



the
THARU BARKA NAACH

A rural folk art version of the
MAHABHARATA

As told by the Dangaura Tharu of Jalaura, Dang Valley, Nepal.

Based on the manuscripts collected and collated by
Dangaura Tharu leaders
1922/Samrati 1979

English translation
Dinesh Chamling Rai
Los Angeles, 1997/Samrati 2054
With the assistance of Ashok Tharu and Kalpana Ghimire

Edited by
Kurt Meyer and Pamela Deuel
Kathmandu, 1998/2055

Illustrations
Ashok Tharu
Hekuli, Dang Valley, 1998

Graphic design & publication coordination
Lee Birch
Kathmandu, Nepal

This edition is partially funded by
the **RUSCA TRUST**

First Published by
Himal Books
Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, Nepal
September 1998/Ashoj 2055

Layout & Printing
Jagadamba Press
Patan Dhoka, Lalitpur, Nepal

Simultaneously published in the United States by
Deuel Purposes
2702 Westshire Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90068

ISBN: 0-9666742-2-7

Cover art, by Dambar Bahadur Choudhuri of Kachila Village of Dang District, Nepal, is a detail from a wall painting depicting scenes from The Barka Naach.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Barka Naach Puja, the Dangaura Tharu version of the story of the Mahabharata, concentrates on the story of the five Pandava brothers. It was last performed in Narayanpur (Jalaura), Dang Valley, in 1963. This important puja is revived at Dasai 1998 (Samrati 2055). We hope that this marks the beginning of a new cycle of performances. The following people have kept the tradition alive. Without their commitment, the tradition would have died out:

Shree Narahari Nath Yogi and Shree Badrinath Yogi in Narayanpur; - Mahatawa Chandra Prasad Chaudhary, the one man who remembers the dances and carries on the tradition; - Ashok Tharu, the recorder 'par excellence' of Dangaura Tharu culture and history, without whom the translation of the Tharu text would often have lost the essence of its meaning in historic context; - Dr. Drone Rajaure (CNAS, Tribhuvan University); - our translators: Dinesh Rai Chamling, Kalpana Ghimire, and Ashok Tharu; - the collectors of the Tharu script, Mahatawa Rup Lal Chaudhary (d.1970), - Tilak Ram Mahato for giving us access to Tharu legends, various Tharu Guruwas, and most of all, we give credit to:

**The people of Narayanpur,
Who have kept their tradition alive.**



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Prelude	1
Introduction	3
The Tharu People	3
The Tharu relationship to the Mahabharata	4
The Tharu Interpretation	6
Map	11
The Barka Naach	13
The Tharu version of the Mahabharata:	13
History	13
Opening song - The dancers pay their respects to the gods	15
First Song - The Kauravas try to burn the Pandavas alive	18
Second Song - Bhim fights the Demon Danu	24
Third Song - Draupadi's Swayamvara	30
Fourth Song - The Pandavas lose a game of dice	43
Fifth Song - In exile in the forest	53
Sixth Song - Journey to King Bairath's court	60
Seventh Song - Stay in the Matsya kingdom	66
Eighth Song - Bhim kills Kichaka	71
Ninth Song - The cattle-stealing war	76
Tenth Song - The final battle at Kurukshetra	102
Epilogue - The Journey to Heaven	112
Appendix	
Glossary	115
Bibliography	118
Kuru Family Tree: Genealogical Table	120

P R E L U D E



It is autumn. The fields of Dang Valley are golden-yellow, and the heavy stalks of rice sway gently in the breeze. In a few days the Dangaura Tharu farmers will perform the Barka Naach in song and dance. Tharu families will come from miles around to watch this Tharu celebration of the Mahabharata. The last time the Barka Naach was performed was over 30 years ago, and many Tharu will witness this great tradition for the first time in their lives.

It is not known when the Barka Naach, the Dangaura Tharu version of the Mahabharata, was first performed in Dang Valley. We do know, however, that at the beginning of this century a farmer and village leader, Mahatawa Rup Lal Tharu of Jhalaura, decided he would undertake the job of preserving the Barka Naach. Knowing that many segments of the songs were missing, he, together with local Tharu guruwas, collected loose manuscript pages of the Barka Naach. He then collated these pages into a complete manuscript. Since he was an illiterate farmer, Rup Lal Tharu first had to teach himself to read and write. He then wrote down the story in its original Tharu language as a single manuscript. Before he died in 1970, Rup Lal passed the manuscript along to his son, Mahatawa Chandra Prasad Tharu, the current village leader, who now carries on his father's commitment to preserve the tradition of the Barka Naach.

In 1922 Rup Lal first reconstructed the entire performance of the Barka Naach into a cohesive whole. Then, assisted by a number of Tharu Guruwas, he organized performances for over 50 years, from 1922 until 1963. With the aid of Naraharinath Yogi, local Tharu staged many performances until the 1960's, when there were no longer sufficient funds available to finance the considerable cost of a complete performance.

In 1993 Kurt Meyer and Pamela Deuel, guided by Professor Drone Rajaure, came across the Tharus' predicament on a routine research trip during which they met Mahatawa Chandra Prasad Tharu, the son of Mahatawa Rup Lal. Mahatawa Chandra is one of the very few Tharu still living

today who know the songs by heart and who possess a transcript of the Tharu songs. To revive the traditional performance of the Barka Naach, Meyer and Deuel provided financial support to the farmers so they could produce a shortened version designed to demonstrate their skills. It was an unforgettable and moving experience when, in February 1994, Tharu families from Dang and the surrounding hills converged for a weekend of tradition. This abbreviated "practice" version of the play drew over 3,000 local men, women and children, many of whom traveled many hours on foot or by bus to attend.

The Tharu are now in the process of regenerating the traditional Barka Naach offerings. The 1998 performance is expected to be a new beginning in the cycle of performing this important puja¹. Mahatawa Chandra best explains the importance of these efforts:

"We are afraid of losing our Tharu culture which is deteriorating day by day. The main purpose of recording a small part of the dance on video is to maintain the Tharu culture so it can continue to exist. Also for this purpose my father, with the help of Naraharinath Yogi and Badrinath Yogi, has written a book describing the role of the Barka songs in the Tharu culture."

To the Tharu, the performance of the Barka Naach, the Big Dance, is a devotional presentation offered to the gods to ensure good health, a plentiful harvest and good fortune for the village.



¹ Puja means worship.

INTRODUCTION



The Tharu People:

The Tharu are believed to be the first people to live in the Tarai, the tropical lowlands that are both jungle and breadbasket of Nepal. Few people realize that the Tharu, numbering nearly 1.2 million people according to the 1991 census, are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nepal.

The Tharu's origins in prehistoric times are shrouded in mystery. Mongoloid as well as Indo-Aryan features can be detected in their faces. But, wherever they came from, they settled the dense jungle which covered that part of the Gangetic plains which meets the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. Over time the Tharu developed a remarkable resistance to the deadly malaria which kept other tribes and the British away until DDT eliminated the disease in the 1960's.

They became the cultivators of the Tarai. Over the last two hundred years they have turned the region into prime agricultural land. Once semi-nomadic people who did not know the meaning of individual land ownership, they have become farmers settled in permanent villages. Where the *maharajas* of yesteryear hunted tigers and leopards, the jungle is now reduced to a handful of national wildlife preserves. Today tourists safely sit atop elephants or take nature walks in search of rhinoceros, crocodile or the elusive tiger.

The Tharu are commonly described in Nepal as one people. Closer examination reveals that many subgroups that are quite different from each other exist: Kochila in the eastern Tarai, Chitwaniya and Desauri in the center, Kathariya, Dangaura and Rana in the west. House construction, religion, culture, and historic background vary considerably from group to group, but all are called "Tharu."

The Barka Naach is unique to the Dangaura Tharu who live in the Dang/Deukhuri district of the Tarai.

The Tharu Relationship to the Mahabharata:

The Barka Naach (“the Big Dance” in Tharu) is part of the Barkimar (“the Big War”) of Tharu legend. For generations the Dangaura Tharu have performed the Barka Naach. The stories are drawn from the Mahabharata, the great Indian Sanskrit epic which tells the story of the two branches of the royal clan of Kuru who lived in northern India thousands of years ago: the princes called the Pandavas and the Kauravas. The Tharu version is a devotional puja honoring the five Pandava brothers, the sons of Pandu, who, it is recounted, jubilantly danced the Barka Naach after their victory over the Kauravas at Kurukshetra.

The legend of the Mahabharata, and most of all, of its heroes the Pandavas, is intricately woven into the fabric of the history of the Dangaura Tharu in Dang Valley. The Pandavas are credited with the construction of a temple of stones so colossal that no one but Bhim, the mighty second brother, could carry them. The map in this volume shows how close the land of the Tharu is to the region in Northern India where the Mahabharata story is said to have taken place. History also tells us that Tharu settled in many regions south and west of the Nepali border. No large jump in credibility has to be made to agree with those historians who claim that the Tharu were part of the Kuru kingdom. Several local Dangaura legends recounted by Dang Valley Tharu also substantiate this relationship. They include the following:

How Bhim gave Dangi Sha Ran Refuge in the Jungle

Once the sage Durvasha was sent to the palace of Indra, who welcomed him with warm hospitality. During his stay at the palace, Urvashi, the dancer at Indra's palace, was tired and danced badly. Durvasha felt dishonored by her poor performance and cursed her. Under this curse she was born again in the shape of a female horse. The horse reached Nepal after wandering through Jamboo Dweep, Dandakarayanya Jungle, Kashmir Jalandhar and Champa Nagar Champaran District in Bihar, India.

One day while wandering and hunting, the Tharu King Dangi Sha Ran sighted the beautiful horse. Dangi Sha Ran followed the horse until at sunset she changed back into a beautiful woman, as provided for the curse. She explained the curse to the startled king.

He brought her back to his palace (the ruins of which can still be seen at the village of Sukaura in Dang Valley). Once he found out that Dangi Sharan was keeping the dancer Urvashi, Indra sent a message to the King to return his horse.

The King refused. When Krishna heard this, he commanded the King to return the horse, or he, Krishna, would destroy the world.

Overwhelmed with fear, King Dangi Sharan went into exile in the forest, where he asked Duryodhan (the oldest of the 100 Kaurava brothers) for shelter. Duryodhan refused. When he asked the Pandava brothers, however, Bhim gave him refuge and the others kept silent.

This legend shows that Bhim, of all the Pandavas, is the closest to the Tharu, although the Tharu worship and respect all five brothers. Tharu affection for Bhim explains why in the Tharu Barka Naach it is Bhim (not Arjun as in the classical Mahabharata) who succeeds in hitting the eye of the bird and carrying away Princess Draupadi to become the wife of the Pandavas. (See “The Tharu Interpretation” below.)

The Pandavas: Tharu Deities of Prosperity

The Tharu also celebrate the Pandavas in their festival of the Big Sunday: the Barka Atwari. In her book *Maitres et Possédés* (1989:116) Dr. Gisele Krauskopff relates:

When Mahadeva marries the goddess, daughter of the First Tharu, he decides to create agriculture and have a great wedding celebration, to which he invites the Pandava brothers. Once a year on Barka Atwari, the first Sunday of the bright fortnight of August, Tharu men fast in honor of the five Pandavas, considered the princes of land and its "first farmers." They are presented with vegetarian offerings, milk and cooked foods, and are invoked to protect the village, for which they are the main divinities. Of all the deities, the Pandavas are probably the only ones to have a uniquely benevolent aspect and the exclusive role as protectors of the land.

The Tharu have a number of village gods at their village shrine called *bhuihyar*, which means watchman or landowner. The five Pandavas, represented by five carved wooden sticks, are included among those village deities.

Tharu legends are by no means exclusive to Dang. In Nawalparasi, in central Nepal, the following legends are told about the settlement of the Tharu:

Bhim: Protector Deity of Nawalparasi

Long ago, the kingdom that is now called Nawalparasi was dense forest, and the Narayani River flowed through the valley. The god Kumarvarti lived on the mountain peak called Devchuli overlooking Nawalparasi.

The Tharu cleared the forest, felling trees to create good farmland and building villages. They abandoned the holy thread² to become farmers. In doing so, they ignored the holy injunction of Kumarvarti in order to become farmers.

The land that they cleared, however, was the garden of the god Kumarvarti. He was angered by the destruction of his garden. To punish the farmers, who refused to leave his garden alone, he ordered Bhim, the strongest of the five Pandava brothers, to flood the valley by damming the Narayani River. At the foot of the mountain lived a maharaj raja, a Tharu king. His lands included a large pond that is still evident today. Kumarvarti sent his threat to the king in song:

'If you don't worship me,
I will release all of the Himal rivers,
To flood your lands and the valley!'

The Tharu king was afraid of Kumarvarti, and, to prevent Bhim from destroying the valley, he started the festival of Kantari Puja, which to this day is celebrated every five years by the Tharu of Nawalparasi to worship Kumarvarti and the other local gods.

The Pandava Feast at Sat Gaun

It is also said that the Pandava brothers visited Nawalparasi after they defeated the Kauravas at the Battle of Kurukshetra. They had a big feast at a place called Sat Gaun (Seven Villages), southwest of Nawalpur. They cooked rice and other dishes in seven ovens; the ovens are still there. Because there was too much water in the rice, the Pandavas drained off the excess; this water became a river. The Pandavas ate all the food, leaving nothing for their cooks to eat. The cooks became angry ("rusal") and ran away to live in a place called Ruslahari.

² The holy thread is worn by Brahmins and Chatriyas, who are not permitted by Hindu law to farm the land.

The Tharu Interpretation:

The Tharu performance is not the sort of drama typically seen on Indian television. It is closer in form to the classic Greek drama: the story is told through the **dancing** of performers and the singing of the traditional Tharu text by a **chorus**.

Passed down over the years through oral tradition, the Barka Naach has survived for generations. Local farmers, who inherit their roles and learn from their fathers, in turn pass the knowledge on to their own sons.

The version performed by these farmers varies in many details from the classic Sanskrit story. A few of these variations are worth noting.

At Draupadi's Swayamvara (a contest at which Draupadi's suitors vie for her hand in marriage), in the traditional text the suitors must shoot five arrows in succession through the hole of a wheel and hit the target. The successful marksman, if from a good family, will win Draupadi in marriage. All contenders fail even to string the bow except Karna, who is able to string the bow but fails because the princess disqualifies him for "being a [low-caste] charioteer's son." Arjun, disguised as a Brahmin priest, succeeds with ease (Rajagopalachari, 1996).

In the Tharu version, the suitors must hit the eye of a rau bird. The suitors are able to string the bow but are unable to hit the eye of the bird and cast aside the bow and arrows in disgust. It is Bhim, not Arjun, who succeeds. He and Arjun carry away the Princess Draupadi to become the wife of the five Pandava brothers.

Readers familiar with the Greek epic *The Odyssey* may be reminded of a familiar episode from Homer's tales of Ulysses. In the last song of the *Odyssey*, Ulysses returns to his palace in disguise to find his wife Penelope surrounded by suitors (who claim that she is a widow). She is ready to wed whichever archer can successfully shoot an arrow through five ringlets to the target, but no one is able even to string the bow. Finally, Ulysses steps up, strings the bow, hits the target, and reveals himself.

There are other dissimilarities between the classical Mahabharata story and the Barka Naach. In the classic, the wily Sakuni, uncle of the Kauravas, is not only their conniving strategist but also the gambler who rolls the dice on behalf of the oldest Kaurava brother, Duryodhan, against the oldest Pandava brother, Yudhishtir, in the fixed game. In the Tharu version, Duryodhan himself is the Kaurava gambler facing Yudhishtir. Only when he loses the first roll of the dice does he call on Sakuni for help.

When Susharma loses his battle, in the classic text, Yudhishtir admonishes him not to fight his cousins anymore. In the Tharu version, Bhim, the Tharu's 'most favored brother', puts a curse on Susharma, who is reduced to the lowly caste of iron-maker for not having fought like a Chatriya should.

In addition to details such as those noted above, there is also a fundamental difference that distinguishes the Barka Naach from the classical epic. Unlike the Mahabharata, the Barka Naach is strictly an "action story." The religious and philosophical teachings that pervade the Mahabharata are absent in the Barka Naach except in its prologue and epilogue. (In the opening song "Samrauti" the singers pay their respects to the deities and pray that the deities' benevolent side will prevail over their wrathful aspects, so that a plentiful harvest is ensured. The epilogue "Swarg Arohan," the Journey to Heaven, gives thanks to the gods.) Whatever moral teachings may appear in the songs are implied through the behavior of the heroes.

The Barka Naach is considered to be a devotional puja that will assure a good harvest for the village. The body of the songs is placed between the opening prayer (Samrauti) and the closing prayers (Swarg Arohan). The opening and closing puja are mandatory parts of the performance, but the dance songs which make up the body of the Naach are selected from the Mahabharata story to suit the situation and the desires of the performing villagers. The organizing village of Narayanpur produces all of the activities, including two days of puja preceding the dance and an additional day of closing puja at the end.

Neighboring villages who wish to benefit from the blessings of the puja can request that the dancers perform a selection of songs in their village.

The neighbors may choose the songs they wish to have performed. Because of these options, the duration of the Barka Naach varies depending on how many villages make a request. The closing puja, however, is always carried out in the organizing village under the guidance of the local *guruwa* (Tharu priest).

Once performed, the Barka Naach must be repeated two times more at five-year intervals. The last recorded Barka Naach cycle took place in 1953, 1958, and 1963. Mahato Rup Lal Chaudhary passed away in 1970. His son, Mahatawa Chandra Prasad, is currently reviving the tradition resurrected by his father years ago, helped by the strong assistance of Shree Narahari Nath Yogi.

In India the *Mahabharata* is often referred to as the 'Fifth Veda.' Encyclopedic in scope, it contains nearly every branch of knowledge. The poets who composed it (for it does not seem possible that this vast poem could be the work of one individual, as there are pieces in it of very different linguistic and metric structure) have woven into it history and legend, myth and folklore, fable and parable, philosophy and religion, statecraft and the art of war, morality and romance. Most important of all is the section known as the *Bhagavad Gita*, one of Hinduism's central scriptures.

On the one hand it inspires philosophical research and questioning, and on the other it provides a vital ethic that shapes the lives of hundreds of millions of Indians of today through its captivating stories, as it did in centuries past.

The *Mahabharata* has traveled and even been adopted in other Asian countries including Indonesia, Thailand, and Cambodia. In each setting its characters take on some of the flavor of that region; consequently, the various versions of the epic differ somewhat from each other. The basic story, however, as told by the poet Vyasa to his scribe Ganesh remains the same.

Condensed to the briefest of outlines, the story unfolds like this:

King Vishitravarya had two sons: Dhritarashtra and Pandu. The Pandavas, the five sons of Pandu and the Kauravas, the one hundred sons of Dhritarashtra, both expected to become the rulers of the Kuru kingdom. To avoid a struggle, the family patriarch Bhishma attempted to make peace by dividing the kingdom into two: one kingdom for the Kauravas with Hastinapura as the capital and the other for the Pandavas with Indraprastha as the capital. (Both kingdoms are located near today's New Delhi, only about 300 kilometers from the Nepali border). This division did not end the animosity, however: the Kauravas, using various deceitful means, attempted several times without success to eliminate the Pandavas. When the Pandavas, besting the Kauravas, won Draupadi as their wife in a contest, the enmity increased.

One day the treacherous Kauravas arranged a dishonest game of dice, in which the Pandavas lost everything, including their kingdom and Draupadi, to the Kauravas. They were exiled into the forest for twelve years. They tried to peacefully re-establish themselves later, but conflict was unavoidable and inevitable. Helped in the great battle of Kurukshetra by the god Krishna, they triumphed at last, killing all 100 Kaurava brothers in a symbolic victory over the wrathful side of man.

Even today the power of the central theme of the *Mahabharata* is undiminished; it resonates with warnings for our future. It tells of a Great War that nearly destroys an entire civilization despite the despairing awareness in both kingdoms that war will lead only to universal destruction. The Tharu version of the Mahabharata, the **Barka Naach** (the big dance) is just one of many regional variations of the Mahabharata in the Indian subcontinent.

