupadi's words, Bhima, was angered and ran after Aswathama, Driven by destiny and out of fear of Bhima, the son of Drona unleashed Brahmastra the celestial weapon, urging it to destroy the Pandavas. However, Arjuna blocked this with his own Brahmastra.

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Veda vyasa and Narada came to the scene and requested both Arjuna and Aswathama to withdraw the weapon, to avoid great calamity. Arjuna withdraws it, but unable to do so, Aswathama redirects it to yet to be born baby of Abhimanyu.

After the funerals of all the kings were performed with offerings of water, there follows the acknowledgement by Kunti of the secret story of how Karna was born from her. Thus concludes Souptika Parva.

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After that comes the ‘Stri Parva’. Here is recounted the pitiful lamentations of the wives of the heroes and Gandhari and Dhritarashtra’s wrath and fainting. They saw the Kshatriya warriors lying on the field of battle, unable to escape destiny—dead sons, brothers and fathers. There the extremely wise king, Dhritarashtra, burnt the dead bodies of the kings according to prescribed rites.

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After that follows the twelfth' the 'Shanti Parva', which increases one's understanding of life. This parva narrates Dharmaraja Yudhishthira's despondency at having killed his fathers, brothers, sons, maternal uncles and relations by marriage. On the bed of arrows, Bhishma narrates the duties and laws that kings who desire to have knowledge should study. Also recounted are norms during emergencies and rules of time and cause. The wonderful path to salvation '*moksha dharma'* is described in detail and a person who understands these attains supreme knowledge.

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Then follows the ‘Anushasana Parva’. Here, Yudhishthira, king of the Kurus, was composed after learning about righteous conduct from Bhishma. It describes the rules of Dharma and Artha in detail, the different rules of donation and their fruits, the different merits of charity depending on persons to whom charity is given, the rules of living, the rites of individual conduct and the unmatched supremacy of truth sathya .

All these diverse and supreme accounts are recounted in Anushasana Parva and it also describes Bhishma’s ascent to heaven.

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After that is the fourteenth, ‘Ashvamedhika Parva’. There is related the story of Samvarta and Marutta, the discovery of the golden treasures, then the birth of Parikshit, who was burnt almost dead by the weapon and revived by Krishna again. Arjuna’s journey with the aswamedha horse that had been set loose, and his combat with many kings is described here.

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Then follows the fifteenth ‘Ashramavasika Parva’. In this, abdicating the kingdom, King Dhritarashtra, accompanied by Gandhari and Vidura, retires to the forest. On seeing this, the virtuous Kunthi, who always served her superiors, left the kingdom of her sons and followed the old couple.

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The word musala means pestle. The Yadavas are cursed by rishies that pestle will destroy them. Grass turns to pestle and the Yadavas kill each other with these. Balarama and Krishna give up their lives on earth, as they understand that their ‘Avatara lakshya’ is accomplished. Arjuna’s powers vanish and he becomes a normal person, unable to rescue even yadava women from dacoits.

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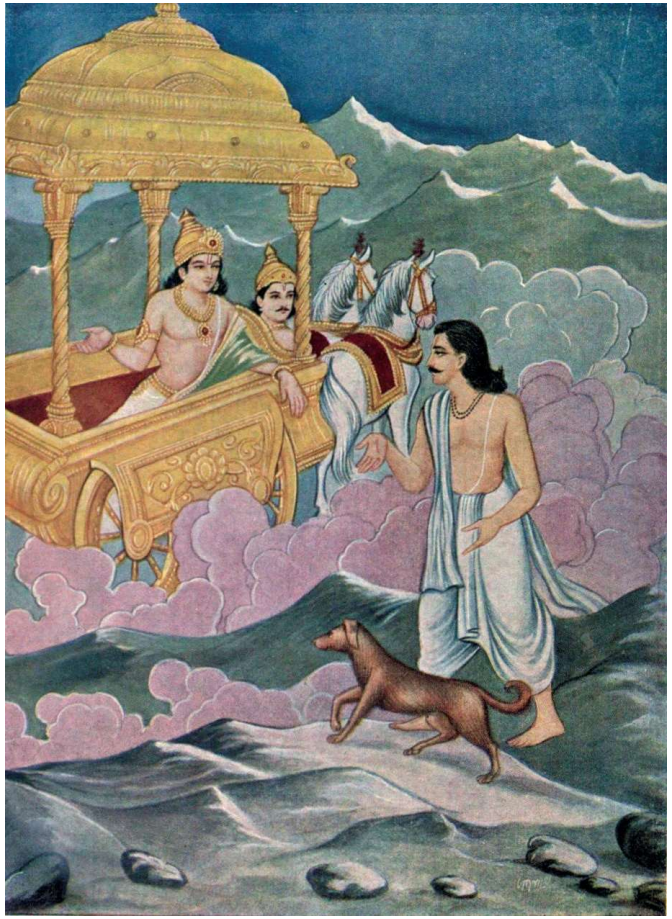

Maha means great and prasthana means journey or departure. Thus, maha-prasthana literally means great journey, but stands for departure from this world, or death. ‘Maha Prasthanika Parva’ is about the departure of the Pandavas for the Himalayas and their deaths, one after another.

It has the story of Dharma disguised as a dog and Yudhishthira’s ascent to heaven, in his physical body. In the 18-parva classification, Maha-Prasthanika Parva is the 17th.

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Svargarohana Parva is the concluding parva of the epic. All the major characters return to their celestial abode after completing earthly duties. Here once again the author Krishna Dwaipayana extols the core message of Mahabharata. In the concluding verses, Vyasa laments.

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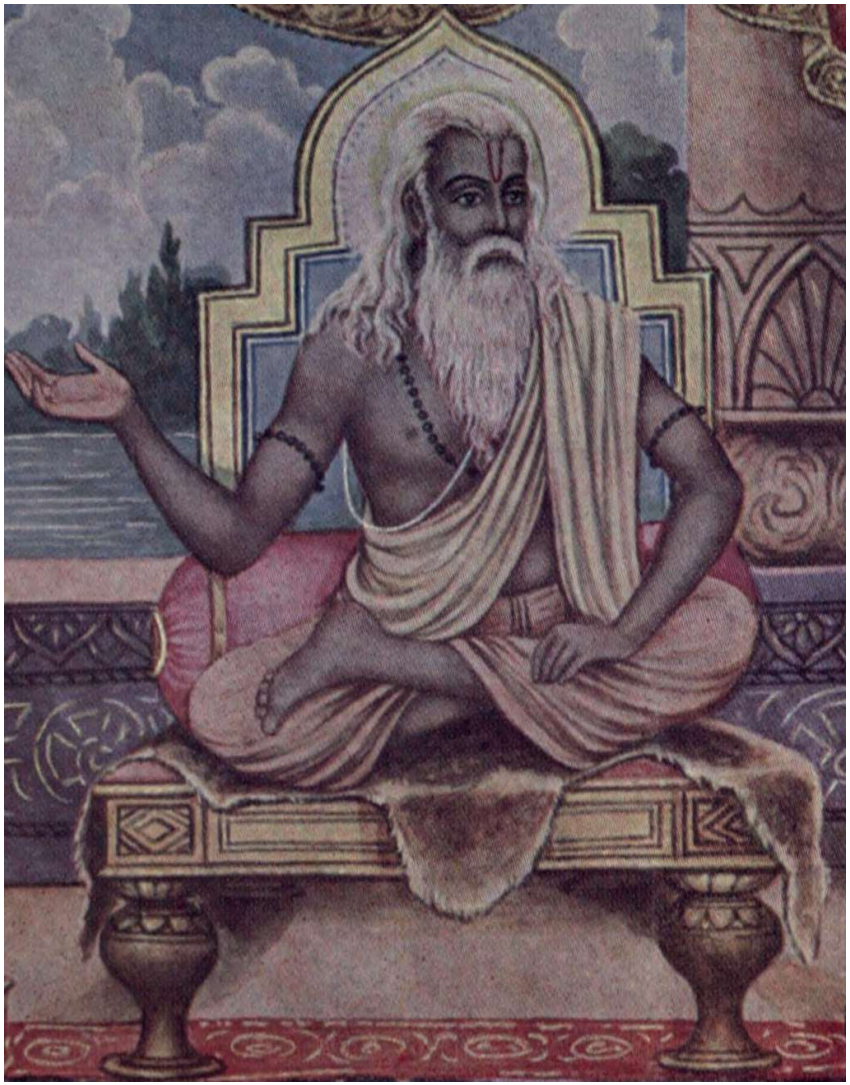

‘Thousands of mothers and fathers and hundreds of sons and wives arrive in this world and then depart elsewhere. There are thousands of reasons for joy and hundreds of reasons for fear. From one day to another, they afflict those who are stupid, but not those who are learned. I am sad and have raised my arms, but no one is listening to me.

For the sake of kama, fear or avarice, and even for the sake of preserving one’s life, one should not give up dharma. Dharma is eternal. Happiness and unhappiness are transient. The atman is eternal, but other reasons are transient.’

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Thus concludes Mahabharata, the largest literary project ever created, for transcending the dualities of life in this world and other worlds. One who understands this purpose of Mahabharata will alone benefit from its reading.

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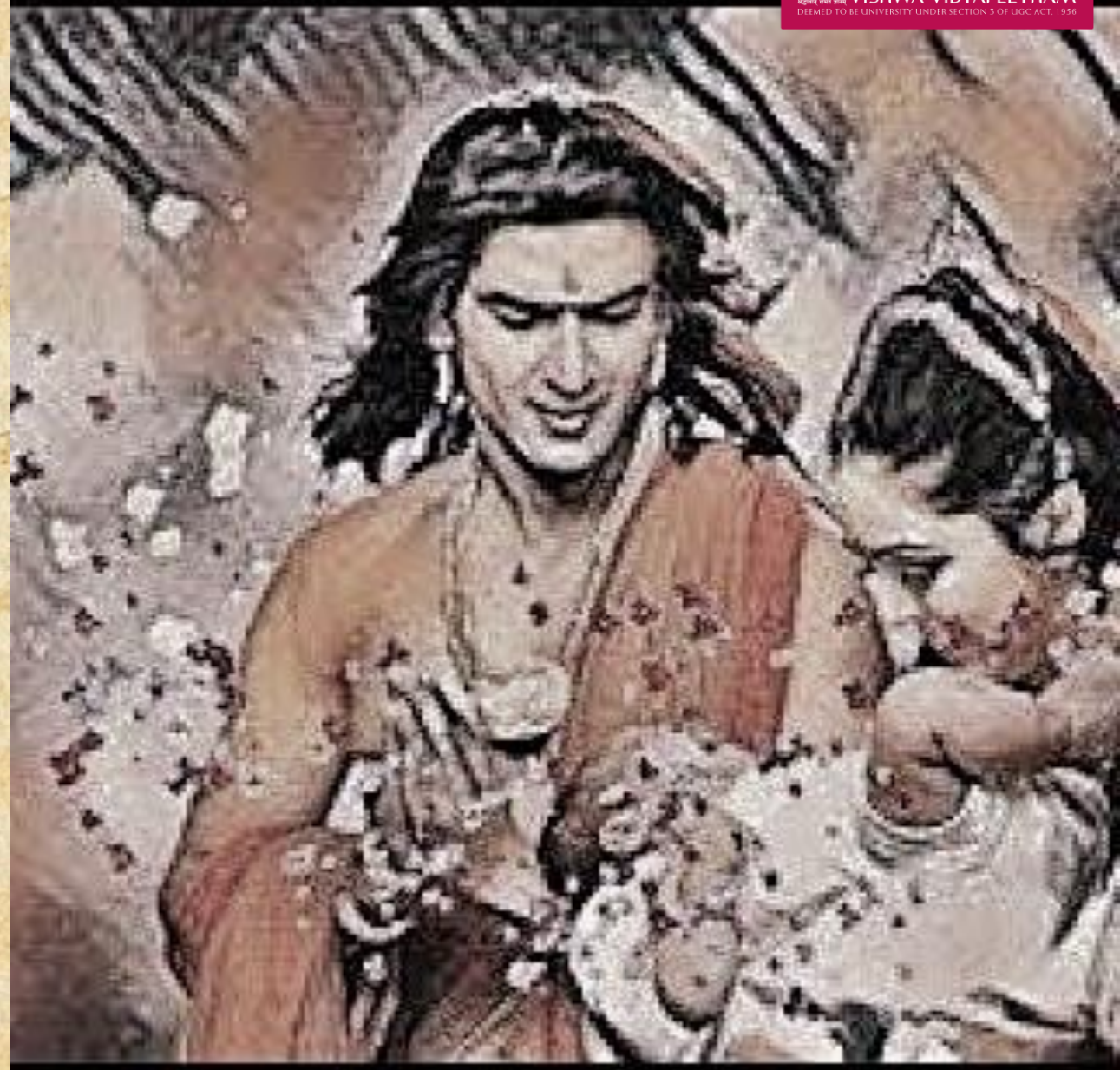
To know and analyse- Mahabharata Characters Part 3: Yudhisthira and Draupadi

Yudhishthira
Most pious one

Known for

- Honesty, Justice, Sagacity
- Tolerance, Good behaviour & Discernment.