The Barka Naach is storytelling in a farming community where few people are literate. For generations, knowledge of the Barka Naach, imprinted in the memories of village storytellers, has been handed down from parent to child. As is inevitable due to the nature of storytelling, the Tharu version of the great epic varies in many details from the classic version, which was passed down to the people of today in Sanskrit.

The Mahabharata scholar C. Rajagopalachari (1996) describes the history of the epic as follows:

The Mahabharata was composed many years ago...but generations of gifted reciters have added to Vyasa's original a great mass of material. All the floating literature that was thought to be worth preserving, historical, geographical, legendary, political, theological and philosophical, of nearly 30 centuries, found a place in it. In those days, when there was no printing, interpolation in a recognized classic seemed to correspond to inclusion in the national library.

Is it any wonder that the Tharu, who lived in the jungles of the Tarai, illiterate and isolated from the rest of the peoples in the region, adapted the poems that they heard – maybe from itinerant storytellers – to their own lives and history? The deviations from the classic version give the Barka Naach the status of a fine example of the folkloric transmittal in epic legend in the best storytelling tradition.

Transmitting an epic orally has many effects on the story itself.

To facilitate the memorizing of long stories before printing arrived, verse was the convenient and pleasing vehicle of recitation. Moreover, verse was the customary format for transmission of many facts, traditions, and epics.

When the written form emerged, Aristotle observed:

It really lies in this: the one describes what has happened, the other what might have happened. Hence poetry is something more philosophical and more serious than history, for poetry speaks of what is universal, history of what is particular.

The differences between the classic versions of the Mahabharata and the rural versions reflect the differences between classically educated urban dwellers and hardworking villagers in the countryside.

While the classic versions were originally also recited orally, they were written down early in south Asian history (and in legend by the scribe Ganesh). Fixing the stories in writing also fixed

their contents, even though various experts may argue over the relative merits of the different versions, such as the Bengali or Bombay, Gorakhpur or Poona versions. (The Christian world's equivalent would be the many versions of the Bible's New Testament.)

The Tharu version – like countless other rural versions – is not burdened with the need to follow a single 'correct' text. The raconteur is free to add his own perception of the story in the Zeitgeist of his time. Local beliefs and customs often influence his understanding of the deities' roles. Looking for applause, the storyteller wants to captivate his illiterate farmer audience with an appealing story. He leaves out complex philosophical concepts that are hard for his listeners to remember, and that lack the appeal of the exciting action tales of loyalty and deceit, death and life, contained in the epic. To say that many princes and kings vied for the hand of Draupadi is not as compelling as describing the candidates, name by name, and revealing whether they succeeded or failed in their quest. The participants certainly came from kingdoms whose names and locations were familiar to many in the audience.

The use of repetition is a technique used by storytellers throughout the ages. In the Mahabharata it is an indispensable tool that helps the storyteller remember the thousands and thousands of couplets that make up this epic.

In the Tharu Barka Naach we find two types of repetition. The use of a one or two line refrain is found at the end of each stanza. In the Seventh Song, one of the longest, one refrain is repeated 50 times:

*Virtuous King Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

This is followed by another refrain, used 48 times:

*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

The effortless repetition of these refrains allows the raconteur to sing automatically while he digs into his memory for the next stanza.

The second type of repetition is one in which whole stanzas are repeated with only minor changes, such as the name of a person. This is prominent in the orally transmitted Tharu version and almost absent in the classic versions. We refer to one example only:

*It is the day after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it.*

In the succeeding stanzas only the number of days changes from "the day after" to "three days after," then five, seven, nine, eleven, thirteen days after. (See stanzas 6 to 18 of the First Song for another example.)

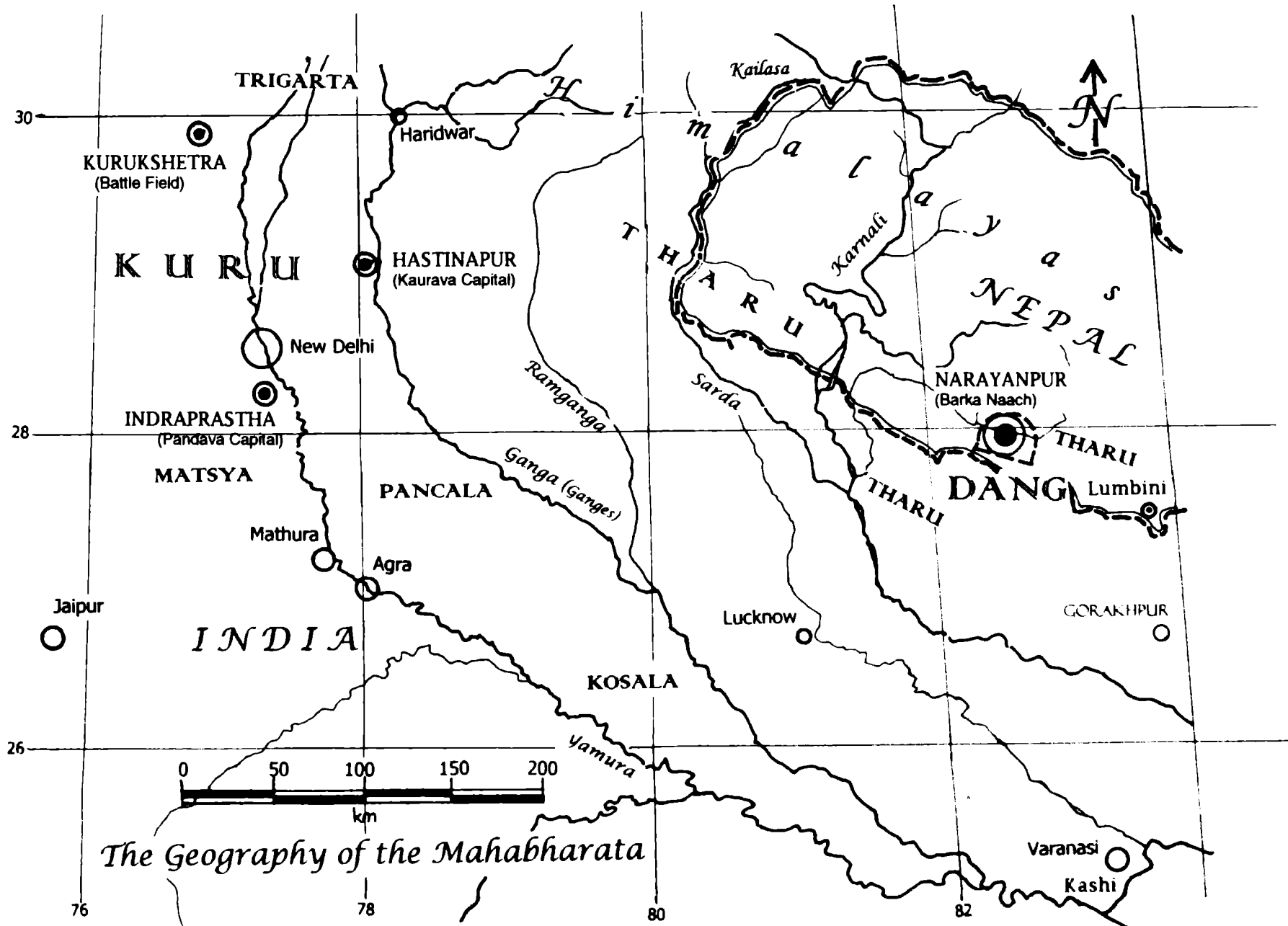
Framed within this storyteller's structure are many delightful verses that illustrate the depth of the culture and a deep understanding of life's events. Anyone who has experienced military life can appreciate how succinctly and accurately the life of a soldier is described in just a few telling words:

*The front troops fight in a watery marsh,
The central group fights in the mud,
The third group has no idea where they are,
And the last group has no idea of what they are doing.*

The Tharu manuscript of the Barkimar, or Great War, was compiled from many fragments of writing, often little more than torn pieces of pages. This resulted in a disjointed arrangement of some of the stanzas. In our text we have eliminated obvious duplications for the benefit of the reader. (Stanzas relating to and found in the Ninth Song, for example, were also found duplicated in the Tenth Song.) We then arranged the main part of the text in its traditional and logical order. Our Tharu text is a meager recounting of the detailed story of the "Great War." Considering the circumstances of its collection, it would not be too far fetched to assume that some pages were lost along the way.

With these thoughts, we invite you to enjoy reading this farmer's version of the Mahabharata, filled with the riches of folk wisdom.





The Geography of the Mahabharata



The sage Vyasa dictates the saga of the Mahabharata to his scribe Ganesha

His story is told on the following pages

THE BARKA NAACH



The Tharu Version of the Mahabharata

The texts presented here are the songs of the Barka Naach, a rural folk art version of the Mahabharata. The main text is sung by a group of singers, but all performers sing the chorus together. To help the reader put the shorter Tharu version into the context of the fuller classical story, a summary of the classic epic precedes each song. The Tharu version does not contain all the events of the Mahabharata, but concentrates on the deadly conflict between the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

A note on translation:

Meyer and Deuel coordinated the translations into English. As few modern Tharu are equally knowledgeable in English, Nepali and old Tharu, it was necessary to consult various experts, both Tharu and Nepali, for help not only in translating the words but also in clarifying the meaning within the broad cultural context. The dilemma of all translators was confronted: Is the translation to be literally correct, or is it designed to present a readable English language text? Colorful Tharu metaphors make bad reading in English. The goal of this translation is to present readable English without destroying the folk art flair of the original. It is no secret, however, that not all experts conferred with agreed on every word.

History

In ancient times King Shantanu ruled over the Kingdom of Hastinapura in the land of Bharata. As leader of the great Aryan clan, the Kuru, he was honored far and wide. With the goddess Ganga he begot a son, Devevrat. In order to enable his father to marry the beautiful young

woman Satyawati, Devevrata took a vow never to marry. With this vow, he guaranteed that (as oldest heir to the throne) he would never bear sons who would by birthright be entitled to become king. Therefore, when Satyawati bore two sons to Shantanu, the royal line transferred to these boys, Vichitraveera and Chitrangada. In turn, Vichitraveera fathered three sons: one each from his two wives and a servant girl. His wife Ambalika bore him Pandu; Ambika gave him Dhritarashtra, and Vidur was born to the servant girl.

Pandu produced five sons, and Dhritarashtra 100 sons. These cousins are the protagonists in the developing conflict of the Mahabharata.

Vidur and Devevrata, now known as Bhishma, play the roles of wise counselors at court, urging peaceful solutions to the growing animosity between the sons of the other two, Pandu and Dhritarashtra. There are countless captivating anecdotes in the complete Mahabharata which are not mentioned in the Barka Naach. (The full epic contains over 200,000 couplets.) The curious reader will find many references to the complete story in the bibliography.

Grandsons of Vichitraveera, the Pandavas and Kauravas are first cousins. The Kaurava line should have been first in succession to the throne because their father, Dhritarashtra, was first-born. But because he was blind, he was superseded in line for the crown by his younger brother, Pandu, who was declared king. When King Pandu died in a forest retreat, Dhritarashtra raised Pandu's five sons together with his own one hundred. Yudhishtir, the oldest of the five Pandava brothers, and a bit older than Duryodhan, the oldest of the 100 Kaurava brothers, became heir apparent. Duryodhan seethed with ambition to seize the crown from his older cousin, Yudhishtir, and restore it to his branch of the Kuru. Duryodhan was obsessed with this goal and would settle for nothing less than ascending the throne as the rightful ruler (in his eyes) of the entire kingdom.

As young men, the Pandavas and the Kauravas together received training in the martial arts from the kingdom's most respected master, the famous archer Drona. The conflict between the cousins was sharpened by the fact that Drona's favorite pupil was Arjun, the skilled warrior brother of the Pandavas. Arjun's older brother Bhim, the strongest of them all, intensified the conflict by constantly needling Duryodhan.

Bhishma, the Kuru family patriarch, tried to resolve the problem by splitting the kingdom in two, one half for the Kauravas, and the other for the Pandavas. This solution was no more successful here than it has been in other countries and at other times. Embittered, Duryodhan soon began scheming to destroy the Pandavas. His first plot—to kill Bhim—was thwarted. In a tournament, the strong warrior Karna, who sided with the Kauravas, was not allowed to fight Arjun because of Karna's reputed low birth. Only his mother knew that Karna was actually Arjun's oldest brother.

The Kauravas' hatred, fed by Duryodhan's obsession, grew and grew. They schemed to burn the Pandavas alive, and at this point the Tharu Barka Naach begins:



Refer to the Appendix for a chart of the Kuru family tree, where the complex relationships of the Mahabharata participants are explained.

THE OPENING SONG



SAMRAUTI

Where the dancers pay their respects to the gods, ask for protection and permission to carry out the dance.

Before the day of the actual Barka Naach performance, many preparations must be completed. Temporary shelters are erected for the *guruwas*, dancers and participants, and kitchens and teashops are set up to feed the participants and audience for as many days as the dance goes on. In the meantime, costumes are made and the performers rehearse.

When all is prepared, the Barka Naach can at last begin.

Because the Barka Naach is a major puja (worship) intended to bring blessings upon the village whose farmers perform it, the approval and assistance of the deities must first be invoked. Their approval is sought in the opening song, the Samrauti, in which the dancers hail the gods, reminding them that the puja is being performed in their honor:

Goddess Saraswati, you are the light of life.
Listen, oh elders, where shall we take our Pandava story?
Wherever it is taken and wherever it is told, Lord Vashu Dev is there.
So, oh Goddess Bhagawati, we worship you and
Humbly ask for your blessings and protection.

Only after all the gods have been greeted can the Barka Naach proceed.

Our humble salute to the Sun God of the east,
And to the many incarnations of the Goddess of the west,
And our salute to Hari of Kailash (Shiva), lord of the north.
We hail Hanuman, the destroyer of Lanka.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,

*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Goddess Saraswati, you are the light of life.
Listen, oh elders, where shall we take our story of the Pandavas?
Wherever it is taken and wherever it is told, Lord Vasuki Nag³ is there.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Oh Goddess Saraswati, to me you are the sea of knowledge,
Your precious pearls of wisdom are an ocean of wealth.
We worship Hanuman⁴, the destroyer of Lanka,
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Goddess Saraswati, you are the teacher of all teachers;
I honor my parents, and my life is guided by your wisdom.
May goodness multiply and evil perish.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

You are the goddess with golden face, you lie on a bed of brass;
Oh, golden-faced Goddess, sometimes you play priceless instruments.
When sometimes you disappear from our sight
Help us to keep our dignity, not bow our heads in shame.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Oh Goddess Saraswati, we respect you as a goddess,
In the battle field of Kurukshetra your umbrella protects Nakul.
We worship Hanuman, the destroyer of Lanka.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Oh, Goddess Saraswati, we hail you as our mother from whose blood we got life;
You have seven daughters named Satul Patul⁵, who are worshipped by us.
While walking along, you must take a rest,

³ King of the Snakes in Patallok, the underground kingdom.

⁴ Monkey God who destroyed the Kingdom of Lanka to return Sita to Ram.

⁵ "Satul" is seven, and "Patul" is Patan, which lies in India's Uttar Pradesh. In Tharu and Nath Yogi mythology, the goddess known in old Tharu as Satul Patul is Patnahi Bhawani, the Goddess of Patan, an important goddess worshipped by Tharu women.

Remembering to always pay your respects to
A hundred deities of all different religions
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Oh, Goddess Saraswati, I respect you
Who befriend a hundred and twenty five thousand deities.
I also respect all eight million four hundred thousand other deities.
And I respect the cuckoo bird who lives in the dense garden⁶.
I pray to all eight million and four hundred thousand deities
To help us in our dance.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Oh, Lord Gorakhnath, I honor you as the protector of this region
And I respect you as the protector of this border;
I respect Lord Burhi⁷ as the god of the fields.
We worship you even at the corners of the roads.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

Oh, Lord Pandavas, we hail you;
Please protect this group of dancers from evil spirits;
Oh Goddess Bhagawati, we worship you;
Please bless and protect us.

I have paid my respects to the unnamed deities
Whom I have forgotten to worship, so please protect our dancers
Who twirl round and round; protect them from evil spirits.
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*

I have paid my respects to all gods and goddesses known to me;
I cannot remember the names of yet another one hundred gods,
So please accept our offer of salutations,
So please accept our respect, oh Goddess Bhagawati,
*Relying on you, we worship you,
Hear our prayers and protect us.*



⁶ This cuckoo bird was a friend of Gauri Parvati while she was living in the Himalayas. In Tharu the story is called *phulwars*. There are many *phulwars*, i.e. Daha, Barka, etc. *Phulwar* is a mythological story about the origin of the world.

⁷ The Nepali name is *chetrapal*.

LAKHAGIRAK PAIDHAR

Where the Kauravas conspire to kill the Pandavas by burning them alive in
a house made of wax.

After various plots to eliminate the Pandavas fail, Duryodhan's schemes escalate, as he draws his entire court into the planning of the destruction of the Pandavas.

Sakuni, the brother-in-law of the blind king Dhritarashtra, masterminds the evil deeds against the Pandavas. One scheme involves inviting the five brothers to festivities in Varnavata, where they are to be housed in a special new palace. Even though he lives at the court of Dhritarashtra, the Kaurava cousin Vidur (the son of the servant girl), reveals to the Pandavas that the palace has been built from wax and other combustible materials and that the Kauravas plan to burn them alive inside the wax palace. Vidur also arranges for their escape: below the palace he built a tunnel that emerges in a nearby forest dug. Sakuni's scheme is carried out: the fire is set and destroys the palace. But Vidur's planned escape succeeds and the Pandavas save themselves by taking the underground route into the forest. Disguised as Brahmins, they stay away from the court to avoid further conflict.

This is the way the Tharu describe Sakuni's plot:

1

King Duryodhana says, "Oh, Uncle Sakuni, you must find a way,
Either one hundred or a single plot to kill all five Pandava brothers."
*King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

2

Sakuni and the King's ministers contemplate schemes;
King Duryodhan's obsession shows no sign of relenting.
There are few ways to kill the Pandavas,
But it is possible to build and set on fire a house of wax, and
By locking them inside, burn them to death.
*King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

3

Kings and priests from nations far and near must be invited, and
After a careful survey, a huge plot of land⁶ must be prepared,
Which is suitable for building the house of wax.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
*King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

⁶ 14 *yojan*, a large measurement of land.