Yudhishthira is the eldest son of King Pandu and Queen Kunti who was born with the blessings of Lord Dharma, through a boon given to Kunthi by sage Durvasa.



Life example

Yudhishthira's was filled with Dharma, truthfulness, knowledge and justice knowing son right from his birth.

As a King

Yudhisthira's dharma was markedly distinct from that of other righteous kings. Yudhisthira was crowned king of Khandavaprastha and Indraprastha. As he governed with absolute piousness, with a strict adherence to duty and service to this people, his kingdom grew prosperous, and people from all over were attracted to it.

Attitude

Yudhisthira's attitude was his prowess, shown in his unflinching adherence to Satya (truth) and dharma (righteousness), which were more precious to him than any royal ambitions, material pursuits and family relations.

Example

According to Yudhishthira a Brahmin is known by his actions and not his birth or education--thus portraying the real changeable dharma, the dharma that modifies itself to suit the times.

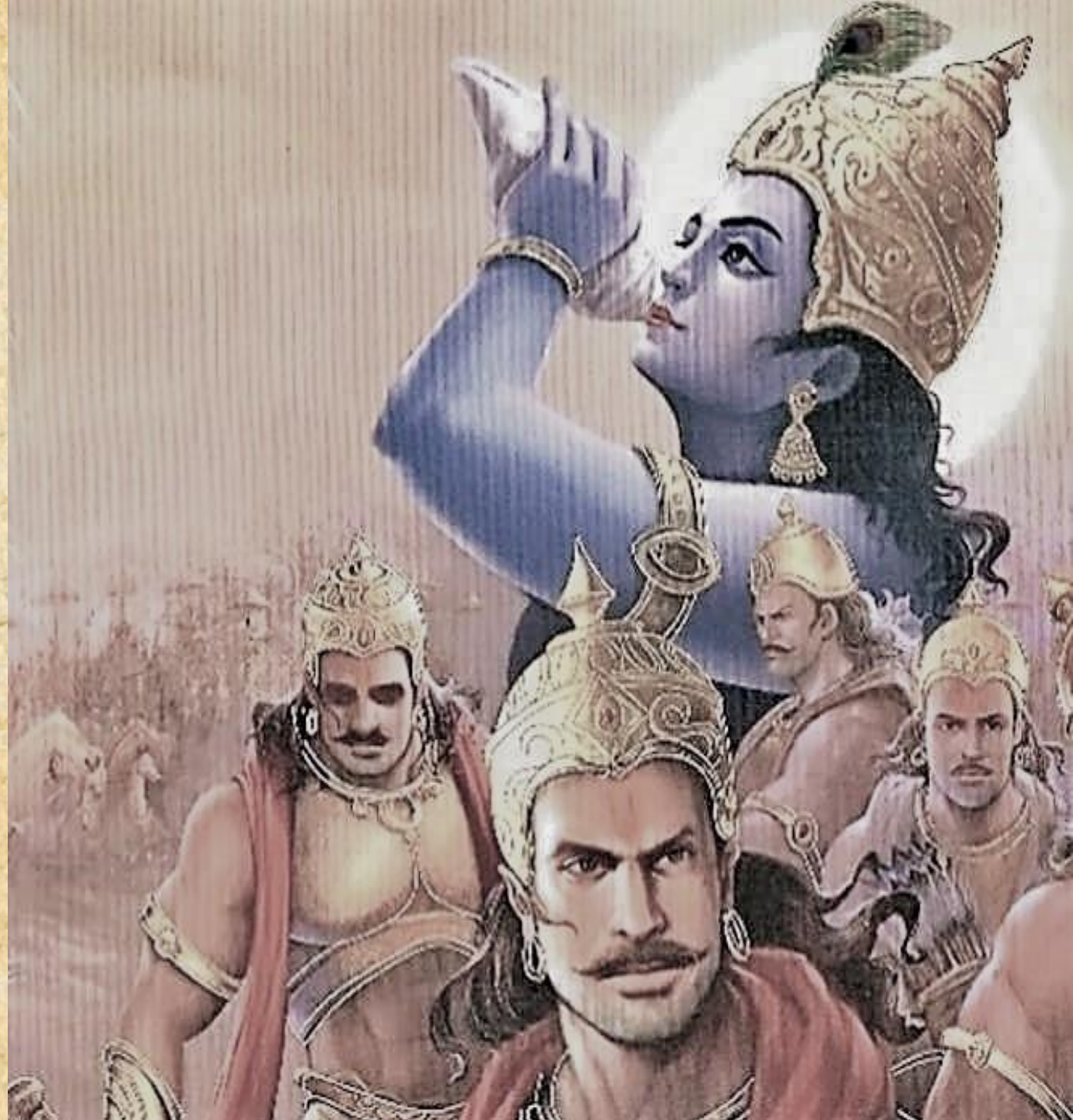
Dharma Yudha

In the war, the Kuru commander Drona killing thousands of Pandava warriors. Krishna hatched a plan to tell Drona that his son Ashwathama had died, So that the invincible and destructive Kuru commander would give up his arms and thus could be killed.

The plan was set in motion when Bhima killed an elephant named Ashwathama, and loudly proclaimed that Ashwathama was dead. Drona, knowing that only Yudhisthira, with his firm adherence to the truth, could tell him for sure if his son had died, approached Yudhisthira for confirmation. Yudhisthira told him: "Ashwathama has died". However Yudhisthira could not make himself tell a lie, despite the fact that if Drona continued to fight, the Pandavas and the cause of dharma itself would have lost and he added: Ashwathama Hatahath "naro va kunjaro va" which means he is not sure whether elephant or man had died.

See Krishna to the Rescue

Krishna knew that Yudhisthira would be unable to lie, and had all the warriors beat war-drums and cymbals to make as much noise as possible. The words "naro va kunjaro va" were lost in the tumult and the ruse worked. Drona was disheartened, and laid down his weapons. He was then killed by Dhristadyumna.



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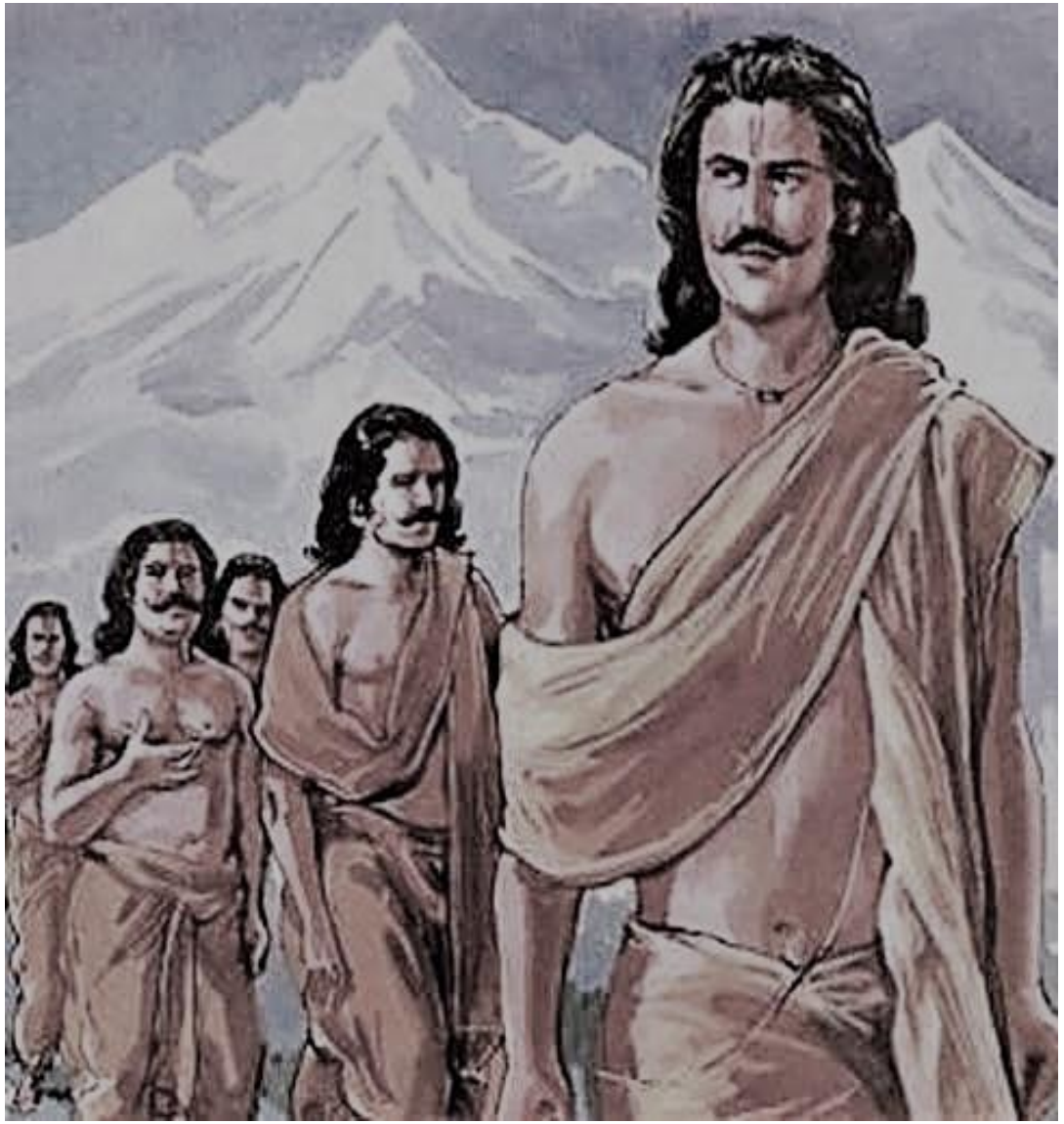
The Final Test

Upon the onset of the Kali yuga and the death of Krishna, Yudhisthira and his brothers retired, leaving the throne to their only descendant to survive the war of Kurukshetra, Arjuna's grandson Parikshita. Giving up all their belongings and ties, the Pandavas made their final journey of pilgrimage in the Himalayas.