4

All monarchs from kingdoms far and near must be invited,
 A nice plot of land must be leveled for the house of wax.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

5

Kings and priests from nations far and near must be invited, and
 A large piece of land must be leveled and flattened.
 Upon it a house of fine quality will be erected.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

6

Pearl pillars will have pearl joints.
 Let's start building the pearl pillar.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

7

Pillars of silver will have joints of silver.
 Let's start building the silver pillar.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

8

Copper pillars will have joints of copper.
 Let's start building the copper pillar.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

9

Bronze pillars will have joints of bronze.
 Let's start building the bronze pillar.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

10

Brass pillars will have joints of brass.
 Let's start building the brass pillar.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

11

Iron pillars will have joints of steel.
Let's start building the iron pillar.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

12

Solder pillars will have joints of solder.
Let's start building the solder pillar.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

13

Glass pillars will have joints of glass,
Let's start building the glass pillar.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

14

Lead pillars will have joints of lead.
Let's start building the lead pillar.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

15

Bricks pillar will have joints of brick.
Let's start building the brick pillar.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

16

Sealing wax pillars will have joints of wax.
Let's start building the wax pillar.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

17

Beautiful pillars will have beautiful joints.
Let's start building the beautiful pillars.
Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

18

All the twelve pillars are now leveled and plumbed.
 Let's build the house of wax now; let's build the house of wax!
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

19

King Duryodhana says, "Oh Uncle Sakuni,
 I offer you a handful of betel nuts in respect.
 Go invite the Pandava brothers; I have matters to discuss with them."
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

20

Uncle Sakuni mounts the elephant and
 Travels from Hastinapur towards Jaitapur.
 After dismounting the elephant, Uncle Sakuni invites the Pandavas.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

21

Four brothers, along with Uncle Sakuni, mount the elephant,
 But one brother, Shadev, refuses⁹.
 "Oh! Brother Shadev, climb up or we shall be killed by the elephant."
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

22

Four brothers along with Uncle Sakuni, dismount the elephant,
 But one brother, Shadev, refuses.
 "Oh! Brother Shadev, dismount or we shall be killed by the elephant."
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

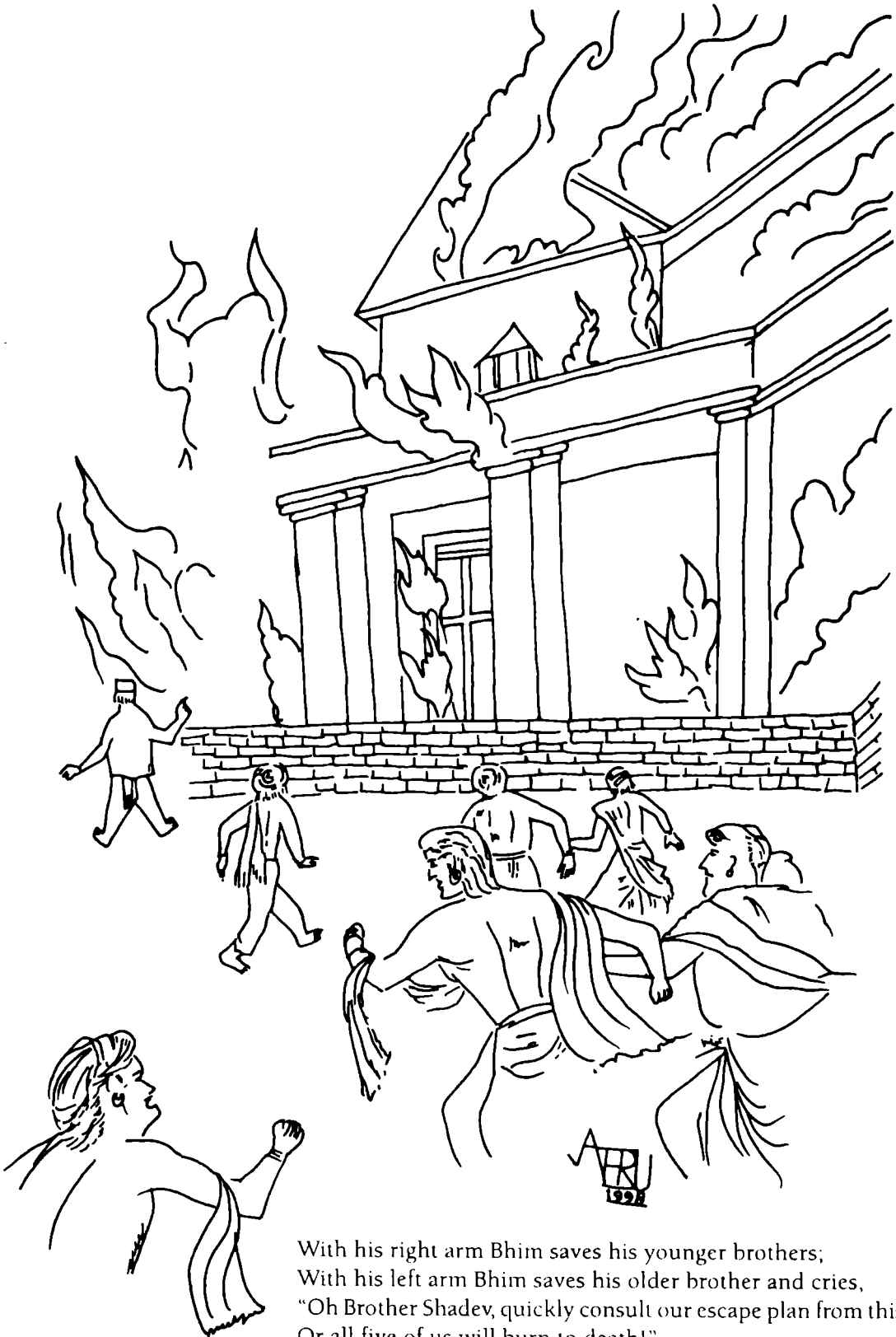
23

Four brothers along with Uncle Sakuni, enter the house of wax,
 But one brother, Shadev, still refuses: "Oh! Brother Shadev,
 Come into the house or we will be thrown on the ground and killed."
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

24

Five Pandava brothers enter the house of wax.
 "Oh Brother Dushashana, [a Kaurava prince] shut the door,
 Oh Brother Daunagir, lock the door; oh Brother Daunagir, lock the door!"

⁹ Sahadev was an intelligent scholar of astrology and knew that this invitation was part of a devious plot.



With his right arm Bhim saves his younger brothers;
With his left arm Bhim saves his older brother and cries,
"Oh Brother Shadev, quickly consult our escape plan from this house,
Or all five of us will burn to death!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

25

Fire of golden hue and latch of wood.
"Oh Brother Dushashana, turn the latch,
Oh Brother Daunagir, lock the key; oh Brother Daunagir, lock the key!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

26

Excited, Duryodhana runs towards the east,
Then he runs towards the west. Bursting with joy, he leaves the house
And jumps onto a heap of dirt¹⁰, shouting:
"The Pandava brothers are now burned to ashes!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

27

With his right arm Bhim saves his younger brothers;
With his left arm Bhim saves his older brother and cries,
"Oh Brother Shadev, quickly consult our escape plan, from this house,
Or all five of us will burn to death!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

28

Shadev reviews the plan and says,
"The pearl pillar is our way to salvation;
Whoever knows about it can escape underground,
Through a tunnel with a very low roof."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

29

With his left arm Bhim saves his brothers;
And with his right arm he pulls the pillar out.
Pulling the pillar out, they enter the tunnel.
Pulling the pillar out, they escape underground.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*



¹⁰ "Jumping on a heap of dirt" is a metaphor that means that the scheme of killing the Pandavas is a dirty, immoral act

JATIYAK PAIDHAR

Danu the Giant's encounter with the Pandavas on their way to Jaitapur
after escaping the burning house of wax.

The forest is dark and teeming with wild animals and creatures. While he hunts for food, Bhim encounters the demon queen Hidimba, who falls in love with him. In order to win her, Bhim must first fight her evil brother. After winning the tremendous struggle, Bhim takes Hidimba as his wife. Hidimba and Bhim proceed together until they reach the point where she must stay behind because she is a forest creature. Before parting, she bears Bhim a son, Ghatotkacha, who later on plays a key role in the great war. Travelling on alone, Bhim next encounters Danu, a ferocious giant who controls the water supply and feeds on humans. From time to time he commands the nearby villagers to sacrifice one of their own to satisfy his craving for human flesh. When Yudhishtir sends Bhim to fetch water for the Pandavas, he cannot avoid confronting Danu, who devours him although he promises "not to use his teeth." It seems that Bhim has died, but he manages to cut his way out of Danu's stomach and returns to his siblings and his distraught mother Kunti in disguise – to them he must next prove that he really is Bhim.

The gory story of Danu is told by the Tharu in verse form:

1
How will the Pandavas feed themselves and survive?
They must beg from door to door.
People give them alms, which they reluctantly accept;
Instead of handing out alms as kings, this time they must accept them.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king, and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

2
The Pandavas pool their alms together,
Search for firewood and gather green leaves.
Nakul fetches cold water and Arjun prepares the porridge.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king, and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

3
When Nakul goes to fetch water in a golden kettle,
Danu the giant threatens, "Go away or I shall eat all five of you at once!"
King Yudhishtir is a pious king, and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

4
Nakul goes to fetch water in a golden kettle,
Danu the giant threatens,
"Who are you to fetch water from MY pond?
I am going to eat all five of you in one bite!"

*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

Danu says to the Pandavas,
I am famished; if you come to fetch water,
With twenty people, I will eat all twenty at once.
If you come with ten people, I will eat all ten at once,
If you come with five people I will eat all five at once,
And if you come alone, I will eat you at once.
No one can escape!

5

Bhim goes to fetch water in a golden kettle,
Danu the giant threatens,
"Who are you to fetch water from MY pond?
I will eat all five of you at once!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

6

Arjun goes to fetch water in a golden kettle,
Danu the giant threatens,
"If you want to fetch water from this pond,
First I will eat one of you to satisfy my hunger!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned,*

7

Yudhishtir goes to fetch water in a golden kettle,
Danu the giant threatens:
"Who are you to fetch water from this pond?
I will eat all of you five at once!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

8

Yudhishtir thinks, "If I sacrifice Nakul, I will lose a brother.
If I sacrifice Shadev, I will lose a scholar.
If I sacrifice myself, a kingdom will be lost."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

9

Yudhishtir continues,
"If I sacrifice Bhim, I will lose my strength.
If I sacrifice Arjun, I will lose my arms and weapons.
If I sacrifice myself, a kingdom will be lost."

SECOND SONG

*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

10

King Yudhishtir plants a stick in the middle of the river.
This stick will 'speak' and decide.
"Beem-beem-beem" the stick sounds.
"Oh Bhim! Listen, your name¹¹ has been called."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandava's kingdom will be returned.*

11

"Bheem - bheem!" the stick sounds.
"Oh Bhim! Listen to your name.
Oh Bhim! Now you will be Danu's dinner!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

12

"My mother, Queen Kunti, is your sister, so you are my uncle,
And I am your nephew.
Therefore, Uncle, while you eat me, do not use your teeth.
Oh Uncle Danu, do not use your teeth to eat me."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

13

"Queen Kunti is my sister, I am your uncle,
And you are my nephew.
Oh Nephew, I will not use even a single tooth to eat you."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

14

Bhim sits down with his legs folded, and
Danu opens his mouth and swallows him;
Bhim has become Danu's meal.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

15

First Yudhishtir searches to the north;
Then King Yudhishtir searches to the south.
All the time the King cries out, calling for his brother.
"Alas! My brother is in exile by himself."

¹¹ Yudhishtir is convinced that only Bhim has the strength to kill Danu and sets up the test so that Bhim is chosen.

*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the 'Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

16

"I have eaten and digested a hundred worms;
I ate this worm called Bhim and I now have a stomach pain.
I'll drink a barrel and a half of water to digest this worm."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

17

Bhim cuts Danu's liver and blocks the rectum.
He cuts the lungs and blocks the giant's mouth.
Ripping open his stomach, Bhim emerges;
Striking out on his left foot, Bhim heads for home.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

18

At times Bhim looks in the north;
At times Bhim looks in the south.
At times Bhim cries out for his older brother:
"Woe is me! I am the only brother alone in exile."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

19

Bhim makes crutches from two tree branches;
Tearing a scarf, he ties a sacred thread around his neck,
And disguises himself as a Brahmin priest.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

20

Only four brothers reach Jaitapur, where
Queen Mother Kunti demands the true story.
"Dear sons, you have been to Hastinapur.
What did you do there?"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

21

"Oh Mother, we went to Hastinapur, and
The Kauravas locked us inside a house of wax and set it on fire.
By pulling out the ruby pillar, we escaped underground,
But afterwards Bhim was eaten by Danu the giant."

(Chorus)

Oh Mother, for the last rites of brother Bhim,
Where will we find a priest?
Oh! If Danu has finished Bhim as his meal,
For his last rites where will we find a priest?

22

Duhariya the messenger sets off to find a priest in Jaitpur.
After killing Danu, Bhim walks towards home, and
They meet in the middle of the road.
*King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

Oh Duhariya, where are you going?
I am going in a search of a priest
For the last rites of our brother Bhim.
Oh Duhariya, I am a priest.

23

Duhariya returns with a priest, who begins his rites.
When the priest finishes his duties, he says,
"Bring food for the priest."
*King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

24

Mother Kunti says,
"When the lentils are served, you eat lentils.
When rice is served, you eat rice.
You eat like my son Bhim use to eat, oh priest!"
*King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

25

Bhim replies,
"Oh Mother Kunti! Your eyes are blind.
You mourn your son who is alive,
You do not recognize your own son."
*King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

26

Bhim continues,
"Pluck seven leaves of *purain*¹² and bring them to me.
If you don't believe me, Mother,

¹² A plant similar to the lotus.

Lay them over my mouth and sprinkle your milk over them."
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

27

Kunti says,
 "Duworiya, bring me seven leaves of *purain*,
 And lay them over his mouth.
 Mother Kunti will sprinkle her milk over them
 And it will pass through the leaves to his mouth."
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

28

Duworiya brings seven leaves of *purain*
 And lays them over Bhim's mouth;
 Mother Kunti sprinkles her milk over them.
 Tearing a hole through the leaves, the milk goes straight into his mouth.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

29

"Oh dear Son, if you had revealed yourself before,
 I would have cooked 52 kinds of fritters just for you,
 To satisfy your appetite," says Kunti.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom will be returned.

30

She concludes,
 "I must have done good deeds in my previous life,
 A hundred good deeds come back to me.
 Now my five sons are together again,
 My five sons are together again."
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.



RAU BEDHAK PAIDHAR

In which Princess Draupadi selects a husband at her Swayamvara.

In a neighboring kingdom, the powerful monarch King Draupad has a daughter of marrying age, Princess Draupadi. Following the customs of the day he arranges a *swayamvara*. At a *swayamvara*, the father of the bride-to-be invites all eligible bachelors from suitable families to present themselves to the princess and display their skill and talents before her. From among these contenders, the Princess will select one man to be her husband. A central test of this particular *swayamvara* is to be a challenging test of the suitors' skill in archery. Draupadi protests when she sees the difficult contest her father has chosen for the selection of her future husband.

It will take a lifetime for me to wed,
If I fail to marry in my youth!

After a mansion is built for the *swayamvara*, hundreds of eligible bachelors of suitable background, among them the five Pandavas, all in disguise, assemble to compete for Draupadi's hand in marriage. King Draupad has set up a target that is almost impossible to hit, a *rau* bird¹³. (The description of the challenge varies from version to version of the Mahabharata, but the essence remains the same.)

All the kings and the 100 Kauravas have failed when Karna steps forth. A master archer who can hit the target, he is about to shoot when Draupadi halts him, crying out, "I will not marry a charioteer's son! I will not allow a commoner to vie for my hand!" Mortified, Karna steps back in shame.

Nobody succeeds in hitting the target, and the princess becomes more and more worried that she will never find a suitable husband. Finally, a Brahmin steps forward and hits the target: it is Arjun, who has competed incognito in the classic version, but in this Tharu version it is Bhim, who has long been a favorite of the Tharu, and is still today. When the Pandavas' true identity is revealed, a brief scuffle takes place, but the fact remains: a Pandava has once again bested the Kauravas. The Pandavas' mother Kunti reminds Bhim and his four brothers that they have promised to share equally "all of the fruits of life"; consequently Princess Draupadi becomes the wife of all five brothers.

Heart-broken, King Duryodhana grudgingly accepts the outcome, but he seethes with hatred for the Pandavas.

1

Unadorned by the *bebri*¹⁴ flower, we ignorantly surrender at your feet.
Oh Goddess of wealth and prosperity¹⁵, keep us in your heart.
Oh Goddess Bhagawati, relying on you, we want to take shelter in your name.
We are devoted to your faith and, accepting our adoration, please protect us.

¹³ The *rau* bird is not a live bird, but a target which looks like a bird.

¹⁴ *Bebri* is a fragrant flower the Tharu wear at Dasai pujas.

¹⁵ Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity.

2

The daughter of King Draupad, Princess Draupadi,
Is in the prime of her youth.
Breaking the tradition of marriage is as difficult
As a drunken elephant breaking a chain
Or a new mother tigress killing a cow.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

3

Priests and kings must be summoned from states all around,
And a large site chosen, surveyed, and prepared.
It should be the best site for the wedding hall and Draupadi's court.
The royal court of King Draupad must be the finest.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

4

Oh King, command that plows be brought from all around
To till and flatten a vast plot of land
Worthy of your great stature,
To hold the royal court of King Draupad
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

5

Oh King, summon cow dung plasterers¹⁶ from near and far,
And let them plaster the flattened ground to purify it.
Here the Royal Court of King Draupad will be held,
And must be worthy of your great stature.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

6

On top of the hill the royal palace shall be a sign, announcing
That an exquisite mansion will be built to host the Royal Court.
"I will give my daughter's hand in marriage to the great man
Who hits the beautiful rau bird to win Princess Draupadi,"
Says King Draupad.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

7

The King continues,
"If anyone finds it difficult to identify a rau bird as beautiful as Princess Draupadi,
He shall go to see Princess Draupadi with his own eyes.
A sign from the heaven above will be given.
To the great person who hits the rau bird with the first arrow
Shot from his bow, I will give my daughter's hand in marriage."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

¹⁶ A mixture of clay and cow dung is used to finish the walls of houses and smooth the floors.

8

In despair, Princess Draupadi laments,
"It will take a lifetime for me to marry, and
If I fail to wed in the prime of my youth,
I will be unmarried forever!"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

9

King Draupad comforts Princess Draupadi,
"Don't be impatient; be calm.
Everything comes in its own time, and
Just like the turning of a potter's wheel,
Our rau bird will make its round."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

10

Fourteen hundred great men have been invited.
Who cannot identify a rau bird as pretty as Princess Draupadi?
The one who hits the rau bird with his first arrow
Shall marry Princess Draupadi.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

11

Over twelve leagues of beautiful land
Patrol fourteen hundred soldiers and kings.
The great person able to hit the rau bird with his first shot
Shall win Princess Draupadi.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

12

Of all the Kaurava braves, Prince Dronacharya arrives, dressed to compete and
Determined to hit the rau bird like the skilled archer he is,
And to see the target, saying,
"I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to see how pretty she is,
And to observe the target."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

13

Hundreds of braves have arrived.
Daunagir declares, "I shall not be late, I will wed Princess Draupadi.
I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

14

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky.
The bound rau bird lowers its head in sadness¹⁷, but

¹⁷ The rau bird here is a metaphor for Draupadi, who is the one who lowers her head in sadness.

The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.
 In frustration, Prince Daunagir flings his arrows
 Down onto the ground.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

15

(Chorus)

Alas! The arrow I shot was empowered by the mantras;
 Somehow the rau bird tricked me, and my aim fell short
 Fate has cheated me of Princess Draupadi,
 Prince Dronacharya explains.

16

Among the Kaurava princes, the foolish prince arrives
 Full of desire to hit the rau bird like a skilled archer.
 "I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to see how pretty she is,
 And to observe the target."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

17

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,
 As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.
 The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.
 Oh foolish prince, you know you are not a skilled archer,
 So why are you so frustrated that
 You fling your arrows down on the ground?
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

18

Hundreds of you braves have arrived!
 I shall not be late, I will win Princess Draupadi.
 I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi, and bring her home.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

19

King Sakuni arrives, full of desire to hit the rau bird like a skilled archer.
 He arrives wearing his fighting attire and declares,
 "I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to find out how pretty she is,
 And to observe the target."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

20

"Come, one and all, and don't be late!" says Sakuni.
 "I am going to win Princess Draupadi.
 I shall hit the rau bird and wed Princess Draupadi."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

21

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,
As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.
The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.
In frustration, King Sakuni flings his arrows
Down onto the ground.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

22

King Chuchanka arrives, full of desire to hit the rau bird like a skilled archer.
He arrives wearing his fighting attire and declares,
"I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target.
I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to find out how pretty she is."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

23

"Come one by one, and don't be late," encourages King Sapkewa.
"I am going to win Princess Draupadi.
I shall hit the rau bird and wed Princess Draupadi!"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

24

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,
As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.
The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.
In frustration, King Sapkewa flings his arrows
Down onto the ground.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

25

Many superior kings arrive, full of desire to hit the rau bird like skilled archers.
They arrive wearing their fighting attire and declare,
"We want to see Princess Draupadi for ourselves to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

26

"Come, one and all, and don't be late!" says King Hasta.
"I am going to win Princess Draupadi.
I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home!"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

27

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,
As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.
The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.
In frustration the superior king flings his arrows

Down onto the ground.

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

28

King Bidur arrives, full of desire to hit the rau bird like a skilled archer.

He arrives wearing his fighting attire and declares,

"I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target."

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

29

"Come one by one, and don't be late," encourages King Vidur.

"I am going to win Princess Draupadi!

I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home."

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

30

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,

As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.

The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.

In frustration King Bidur flings his arrows

Down onto the ground.

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

"Alas! The arrow I shot was empowered by the mantras;

Somehow the rau bird tricked me, and my aim fell short

Fate has cheated me of Princess Draupadi,"

Prince Vidur explains.

31

King Vagdanta arrives, full of desire to hit the rau bird like a skilled archer.

He arrives wearing his fighting attire and declares,

"I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target."

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

32

"Oh great men, one and all, don't be late!" says the great man Vagdanta.

"I am going to win Princess Draupadi.

I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home!"

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

33

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,

As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.

The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.

In frustration, King Vagdanta flings his arrows

THIRD SONG

Down onto the ground.

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

34

King Balabhadra arrives, full of desire to hit the rau bird like a skilled archer.

He arrives wearing his fighting attire and declares,

“I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target.”

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

35

“Oh great deities, don't be late!” he calls after arriving.

“I shall win Princess Draupadi.

I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home.”

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

36

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,

As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.

The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.

In frustration, King Balabhadra flings his arrows

Down onto the ground:

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

37

Countless kings now arrive, full of desire to hit the rau bird like skilled archers.

They arrive wearing their fighting attire and declare,

“We want to see Princess Draupadi for ourselves to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target.”

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

38

“Oh gentlemen, don't delay, come here!” call the many kings.

“If not, we shall win Princess Draupadi.

We shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and take her home.”

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

39

“Come, all great sages from near and far!” they say.

“We shall win Princess Draupadi.

We shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home.”

The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

40

They release their arrows, which soar up to the sky

As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.

The arrows miss their mark and shatter into pieces.

In frustration, the braves fling their arrows
Down onto the ground.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

41

The eldest Kaurava, Prince Duryodhan, arrives,
Full of desire to hit the rau bird like a skilled archer.
He arrives wearing his fighting attire and declares,
"I want to see Princess Draupadi for myself to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

42

"Come warriors, one and all; don't delay!" says Prince Duryodhan.
"I am going to win Princess Draupadi, meeting the test of King Draupad
I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

43

He releases his arrow, which soars up to the sky,
As the tied rau bird lowers its head in sadness.
The arrow misses its mark and shatters into pieces.
In frustration, King Duryodhan flings his arrows
Down onto the ground.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

(Chorus)

Alas! The arrow I shot was empowered by the mantras
Alas! The rau bird as-pretty-as Princess Draupadi tricked me.
My aim was not good enough, and it is not my fate
To win Princess Draupadi, says Prince Duryodhan.

44

The brave Pandavas also want to compete, to hit the rau bird like skilled archers.
They arrive wearing their fighting attire and declare,
"We want to see Princess Draupadi for ourselves to find out how pretty she is,
And to observe the target."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

45

"Oh gentlemen, don't delay, come here!" says King Padovir.
"If not, the Pandavas shall win Princess Draupadi.
I shall hit the rau bird, wed Princess Draupadi and bring her home."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

46

After watching the efforts of the kings and princes,
Princess Draupadi becomes furious.

THIRD SONG

Princess Draupadi stands up and scolds
Duryodhan, the eldest Kaurava brother.
"Because you failed to hit the target, symbol of my beauty,
You leave me unmarried forever!"

47

Duryodhan says,
"Who are you to speak such vile words?
Many princes, warriors, gods and sages are crestfallen by their failure
Because their arrows did not reach the target.
You dare to foretell your fate as an old maid?"

48

Draupadi continues,
"I am in the prime of my youth, but no one has yet won my hand in marriage!
I will be left unmarried. For twelve years I have been unmarried!
Now who shall ask for my hand in marriage?"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

49

In response to this insult hurled by Princess Draupadi
Sakuni looks around at the royal court.
He finds everyone present except the five Pandava brothers,
So he decrees that only brave warriors be allowed to compete.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

50

Of all five Pandava brothers, Bhim is the most furious.
At hearing these insults, he says, "I shall quickly go,
And, if allowed by my older brother,
I will hit the hanging target with my arrow!"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

51

Like someone staring at a snake, the oldest prince, Yudhishtir,
Stares at Bhim with accusing eyes and says,
"Patience! A cup of hot milk must be cooled before sipped.
If you drink it hot, it scalds your lips."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

52

To test the interest of brave Prince Karna,
Arjun makes a pair of crutches out of a staff,
Drapes a fake holy thread around his shoulder,
And poses as a Brahmin priest.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

53

Crutches under his arm, and holy thread across his chest,
Arjun goes to see brave Prince Karna.
A meeting takes place with Prince Karna and
Arjun asks to be given his secret knowledge of warfare as alms.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

54

Arjun says, " Oh brave Prince Karna, give me all of your knowledge
Of warfare in exchange for all of my wealth.
Give me your knowledge of weapons as alms
And in return I'll give you all my land."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

55

Brave Prince Karna replies,
"I will give you my knowledge of warfare as alms, in exchange for your wealth.
I will give you my knowledge of weapons as alms, and shall ask for your land."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

56

Karna continues,
"I will give my knowledge of weapons as alms,
But then I must be allowed to marry Princess Draupadi."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

57

Arjun says,
"I am a priest, and she is our priestess.
How dare you ask for our priestess!
Now, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra¹⁸ there shall be a great battle,
And a river of blood will flow from this fight!"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

58

Karna responds,
"I was ready to trade my knowledge of weapons for wealth and land,
But he was not a Brahmin priest; he was Arjun.
Now, on the battlefield of Kurukshetra, there shall be a great battle;
And a river of blood will flow from this fight!"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

59

Because of the bitter argument between Arjun and Karna,
Arjun must find another way.
Escorted by Uncle Krishna, Arjun fetches water with a golden pot,

¹⁸ The site of the ultimate battle between the Pandavas and Kauravas (Tenth Song).

And asks his uncle, " Oh Uncle, fill my brain with the knowledge and wisdom
That will win me Princess Draupadi in marriage."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

60

Arjun says,
"Oh dear Uncle, my mother, Princess Kunti, is your sister;
You are my uncle and I am your nephew; I will follow your wisdom.
Oh Uncle, give me knowledge and wisdom."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

61

Krishna replies,
"Princess Kunti is my sister, you are my nephew,
I am your uncle, and you have followed my teachings;
Dear Nephew, heed the wisdom and knowledge I have given you."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

62

Looking at the rau bird's reflection in the water,
Bhim shoots his arrow and hits the rau bird.
Overcome with joy at his success, Bhim stands motionless,
And Princess Draupadi also stands up.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

63

When Princess Draupadi hears that she will be married to Bhim,
She climbs into his chariot; gently escorting her, Bhim holds her arm
And proclaims, "Now Princess Draupadi is mine!"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

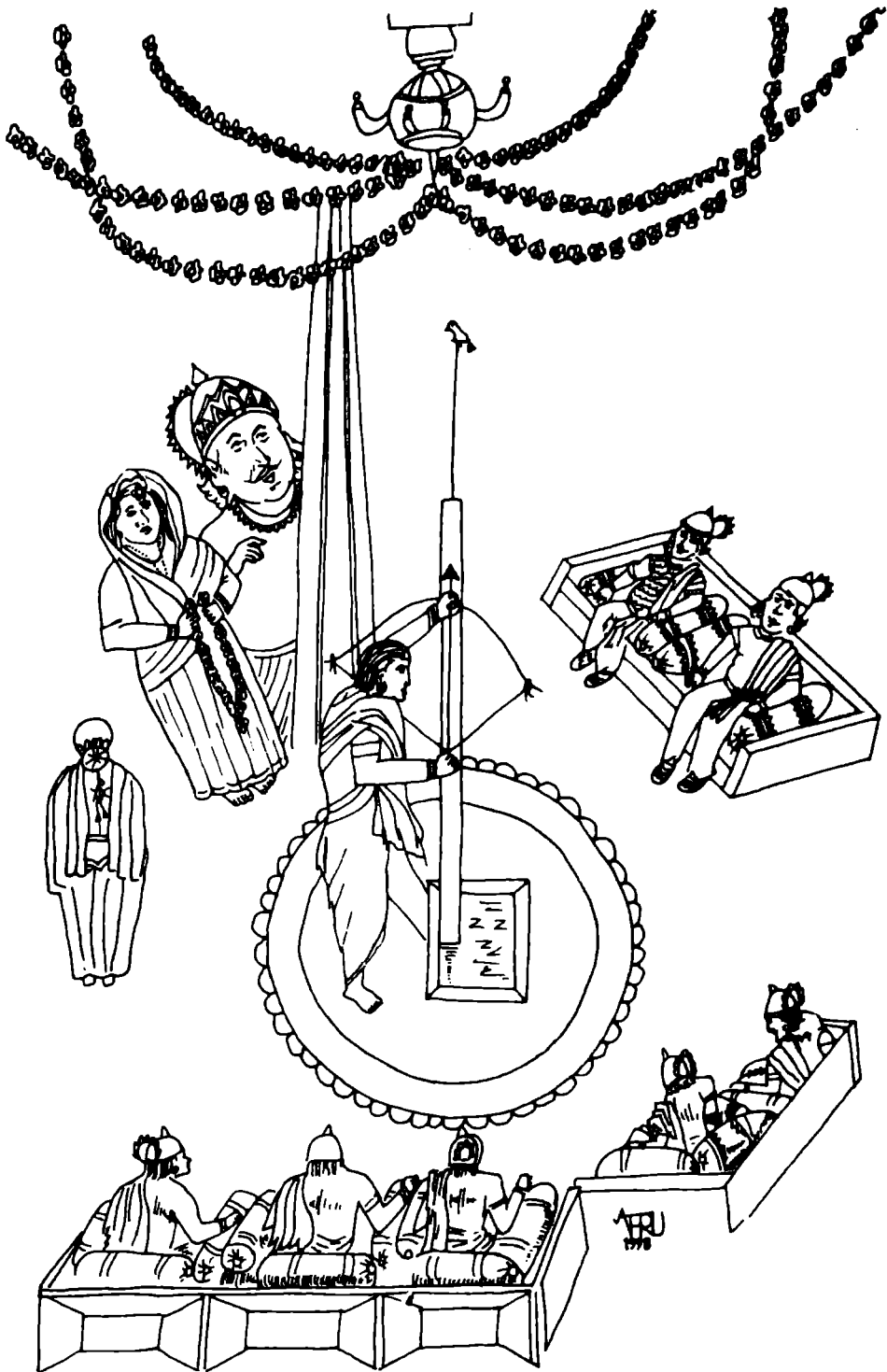
64

Walking quickly, four steps ahead of his four brothers,
Bhim asks his mother,
"Oh Mother, I have found a fruit,
And with your permission I will eat it alone."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

65

Queen Kunti says,
"Five sons of mine, and all five of you are equally dear to me.
None of you five is without my love;
Therefore, all five of you must equally share that fruit.¹⁹"
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

¹⁹ It is not clear if Kunti knows that the "fruit" to share is actually Draupadi, won in the Barka Naach by Bhim but in the classic version by Arjun. Polyandry was common in Buddhist Tibet but rare in Hindu India.



Looking at the rau bird's reflection in the water,
 Bhim shoots his arrow and hits the rau bird.
 Overcome with joy at his success, Bhim stands motionless,
 And Princess Draupadi also stands up.
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

66

Bhim replies,
"If it were anyone else, I would tear open her belly,
Or slap her across the face, but, because you are my mother,
Queen Kunti, I shall let it pass.
Oh Queen Kunti, I shall let it pass."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

67

Queen Kunti speaks,
"If it were anyone else, you would tear open their belly,
Or slap them across the face.
Let it be, oh, let it be! I am your mother Kunti."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.

68

Queen Kunti speaks,
"I must have performed many good deeds in my previous lifetimes,
With hundreds more good deeds to come in the future;
All the brothers will sleep in one room."
The one chosen by Princess Draupadi will be immortal forever.



PASHAWARAK PAIDHAR

Where the Pandavas lose everything they have in a crooked game of dice.

After Bhim wins Draupadi at her swayamvara, Yudhishtir conducts the 'Imperial Sacrifice,' the ceremony with which he formally assumes the title of Imperial Ruler over all other kings of ancient India. He is now the undisputed King of Indraprastha and suzerain ruler over countless kingdoms. Duryodhan, invited to the ritual as a courtesy, burns with jealousy at the sight of the Pandavas' prosperity, which he sees everywhere around him in their capital. He wants to seize the kingship for himself and proposes to defeat the Pandavas in war before they become too powerful to overcome.

His uncle Sakuni, however, advises him against war; "I know a way to drive Yudhishtir out of Indraprastha without fighting or shedding blood" goes the traditional Mahabharata story. Sakuni proposes to take advantage of the Pandava king's love of gambling to win the kingdom: "Yudhishtir is fond of dice, but being unskillful, he is altogether ignorant of the tricks used by clever gamblers. If we invite him, he will accept. I know the tricks of the game and I shall play on your behalf. Yudhishtir will be as helpless as a child against me, and I will win his kingdom and wealth for you without shedding a drop of blood." In the Tharu version, Duryodhan himself gambles against Yudhishtir, with continual advice from Sakuni.

As expected, Yudhishtir accepts Duryodhan's invitation, and play begins. Sakuni has predicted correctly: Yudhishtir loses each throw of the dice, and soon loses everything he owns—his kingdom, his people, his brothers and ultimately, their bride Draupadi. The victorious Kauravas disgrace the Pandavas, who now become slaves. Above all, Draupadi is shamed and humiliated by the Kauravas' attempts to disrobe her. Enraged, Bhim vows revenge, which he will later exact at the great battle of Kurukshetra.

For the moment, cooler heads prevail, and it is decided that rather than becoming slaves to the Kauravas, the Pandavas will go into exile for twelve years in the jungle, and spend a thirteenth year outside the jungle incognito. If they are recognized by anyone, the Pandavas will have to endure another twelve years of exile.

1

Unadorned by a bebi flower, we ignorantly surrender at your feet.
 Oh goddess of wealth and prosperity, keep us in your heart.
 Oh Goddess Bhagawati, relying on you, we want to take shelter in your name,
 We are devoted to you; accepting our adoration, please protect us.

2

Then Duryodhan, the oldest Kaurava prince, demands,
 "Uncle Sakuni, we must do something—
 Find a plot to kill the Pandava brothers
 So their kingdom becomes ours."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

3

Sakuni replies,
"The Kauravas and Pandavas are cousins, the sons of two sisters.
How can I possibly find a way?
Oh Nephew, how can I find a way; how can I find a way?"
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

4

Duryodhan says,
"Oh Uncle Sakuni, we must find a way to poison them so that
When we eat water rice, the parrot lives,
But when the Pandavas eat, the parrot dies."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

5

All the ministers, including Sakuni, search for a scheme,
But Prince Duryodhan utters not a word.
There are many ways to kill the Pandavas;
They can be defeated in a game of dice.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

6

Duryodhan says,
"Call Vidur²⁰ to deliver the invitation.
He will invite the Pandava brothers to discuss royal matters with us."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

7

The doorkeeper calls,
"Vidur! Vidur! Oh Vidur, come quickly.
You are summoned by Prince Duryodhan to discuss politics."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

8

Prince Duryodhan takes a seat on one side,
As Vidur will arrive shortly.
"Oh Prince Duryodhan, Prince Vidur is at the door."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

²⁰ The brother of Pandu and Dhritarashtra.

9

Duryodhan speaks,

“Doorkeeper, go home, it is an ordinary meeting.
Doorkeeper, go home, we will just discuss day-to-day matters.”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

10

These are the words of Prince Duryodhan:

“Oh Vidur, listen. I hand you this betel nut *paan*²¹ to deliver;
The Pandava brothers must be invited.”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

11

Vidur replies,

“Oh Brother, I do not want to go to the Pandavas’ doorstep.
Bhim is hot-tempered; what if he strikes me?”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

12

Vidur continues,

“I have been given this wicked task;
I wish I could refuse it without fearing Prince Duryodhan.”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

13

The doorkeeper says,

“Prince Yudhishtir is seated on one side, Vidur’s seat on the other;
Oh Prince Yudhishtir, listen, Minister Vidur is arriving shortly.”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

14

King Yudhishtir says,

“Doorkeeper, go home. It is just a courtesy meeting.
Doorkeeper, go home; we will talk only about routine matters.
Wish us happiness and prosperity, and accept our respects and best wishes.”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

15

Yudhishtir continues,

“Tell me if all your family members are happy and prosperous.

²¹ Chopped betel nut, when wrapped inside a green *paan* leaf together with lime paste and spices, is presented as a ritual offering.

Are Prince Duryodhan and all one hundred brothers well and fine?
Tell me that Mother Gandhari is happy and prosperous too."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

16

Vidur replies,
"All our family members are happy and prosperous,
Prince Duryodhan is well; all one hundred brothers are fine,
And Mother Gandhari is also prosperous and happy."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

17

Vidur says,
"Tell me that all your family members are happy and prosperous,
That you, Prince Yudhishtir, and your brothers are fine.
And tell me that Mother Kunti is well and prosperous too."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

18

Yudhishtir replies,
"All our family members are happy and prosperous.
Prince Yudhishtir is well; all five brothers are fine,
And Mother Kunti is also prosperous and happy."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

19

Prince Yudhishtir insists on a large comfortable seat for Vidur;
He himself sits on an ordinary mat,
And greets Vidur with the highest respect.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

20

Vidur stands up and speaks, "Oh Prince Yudhishtir, listen; you are invited
By Prince Duryodhan to discuss political matters together."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

21

The Pandavas accept Vidur's invitation and set out for the palace.
Drums and music are played in both palaces,
In the government offices, and in the house of Lord Kailash [Shiva].
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

22

Yudhishthir walks in front of his four brothers;
 He does not know the real reason for the invitation.
 Oh Brother Sahadev, use your knowledge;
 We wish to know if our visit is auspicious.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishthir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

23

Prince Duryodhan takes a seat on one side,
 Seats are set up for the Pandava brothers on the other.
 "Oh Prince Duryodhan, listen; the five Pandavas stand at the door."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishthir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

24

Simple seats are offered to these great men, the Pandavas;
 While the Kauravas take regal thrones for themselves,
 And greet the Pandavas with disdain.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishthir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

25

Duryodhan says,
 "Doorkeeper, go home. It is just a courtesy meeting.
 Doorkeeper, go home; we will talk only about good will."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishthir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

26

"All our family members are happy and prosperous,
 Tell me, Prince Yudhishthir, that you and your brothers are fine;
 Tell me that your mother Kunti is also prosperous and happy."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishthir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

27

Yudhishthir replies,
 "All the family members are happy and prosperous,
 And I am fine myself. All of us are well,
 And our mother Queen Kunti is also prosperous and well."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishthir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

28

"I have told you about our well-being and prosperity,
 Now tell me, how is everything with you?
 Tell me that all your family members are happy and prosperous

And, Prince Duryodhan, that your hundred brothers are fine.
And tell me Mother Gandhari is happy and prosperous too."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

29

Duryodhan replies,
"All our family members are happy and prosperous,
And I am fine myself. All one hundred brothers are well,
And our mother, Queen Gandhari, is also prosperous and well."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

30

He proposes,
"Listen, oh Prince Yudhishtir, while the meal is being prepared,
Let's play a game of dice."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

31

Duryodhan continues,
"I will gamble with all the property and wealth I own;
You too must wager everything you possess.
I will stake my entire kingdom in this game;
You too must wager your entire kingdom."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

32

Duryodhan plays a trick²² and requests that
Bhim from the Pandava side and Dushashan from his side
Go to fetch water from the root of a tree with a pail.
Suspicious of the Kauravas, Bhim is furious and is ready to start a fight.