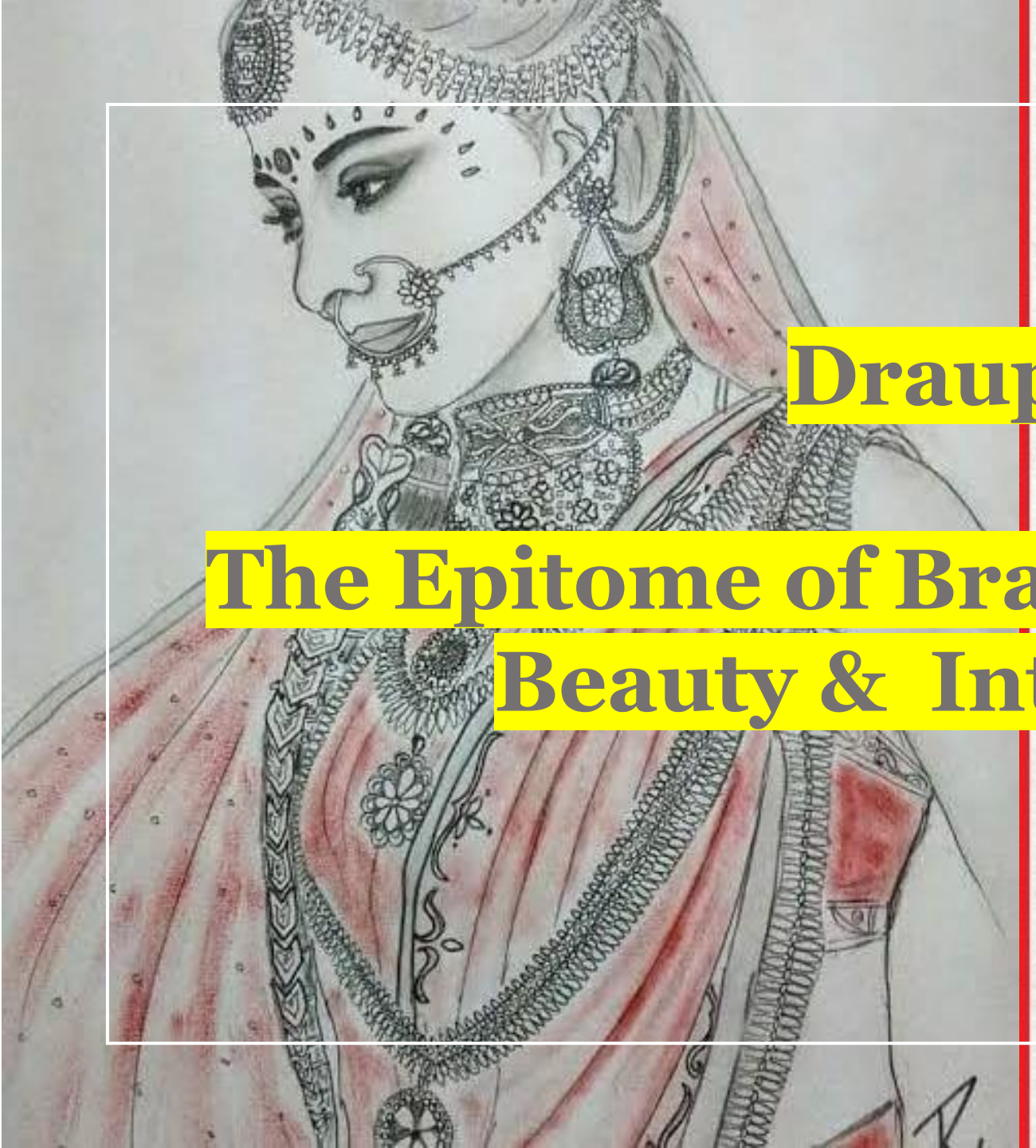
Only Yudhishthira could reached the mountain peak, along with a dog that followed on the way. On reaching the mountain peak, Indra, King of Gods, arrived to take Yudhisthira to heaven in his Golden Chariot. As Yudhisthira was about to step into the Chariot, the Deva told him to leave behind his companion dog, an unholy creature not worthy of heaven. Yudhisthira stepped back, refusing to leave behind the creature who he had taken under his protection.

At that moment the dog changed into the God Dharma, who was testing him...and Yudhisthira had passed with distinction. Yudhisthira was carried away on Indra's chariot.

Moral

"If you protect Dharma, Dharma will Protect you."

- Amma



Draupadi

The Epitome of Braveness, Courage, Beauty & Intelligence.

Known For

Standing up against the Evil, Suffered many losses and still standing for the Right and Justice with Courage, Strength and Will.

Other names

- Panchali
- Krishnaa (due to her dark complexion)

Birth

Draupadi is the daughter of King Drupada. Drupada was defeated by Arjuna on behalf of Drona, who subsequently took half his kingdom to humiliate him. To gain revenge on Drona, he performed a great sacrifice to beget a powerful son who could kill him.

Having been struck by Arjuna's valour, Drupada also prayed at the sacrifice for an exceptionally beautiful daughter to give to him, as a token of his appreciation. Draupadi thus emerged with Drishtadyumna from the sacrificial fire.

Marriage

King Drupada arranged a special task for all the king's and Prince of different kingdom who came to participate in Swayamvara (Marriage) of Draupadi. The Princes vying for Draupadi's hand had to shoot a maximum of 5 arrows at a revolving target, while looking only at its reflection in a bowl.

Drupada was confident that Arjuna alone could accomplish this task. Arriving with his brothers disguised as brahmins, Arjuna successfully tackles the target.

Marriage with Pandavas

While in exile, Kunti, mother of the Pandavas often advised her sons that they share everything they have (or obtain through Bhiksha i.e. alms) equally amongst themselves. Upon returning home with Draupadi, Arjuna addresses his mother first "Look mother, I have brought Bhiksha (alms)!".

Kunti, unmindful of what Arjuna was referring to, unassumingly asked her son to share whatever it is with his brothers. Thus, in order to obey their mother's order all five accepted Draupadi as their wife. This is fraternal polyandry.

It is also said that, when Sage Vyasa visits the family, he explains to Draupadi that her unique position as the wife of five brothers results from a certain incident in her previous birth. She had in that lifetime prayed to Lord Shiva to grant her a husband with five desired qualities. Lord Shiva, pleased with her devotion, tells her that it is very difficult to get a husband with all five qualities that she desired. But she sticks to her ground and asks for the same.

Then Lord Shiva grants her wish saying that she would get the same in her next birth. Hence she gets married to five brothers each who represents a given quality.

Draupadi’s greatest humiliation in life

Duryodhana commands his younger brother Dushasana to forcefully bring her into the forum after defeating Yudhistra in the game of dice. Dushasana barges into the living quarters of Draupadi and grabs her by the hair and brings her into the court dragging her by the hair.

Draupadi’s Cheer-Haran, literally meaning stripping of one’s clothes, marks a definitive moment in the story of Mahābhārata. It is the central reason of the Mahābhārata war, the rivalry between Pandavas and Kauravas being the more general cause.

Sree Krishna to the rescue

To the horror of everybody present, Dushasana proceeds to strip Draupadi of her sari. Seeing her husbands unable or unwilling to help her, Draupadi prays to Lord Krishna to protect her modesty. Lord Krishna now works a miracle so that as Dushasana unwraps layers and layers of her sari, her sari keeps getting extended. Finally, a tired Dushasana backs off without being able to strip Draupadi.

Seeing Draupadi being violated so brazenly, Bhima in a roaring rage, vows to tear open Dushasana's breast one day and drink his blood. Duryodhana with the advice of Karna, bares and pats his thigh looking into Draupadi, implying her to sit on his thigh.

In impotent rage Bhima vows in front of the entire assembly that one day he will break that very thigh of Duryodhan in a battle.
Arjun vows to kill Karna for insulting Draupadi.

The Greatest Forgiveness

Finally, the blind monarch Dhritarashtra's conscience is stirred, in part fearing the wrath of Pandavas against his sons. He intervenes and asks Draupadi to wish for whatever she desires. Draupadi asks her husbands the Pandavas to be freed from slavery. Dhritarashtra grants her wish and also restores to Pandavas all they lost in the game of dice.

Dharma Yudha

Even though after knowing that she will loose everything in the mighty war, Draupadi accepting all the results that would come in the future and asked the Pandavas to Fight and defeat the Kauravas to protect and establish Dharma.

Draupadi's strength of character

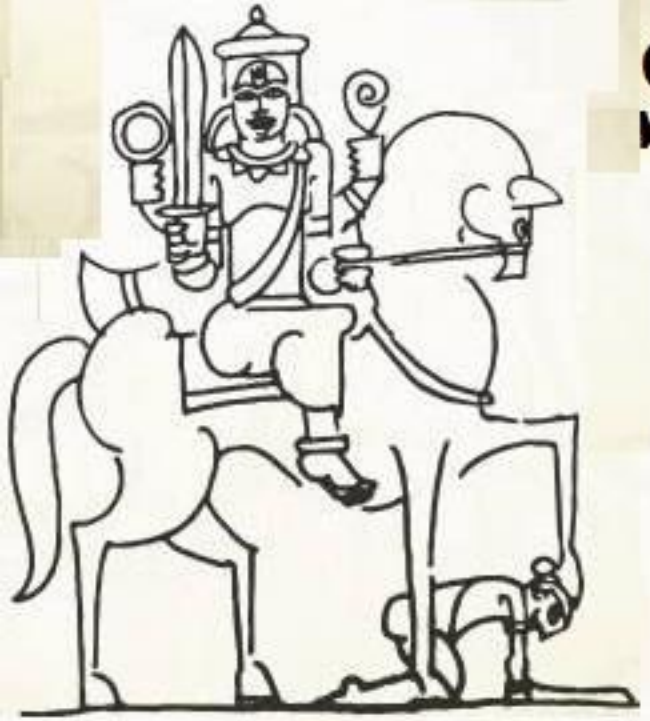
Her drive and will to stand up for herself and Dharma, even after all the diversities makes her an ideal model for the new age where women are harassed, insulted, down trodden, abused by many evil minded people.

Men may have more muscle power than women, but women have one muscle that make them more powerful than men. It is the muscle of the heart.

- Amma

Namah Shivaya

Revisiting Mahabharata: Lesser Celebrated Stories



Story of Dharmavyadha

The Vyadha Gita (meaning, teachings of a butcher) is a part of the epic Mahabharata and consists of the teachings imparted by a Vyadha (Butcher) to a brahmin sannyasin named Kausika .

It occurs in the **Vana Parva** section of Mahabharata and is told to Yudhishthira, by sage Markandeya.

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Once the sage Markandeya came to see the Pandavas.

Yudhishthira happened to talk of the virtues of the fair sex and said: "What great wonder is there in this world than the patience and the chastity of woman?

She gives birth to a child after cherishing it in her womb as dearer than life itself. She brings it into the world in pain and anxiety and thence forward her one thought is for its health and happiness. Large hearted and forgiving, a woman forgives and continues to love even a wicked husband who neglects and hates and subjects her to all sorts of miseries. How strange!"

Hearing this Markandeya told him a sacred story.

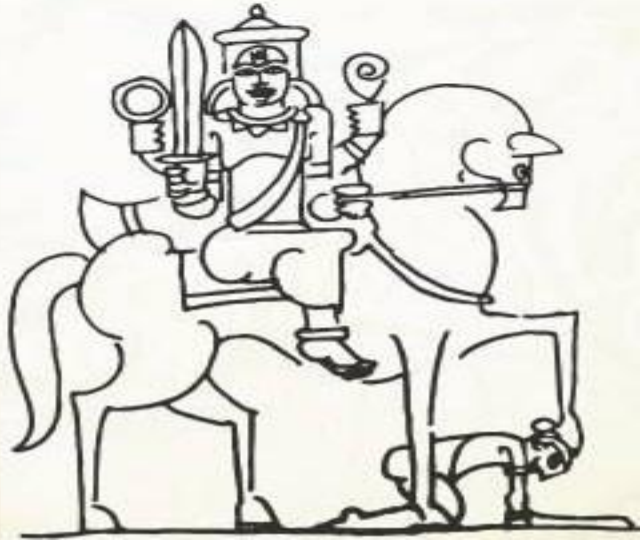
There was once a brahmana, named **Kausika** who observed his vow of brahmacharya , with great steadfastness and devotion.

One day, he sat under a tree reciting the Vedas. A crane, perched on the top of the tree, defiled his head with its droppings.

He looked up at it, and his angry look killed the bird and it fell down dead.

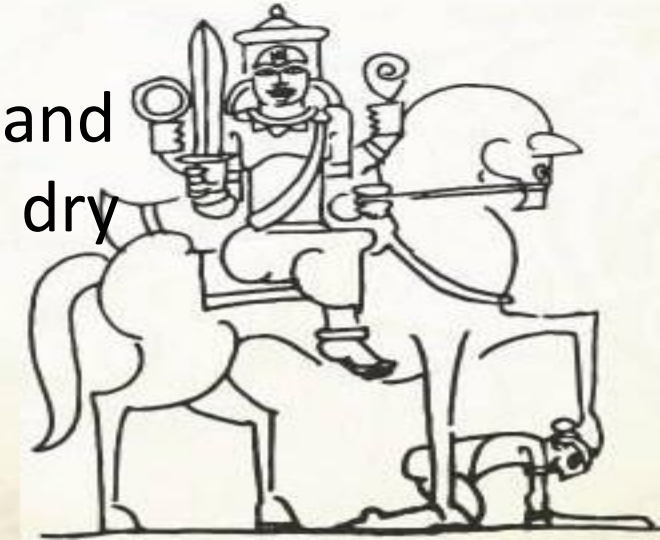
Kausika sorrowed that the evil thought that passed in his mind in a moment of anger had killed an innocent bird.

Sometime later, he went as usual to beg **alms**.



He stood before the door of a house to receive his dole. The housewife was cleansing utensils at that time.
Kausika waited in the hope that she would attend to him after her work was over.