33²³

Bhim tries to pour water into the top of the pail,
And then he tries to put water in from below,
But the pail will not hold any water.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

²² To keep Bhim, with his violent temper and huge strength, away from the crooked game.

²³ The following stanzas imply that even wise people must use their common sense or they will fail. Yudhishtir was a wise and religious man, but he didn't use good judgement while gambling against his crafty cousin. Bhim was strong, but he didn't use his common sense when he went to fetch water with a pail with a hole in its bottom.

34

"We will play this game of chance, and we will drink cold water.
The winner becomes the ruler of the Kingdom of Hastinapur,
And the loser must go into exile in the forest for twelve years."
Says Duryodhan. "This agreement is made between us."

35

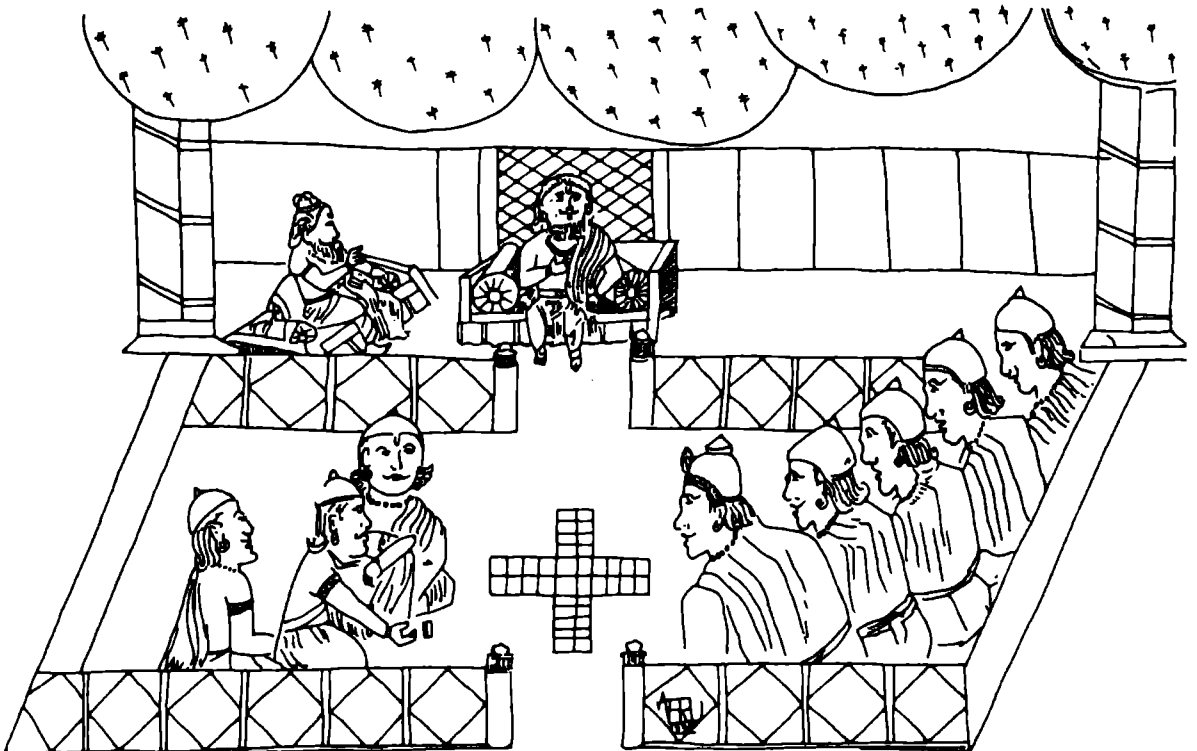
The first turn is rolled by Yudhishtir; next is Duryodhan.
Yudhishtir wins this roll, and Duryodhan loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

36

"Sakuni! Sakuni!" whispers Duryodhan,
"Come quickly and bring your crooked dice along with you.
Let's eliminate the risk and carry out our scheme."
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

37

Duryodhan rolls the next turn, and Yudhishtir rolls after him.
Duryodhan wins this roll, and Yudhishtir loses again.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*



38

Yudhishtir puts down his earrings as his stake,
And Duryodhan matches him with his own earrings.
Again Duryodhan wins the roll, and Yudhishtir loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

39

Next, Yudhishtir puts down his shirt as the stake,
And Duryodhan puts down his shirt as his stake.
Again Duryodhan wins the roll and Yudhishtir loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

40

Yudhishtir puts down his robes as the stake,
And Duryodhan puts his robes down, too.
Duryodhan wins this roll, and Yudhishtir loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

41

Yudhishtir puts his waist belt down as his stake,
And Duryodhan does the same.
Duryodhan wins this roll, and Yudhishtir loses again.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

42

Next, Yudhishtir wagers his slippers,
And Duryodhan also wagers his slippers as his bet.
Duryodhan wins this roll, and Yudhishtir loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

43

Yudhishtir puts down his toe rings as the bet, and
Duryodhan matches them with his own.
Again Duryodhan wins the roll and Yudhishtir loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

44

Yudhishtir wagers his entire kingdom as the bet,
And Duryodhan wagers his kingdom too.
Again Duryodhan wins this roll and Yudhishtir loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

45

Yudhishtir removes the crown from his head as his stake, and
 Duryodhan puts down his crown as his stake.
 Duryodhan wins this roll, and again Yudhishtir loses.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

46

You have lost the game of dice, oh Yudhishtir!
 You have lost the entire wealth of the treasury,
 You have lost everyone's beloved Draupadi,
 And you suffer as if you were struck by a sword.
 Now you must live in the jungle for twelve years.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

47

Bhim finally returns from fetching water.
 Angry, he grabs King Duryodhan and heaves him aside.
 And he grabs Dushasan and throws him aside too.
 "You have tricked us into losing!"
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

48

"I will throw your crooked dice onto the ground
 And smash them with my battle club²⁴!
 You have made us lose this crooked game of dice today!"
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

49

You have lost the game of dice, and all your bets.
 You have lost the entire wealth of your treasury.
 You have lost everyone's beloved Draupadi, too,
 And you suffer as if you were struck by a sword.
 Now you must go live in the jungle for twelve years.
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

50

Prince Yudhishtir walks in front, followed by his four brothers.
 They stop at Jaitapur, which once was theirs.
 Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
 But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.

²⁴ Bhim's huge battle club, or mace (a common battle club of the times), is his primary weapon.

51

Queen Kunti asks her sons what happened,
“Dear Sons, you went to the Kingdom of Hastinapur,
What games did you play, and what tasks did you do?”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

52

Says Prince Yudhishtir,
“Dear Mother, I went to the Kingdom of Hastinapur,
And I return with everything wagered and lost.
I have even lost our dear wife, Queen Draupadi.
Her pain is as great as if she had been struck by a sword.
Now we must live in the jungle for the next twelve years.”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

53

Queen Kunti cries,
“Oh! What sins did I commit in my previous life?
Now my five sons must live in the jungle for twelve years!”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*

54

“Five sons I have, all beloved by me,
And, among all, the youngest Nakul is the most dear.
Now you will face misery and hardship in the jungle.”
*Virtuous Prince Yudhishtir follows the path of honesty,
But we must deny the Pandavas their kingdom.*



BANABASAK PAIDHAR

The Pandavas spend twelve years in exile in the jungle.

Their exile in the forest is an important period in the lives of the Pandavas. During the exile, Krishna assures Draupadi that her shame will be avenged, and that those who caused her sorrow will be destroyed. The journey of the Pandavas leads them to many places: the Kamyaka and Dweta jungles, the holy site of Prayag and ultimately the ocean. They receive many moral teachings and they become ever stronger and wiser. Duryodhan, however, is not satisfied with mere banishment, "Unarmed and helpless, the Pandavas wander through the forests, and we can certainly defeat them." He convinces his cohorts to march their armies into the forest. But instead of encountering five brothers weakened from the forest diet, they are confronted by the army of Gandharvas, a class of celestial beings who protect the forest. Predictably, the Kurus are defeated and Duryodhan is taken prisoner. True to his peaceful nature and to the dismay of his brothers, Yudhishtir releases him, saying "we cannot forsake him in his distress." This act of forgiveness infuriates Duryodhan even more: "Far better to die than to owe my life to the man I hate."

The warrior Arjun, in the meantime, listens to a wise man who advises him to obtain heavenly weapons from the gods. Arjun must do penance and obtain the blessing of Mahadeva, the god of destruction. Disguised as a tribesman, Mahadeva mercilessly punishes Arjun—until Arjun finally realizes whom he is fighting. Then, impressed by Arjun's valor, the great god gives him the weapons Arjun has prayed for. He blesses the Pandava and assures him that final victory will be his. Indra, who had arranged the event in the first place, then takes Arjun to his kingdom in the heavens, where he lives for five years in comfort and learns how to use the awesome weapons he has received²⁵. These weapons will play an important role in defeating the Kauravas in the Battle of Kurukshetra. In the jungle, the Pandavas must pass many tests of character. Finally, Yama, the god of justice and Yudhishtir's father, impressed with Arjun's noble conduct, blesses Arjun. He advises the brothers to go to the kingdom of Matsya, where the good King Virat (here spelled 'Bairath') lives, and remain there in disguise for their thirteenth year of exile.

Our Tharu story does not recite all the trials of the brothers; instead, it confines itself to the events below:

1

The five Pandava brothers trudge toward the jungle,
Abandoning their home and lands to others' hands.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

2

No humans accompany the Pandavas,
But the gods within them go with them.

²⁵ The battles of the Mahabharata are fought not only with conventional weapons such as bows and arrows, spears, swords and maces, rocks, trees and brute strength, but also with celestial ones. Some of these weapons become *divya* weapons, whose genesis is divine. They are supernatural weapons, fantastic and wonderful. Charged with specific mantras, they are supremely powerful and can bring about darkness, rough storms, turbulent seas, earthquakes, fog and more. Arjun will call upon these celestial weapons in battle.

FIFTH SONG

They question, "Why, oh gods, are you with us²⁶?
We own nothing, but our legacy is with the good people of Jaitapur,
Who worship all of you."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

3

The Pandavas have endured their first year in the jungle,
And now begin the second year.
In the third year they encamp.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

4

Carrying a basket on his back, Bhim goes to pick
Some fruits of the jungle.
Bhim eats all the ripe fruits and brings back
The basket filled with unripened fruit.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

No reason why brother Bhim should eat all the ripe fruits,
And bring back only the unripe ones.
But Queen Draupadi cooks the unripe fruits
And in one place the Pandava brothers sit and eat together.

5

The Pandavas have endured their third year, and
Now begin their fourth year.
In the fifth year they encamp.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

6

Carrying a basket on his back,
Bhim goes to pick the fruits of the jungle.
Bhim eats all the ripe fruits and brings back
The basket filled with unripened fruit.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

7

The Pandavas have endured their fifth year in the jungle,
And now begin their sixth year.

²⁶ Actually the gods did not literally follow them; the Pandavas are deities themselves, embodying ethics, morals and pious values. They are so highly principled that even after they leave Jaitapur, the town's people retain their high ethical standards.

In the seventh year they encamp.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

8

Carrying a basket on his back
 Bhim goes to pick the fruits of the jungle.
 Bhim eats all the ripe fruits and brings back
 The basket filled with unripened fruit.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

9

The Pandavas have endured their seventh year in the jungle,
 And now begin their eighth year.
 In the ninth year they encamp.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

10

Carrying a basket on his back,
 Bhim goes to pick the fruits of the jungle.
 Bhim eats all the ripe fruits and brings back
 The basket filled with unripened fruit.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

11

The Pandavas have endured their ninth year in the jungle,
 And now begin their tenth year.
 In the eleventh year they encamp.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

12

Carrying a basket on his back,
 Bhim goes to pick fruits of the jungle.
 Bhim eats all the ripe fruits and brings back
 The basket filled with unripened fruit.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

13

The Pandavas have endured their eleventh year in the jungle,
 And now begin the twelfth year.
 In the thirteenth year, they encamp.
 King Yudhishthir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

14

Bhim is angry at being accused of eating his brothers' ripe fruits.
Bhim always eats all the ripe fruit and brings back a basket full of unripened fruit.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

(Chorus)

Why are you angry, oh Brother Bhim?
Please don't be angry; instead, eat all the ripe fruit,
And bring us the unripened fruit.
Then Draupadi will cook it,
And we will all eat together.

15

Carrying baskets on his back, Bhim goes to pick fruit in the jungle,
But after roaming from one place to another,
He fails to fill even one basket with fruit.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

16

Bhim says,
"Brothers, we must think fast to survive,
If we plan to wander from place to place.
I have lost heart for feeding you with fruits from the jungle;
Fruits will not give us strength if the enemy attacks us."

17

Famished, we traveled north for six months to a year.
All this time we were hungry, with no food to eat.
We cannot bear this hunger any longer.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned

(Chorus)

Why are you angry, oh Brother Bhim?
Please don't be angry; instead, eat all the ripe fruit,
And bring us the unripened fruit.
Then Draupadi will cook it,
And we will all eat together.

18

We ate berries and mangos, which were delicious.
We ate citrus fruits and tamarind, which were sour.
We cannot bear this hunger any longer.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned

19

Bhim says,
 "You told us to be patient but made us miserable;
 We have lost our strength, eating only the wild fruits of the jungle.
 How much strength can we gain after eating only fruit?
 No, we cannot bear this hunger any more."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

20

Shadev has scouted many kingdoms and sees possibilities.
 He is considering the Kingdom of Banaras
 On the banks of the holy River Ganges,
 Toward the west of his own kingdom.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

(While traveling toward the Kingdom of King Bairath, the Pandavas
 encounter villages of a tribe called Ahirs, the cow herders.)

21

Bhim says,
 "The tribe of Ahirs is neither dumb nor smart.
 They are virtuous, but also devious.
 They must give me an ax to work or I will slap their faces."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

22

Arjun explores the possibilities in different kingdoms.
 Wherever he looks, he sees hope;
 He also inspects the Kingdom of Banaras
 On the banks of the holy River Ganges.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

23

Arjun says,
 "Wherever a kingdom is prosperous, the officials are not.
 Wherever officials are prosperous, the kingdom is not.
 Wherever there are Brahmins²⁷, there is religious faith,
 So let's go to a place of religious faith.
 In case of any disaster and hardship, King Bairath will look after us."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

²⁷ Brahmin is meant here in its original meaning, having moral and universal knowledge—not being a member of the Brahmin caste.

24

Four unhappy brothers sit together anxiously and wonder
What hardship Nakul must face.
Nakul is young and beloved by all.
We must face whatever hardship is given by King Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

25

Nakul replies,
"Oh Brothers, don't worry about me! I have my own ideas.
I shall herd cows with the Ahirs for my livelihood."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

26

Four unhappy brothers sit together anxiously and discuss
What hardship awaits them; even Nakul²⁸ cannot predict the future.
Whatever the hardship, it will be endured in the kingdom of Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

27

Sahadev replies,
"Oh Brothers, don't worry about me! I have my own ideas.
To earn my living, I will take a milk-can and milk all the cows in town."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

28

Four unhappy brothers sit together anxiously and discuss
What hardship Bhim must face even though he is a giant of a man.
Whatever the hardship, it will come from King Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandava's kingdom must be returned.*

29

Bhim replies,
"Oh Brothers, don't worry about me! I have my own ideas.
I shall take care of King Bairath's horses to support myself."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandava's kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

I shall feed the horses grass and give them water too,
And if they do not follow me, I will hit them.

²⁸ Nakul was trained in astrology.

30

Four unhappy brothers sit together anxiously and discuss
 What hardship even the champion Arjun must face.
 Whatever hardship is given, it will come from King Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandava's kingdom must be returned.*

31

Arjun replies,
 "Oh Brothers, don't worry about me! I have many ideas.
 I will carry a flute in my hand and a drum on my shoulder
 And I will disguise myself as a woman to earn my livelihood."²⁹
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandava's kingdom must be returned.*

32

Four unhappy brothers sit together anxiously and discuss
 What hardship their cherished Draupadi must face.
 Whatever hardship is given, it will come from King Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

33

Draupadi replies,
 "Don't worry about me, my dearest! I have my own ideas.
 Carrying oil and comb, I shall care for the Queen's hair.
 This shall give me my livelihood."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

34

Four unhappy brothers sit together anxiously and discuss
 What hardship the intelligent and wise Yudhishtir must face.
 Whatever hardship is given, it will come from King Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

35

King Yudhishtir says,
 "Oh Brothers, don't worry about me! I have ideas of my own.
 I shall tutor the sons and daughters of King Bairath
 To support myself."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*



²⁹ While living in disguise at King Bairath's court in Matsya, Arjun wears woman's clothing and teaches dancing and music to the Princess and her companions. In the Ninth Song, Arjun is referred to as Arjuna (also Brihannala), the female dancing teacher.

GHARBASAK PAIDHAR

The journey towards the house of King Bairath.

The Pandavas have now survived twelve years in the jungle, and their thirteenth year of exile begins. They are required to live incognito for the entire thirteenth year in some community without anyone recognizing them as the Pandava princes. If they are discovered, they will be exiled to the jungle for twelve more years.

After reviewing different options for the thirteenth year, they decide to take Yama's³⁰ recommendation to live in the kingdom of King Bairath³¹. They choose disguises to conceal their real identities. Yudhishtir will go to Bairath's court as a courtier who has lost his kingdom; he will amuse and delight Virat with his clever conversation and dexterity at dice. Bhim will go disguised as a cook, and Arjun will teach the courtiers dance and music in the guise of a woman or transvestite. As a stablehand, Nakul will take care of the king's horses; and Sahadev will guard the royal cattle. Draupadi will serve the queen. These domestic services do not come easily, but the Pandava family endures this thirteenth year.

1

After leaving their kingdom, the five Pandava brothers,
Yudhishtir, Nakul, Bhim, Arjun, and Sahadev,
Lived in the jungle for twelve years.
And now they make their way to the house of King Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

2

After leaving the jungle, the virtuous Pandavas reach King Bairath's kingdom.
Beneath a *sainik* tree³² outside the city, the Pandava princes rest.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

3

The *sainik* tree casts a special shadow
Which hides the light of the moon;
Beneath this tree the Pandava princes rest.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandava's kingdom must be returned.*

³⁰ Yama is the father of Yudhishtir and the god of death and dharma.

³¹ Bairath is the Tharu spelling for Virat, the King of Matsya.

³² The *sainik* tree yields firewood, and because of its sacred quality is used by Tharu to light their holy hearth fires. The Pandavas hide their weapons in a *sainik* tree while they live incognito in King Bairath's kingdom.

4

Above the sainik tree shines the light of the moon,
 But below, the darkness gives safety.
 This is where the Pandava princes take their rest.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

5

The branches of the sainik tree spread more than twelve *kosh*³³,
 Its roots spread twelve *kosh* like a cave.
 Here the Pandava princes take their rest.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

(Chorus)

If we go to King Bairath with our weapons,
 We will find neither work nor a place to live.
 If we leave our weapons in the sainik tree,
 We can earn our livelihood.

6

For twelve years I have wandered with my broken dreams,
 And all my knowledge has turned to ashes.
 I have forgotten all I knew and now
 I must tend grazing cows with the Ahirs³⁴.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandava's kingdom must be returned..

7

Sahadev takes the flag from Nakul;
 "Give me your weapons, I will hide them in the tree.
 I will climb the tree, where they will be safe.
 If we survive, we will return to collect them."
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the kingdom of the Pandava's kingdom must be returned.

(Chorus)

The Kauravas will find the hiding place where we have
 Stashed our weapons. If we return in twelve years,
 All our weapons will be ruined from rust and age;
 That is why we must take our weapons with us.

³³ *Kosh* is a length, equal to approximately a quarter of a mile.

³⁴ During the Pandavas' exile, the cattle-herding Ahirs were kind and helpful to them. For this reason, the Tharu refer to Ahirs with the term of respect *ahira guni*, and worship them as cattle-protecting village deities, *Bagar puja*.