In the meantime, the master of the house returned, tired and hungry, and the wife had to attend to his wants, wash and dry his feet and serve him with food.



She said: "I am sorry to have kept you waiting long. Pardon me." Kausika, burning with anger, said: "Lady, you have made me wait for such a long time. This indifference is not fair."

The woman told the brahmana: "Best of brahmanas, kindly do forgive me. I was serving my husband and hence the delay." The brahmana remarked: "It is right and proper to attend on the husband, but the brahmana also should not be disregarded . You seem an arrogant woman."

She said: "Be not angry with me and remember that I kept you waiting only because I was dutifully serving my husband. I am no crane to be killed by a violent thought and your rage can do no harm to the woman who devotes herself to the service of her husband.”

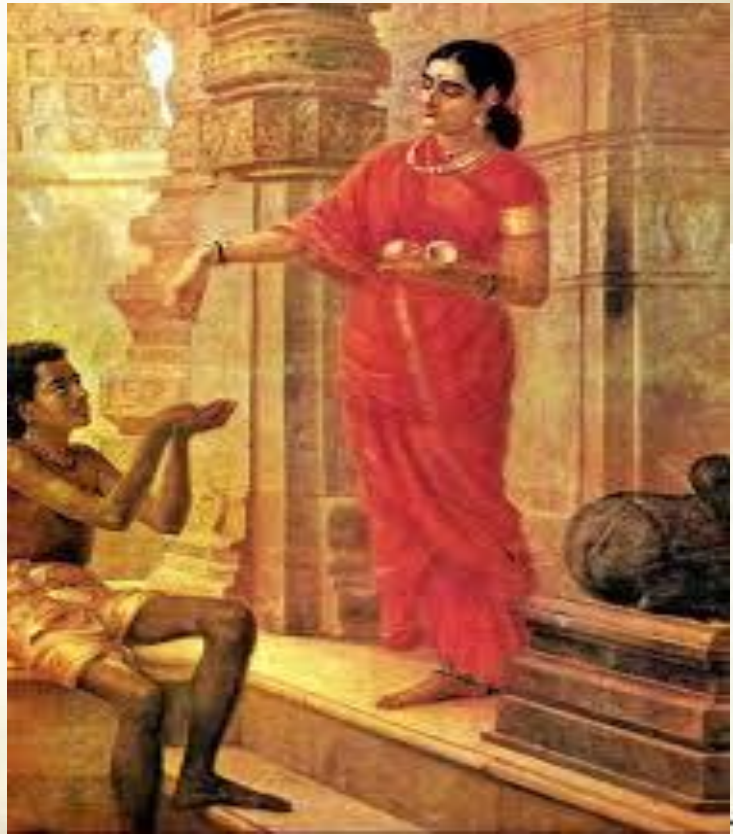
The brahmana was taken aback. He wondered how the woman knew of the crane incident.

She continued: “O great one, you do not know the secret of duty, and you are also not aware that anger is the greatest enemy that dwells in man.
Forgive the delay in attending to you. Go to Mithila and be instructed in the secret of good life by Dharmavyadha living in that city.”

The brahmana was amazed. He said: “I deserve your just admonition and it will do me good. May all good attend you.” With these words he went to Mithila.

Kausika reached Mithila and looked for Dharmavyadha’s residence , which he thought would be some lonely hermitage far from the noise and bustle of common life.

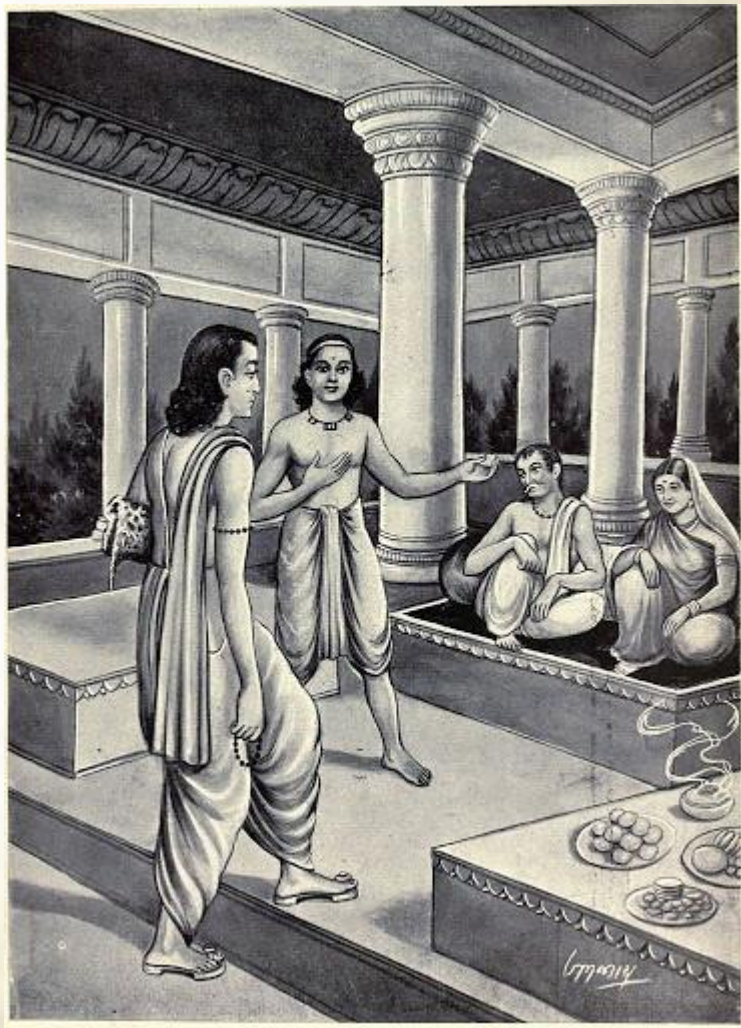
He walked along magnificent roads between beautiful houses and gardens in that great city and finally reached a butcher’s shop, in which was a man selling meat. His amazement was great when he learnt that this man was Dharmavyadha.



The brahmana was shocked beyond measure and stood at a distance in disgust. The butcher suddenly rose from his seat came to the brahmana and inquired: “Revered sir, are you well?”

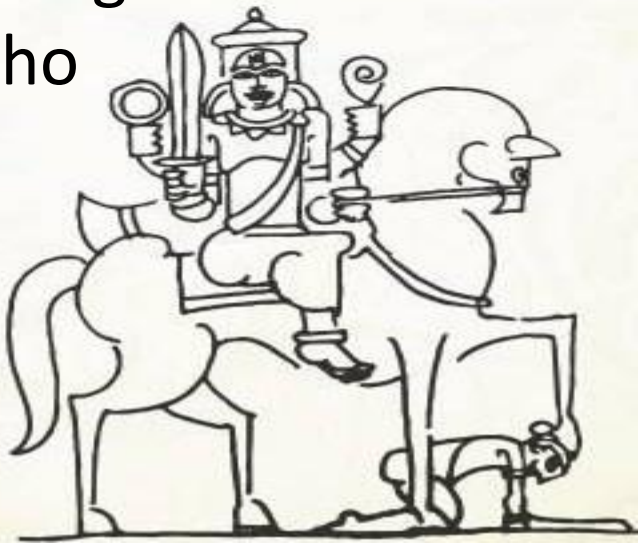
The brahmana was stupefied.

“Revered sir, I know why you have come. Let us go home.” Said the butcher and he took the brahmana to his house where he saw a happy family and was greatly struck by the devotion with which the butcher served his parents.
Kausika took his lessons from that butcher on dharma, man’s calling and duty. Afterwards, the brahmana returned to his house and began to tend his parents, a duty, which he had rather neglected before.



The moral of this striking story of Dharmavyadha so skilfully woven by Vedavyasa into the Mahabharata, is the same as the teaching of the Gita.

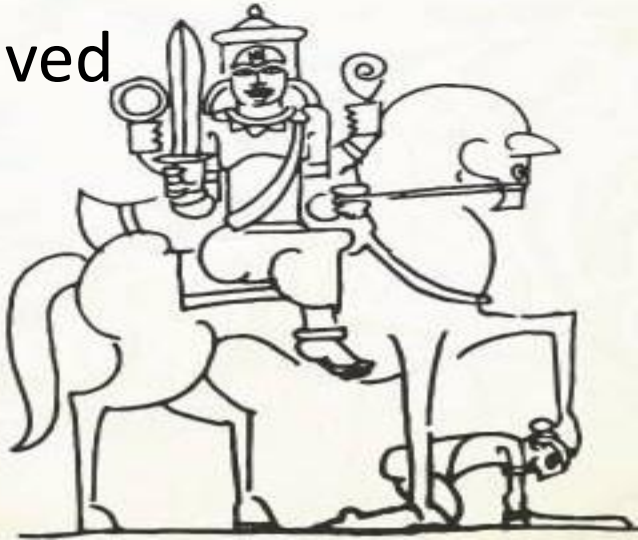
Man reaches perfection by the honest pursuit of whatever calling falls to his lot in life, and that this is really worship of God who created and pervades all.



Moral of the story

The occupation may be one he is born to in society or it may have been forced on him by circumstances or be may have taken it up by choice. But what really matters is the spirit of sincerity and faithfulness with which be does his life's work.

Vedavyasa emphasizes this great truth by making a scholarly brahmana, who did not know it, learnt it from a butcher, who lived it in his humble and despised life.



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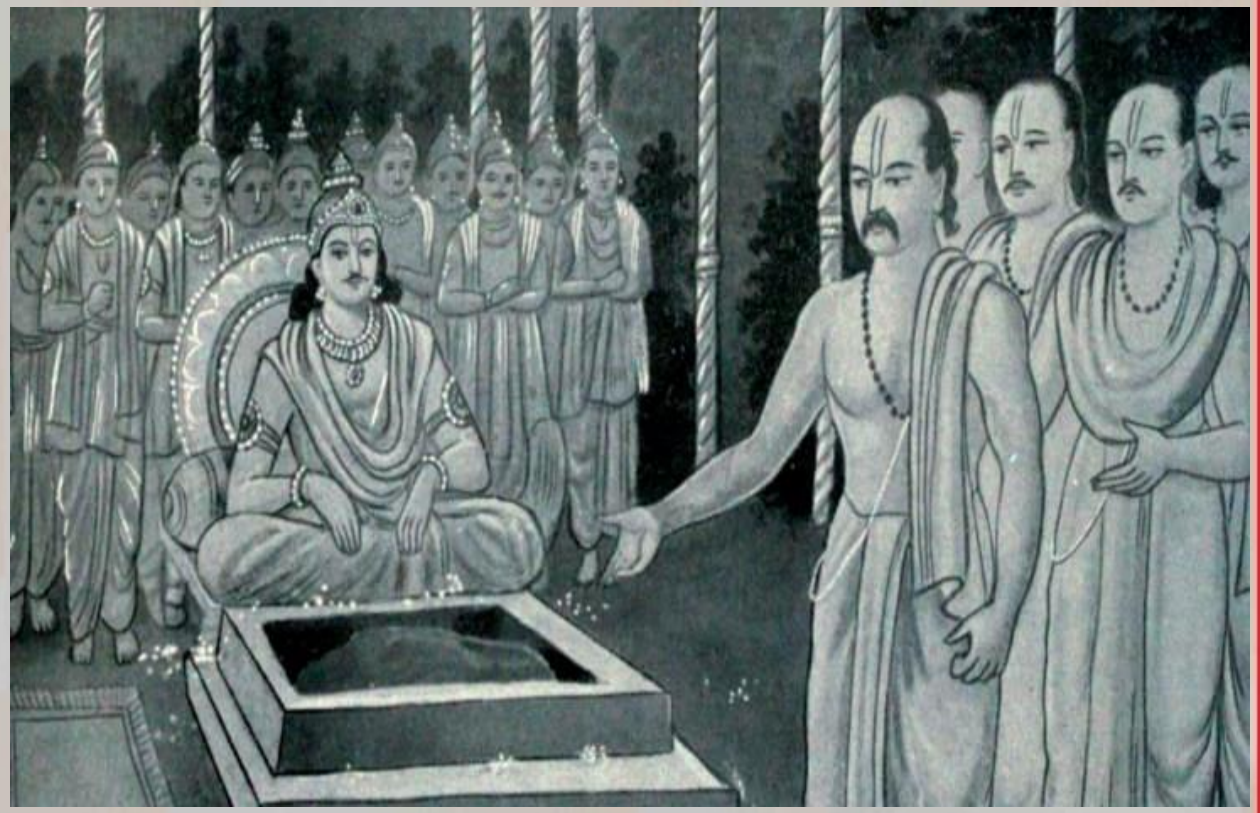
Revisiting Mahabharata

Lesser Celebrated Stories – Part 2

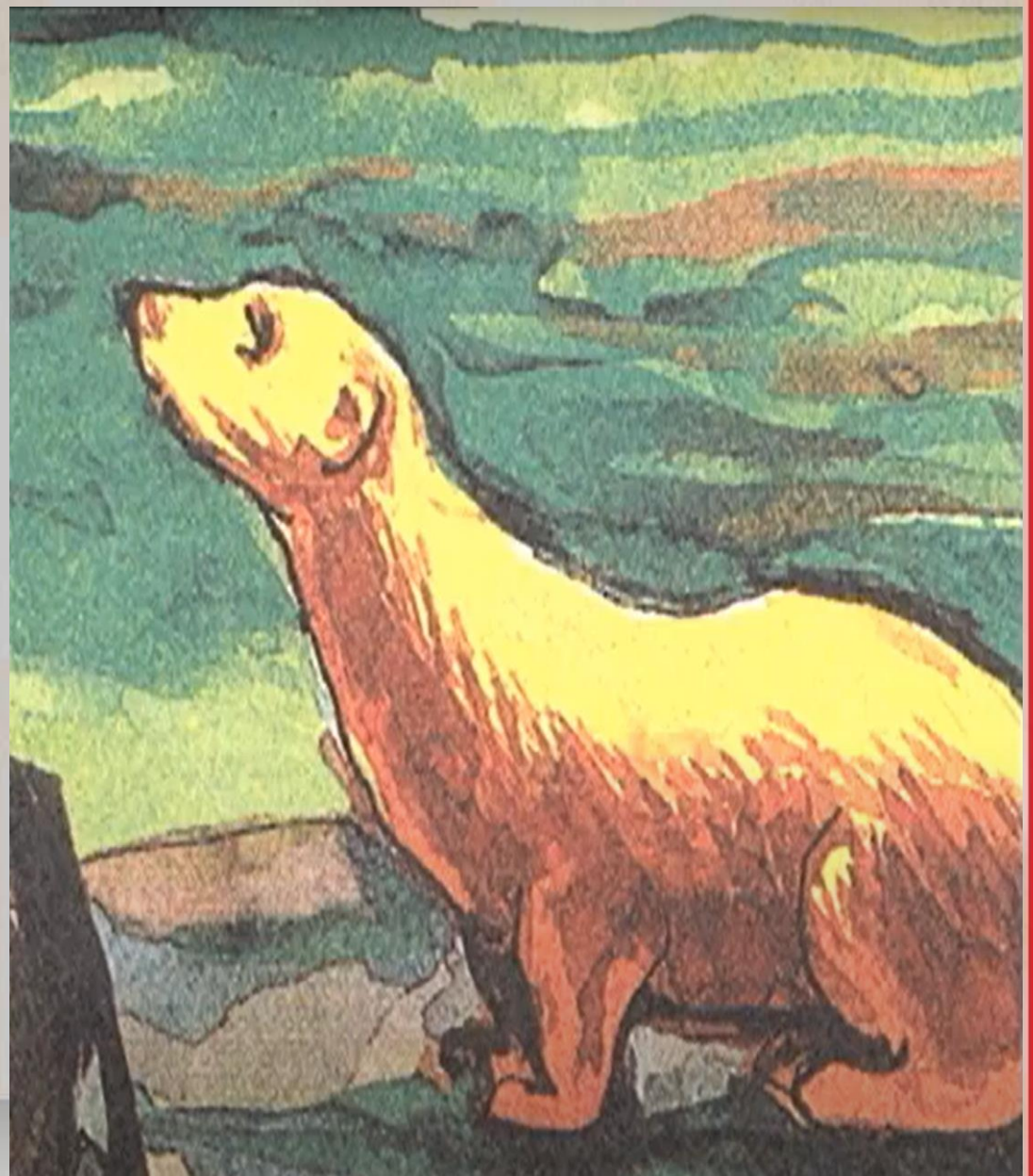
Ashvamedhika Parva is the fourteenth of eighteen books of the Indian Epic Mahabharata.

Ashvamedhika Parva begins with an advice from Krishna and Vyasa who recommend Yudhishthira to perform the Ashvamedha ceremony.

When Yudhishthira was crowned and installed as king after the Kurukshetra battle, he performed an aswamedha yajna. As was the custom on occasions of this great horse sacrifice, all the princes of the land gathered on invitation and the yajna was completed in great splendor. The brahmanas and the poor and the destitute people, who had come in great numbers from all parts of the country received bounteous gifts. Everything was done in magnificent style and in conformity with the injunctions relating to the sacrifice.



From somewhere unseen, a weasel suddenly appeared right in the middle of the assembled guests and priests in the great pavilion and, after rolling on the ground laughed a loud human laugh as if in derision. The priests were alarmed at this strange and unnatural occurrence and wondered whether it was some evil spirit that had come to pollute and disturb the sacred rites.

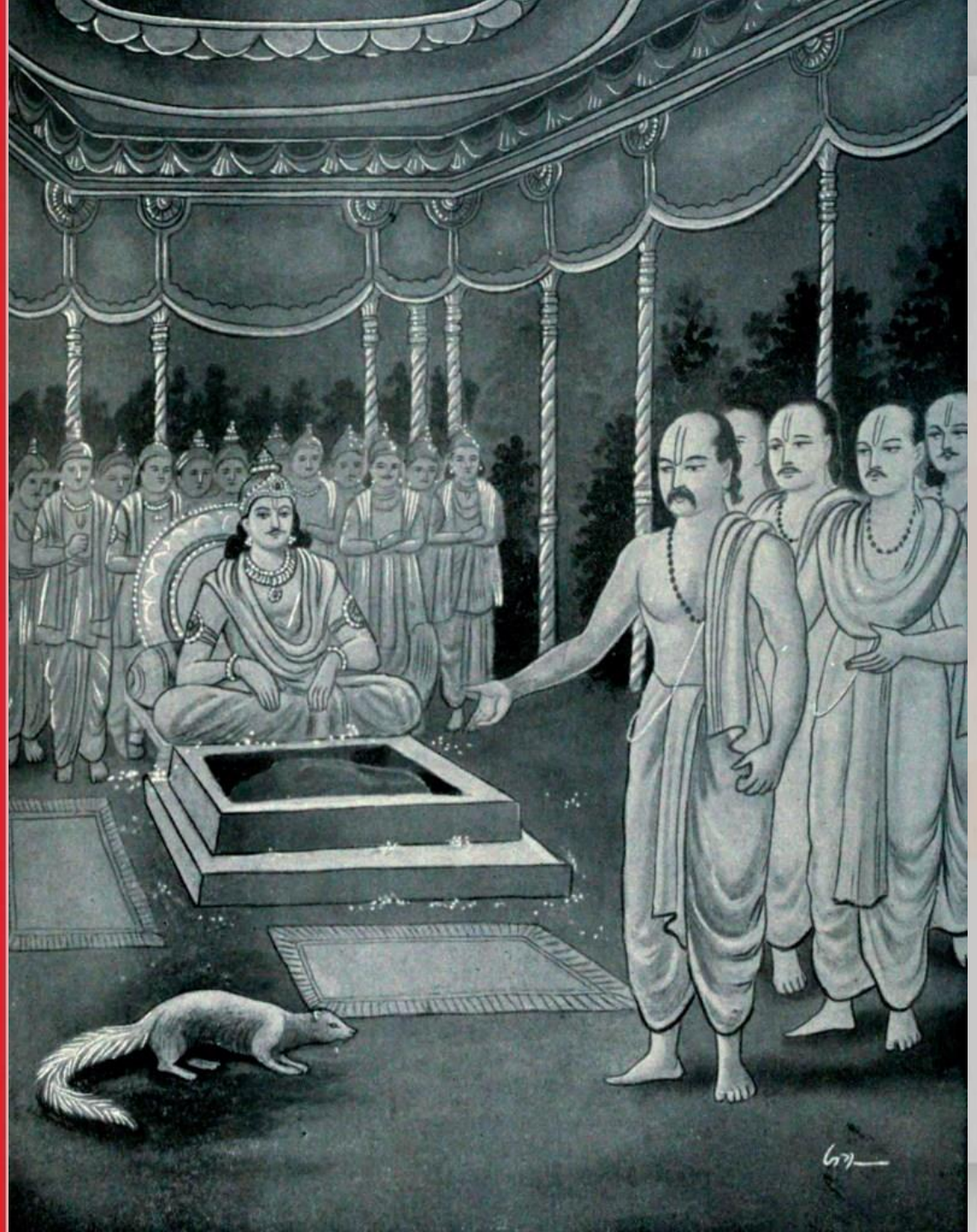


The weasel's body was on one side all shining gold. This remarkable creature turned round and took a good vie of the assembly of princes and learned brahmanas that had come from various countries and gathered in that great pavilion and began to speak:

“Princes assembled and priests, listen to me. You no doubt believe that you have completed your yajna in splendid style. Once upon a time, a poor brahmana who lived in Kurukshetra made a gift of a pound of maize flour. Your great horse sacrifice and all the gifts made in that connection are less than that small gift of the Kurukshetra brahmana. You seem to think too much of your Yajna. Pray, be not so vain about it.

The gathering was amazed at this strange and impertinent speech of the golden weasel. The brahmana priests, who had performed the sacrificial rites, went up to the weasel and spoke to it:

"Wherefrom and why have you come to this yajna, performed by good and worthy men? Who are you? Why do you utter words of scorn about our sacrifice? This aswamedha has been duly completed in every detail in accordance with sastraic injunctions. It is not proper that you should speak derisively of our great sacrifice. Everyone that has come to this yajna has been duly attended to and has been accorded suitable honors and gifts.



Everyone is pleased with the gifts and returns happy and contented. The mantras have been chanted perfectly and the oblations duly offered. The four castes are pleased. Why do you speak as you do? Do explain yourself."

The weasel laughed again and said: "O brahmanas, what I said is true. I do not grudge the good fortune of king Yudhishthira or the good fortune of any of you. The yajna, which you have just completed so showily, is not in truth as great an act as that gift of the poor brahmana, which I have seen. And in reward for his gift, he and his wife, son and daughter-in-law were immediately taken to Swarga

Long before you waged your battle there, a brahmana, lived in Kurukshetra, who obtained his daily food by gleaning in the fields. He and his wife, son and daughter-in-law, all four lived in this manner. Everyday in the afternoon they would sit down and have their only meal for the day. On days when they failed to find enough grain, they would fast until the next afternoon.

Then a great drought came and there was feminine all over the land. For many days the brahmana and his family starved. One day after wandering in hunger and heat, with great difficulty they came home with a small quantity of maize, which they had gathered. They ground it and after saying their prayers they divided the flour into four equal parts and, offering thanks to God, sat down eagerly to eat. Just then, a brahmana entered and he was exceedingly hungry. The brahmana of Kurukshetra gave his share of the flour to the guest. The guest ate it with avidity but he was still hungry when he had finished. Brahmana's wife handed her share of the flour to her husband to be given to the guest.

The brahmana took the wife's share and gave it to the guest who took it greedily and ate it. But he was still hungry! His son, who saw this, came forward. 'Father, here is my share,' said he. 'Give it to this guest the father and took the son's flour and gave it to the guest to eat. The guest ate the third part of the flour also, but he was still hungry! The brahmana, who lived on scattered grain, was confused. While he was in distress, not knowing that to do, his daughter-in-law addressed him thus: 'Lord, I shall give my share too and gladly complete our efforts to feed this guest. The brahmana accepted her share of the flour. The guest received this last portion avidly and ate it and was satisfied. 'Blessed is your hospitality, given with the purest intent and to the uttermost of your capacity.

Your gift has leased me. Lo there, the gods are showering flowers in admiration of your extraordinary sacrifice. Rajasuya sacrifices and horse sacrifices completed in splendor, would pale into insignificance before the great sacrifice you have done through this single act of hospitality. The chariot is waiting for you. Enter and go to Swarga, you and your family.' Saying this the mysterious guest disappeared."