8

Bring Bhim's battle club and Arjun's bow and arrows
To hide them in the tree.
If we survive, we will return to collect them.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

9

Bring the pearl-studded tiara of Queen Draupadi,
And bring the King's spear to keep it safe in the tree.
If we survive, we will return to gather them all.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

10

Bhim holds his battle club in one hand,
Gazing at it with love and with care, he says
"I am sad to leave my battle club behind."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

Oh brothers, why do you plan to stash your weapons in this tree?
I have decided take mine with me, because
There may be trouble in this city of Bairath,
Or we may have to fight an enemy. Then I shall save us with my battle club!

Yudhishtir replies,
"Oh Brother Bhim, if we take our weapons with us to the city of Bairath,
We will not be able to find jobs, and will be recognized everywhere.
But if we leave our weapons in the sainik tree
We will be able to find jobs and a place to live."

11

The Kauravas don't know about the suffering of Brother Nakul³⁵.
Suffering stays with Nakul just as musk
Stays forever with the kashhuri deer.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

12

"Oh Brothers! Look, there is the royal flower garden!
Oh Brothers! Look, there is the park!
Oh Brothers! Look, I think I see a fountain!

³⁵ The reason for Nakul's suffering is not clear. He is a learned astrologer and he may suffer because he alone can foresee the terrible events in the Pandavas' future.

Oh Brothers! I hear the pleasant sound of women filling their water jars!"

Exclaims King Yudhishtir.

King Yudhishtir is a pious king,

And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

13

A brown dove³⁶ coos in the sky, parrots chatter in the park,

Birds sing in the dense forest and flirt with

Twenty-five thousand other feathered friends.

King Yudhishtir is a pious king,

And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned..

14

In the middle of town is the King's water well,

Its grounds paved with stones of black;

Its waters run so crystal clear that hands and feet shiver with its cold.

King Yudhishtir is a pious king,

And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

(Chorus)

As King Yudhishtir walks in the open,

He captivates people with his charm.

Since the Pandavas are hungry,

They eat *chiura*³⁷.

15

The Pandavas stroll about town from place to place,

Mesmerizing villagers with their distinguished looks;

A blacksmith hammering iron misses the iron and hits his thumb.

King Yudhishtir is a pious king,

And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned..

16

The Pandavas roam around town,

Captivating villagers as they walk by.

The grocer measures out one pound, but charges for two.

King Yudhishtir is a pious king,

and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

17

The Pandavas stroll about town from place to place,

Fascinating villagers with their good looks;

A stable boy saddles his horse backwards.

³⁶ According to Krauskopff, in the Tharu mythology of the creation of the world, Gurubaba Janmanti is the first Tharu ancestor, but in the Vedic context of the Puranas, Gurubaba is Brahma. The brown bird is one of Brahma's incarnations, and is able to observe the world without being recognized.

³⁷ *Chiura* is flattened rice, a cereal.

*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

18

The Pandavas stroll about town from place to place,
Spellbinding villagers with their elegant looks;
A betel nut cracker misses the nut,
Cutting his finger instead.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

The Pandavas mutter to each other
Oh Brothers, give me permission to break his head with his
Betelnut cracker. Let me satisfy myself!
Why do we remain here enduring this behavior towards
Brother Bhim and our beautiful Draupadi?
We must leave this place immediately!

19

Dazzled by Queen Draupadi's beauty,
A farmer plows uneven fields, a blacksmith beats his iron clumsily,
A trader mindlessly sells his goods, a stable boy saddles his horse backwards.
People everywhere are distracted from their work.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

20

Five men walk together,
Bodies well-built and with foreigners' looks,
Dressed from head to toe in beautiful cloth.
And the people of King Bairath ask,
"Where do you come from and where do you go?"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

22

King Yudhishtir replies, "We have survived in the forest.
Because we have lost our kingdom,
We have come here in search of our livelihoods."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

23

King Bairath says,
"If you want to stay here.
Some of you must work as gardeners,
Some of you must work in the stables,

Some of you must work as gatekeepers.
 If you will not take this work, you must go."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

24

The Pandavas reply,
 "We will work as your gardeners,
 We will work in your stables,
 Or as your gatekeepers."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

25

Yudhishtir says,
 "Draupadi, please go inside the palace to
 Offer your services and devotion to the Queen.
 This will win us acceptance here."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*



HATHIYAK PAIDAR

King Bairath allows the Pandavas to stay, but compels Bhim to fight an elephant.

This song seems designed primarily to admire Bhim's prowess by recounting his fight with King Bairath's elephant. In order to test Kanka (the name taken by Yudhishtir in disguise), King Bairath sends a servant into the fields to raise havoc.

1

The servant becomes a female goat out to destroy the fields.
Kanka exclaims, "I have no idea how to capture this goat.
If I hit it, it may die; so it is better to let it destroy the crops."
Bounding from one corner to another, the goat destroys his fields,
Forcing King Yudhishtir to go see King Bairath.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

2

After listening to Kanka's plea,
King Bairath stands up to say, "Listen to me, Kanka³⁸.
Let us settle this with a fight between my elephant and Ballava."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

3

Kanka replies,
"King Bairath, let's not have a fight between Ballava and your elephant."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

Our Ballava has been in exile for twelve years; he is weak.
Let's not have this fight between Ballava and the elephant.

4

King Bairath says casually,
"If my elephant is killed, I will bear the loss;
And if Ballava is killed,
I will not be accused of murder.

³⁸ During their thirteenth year in the Matsya Kingdom, the five Pandavas take on new names to hide their identities: Yudhishtir is Kanka; Bhim, Ballava; Arjun, Brihannala; Sahadev, Tantripala; and Nakul, Dharmagranthi.

Let us have a fight between Ballava and my elephant.”
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

5

Kanka pleads again,
 “Oh King, if your elephant is killed, you will suffer no great loss,
 And if Ballava gets killed, you will not be accused of murder.
 Therefore, let's not have Ballava fight your elephant.”³⁹
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

6

King Bairath continues,
 “If the elephant is killed, it will be my loss;
 And if Ballava is killed, we will give him *amrit* ⁴⁰,
 And he shall return to life.
 Let us have a fight between Ballava and my elephant.”
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

7

To adorn the fighting elephant,
 Beautiful fabrics must be brought from many countries,
 And for Ballava, let's make fighting attire for him to wear.
 Let's have a fight between Ballava and the elephant.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

8

It is midday; time for refreshments.
 A hundred dishes are prepared for Ballava.
 Following Ballava, the king will eat;
 And afterwards, the leftovers will be shared by all.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

9

Bring the elephant and give him an alcoholic drink;
 Bring Ballava and feed him well,
 Let's have the fight between Ballava and the elephant.
 King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
 And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

³⁹ King Bairath's proposal is unfair. Since he owns many elephants, he would not notice the death of one; but Bhim is the most powerful of the five Pandava brothers and is therefore irreplaceable.

⁴⁰ *Amrit* is the nectar of the gods, which makes the partaker immortal.

10

As soon as Ballava hears, "Fight! Fight!" his fighting attire rips apart,
So he requests, "Brother, find me another garment;
You must get me another garment!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

11

Ballava requests,
"This is the same garment⁴¹ I wear when I work,
And this is the same garment I wear when I travel.
Please make a new garment for your brother,
Make another garment for me."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

Oh Brother Ballava, win this fight wearing the same torn loincloth.
Next time we will get you a new one.

12

Bring the elephant and adorn it with an embroidered blanket;
Bring Bhim and dress him in his fighting attire.
Let Bhim and the elephant fight!
Let Bhim and the elephant fight!
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

13

Everybody stands up to watch.
King Bairath commands the elephant be brought,
And holds it for some time.
He commands the elephant named Bhauranand.
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

14

The elephant's four feet are molded with silver.
The elephant cries, remembering his past.
He cries, remembering all his good times.
He cries, "Oh Mother, the mahout is taking me to fight."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

⁴¹ Garment is called *kacha* in Tharu.

15

"Naow! Naow!" shouts the skinny mahout,
 And the drunken elephant slowly steps forward.
 Ballava also steps slowly, carefully moving his feet step by step.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

16

The elephant turns left; Ballava spins right.
 Ballava quickly grabs the elephant's tusks
 And hits the elephant with many blows to the head.
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

17

Ballava declares,
 "I have killed the elephant Bhauranand!
 If you do not believe me, ask my friends:
 The waters of the ocean may run dry,
 But I hold the moon and sun gods in my hand⁴²!"
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

18

"I shall push his two front feet to the rear
 And I shall twist his head from the front to the rear.
 I proclaim to the world that I have destroyed a mountain of an elephant!
 The waters of the ocean may run dry,
 But I hold the moon and sun gods in my hand!"
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

19

After killing the elephant, Ballava stares with big eyes;
 He has removed the tusks of the elephant and is proud.
 The townspeople slowly disperse and walk home;
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
and the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

20

Ballava thumps the elephant with his fists.
 Holding it by its feet, he pulls out a tusk and he tells King Bairath,
 "Take this tusk, for your elephant was the strongest."
King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.

⁴² Bhim was proud of his physical strength. Because of his excessive pride, at first he was not allowed to enter the Kingdom of Ir.dra (heaven).

21

By killing the elephant, Ballava justifies his fame,
And by pulling out the tusks, he proves his strength.
"Oh King, take this tusk; it's yours!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

22

Ballava accepts the betel nut⁴³ offering
As a sign of friendship from King Bairath:
"You are welcome to stay here in my kingdom,
And you are welcome to eat at the King's table."
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*

(Chorus)

In case of any trouble or enemy attack,
You must protect us now.
Yes, Ballava confirms,
In case of any attack from any enemy, we will protect you.

23

Ballava comes home after killing the elephant,
And all four brothers feel joy.
"Ballava's success has changed our fate,
And a great kingdom may one day again be ours!"
*King Yudhishtir is a pious king,
And the Pandavas' kingdom must be returned.*



⁴³ Offering betel nut to a person is a way of showing respect.

KICHAKAK PAIDHAR

Kichaka falls in love with Draupadi and is killed by Ballava.

Yudhishtir has now become King Bairath's companion, and spends all day playing dice with him. Bhim works as chief cook, at times entertaining the king by wrestling with reputed men of strength and by fighting wild animals (see the previous song). Arjun, dressed as a woman called Brihannala, teaches dancing, singing, and the playing of musical instruments to Princess Uttara and the ladies of her court. Nakul and Sahadev look after the King's cows and horses. Princess Draupadi (who should herself be served by maids) serves Queen Sudeshna. Kichaka, the Queen's brother, is Commander-in-Chief of the army. He wields vast influence over old King Bairath, and it is whispered that he is the real ruler of Matsya. Not surprisingly, he notices the Queen's beautiful maid-servant and becomes infatuated with the disguised Draupadi.

Given the prevailing attitude towards servants and customs of the times, Draupadi's complaints about her admirer are not well received; as Kichaka gets bolder in his advances, she protests to Bhim. They set up a trap: Draupadi is to give the appearance of yielding to Kichaka by suggesting that he meet her at midnight in a barn. He appears, full of lust, but instead of finding Draupadi, he faces Bhim, who destroys him and pounds him into a shapeless lump of flesh.

This turn of events has weighty consequences. The Kingdom of Matsya was feared because of Kichaka's power, so when it becomes known that he is dead, neighbors see a chance to enrich themselves at Bairath's expense, as is recounted in the Ninth Song.

This song is the story of virtue vindicated:

1

Sakuni says,
 "In the month of November the spirits and ghosts are at work,
 So you now can call on the pure Queen Draupadi.
 But the important words are those of your nephews,
 And the days of Kichaka are over."
Whatever happens is the will of God.

2

In the evening there will be music and gatherings at the king's palace,
 There will be music at the doors of the gods and deities,
 There will be music in heaven;
 But any person whose life is ending
 Cannot be saved with a hundred kinds of treatments.

3

A farmer cries, saying,
 "I shall give my best milk cow as a gift

EIGHTH SONG

To whoever saves Kichaka!"
Whatever happens is the will of God.

4

A blind guruwa⁴⁴, pretending to know, touches every joint,
Searching for the problem but finds no fever,
And finds no pain in the arms or legs:
Kichaka has the sickness of love.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

5

Draupadi drapes a shawl on her left shoulder;
Then she puts on a beautiful hair decoration, saying
"An Ahir spied on me as I dressed!"
Whatever happens is the will of God.

6

Draupadi puts bracelets on her wrists and rings on her fingers,
She puts rings on her toes and rings in her ears.
She cries, "An Ahir spied on me as I dressed!"
Whatever happens is the will of God.

7

Draupadi puts on an embroidered sari with silken sashes,
She lines her eyes with kohl and puts vermilion on her forehead.
Princess Draupadi is going to Kichaka's house.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

8

When Kichaka sees Draupadi's beauty,
He feels his life is worthless without her.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

9

When Kichaka sees Draupadi, he
Adorns his head with flowers and
Wants to embrace her.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

10

Kichaka speaks,
"Delicate woman with exquisite face and beautiful shape,
Lower your hands from your face and
Please speak to me, oh Beauty, please speak."
Whatever happens is the will of God.

⁴⁴ *Dhaupat Guruwa* is the Tharu word for a homeopathic doctor; in the Vedas he is known as *charwak*.

11

Kichaka wants to go to the door to introduce Draupadi
 But he hesitates, for there are mothers-in-law.
 Even so, he says, "Let's go in to be introduced."
Whatever happens is the will of God.

12

"Walk slowly, oh Beauty, speak beautiful words to me
 Oh lovely woman, drop your hands from your face and speak."
Whatever happens is the will of God.

13

Kichaka and Draupadi arrive at the front door, which is blocked by Ballava,
 Who challenges Kichaka, saying
 "Where do you think you are going, you scoundrel, Kichaka?"
Whatever happens is the will of God.

14

Kichaka replies,
 "The peacock dances to mate in the month of November
 Just like my heart has fallen in love!"
 Even with a hundred ways of treatment
 Love sickness cannot be cured.

15

Both Ballava and Kichaka are strong wrestlers.
 They wrestle fiercely together and sweat.
 Both of them are stubborn and wrestle fiercely.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

16

Both men are powerfully built.
 Both have muscular arms, and
 Both sweat from their terrible struggle.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

17

Both men are equal in size,
 Both wear rhododendron flowers in their hair,
 Both of their bodies drip with sweat from the wrestling.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

18

Bhim turns left and Kichaka swings right.
 Kichaka, with a sly maneuver, throws Bhim to the ground.
 After struggling for a long time, Bhim finally stands up.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

19

Kichaka turns left and Bhim swings right.
Bhim, with a trick, throws Kichaka the ground.
After a long struggle, Kichaka finally stands up.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

20

Bhim knocks Kichaka down to the ground with his fist.
Grabbing him tight, he breaks ten of his ribs.
He tears one arm off and throws it up to the sky;
He tears off the other and throws it down to the ground.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

21

It is the day after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it;
It is over two days now since Kichaka has died,
But no Kaurava has heard the news.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

22

It is over three days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it;
It is over four days now since Kichaka died,
But no Kaurava has heard the news.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

23

It is over five days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it;
It is over six days now since Kichaka died,
But no Kaurava has heard the news.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

24

It is over seven days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it;
It is over eight days now since Kichaka died,
But no Kaurava has heard the news.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

25

It is over nine days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it;
It is over ten days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava has heard the news.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

26

It is over eleven days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it;
It is over twelve days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava has heard the news.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

27

It is over thirteen days after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava knows about it;
It is over fourteen days⁴⁵ after Kichaka's death,
But no Kaurava has heard the news.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

28

One hundred Kauravas have at last heard the news.
Gathering on the banks of the River Ganga,
They cremate his body.
Whatever happens is the will of God.

(Chorus)

All one hundred Kauravas have at last heard the news.
Gathering on the banks of the River Ganga,
They cremate his body.
Oh Brother Ballava, why did you do this?
One day we shall take revenge on you!



⁴⁵ In the Vedic tradition, Chatriyas eat no salt, meat or other impure food for the first thirteen days following the death of a blood relative; they eat only rice with ghee or potato porridge. On the fourteenth day, they perform a special ritual called *suddhi karma* in Nepali. Unaware of his death, the Kauravas did not perform the appropriate prayers for Kichaka.

SUSHARMAK PAIDHAR

Susharma and Duryodhan pursue King Bairath's wealth.

When Bhim kills Kichaka, King Bairath's Commander-in-Chief, Bairath's army is crippled. The Kauravas recognize that the balance of power has shifted in their favor, and they team up with the ruler of Trigarta, King Susharma, to conquer Bairath and plunder all his wealth and cattle. They realize that the only person in the world with enough strength to kill Kichaka single-handed is Bhim. If the Pandavas have indeed been in Matsya, going to war will reveal their identity. By forcing them to break their vow to remain in disguise during the thirteenth year of exile, the attack will force them back into exile for another twelve years. The battle plan is simple. First Susharma will attack from the south; then, after Bairath commits his army in the south, Duryodhan will attack from the north with his army, and all of Bairath's cattle will be driven away.

As they have promised, the Pandavas join Bairath in battle. Prince Uttara, the son of Bairath, is afraid of the enemy's superior forces until Arjun, disguised as a woman, convinces Uttara that with Arjun fighting, they can conquer the enemy. He then reveals himself as the man Arjun. With the help of the five Pandavas, the Matsya army is victorious on all fronts and wins back Bairath's cattle. In the classic story Susharma is taken prisoner but is soon released by the peace-loving Yudhishtir with only a mild admonition. In the Tharu version, it is Bhim who releases Susharma, but only after damning him with a powerful curse that reduces him to the lowly state of an untouchable ironsmith, through all four eras and for eternity. Deprivation of his rank is Susharma's penalty for not living up to his status as a *Chatriya*⁴⁶.

The Pandavas are finally identified by the gleeful Kauravas, who claim that the thirteenth year has one more day to run. They are informed, however, that according to the charts the thirteenth year has just ended and that the Pandavas' exile is officially over. To reward Arjun for his valor, Bairath gives his daughter Uttara in marriage to Arjun's son, Abhimanyu.

1

Unadorned by a bebbri flower, we ignorantly surrender at your feet.
Oh goddess of wealth and prosperity, keep us in your heart.
Oh goddess Bhagawati, relying on you, we want to take shelter in your name,
We are devoted to your faith and, accepting our adoration, please protect us.

2

King Duryodhan says, "Oh Uncle Sakuni, find one scheme
Or a hundred different plots to steal the princes' cattle."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

⁴⁶ According to Hindu dictates, if someone fails to act according to the obligations of his caste, he is reduced in state to a lower caste. Members of the *Chatriya* warrior caste are required to fight to the death in battle. By begging Bhim pitifully to spare his life, Susharma violates his caste ethics and loses status. In the battlefield of Kuruchetra, when Arjun is reluctant to go to war against his cousins, Krishna reminds him that because he is a *Chatriya*, he must fight.

3

Sakuni and his ministers confer; King Duryodhan has no ideas.
 We must steal the cattle of Uttara Kumar, attacking from all sides.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

4

Sakuni and his ministers and staff confer;
 King Duryodhan's obsession has not slackened.
 We must steal the cattle of Uttara Kumar;
 We must steal the lands of Uttara Kumar!
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

5

Let the music play! Adorn Hastinapur with flowers.
 Everyone, get your weapons and get dressed, children and adults alike.
 We will steal the cattle of King Uttara Kumar!
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

6

Let the music play! Adorn Hastinapur with flowers.
 We are going to war,
 Children and adults, everyone, get dressed!
 We will steal the cattle of King Uttara Kumar.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

(Chorus)

Hail to my king! Hail to my army! My army is now ready to move!
 Find King Uttara Kumar's cattle and fence in that meadow!
 Oh Uncle Sakuni, my kingdom will definitely grow,
 And so shall your salary!
 That is why I came to you for your ideas and plots.
 I am thankful that I am the King;
 I am thankful that I have retainers.
 Wherever the army goes, the cattle of Bairath will be there,
 And we shall bring back the entire herd of cattle.
 This will serve the kingdom and the treasury.