Having related this story of the Kurukshetra brahmana the weasel continued:

"I was nearby and caught the fragrance wafted from that flour of the brahmana. It made my head all gold. I then went and rolled in joy on the ground where some of the flour had been scattered. It made one side of me into bright gold. I turned on the other side but there was no more flour left and that part of me is still as it was. Desirous of getting my body made all gold, I have been trying every place where men perform great yajnas and penances. I heard that Yudhishthira of world fame was performing a yajna and came here, believing that this sacrifice might come up to the standard. But I found it did not. So, I said that your great aswamedha was not so great as the loft of flour which that brahmana made to his guest." The weasel then disappeared.

Moral of the story is "how an ideal householder should be".

"A true sanyasi has no attachment or sense of possession to things under his custody. He could disassociate himself from anything. But a householder cannot easily have such a sense of detachment. However, he should strive to develop such an attitude always. With all the pressing problems, conflicts and responsibilities in a family life, the householder too can strive to attain inner peace. Many of our ancient rishis were only grihasthas (householders). They could do it. We can also do it if only we strive for it.

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Understanding the tactics of Krishna's Mediation in Mahabharat with high details.

Did you know that the Indian Naval Ships INS used to dock at strategic locations whenever some chief personnel of our Nation is engaged in a diplomatic conversation with another from an unfriendly country? You might be wondering what this has to do with Mahabharata. We will come back to this, but later.

For now, let us continue with our Mahabharata study- “Bhagavan Sri Krishna visiting the Kaurava kingdom as an emissary of peace in an attempt to avoid the War".

For now, let us continue with our Mahabharata study- “Bhagavan Sri Krishna visiting the Kaurava kingdom as an emissary of peace in an attempt to avoid the War".

As a prelude, let us briefly navigate through the immediate circumstances that led to this peace mission. Losing the bet to the deceitful games of Shakuni, the five pandavas and their wife Droupadi lived in the forest for 12 years facing severe hardships and the 13th year incognito at the kingdom of Virata. Having completed the stipulated time of 13 years in exile, now the Pandavas could claim back their rightful share of the kingdom.

A well learned house priest of the panchala king Drupada is sent as the first delegate to Hastinapura, to talk peace. In the meantime, anticipating that the wicked Duryodhana will have no intention to give back the kingdom, the Pandavas raised an army of 7 *akshouhini's*: an *Akshouhini* is a unit of battle formation consisting of huge number of chariots, horses, elephants, cavalries and infantries in particular ratios. Learning about this proactive measure through his spies, Duryodhana also starts gathering his side of the army and raised up to 11 *Akshouhini's*.

The Brahmin priest messenger reaches Hastinapura and politely demands back half the kingdom to Pandavas as it was rightfully theirs. Bhishma supports him but Karna ridicules stating that not even one fourth of the kingdom will be given back, leave alone the half. As not being able to take any decision, king Dhritarashtra sends Sanjaya to the pandavas as a next step towards negotiation. Sanjaya reaches the Pandava camp and conveys that Dritharashtra desires peace and not war. Dharmaputra Yudhishtira echoes back that they too consider peace as superior and If their kingdom at Indraprastha could be returned, they are willing to pardon every single suffering that they have undergone till date due to the misdoings of the Kauravas. Slipping off from that demand, Sanjaya rather sermonizes Pandavas on the evil effects of war. "Can happiness be gained with possessions obtained through war? Even if you do not get back your kingdom, you should not abandon the supreme path of Dharma." etc.

Bhagavan Krishna joins the conversion and recounts all the misconduct of Kauravas towards Pandavas, including the disrobing of Droupadi in the court. He expresses that still he desires peace and so he himself would visit the Kauravas to settle the matters before a disaster happens. Sanjaya goes back to Hastinapura.

Thereafter Krishna consults all the five brothers and their wife to know about their views and get prepared to embark on this peace mission to Hastinapura. Yudhishtira points out that this mission would mostly be a futile exercise since unprincipled Duryodhana will have no honest wish to give back the places they acquired. The eldest of Pandavas even reckons that Duryodhana might even try to harm Sri Krishna during this visit. However Krishna says that even he too thinks that this journey to establish peace shall mostly be fruitless, but still an effort has to be made in all ways to attempt for peace before a massive destruction happens. Also, he reveals his power saying if Duryodhana tries capturing or harming him, he will fight and burn everything to ground. Lord Krishna undertakes his journey with his chariot equipped with weapons and also 10 *Maharathi's* and a thousand soldiers accompanying.

Learning about Krishna's arrival, Dritharashtra makes a grand arrangement of welcome. He keeps ready many ornamented citadels with all riches en route for Krishna to take rest but all these lavishing gifts were in fact only a pretence to win him over! Knower of all hearts, the Yadava king ignores all these arrangements and went to the house of Vidura for his stay.

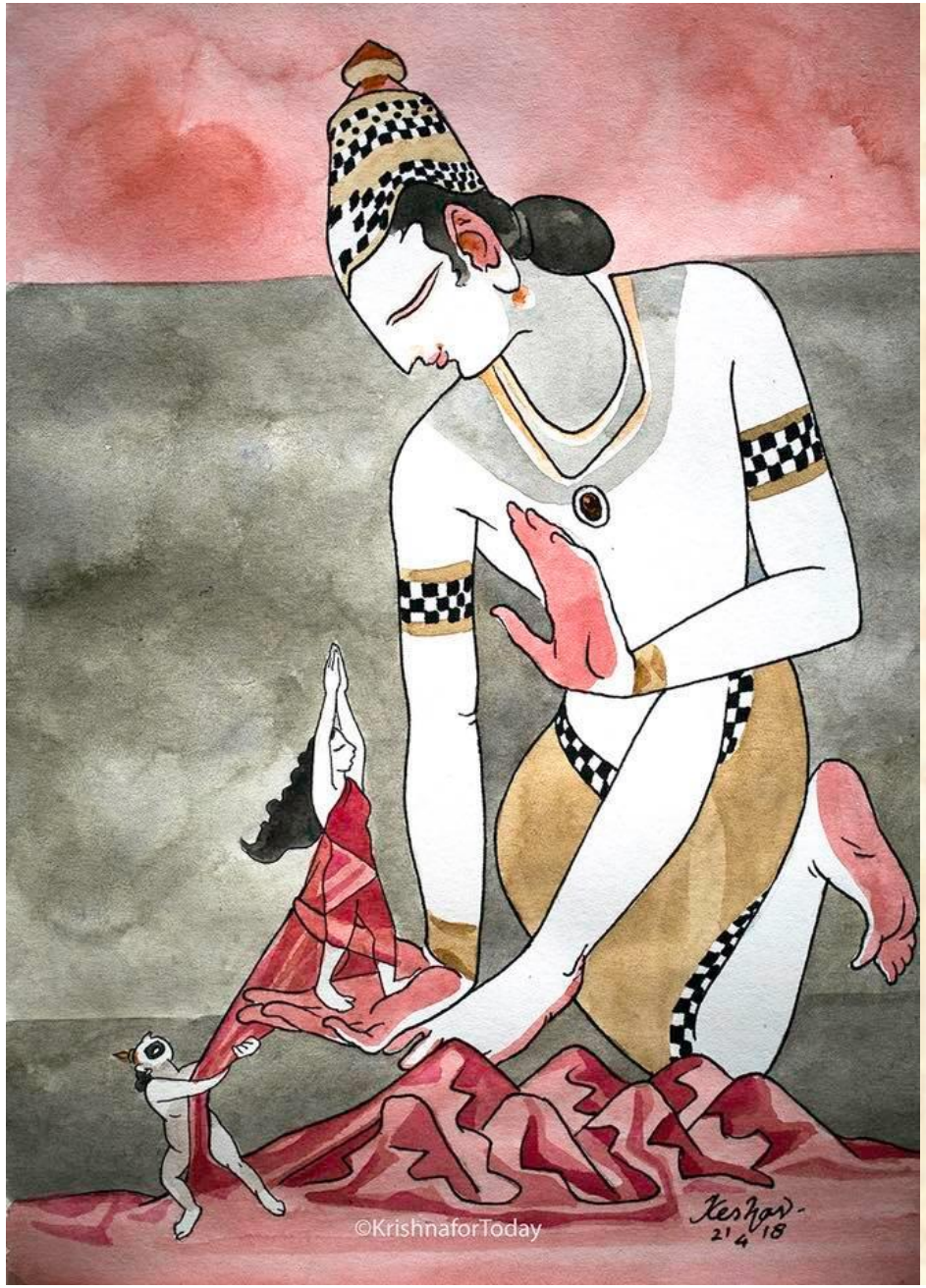
Next day morning, Vidura expresses the same concern to Krishna that this mission was not likely to succeed since Duryodhana was lost to all good counsel. Duryodhana was just eager for war since he thinks that with Bhishma, Drona, Kripa and Karna on his side, the results would be in his favour. Bhagavan Krishna patiently replies that he knows what the Kauravas think. "I know what effect my words will have on them. Still I want to save them from imminent death. They all are certain to die in the war. If I can save them by my efforts I shall win eternal fame. Even if I am not successful, I shall have the consolation that I have made my best efforts. I see the destruction of the Kauravas and I am keen to avoid that. I also want to tell everyone present in the court about the great injustice done to the Pandavas. The war is inevitable but let everyone know who is responsible for it."

KRISHNA IN THE COURT OF KAURAVAS

Next Day, Krishna addressed King Dhritharashtra, that his purpose of visit to Hastinapura is to stop the war by any means. This will avoid unnecessary massacre of eighteen *akshouhinis'* of army, many *Maharathis*, other warriors and heroes. Govinda points out the injustice that has been done to the Pandavas. He exclaimed that If the Kauravas and the Pandavas live together, peacefully, they shall have no rival in the world to challenge the house of the Kurus.

Some thoughtful sentences are worth mentioning: " I see all the kings gathered here in this august assembly, going into the jaws of death. Only you are capable of preventing. Save the world from destruction and let your sons and the Pandavas live peacefully. Don't let the opportunity slip out of your hands. Therefore, it is my humble request to you, that the kingdom of the Pandavas be returned to them."

Listening to this, Dhritarashtra just complains that he is powerless since his sons don't listen to him! He asks Krishna to talk and convince Duryodhana and Karna since even Bhishma and Vidura cannot make them see the right path. Krishna tries that too by praising Duryodhana, "You are a descendant of a very great family. You are endowed with great wealth and many good qualities. I am not able to understand your unjust treatment towards your cousins, Pandavas. My dear Duryodhana, You should choose the path, which may bring happiness to your mother, father, elders and your teachers. You can make them happy by following the path of the truth and righteousness only."



Bhishma, Drona and Vidura also approved of what Krishna had said but on hearing such unpalatable advice of Krishna, Duryodhana blames that Krishna was partial towards the Pandavas. He proudly boasts that he is ready to face the war and will not give them half the kingdom or five villages or even that much land that can be held by the point of a sharp needle.

Though Krishna gets angry by the thoughtless words of Duryodhana, he make another try as well reaffirm all unrighteous actions done like deceitful gambling, trying disrobe Droupadi, insulting words of Dusshasana and Karna, Plotting to burn pandavas in wax palace etc.

Duryodhana walked out of the assembly hall full of rage along with his brother Dushyasana.

Krishna holds everybody in that assembly responsible for such a situation by pampering and not correcting Duryodhana. Krishna says, "A person should be abandoned for the sake of the family, a family should be abandoned for the sake of a village, the village should be abandoned for the sake of a country. For the sake of one's soul the entire world should be forsaken. Only by abandoning Duryodhana and his friends you can save the Kshatriya race."

Meanwhile Duryodhana, Dussasana, Karna and Sakuni secretly conspires among themselves and decides to capture and imprison Sri Krishna. Satyaki who was very alert, understood the evil plan of the wicked four. He immediately alert their soldiers at the main gate to get ready for a battle ambush and gave hint of the scheme to Sri Krishna. Then he revealed it to Dhritarashtra and Vidura also. They were taken aback and at the command of Dhritarashtra, Vidura brings Duryodhana and his brothers back to the assembly. Both Dhritarashtra and Vidura again describe the greatness of Sri Krishna, and advices him to take the path of virtue.

Sri Krishna scoff at Duryodhana for the latter's ignorance in trying to seize him saying that Duryodhana out of his folly considers Krishna as a single person, while he is everything in the universe. Krishna laughs out loud and all Gods and all Suns and everything emerges from him, in his Viswarupa.

His radiant form had many arms that carried many weapons. Except Drona, Bhishma, Vidura, Sanjaya and other Rishis, everybody got frightened at this terrible form and closed their eyes. Shortly, Madhushoodhana took permission of Rishis and left the court to meet his maternal mother Kunti.

Insights and Analysis of Sri Krishna's peace mission

This episode might seem trivial, but it's not! Comprehending this part is very decisive in obtaining a holistic and unambiguous understanding of the *Itihasa*. Let us have a careful glance through the event and take home a few of our learnings.

The first and foremost thing to appreciate is the daring attempt of Sri Krishna to bring peace amongst the cousin brothers. Sanjaya's message from Dhritarashtra was very clear that they (kauravas) do not want a war to happen but as well they have least intention to give back any part of the empire. As Sri Krishna prepares to go as a Pandava messenger, Yudhishtira ponders over the utility of such a mission. He believes that the wicked Duryodhana is not going to give back any land no matter who goes for the negotiation. When that is the case, why should Krishna take up this mission? Later, this same concern is shared by the Dharmic Icon Vidura too. The lord replies to both of them that he too knows in certainty that Duryodhana won't lend an ear to his peace talk nor he would give back the kingdom share, nevertheless, before proceeding to a war that would bring colossal damage to both sides, it would be ideal to try for a peace resolution. At least this act would leave a message to our future generations that we tried our best for peace.

Secondly if we observe the conversation of Sri Krishna in the court of the Kauravas, we can see him trying in all ways to avoid the war. This audacious step taken by Bhagavan Sri Krishna is a very firm evidence against the misrepresentation of him as one who sought for war and instigated Arjuna towards it. Completely wrong!

He, in all his modesty, cared for both sides and dedicated himself to achieve peace even when knowing the probable chances for the peace attempt to work out was next to nothing!

Bhagwan Sri Krishna is rightly warned by Yudhishtira in a prior conversation to his peace mission, that Duryodhana is wickedness personified and he would go even to the extent of harming the messenger Krishna. The lord acknowledges the concern and says that if such a foolish experiment is tried by the Kauravas, he will bring a complete destruction to them. The same expected untoward attempt happens and we all know that Sri Krishna showed his Viswaroopa (all encompassing form), Keeping aside this Godly exhibition, we could even find a political strategy too hidden beneath. There are 10 *Maharathis* and a 1000 soldiers who travel along with Krishna when he goes for the peace mission and Mahabharata particularly mentions that Krishna has his chariot equipped full with arms, if in case required.

You will be surprised to learn that a *Maharathi* is a warrior who can fight with more than 7 lakh warriors simultaneously. Karna, Bhishma, Ravana, Abhimanyu, Drona, Kumbhakarna etc are *Maharathis*. You will be even more surprised to learn that of the 10 *Maharathis* who accompany Sri Krishna, one is his own chief army general Satyaki who has even defeated Karna in a battle. Satyaki is present there with Krishna throughout during the peace talk and will be very alert and prepare his army outside when he sense that Duryodhana might try capturing Krishna.

Such political precautionary measures were pursued during this negotiation meeting. As mentioned in the introduction, even today, the Indian Naval Ships INS used to dock at strategic locations whenever some chief personnel of our Nation is engaged in a diplomatic conversation with another from an unfriendly country. Thousands of years passed on after the Mahabharata, but still there are plenty such examples of similar ideals, practices and strategies practiced today! We can only humbly bow down to the great visionary Sage Vyasa, in wonderment.

Let us learn a wisdom subhashita from Sri Krishna's conversation. As the peace mission concludes without any positive outcome, Sri Krishna tells Dritharashtra this. In Sanskrit it would be

त्यजेदेकं कुलस्यार्थे ग्रामस्यार्थे कुलं त्यजेत्।
ग्रामं जनपदस्यार्थे आत्मार्थे पृथिवीं त्यजेत्

tyajet ekam kulasya arthegrāmasya arthe kulam tyajet |
grāmam janapadasya artheātmā arthe pṛthivīm tyajet ||

Family prevails over individual; Village over family; Nation over Village; The realised one gives up the whole earth. This is the individual-society trade off. For example, in case of physical danger, the father may put his life at stake to save his family. Don't we send soldiers to the border to save the rest of the society?

Krishna is not the first person who advocates this idea in Mahabharata. More than twice the same sloka is recited at different instances implying that the underlying idea could be a bedrock philosophy during Mahabharata times. A methodical analysis would show the essence of Indian Culture being reflected in this verse. The Dharmic view of a greater good perspective which allows for one to denounce relatively smaller things and the spiritual view of complete renunciation which leads one to Divinity. Thank you!

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Mahaprastana Parva

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As a college student, most of you may be thinking about your career

Have you ever thought about your retirement ?

Imagine you are the Managing Director of a billion Dollar company.

Will you be ready to give up all your comforts in a single day ?

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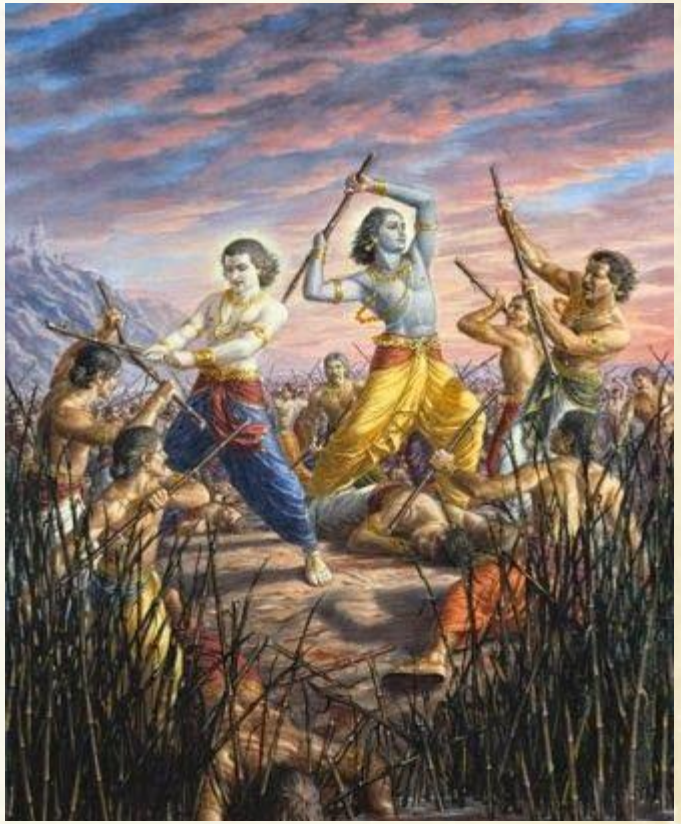
Comment your views on Retirement of Politicians

Towards the finishing point



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Chathurasrama

- Brahmacharya
- Garhastham
- Vanaprastham
- Sanyasam

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Yudhishtira : 'O thou of great intelligence, it is Time that cooks every creatures (in his cauldron). I think that what has happened is due to the cords of Time (with which he binds us all). It behoveth thee also to see it.',

Arjuna: Time, Time !

All brothers endorsed the words that Arjuna had said. Resolved to retire from the world for earning merit, they brought Yuyutsu before them.
Yudhishthira made over the kingdom to the son of his uncle by his Vaisya wife. Installing Parikshit also on their throne, as king, the eldest brother of the Pandavas, filled with sorrow, addressed Subhadra, saying, 'This son of thy son will be the king of the Kurus.

The survivor of the Yadus, viz., Vajra, has been made a king. Parikshit will rule in *Hastinapura,* while the Yadava prince, Vajra, will rule in *Sakraprastha*

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Find out the differences

MahaSamadhi

Prayopesha

Suicide

Euthanasia

Sallekhana

Sokushinbutsu

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The Journey begins.....

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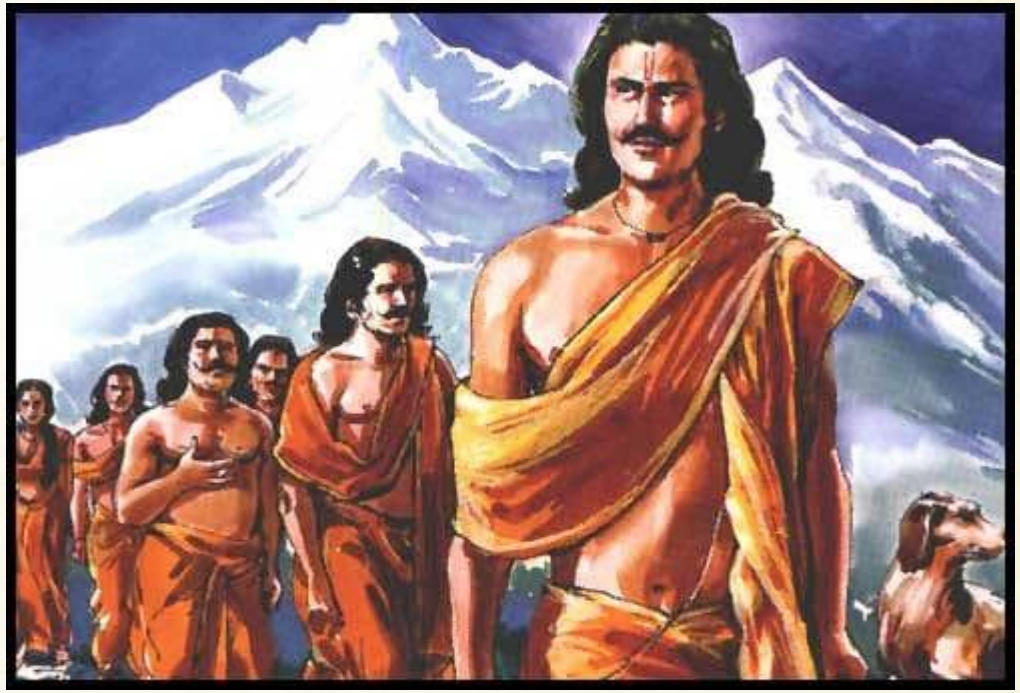
The high-souled Pandavas, and Draupadi observed the preliminary fast, set out with their faces towards the east. Setting themselves on Yoga, those high-souled ones, resolved to observe the religion of Renunciation.



Yudhishthira proceeded first. Behind him was Bhima ; next walked Arjuna ; after him were the twins in the order of their birth ; behind them all, proceeded Draupadi.
While the Pandavas set out for the forest, a dog followed them.

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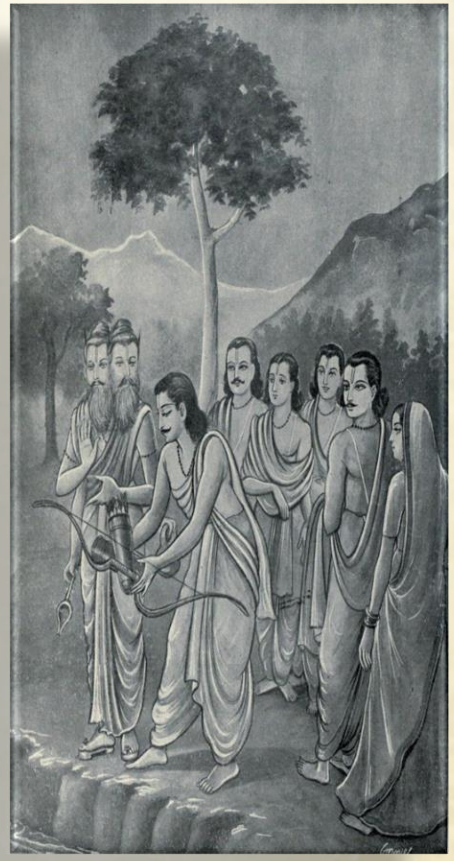
Arjuna Renouncing Gandiva

Proceeding on they reached the sea of red waters. Dhananjaya had not cast off his celestial bow Gandiva and the couple of inexhaustible quivers. The Pandavas there beheld the deity of fire standing before them like a hill in his embodied form.

The deity of seven flames after addressing the Pandavas, said,
“Let your brother Phalguna proceed to the woods after casting off Gandiva, that high weapon. He has no longer any need of it. That precious discus, which was with the high-souled Krishna, has disappeared (from the world). When the time again comes, it will come back into his hands. This foremost of bows, viz., Gandiva, was procured by me from Varuna for the use of Partha. Let it be made over to Varuna himself.'

At this, all the brothers urged Dhananjaya to do what the deity said. He then threw into the waters (of the sea) both the bow and the couple of inexhaustible quivers. After this,the god of the fire disappeared then and there.