7

The flame is lit, oh priests, please wake up!
 Learned sages, please get up and meditate
 To find answers in the astrological charts!
 Let's move silently like a burglar who comes to steal the wealth of others.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

8

Now the learned sages are awake for their prayers,
And the priests are awake to read the astrology charts,
And the cattle thieves move silently to steal people's wealth.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

9

Ravana of Lanka may awake,
Or the men of the Kingdom of Bairath may awake.
Either the sons of the Queen may awake,
Or, for the wealth of others, thieves may wake up;
But no one else will wake up.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Uncle Sakuni, why do we wake up
To steal the wealth of others?
Will we succeed or not
In robbing others of their property?

Sakuni replies,
Oh King Susharma, we are not the sons of thieves,
We are the sons of kings, so we will succeed.

10

Daunagir, Gangewa and all the braves are ready to steal the cattle.
Bidur and Bhagatta are ready as well,
All the braves are prepared to go.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

11

King Balbhadra is prepared to attack the Pandavas.
Many braves are ordered to attack the Pandavas and to fight.
But King Bairath is depressed⁴⁷; he dismounts and stays.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

12

One hundred thousand Brahmins are ready to go,
Two hundred thousand cavalry are ready to go,
Thirty-six hundred thousand archers are ready to go,

⁴⁷ He feels vulnerable because of the death of Kichaka, Bairath's ruthless and powerful military Commander-in-Chief. Indeed the neighbors do try to annex his land.

And seventy-five thousand learned sages are ready to go.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

13

The family patriarch Dharam Gangewa⁴⁸ is ready to go, and
 The Kaurava forces are also ready to go. The deities are ready to go.
 If holy water poured from a blessed golden vessel is sprinkled
 Over your heads, you will return victorious,
 And your heads will be crowned with the colors of victory.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

14

Mother Gandhari blesses everyone with grains of *achat*⁴⁹,
 "You shall all be victorious, and it is no sin to kill your enemy."
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

15

Sakuni looks around the gathering
 And sees everybody ready but the brave Karna,
 The Chatriya King; he calls for Karna.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

16

"Karna! Karna!" They call for him, "Oh Brother Karna,
 Come quickly, for King Susharma calls you!
 He needs to discuss some political matters with you."
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

17

Karna rides at the head of the chariot drivers,
 He urges the charioteers on, and rides for a hundred yards.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

18

Oil lamps burn and priests consult their astrology charts and books.
 Learned sages meditate, and thieves steal other people's wealth.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

⁴⁸ Gangewa is another name for Bhishma, son of Ganga.

⁴⁹ *Achat* is a special rice empowered by mantras and used in Tharu religious rituals.

19

The dawn has followed the darkness,
The sun shines on all animals, birds and men.
The cattle inside the town have emerged,
And Duryodhan has quickly fenced in the herds.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

20

Let's kill the Ahirs and bury them!
Let's lock them and the cattle inside seventy-five farms.
If they escape, they will bring help.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

21

An Ahir escapes by the skin of his teeth;
He abandons his herder's staff behind, losing his honor.
The Ahir escapes and brings help.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Uncle Sakuni, why do we wake up
To steal the wealth of others?
Will we succeed or not
In robbing others of their property?
Sakuni replies,
Oh King Susharma, we are not the sons of thieves,
We are the sons of kings, so we will succeed.

22

The night is now past and daylight has come.
The sun shines on birds, animals and people, and
King Susharma has stolen all the cattle from the city.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

23

The Ahirs must be killed and buried!
The cattle must be hidden in seventy-five houses,
Oh God, let us kill all the Ahirs, who fled seeking help.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

24

One watches, two watches, everybody watches.
All the residents of the Kingdom of Bairath

Watch their cattle being driven away.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

25

After losing all the cattle, the fleeing Ahirs run to Bhim for his protection,
 And cry, "Oh worshipper of strength, we have lost everything,
 We have lost all of King Bairath's cattle!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

26

It is already dark when he runs to the palace.
 Kanka is at the palace of the Queen,
 Who sternly orders Duworiya to ask who the fugitive is.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

27

A weak human must not ask for anything.
 Not a single calf remains to worship.
 They drove all the cattle to unknown places.
 We cannot find even a little cow dung to plaster the ground!
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

28

Where they have gone, no one knows.
 He stole everything, including a calf that could not walk.
 We cannot find even a little cow dung to plaster the ground!
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

29

You will receive no cow dung to plaster your houses,
 You will receive no cow for worship.
 Where they have gone no one knows.
 We cannot find even a little cow dung to plaster the ground!
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

30

Duryodhan says,
 I saw a frightening demon in the sky:
 A huge wooden platform⁵⁰ covered with leather,

⁵⁰ Maciya is the seat of a royal battle chariot.

Ridden by a king, driving the cattle away.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

It looks like a giant animal in the sky;
The wooden platform is covered with leather.
King Kundila⁵¹ rides the platform and
Orders his men to drive the cattle away.
Did you see that?

That is King Duryodhan riding his horse,
With a canopy over his head. He chews betel nut
And carries a weapon,
And it looks like blood drips from his mouth.
Oh Ahir! What do you know? You are a jungle tribe.
You raise cattle and milk cows.
Go to the king. You are a tribe from the jungle. You raise cattle,
You milk cows. That is your fate.
Oh Ahir, what did you see? Tell me the meaning,
And tell me
"Oh King, I saw nothing
Or else I would have told you the meaning."

31

The Ahir replies,
"I saw a dangerous animal with two tails and huge ears.
In the shade of the parasol, a brave warrior
Chews betel nuts and blood comes from his mouth."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Ahir, did you see that? That is the elephant
Ridden by brave King Sakuni, with a parasol over his head.
He chews betel nut and carries a weapon,
And it looks like blood drips from his mouth⁵².
Oh Ahir, what do you know? You are a jungle tribe.
You raise cattle, you milk cows. That is your fate.
Oh Ahir, what did you see? Tell me the meaning,
And tell me,
Oh King, I saw nothing
Or else I would have told you the meaning.

⁵¹ Kundila: A person who wears a *kundal*, a ring in the ear, is called Kundila; here Kundila refers to Duryodhan.

⁵² Betel juice is red and looks like blood.

32

Prince Uttara Kumar thinks,
 "They have looted my wealth by saying it's not mine, but theirs.
 That has caused the war, but
 If no one survives, what is the use of wealth?"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh, Queen Kunti, make us a small promise:
 Promise us that all the Kauravas will be killed
 In the battle of Kurukshetra, and that
 Blood will rain from the sky.

33

Young Prince Uttara Kumar sits on the riverbank.
 The Pandavas may also be in the same village.
 Just stay there and ask the Pandavas for help!
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

34

Tying a turban on his head and taking up his swords and arms,
 He prepares for war. His mother counsels him,
 "Oh Son, you are alone and by yourself can do nothing,
 So do not do anything."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

35

Prince Uttara Kumar speaks,
 "Oh Mother, you who have given me human birth.
 I shall not diminish the prestige of my family.
 It is a question of King Bairath's prestige,
 And I shall ride my horse and fight till I die."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

36

She replies,
 "The Kauravas are one hundred brothers and you are alone.
 You may disappear if so many arrows are shot at you,
 So do not fight."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

37

Arjun, dressed as a woman, adorns his right thigh, looking beautiful.
After that "she" puts on "her" jewelry and says,
"While I dressed, an Ahir spied my thigh."
*The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
The Kauravas from defiling their own sister-in-law.*

38

Arjuna puts on "her" bracelets and earrings,
Arjuna puts rings on "her" fingers and toes
And a vermilion tika on "her" forehead,
"An Ahir has spied my thigh!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

39

Princess Uttara puts on a belt,
With a silken scarf hanging down in front.
Eye shadow on her eyes and vermilion tika on her forehead,
She goes to the palace.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

40

Princess Uttara asks, "Does anyone know how to drive a chariot?
If anybody knows, then he must drive a chariot!
He must earn respect by killing an enemy⁵³."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

41

Arjun says,
"Who knows how to drive a chariot?
Maybe Bhim or Sahadev knows.
From the day the Pandavas left for exile,
I lost my knowledge of driving chariots."
*The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
The Kauravas from defiling their own sister-in-law.*

42

Princess Uttara asks again and again if anyone can drive a chariot.
"If anybody knows how, he must drive a chariot!
He must earn respect by killing an enemy."
*The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
The Kauravas from defiling their own sister-in-law.*

⁵³ Although violence is sinful, in the Geeta Krishna teaches that sinners must be killed so that they will not corrupt the whole world: "To eliminate sin from the world, I, Krishna, take reincarnation time and again in different shapes."

43

Arjun replies,
 "I do not know how to drive a chariot,
 Maybe Nakul or Sahadev knows,
 From the day the Pandavas left for exile,
 I lost my knowledge of driving chariots."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

44

If a warrior does not use his knowledge
 To help others in need,
 His wisdom and knowledge are useless.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Arjun, nobody knows the nature of women
 For your peace of mind,
 Please do only those things you know!

45

Princess Uttara is ready to insult the warriors.
 Draupadi takes Arjuna's arm to tell "her" about reality⁵⁴.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Princess Uttara, what have you that I can ask for?
 Oh Teacher Arjuna⁵⁵, how would I know what I have and what I have not?
 Oh Princess Uttara, I demand a horse.
 Oh Teacher, your demand is a horse.
 I have three hundred horses, take whichever you like.

46

Arjuna starts to choose horses.
 "She" selects first from one hundred thousand,
 Then "she" selects from four hundred,
 Then from three hundred,
 And finally Arjuna chooses one out of the three hundred.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

⁵⁴ When Princess Uttara demands that the chariots be driven into battle, no one complies: the Pandavas are afraid that they might be recognized and forced to spend another twelve years in exile. Draupadi urges the dancing teacher "Brihananta" (Arjun in disguise, or "Arjuna") to prepare to go to war against Prince Uttar. Draupadi adds again: "There is no need to be afraid. According to the solar system of counting months and the moon system of counting months, the thirteenth year of exile has just ended."

⁵⁵ Uttara knows Arjun only in his female disguise as the court dance teacher.

47

The famous horse has pointed ears.
Bring his bow and arrow now.
The Prince says, "This horse is for me!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

48

The great horse has a straight tail.
The stable boy holds the saddle.
The saddle must be mounted like that of a camel;
Instead of going forward, the horse backs up³⁶
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

49

Worried, Uttara Kumar heads for battle, and
King Duryodhan prepares for battle too.
Uttara Kumar goes to the palace to get ready, saying
"I am not the coward who has ruled this country."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Uttara Kumar!
Why do you run these black and white horses in the city streets?
It would be better to display your bravery on the battlefield.
Oh King! My bravery cannot be seen here, but
I shall show my bravery on the battlefield.
I shall die fighting in the war; I'll be ready to challenge Indra.

50

Any wealth saved is not forever,
After death, a coin on the mouth³⁷ is the only reminder.
After death no one needs wealth.
*The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
The Kauravas from defiling their own sister-in-law.*

51

Uttara Kumar says,
"I don't know how long the road is;
I also don't know how anything tastes.
I don't know how deep the ocean is,

³⁶ While incognito, Arjuna starts to drive the chariot. Instead of stepping forward, the horse backs up. Even so, Arjuna drives the chariot skillfully, a skill "she" had been taught by the Gandharvas during their exile.

³⁷ At death a single coin is placed on the mouth, the only money taken into the afterlife.

I don't have all the knowledge about this earth."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

52

Only after traveling do you learn the length of the road;
 Only after eating do you know the taste of anything.
 Only after measuring will you know the depth of the ocean,
 And only after study shall you have knowledge.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

53

Apprehensive, Uttara Kumar heads towards the battle.
 King Duryodhan must prepare for battle too.
 Stop the chariot for a while and ask for help.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

54

King Duryodhan, prepare for battle.
 Stop the chariot for a while and ask the warriors for help.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

55

King Daunagir laughs nervously, and so does King Gangewa.
 Shakuni is nervous too, when they find out that
 This woman-man is none other than
 The famous archer Arjun Proudly driving his chariot.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Brothers! Be ready with your weapons, for
 The thieves of your wealth are coming!

56

Uttara Kumar sees the arrows of the Kauravas:
 Dhauri Ban is brown in color; Piari Ban, yellow.
 Senarari Ban is the color of the sun's rays.
 At seeing these weapons, Uttara Kumar is scared.

(Chorus)

Did you see that brown arrow?
 That is King Duryodhan's arrow!
 Did you see that yellow and white arrow
 Shot by King Duryodhan on his horse?

Did you see that golden arrow
Shot by King Duryodhan under his parasol?
Did you see that black arrow
Shot by King Bhagadatta⁵⁸ on his huge elephant?

57

The army of the Kauravas forms a massive phalanx,
Destroying everything the way a stream of water floods fields
When there are no dams or irrigation canals to contain it.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

58

Uttara Kumar is speechless with fear, and
He shakes like a leaf on a tree.
He wanders aimlessly and does not know what to do.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

59

After seeing the one hundred Kaurava brothers,
Uttara Kumar wavers and says,
"I have no war plan and no courage to fight."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

60

Oh my god, you called me to your palace
And now you have destroyed my faith.
You are frightened at seeing the battle; you are a coward and sinner.
*The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
The Kauravas from defiling their own sister-in-law.*

(Chorus)

Oh King! I am afraid. Run, and I shall follow!
Your wealth and property can be restored.
How can I run, Uttara Kumar, for I am Arjun!
War separates the brave from the cowardly.

61

Arjun says,
Oh Prince Uttara, if you send me to fight in this war,
I shall protect you for generations,
And I shall return to you all your wealth and property.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

⁵⁸ An ally of Duryodhan, King Bhadadatta is the King of Magadha.

62

We were not through with the last problem,
 When Shakuni gave us another:
 He locked us in the house of wax and set it on fire.
 But we removed the main pillar and escaped underground.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

63

We were not through solving this problem
 When Danu gave us another: he ate Bhim.
 But Bhim killed him and returned home.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

64

Before we solved this problem,
 Sakuni presented a new one.
 Deceived, we lost the game of dice and went into exile.
*The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
 Kauravas have started making love to their women.*

(Chorus)

Even with the greatest suffering and punishment, we did not give in,
 And we are afraid in this small matter.
 Oh, King! Please tell us about your biggest suffering
 And our hearts will be satisfied.

65

We had not finished solving the last problem,
 When King Bairath gave us another:
 Bhim and the elephant had to fight.
 Bhim killed the elephant and returned home.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

66

We were not done with the last problem,
 When Kichaka gave us another
 By grabbing Queen Draupadi's arm.
 Bhim killed Kichaka and returned home.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

67

We were not through with the last problem
 When King Susharma gave us another,
 By looting King Bairath's cattle and lands.

Bhim returned home after returning the King's cattle and lands.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

68

Let's go, Uttara Kumar, to the sainik tree to fetch our weapons!
We have left our weapons in the sainik tree.
We shall climb the tree and bring down all our weapons;
We shall bring down all the arrows from the tree.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

69

Wherever Arjun and Uttara Kumar go,
They find the Pandavas' weapons and spears,
They climb into the tree to remove them all.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

70

A python waits at the bottom, a *trish* snake waits at the top;
The python tries to swallow him, and Uttara cries,
"Now the serpent, as the ghost of this place, will eat me!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

71

Arjun cannot kill the serpents with his bows and arrows;
His weapon is still in the sainik tree.
Uttara cries, "These serpents as the ghosts of this place, will eat me."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows*

72

Arjun prays with achat rice;
Uttara Kumar sprinkles the sacred rice grains all over the tree,
And Arjun says, "This weapon is ours and that weapon is ours."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

73

Prince Uttara takes out the *dhaya patka*⁵⁹ of Nakul but says,
"This weapon is not ours!"
And after that, Sahadev rips open the bundle and exclaims,

⁵⁹ The *dhaya pataka* describes the bundle of clothes in which the Pandavas had wrapped their weapons before hiding. It was shaped like a corpse to prevent thieves from stealing it, as dead bodies are impure and would not be touched.

"This weapon is not ours!"

*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

74

Prince Uttara takes out Bhim's club,
And says, "This is not our weapon!"
And then, Arjun takes out a weapon and says,
"This is not our weapon!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

75

Draupadi's jewelry and clay pot are removed,
And she exclaims, "These are not mine!"
And then, King Yudhishtir's weapon is taken out and he says
"This is not my weapon!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh King! All five weapons have been removed!
Where are your weapons?
And Uttara Kumar, why are our weapons switched?

76

This weapon is not mine; that weapon is not mine.
Bring me my weapons, which are like the wings of an eagle.
Like diamonds and emeralds, the clothes of Queen Draupadi are
Like the water of the seven seas.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

77

Prince Uttara starts to remove the weapon of Arjun from the tree,
But he will not touch the "impure" weapon.
Arjun takes hold of his weapon⁶⁰.
Even if you are impure outside, keep your mind pure within.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

They were in the city of Bairath. They sang and danced.
There must have been touching of the untouchables,
So do not touch it — Arjun will take care of it.

⁶⁰ Unlike the Pandavas, Prince Uttara does not know that the bundle is a fake corpse, so is afraid to touch it.

78

I have already told you,
The weapons must have been destroyed.
My weapon has started talking.
Wherever it is sent, it reaches its goal;
And whatever task it is given, it achieves it.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

79

Arjun has his arrow with his mantra and observes
“Duryodhan knows the secret; the sign is given to both of us.”
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

80

Arjun speaks,
“I have already told you that during our exile of twelve years,
Our weapons must have been destroyed.
My weapon has started talking.
Wherever it is sent, it reaches its goal;
And whatever task it is given, it achieves it.”
*The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
The Kauravas from defiling their own sister-in-law.*

81

A bad piece of wood will have many knotholes.
It is very difficult to control sensual feelings in full youth.
A man must be pure if he wants to reach heaven;
If not, he'll revert in his next rebirth.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

82

I can see the galloping horses
Kicking sand down the river banks.
The darkness of night hides the starlight,
And the clouds hide the moonlight.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

83

The earth shakes from the sound of galloping horses.
Clouds of dust hide the sun,
And dust clouds dim the moonlight in the black night.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

84

The front troops fight in a watery marsh,
 The central group fights in the mud,
 The third group has no idea where they are,
 And the last group has no idea what they are doing.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

85

The battle began in the morning and now it is evening.
 The warriors are eighty miles from the canteen.
 The army has broken down in many places.
 "Let us please rest, oh King!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

86

The battle banners have lost their color,
 The diamond's sparkle has faded,
 The flowers adorning soldiers' heads have wilted,
 And the betel nut's flavor is gone.
 "Please, oh King, let us now rest!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

87

Even blessed with *achat* rice by Mother Gandhari,
 I will tie up my horse and remove its saddle,
 After removing the saddle, I will remove the saddle blanket.
 Oh King, let us rest for just a minute.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh, Queen Kunti, make us a small promise:
 Promise us that all the Kauravas will be killed
 In the battlefield of Kurukshetra,
 And that blood will rain from the sky.