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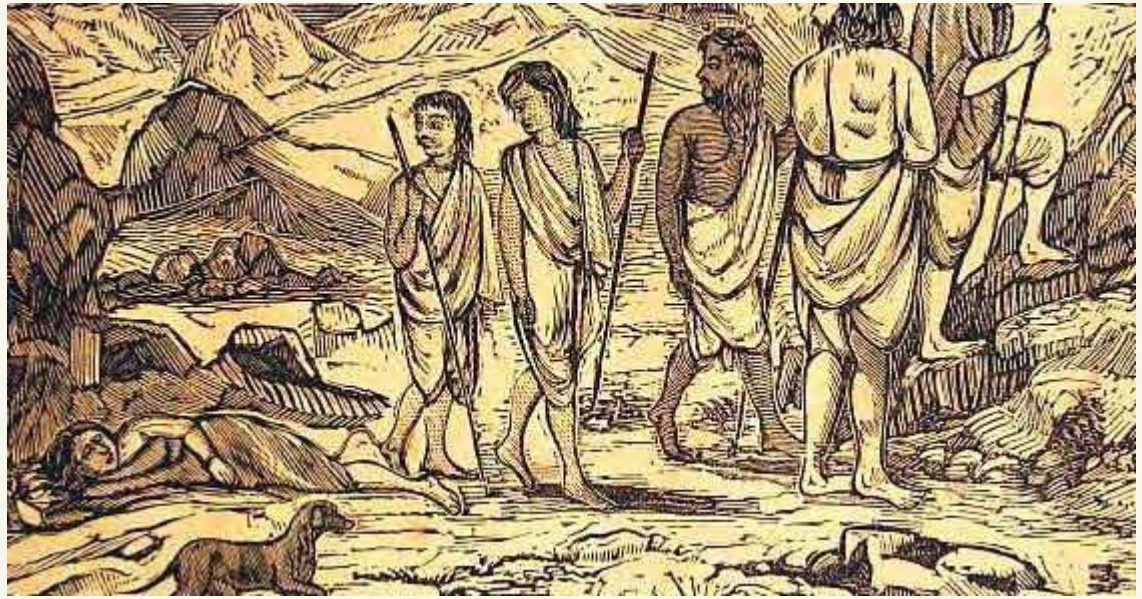
Droupadi

Bhimasena : 'O scorcher of foes, this princess never did any sinful act. Tell us what the cause is for which Panchali has fallen down on the Earth !

Yudhishthira : 'O best of men, though we were all equal unto her she had great partiality for Dhananjaya. She obtains the fruit of that conduct today, O best of men.

Thought : Hope you don't have any partiality towards any of your faculty members.



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Sahadeva

Bhima : Sahadeva who with great humility used to serve us all, alas, why is that son of Madravati fallen down on the Earth ?.

Yudhishthira : He never thought anybody his equal in wisdom. It is for that fault that this prince has fallen down.

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Nakula

Bhima : Our brother Nakula who was endued with righteousness without incompleteness, and who always obeyed our behests, this Nakula who was unrivalled for beauty, has fallen down.

Yudhishthira : He was of righteous soul and the foremost of all persons endued with intelligence. He, however, thought that there was nobody that equaled him in beauty of person. Indeed, he regarded himself as superior to all in that respect. It is for this that Nakula has fallen down.

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Arjuna

Bhima: I do not recollect any untruth uttered by this
High souled one. Indeed, not even in jest did he say anything false.
What then is that for whose evil consequence this one has fallen down on the Earth ?

Yudhishthira: Arjuna had said that he would consume all our foes in a single day.
Proud of his heroism, he did not, however, accomplish what he had said.
Hence has he fallen down. This Phalguna disregarded all wielders of bows.
One desirous of prosperity should never indulge in such sentiments.'

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Bhima

Bhima :'O king, behold. I who am thy darling have fallen down-
For what reason have I dropped down ? Tell me if thou knows it?

Yudhishthira : Thou wert a great eater, and thou didst use to boast of thy strength.
Thou never didst attend, O Bhima, to the wants of others while eating. It is for that, O Bhima, that thou hast fallen down.

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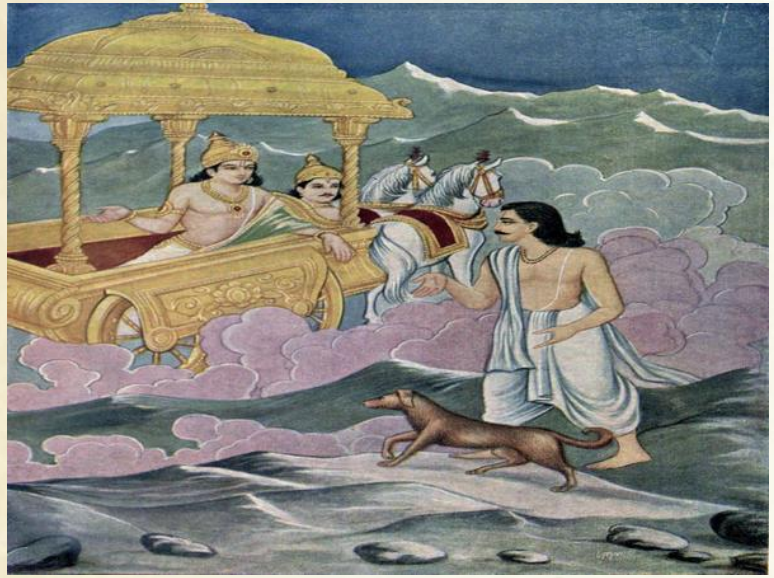
Dialogues with Devendra



Then Sakra, causing the firmament and the Earth to be filled by a loud sound, came to the son of Pritha on a car and asked him to ascend it.

Beholding his brothers fallen on the Earth, king Yudhishthira the just, said unto Indra

'My brothers have all dropped down here. They must go with me. Without them by me I do not wish to go to Heaven, O lord of all the deities. The delicate princess (Draupadi) deserving of every comfort, O Purandara, should go with us. It behoveth thee to permit this.'"

"Sakra said,

Thou shalt behold thy brothers in Heaven. They have reached it before thee. Indeed, thou shalt see all of them there, with Krishna. Do not yield to grief, O chief of the Bharatas. Having cast off their human bodies they have gone there, O chief of Bharata's race. As regards thee, it is ordained that thou shalt go thither in this very body of thine.'

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The second test: Yudhishthira to abandon the dog?

Yudhishthira then asked indra to permit the dog along with him to enter heaven. However Indra did not accept the request.Indra again questions Yudhishthira as

“Having abandoned thy brothers and Krishna, thou hast, O hero, acquired a region of felicity by thy own deeds. Why art thou so stupefied ? Thou hast renounced everything. Why then dost thou not renounce this dog?‘

Yudhishthira replied

“When my brothers and Krishna died, I was unable to revive them. Hence it was that I abandoned them. I did not, however, abandon them as long as they were alive. To frighten one that has sought protection, the slaying of a woman, the theft of what belongs to a Brahmana, and injuring a friend, each of these four, O Sakra, is I think eqal to the abandonment of one that is devoted.' ‘

Hearing these words of king Yudhishthira the dog became transformed into the deity of Righteousness, who was well pleased

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Yaksha prasna: The Prelims

Dharma well pleased with Yudhishtira narrates the incident when he once examined Yudhishthira in the woods of Dwaita, where his brothers met with death. Disregarding both his brothers Bhima and Arjuna, Yudhishthira did wish for the revival of Nakula from his desire of doing good to his stepmother.

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SWARGA

Then Dharma, and Sakra, and the Maruts, and the Aswins, and other deities, and the celestial Rishis, causing Yudhishthira to ascend on a car, proceeded to Heaven.

Yudhishthira reached swarga. There, he saw Duryodhana. The Kuru prince was seated on a beautiful throne and he shone with the splendor of the sun and around him stood in attendance the goddess of heroism and other angels. He did not see his brothers or anyone else.

Yudhishthira was astonished and said that he could not bear the sight of Duryodhana in heaven and asked for his brothers. He then expressed his wish to go where his brothers and droupathi were.

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Narada tries to covince Yudhishsthira by saying

“The brave Duryodhana has attained his present state by force of kshatriya dharma. It is not right to let the things of the flesh stay in the mind and breed ill will. Do follow the law and stay here with king Duryodhana. There is no place in swarga for hatred. You have arrived here with your human body; so it is that you have these inappropriate feelings. Discard them, son!"

but he said,

“I long to see and be with them all. I do not wish to be in heaven, for what good is it for me to be here, away from my brothers? Wherever they may be, that me is swarga; not this place!“

Thereafter he was taken to another place by an angel attendant. He waded through slippery slime of blood and offal. The path was strewn with carrion and bones and dead men's hair. Worms were wriggling everywhere and there was an insufferable stench in the air. He saw mutilated human bodies everywhere.

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THE FINAL TEST

The foul odors of the place were so sickening that for a moment Yudhishthira was minded to go back. But just then, as if divining his intention, vaguely familiar voices rose all around in loud lamentation.

"O Dharmaputra, do not go back! Stay here for a few minutes at least. Your presence has given us momentary relief from torture."

Thus the voices pleaded. Overwhelmed with pity at the poignant anguish in faintly remembered voices, he exclaimed:

"Alas wretched souls! Who are ye that lament like this? Why are you here?"

"**Lord, I am Karna,**" said a voice. **"I am Bhima,"** said another. **"I am Arjuna,"** cried a third voice. **"Draupadi,"** cried another voice in piteous tone. "**I am Nakula," "I am Sahadeva," "We are Draupadi's sons,"** and so on,

Yudhishthira could bear.

"What sin indeed have these been guilty of?" cried he. **"Dhritarashtra's son Duryodhana, what good deeds did he do to sit like Mahendra in heaven, while these are in hell? Am I dreaming or am I awake? Is my mind deranged? Have I gone crazy?"**

Overwhelmed by anger, Yudhishthira cursed the gods and denounced dharma. He turned to the angel attendant and said sharply: "Go back to your masters. I shall stay here where my dear brothers, for no other sin than devotion to me, are consigned to the tortures of hell. Let me be with them."

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The messenger went back and conveyed to Indra what Yudhishthira had said. Thus passed the thirteenth part of a day. Then Indra and Yama appeared before Yudhishthira where he stood in anguish. When they came, the darkness rolled away and the horrid sights disappeared. The sinners and their suffering were no more to be seen. A fragrant breeze blew as Yama, the god of dharma, smiled on his son Yudhishthira and said this was his third and final test.All that happened were illusions. He added ,

Neither the illustrious Savyasachi (Arjuna) nor your beloved brother Bhima is really in hell. Nor Karna the just, nor anyone else who you thought had been consigned to suffering. It was an illusion designed to test you. This is not hell, but swarga.

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The final abode of happiness

Then Yudhishthira saw their Karna and all his brothers and the sons of Dhritarashtra also, serene and free from anger, all having attained the state of the gods. In this reunion, Yudhishthira at last found peace and real happiness.

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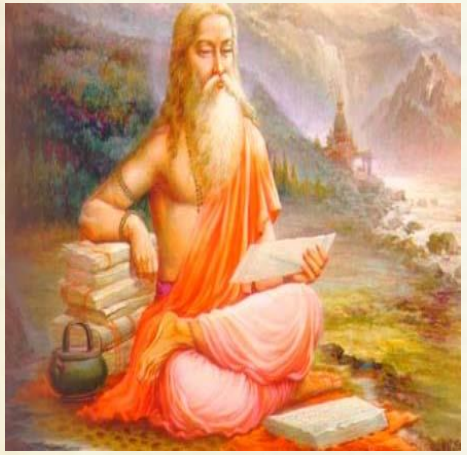
The Message remains



ऊर्ध्वबाहुर्विरौम्येष न च कश्चिच्छृणोति मे ।
धर्मादर्थश्च कामश्च स किमर्थं न सेव्यते ॥

Urdhva bAhur-viraumyeSha na ca kashcicchRNoti me |
dharmAdarthashca kAmashca sa kimarthaM na sevyate ||

With uplifted arms I am speaking aloud but nobody listens me.
Wealth and Love comes out of Dharma,
But no one is bothered to practice this Dharma.

Reference :

The complete Mahabharata translated into English prose directly from the original Sanskrit text
Written by: Pratap Chandra Roy
Published by: ORIENTAL PUBLISHING CO

MAHABHARATA retold by C. Rajagopalachari (Edited by Jay Mazo, International Gita Society)

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Namah Shivaya

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