88

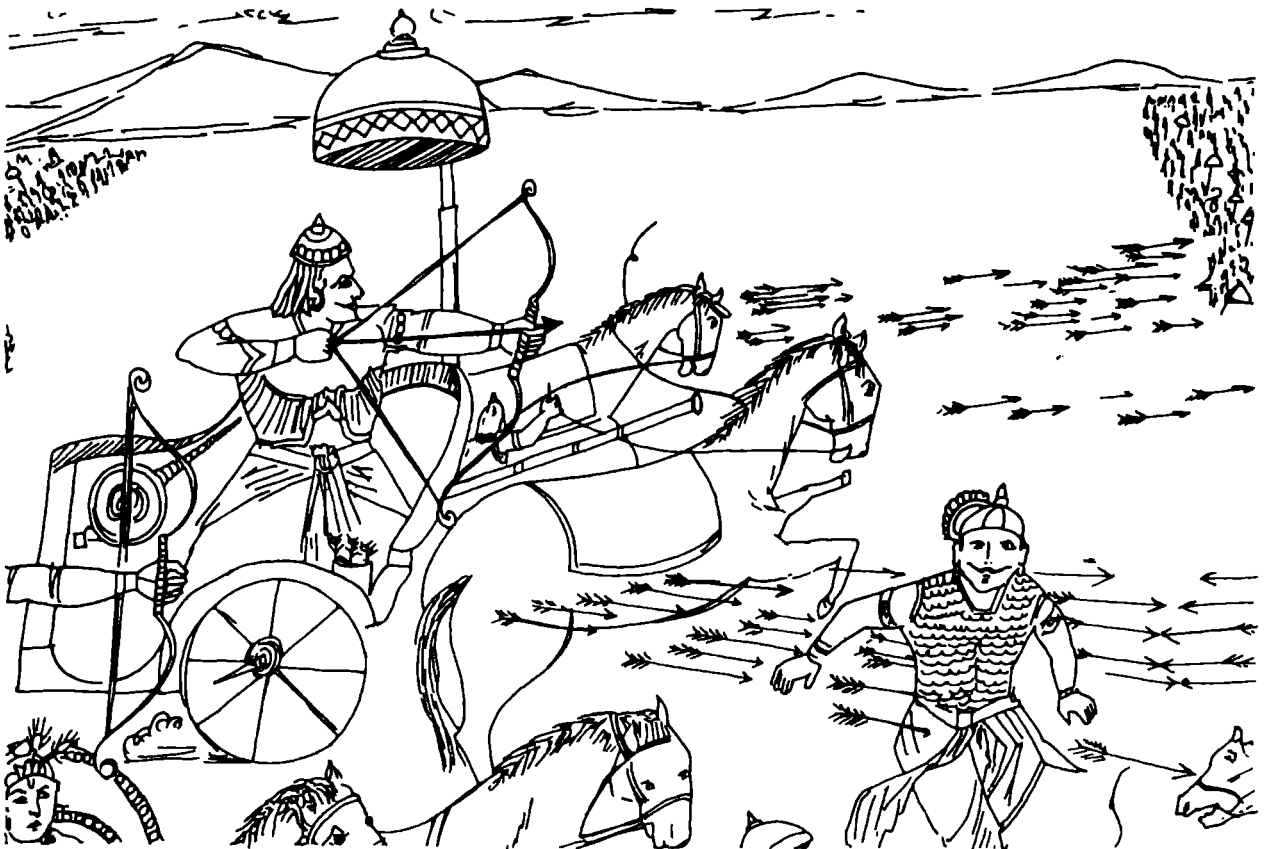
Running down in the mud and running up the cliffs,
 "How can I fight with no weapon?" cries Bhim.
 "Let me at least have a tree branch so I can fight!
 I must go to meet King Susharma!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

"I shall strike one enemy in the leg,
And I shall strike another on the head,
I shall strike a third with my club,
And I shall go to meet King Susharma."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh King Susharma, why did you steal
All the cattle of King Bairath?
Now brace yourself to fight with me,
Or I shall kill you with my club!

Arrow meets arrow.
*Chandar ban (Lightning Arrow) is released by Susharma,
But Bhim turns his invincible left shoulder to receive the shot.
Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*



(Chorus)

Oh King Susharma, you have hit me with your cruelest arrow!
 But that arrow of yours has affected me as little as the *curki*⁶¹ grass that
 Scratches the farmer who works in his fields!
 So, if you have another arrow, use it now, for
 Otherwise I will kill you with my battle club!

91

Arjun has been seen stringing his bow and loading his arrow.
 Duryodhan now knows his secret.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

92

Sometimes I am furious, and sometimes gentle.
 Respect farmers and respect knowledge,
 And wherever I send you, you must go.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

93

A 'woman' in anger intends to strike;
 Because of her bravery, she alone enters the battle.
 Two arrows fall down beyond the feet of Gangewa
 And some Kauravas hear them land with the sound of thunder.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

94

The looted property of others must be returned,
 Even if one must fight with the fists.
 Because of her bravery, only she entered the battle.
 Two arrows fly past Gangewa,
 And some Kauravas hear the thunderous sound.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

95

Thunder and clouds bring rain from the sky;
 A wet 'woman' rises from the River Ganga.
 The King orders the chariots stopped for a while.
 From somewhere comes the sound of thunder.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

⁶¹ Curki is a grass whose edge is pointed and sharp and which thrives during the spring growing season.

96

King Daunagir laughs nervously, and so do King Gangewa and Shakuni,
When they find out that the sound was not thunder,
But the fearsome archer Arjun, proudly riding his chariot.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh Brothers! Make ready your weapons.
That was not thunder, but the awesome archer Arjun.
Be alert with your bows and arrows;
The owners of your wealth are coming.

97

When the brave 'woman' released one hundred arrows,
She felled two hundred fighters.
While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
Arjun's arrows reached their targets.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

98

When the brave 'woman' released two hundred arrows,
She felled three hundred fighters.
While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
Arjun's arrows soared to great heights.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

99

When the brave 'woman' released three hundred arrows,
She felled four hundred fighters.
While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
Arjun's arrows reached everywhere.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

100

When the brave 'woman' released four hundred arrows,
She felled five hundred fighters.
While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
Arjun's arrows found their targets.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

101

When the brave 'woman' released five hundred arrows,
She felled six hundred fighters.

While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
 Arjun's arrows soared north, south, east, and west.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

102

When the brave 'woman' released six hundred arrows,
 She felled seven hundred fighters.
 While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
 Arjun's arrows reached Mount Kailash.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

103

When the brave 'woman' released seven hundred arrows,
 She felled eight hundred fighters.
 While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
 Arjun's arrows found their targets.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

104

When the brave 'woman' released eight hundred arrows,
 She felled nine hundred fighters.
 While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
 Arjun's arrows reached the Himalayas.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

105

When the brave 'woman' released nine hundred arrows,
 She felled ten hundred fighters.
 While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
 Arjun's arrows soared everywhere.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

106

When the brave 'woman' released ten hundred arrows,
 She felled eleven hundred fighters.
 While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
 Arjun's arrows struck the enemies' heads.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

107

When the brave 'woman' released eleven hundred arrows,
 She felled twelve hundred fighters.

While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
Arjun's arrows reached everywhere.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

108

When the brave 'woman' released twelve hundred arrows,
She felled thirteen hundred fighters.
While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
Arjun's arrows struck the soles of fleeing warriors.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

109

When the brave 'woman' released thirteen hundred arrows,
She felled fourteen hundred fighters.
While the arrows of others scattered on the ground,
Arjun's arrows struck their target.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Oh brothers! Be ready with your weapons, bows and arrows,
Advance, protecting yourselves, and Arjun shall move back.

110

Oh King Daunagir, drive onward!
Move your chariot forward and shoot your arrows!
Arjun will retreat to save himself.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

111

Come and face me, whoever is brave enough, come and meet my challenge!
Sahadev will retreat if we attack.
How can I retreat? War separates the men from the boys!
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

112

Weapon meets weapon!
Chandar Ban is the arrow blessed with a muttered mantra.
Dhundi ban (Fog Arrow) is the arrow released by King Daunagir;
It spreads fog all over the countryside.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

113

Weapon meets weapon!

Chandar Ban is empowered by a muttered mantra.

Arjun releases Pawan Ban (Wind Arrow), which clears the fog.

Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,

But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

114

Arrow meets arrow!

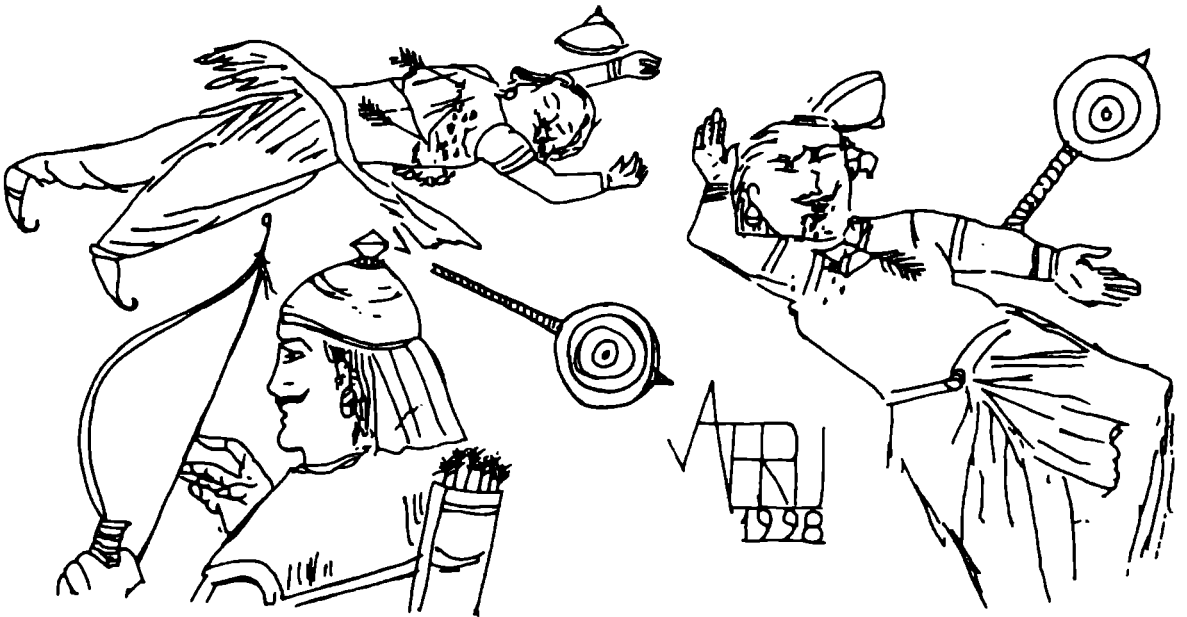
Chandar Ban is empowered by a muttered mantra.

Susharma releases Nid Ban, the arrow that induces sleep.

But Bhim defends himself with his invincible left shoulder.

Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,

But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.



115

Arrow meets arrow!

Chandar Ban is empowered by a muttered mantra.

Susharma releases Jagat Ban, the Big Explosion arrow,

But Bhim defends himself with his invincible left shoulder.

Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,

But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.

116

Arrow meets arrow!

The arrow Chandar Ban is empowered by a muttered mantra.

Susharma releases the arrow of ancestors,

But Bhim defends himself with his invincible left shoulder.

*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

117

Arrow meets Arrow!
The arrow Chandar Ban is empowered by a muttered mantra.
Susharma releases the arrow empowered by his mantra,
But Bhim defends himself with his invincible left shoulder.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

118

The army of Kaurava is in a long formation,
But the ranks of archers and warriors have already been broken,
And the Kauravas' standard has already fallen.
All pretense of following the rules of war is discarded;
All the army's weapons are thrown into battle.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

119

The shine has lost its lustre, the diamond has lost its sparkle,
The flowers adorning soldiers' heads have lost their bloom.
The betel nut in their mouths has lost its taste.
Therefore, oh King, let's take some rest.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

120

Even jewelry cannot make a weeping woman into a beauty,
And a flowing river will always be pure
No matter how much the water is dirtied.
So King, to lose a few of your legions of soldiers is nothing.
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

Like the shining stars in the sky,
The fireflies give us light in the dark.
The fireflies are on our side.

121

The sound of the distant drum beating is alarming.
In the black night Susharma is alone,
Unable either to eat or drink the water he has.
Why should he be afraid, even if the phalanx is broken?
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

122

Fearing for his life, Susharma begs⁶² Bhim to spare him,
 Pleading "Bhim, spare my life! Bhim, please spare my life!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

123

Susharma praises him, waving his hands.
 And pleading, he bows to Bhim's feet and begs,
 "Save me, oh Bhim, please save me."
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

124

Bhim says,
 "You shall earn your living by selling iron tools,
 You shall earn your living by selling needles,
 With this curse you are now a lowly blacksmith!"
*Bhim is one of the best and Arjun is the best of archers,
 But the Kauravas are going to steal all the cows.*

(Chorus)

You shall learn your living by selling *chedna*⁶³.
 You shall live by selling needles.
 You shall not do better in life.
 You shall not die of hunger but
 You shall not store grain.
 You are now a lowly blacksmith because of my curse.

Yes, Bhim, I will earn my living by selling *chedna*.
 I will feed myself by selling needles.
 I will not attack anyone.
 I will also not die of hunger but
 I will not have grain storage.
 I have become a lowly blacksmith under your curse.

The era of truth may come and go,
 The era of deities may come and go,
 The era of wealth may come and go,
 The era of destruction may come and go,
 Oh Bhim, under your curse I have become a lowly blacksmith.



⁶² As a member of the Chatriya warrior caste, Susharma violates his caste ethics by pleading for his life instead of fighting as the warrior he was trained to be, and is therefore reduced to the lowest caste.

⁶³ *Chedna* are iron tools.

BARKIMAR KO PAIDHAR

After killing all 100 Kaurava brothers in the bloody battle, the Pandavas emerge victorious at Kurukshetra, the ultimate battle between the Pandavas and the Kauravas.

After many serious discussions about 'right' and 'wrong,' the Pandavas decide to negotiate with the Kauravas. The Matsya battles are followed by a period of intense conference as the two families try to agree upon the terms of peaceful co-existence. Envoys are sent back and forth to negotiate a settlement. Krishna urges that all means should be used to avoid going to war. He is supported by Draupad, but not by Draupadi, who still seeks revenge for the humiliation and dishonor she suffered at the hands of the Kauravas.

On the Kaurava side, similar dissension exists. Vidur and Bhishma counsel the Kauravas to make peace, but Duryodhan stubbornly resists. When the Pandavas reduce their demand to five villages rather than half the kingdom, even Dhritarashtra counsels the Kauravas to accept their proposal and thereby avoid the deadly war that threatens if talks fail. Finally, as a last resort, Krishna agrees to go to Indraprastha to plead for a peaceful solution. But he is insulted by Duryodhan, who rejects all settlement proposals with fury: "We will not yield even the space of land that is occupied by the point of a needle!"

The tragedy moves inexorably towards its bloody conclusion on the fields of Kurukshetra. The war that destroys nearly an entire civilization is rapidly becoming inescapable.

Both sides prepare for war: they prepare weapons, collect animals, and enlist the support of as many kingdoms as possible. Duryodhan and Arjun both seek the support of Krishna. After some jockeying, Arjun chooses Krishna to be on his side and Duryodhan takes Krishna's armies, the Yadavas. Both are pleased with their choices but – as it will become clear later – Krishna, not his troops, is the crucial factor in determining the outcome of the battle. Not wanting to fight, Krishna becomes Arjun's charioteer. Prophetically, Yudhishtir sums up: "With Krishna on our side, armed or unarmed, we have nothing to fear." And so the inevitable war begins.

The events of the Battle of Kurukshetra offer many opportunities for philosophizing about the ethics of conflict. Indeed, as the underlying theme of the Mahabharata concerns moral duty and right conduct, the writers of the Mahabharata seize this opportunity to insert the "Bhagavad-Gita" teachings at this point. Arjun has misgivings about whether he should fight his cousins the Kauravas, his teacher Drona, and his great-uncle Bhishma, all of whom are blood relatives. Arjun suddenly feels his brave heart fail him: how can he shed their blood? "Krishna," he despairs, "I will not fight this war! Let the Kauravas have everything."

Arjun's change of heart triggers Krishna's teachings. There are many ways to reach God, he explains. Each man may choose his own way, but for the Chatriya, the way to God lies in the path of duty. Arjun is a Chatriya and his duty is to fight for righteousness, whatever the consequences. Eventually, Arjun overcomes his doubts and joins the battle.

These ethical dilemmas surrounding the battle are only indirectly referred to in the Tharu version, but in the classic version these teachings represent a major part of the entire Mahabharata.

The battle lasts eighteen days. The rules of war are agreed to: no hitting below the navel, one-on-one battles between the leaders, no attacks on fleeing enemies or helpless warriors. These rules and many more are adhered to at the beginning, only to be abandoned later as the battle becomes more and more destructive.

One by one the Kaurava heroes fall in war as the battle flows back and forth, but always ceases at sunset. (Many detailed descriptions of the battle songs are strongly reminiscent of the tales of the Iliad.) All the vows made earlier are fulfilled. Warriors are eliminated; battle animals are destroyed. On the last day, Duryodhan, mortally wounded by Bhim, is cheered when he is told that the five Pandavas have been murdered at night in their tent. However, all five Pandava brothers survive and take over the entire Kingdom of Kuru; Yudhishtir is King. After Yudhishtir abandons the throne and turns to meditation, Parikshit, Arjun's grandson, becomes king.

Here then is the Tharu story of the "Barkimar," the final battle:

1

Sakuni looks around at the meeting,
And sees everyone but King Karna.
The Chatriya king must be called.

2

The call rings out, "Karna! Karna!
Oh Brother Karna, come right away!
You are summoned by King Duryodhan, who wants to talk with you."

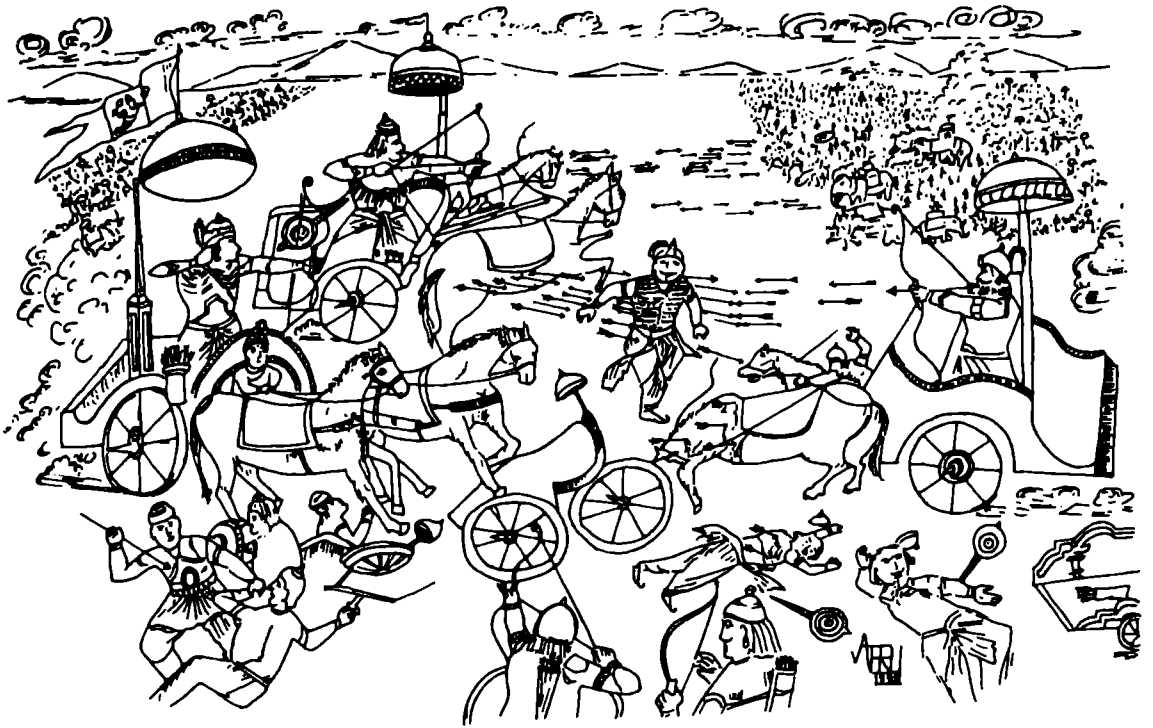
3

Karna goes first, followed by a charioteer
Who drives a hundred-yard long chariot.
He arrives riding a hundred-yard long chariot.

(Chorus)
Even the fireflies are on our side.
Like stars shining with bright light in the sky,
Fireflies give us light in the black night.

4

No matter where I look, I see only sand,
And the hoofs of galloping horses
The storm of dust hides the light from the sky;
And clouds cover the moon.



5

The earth trembles beneath the hoofs of the galloping horses.
Again and again the sandstorm shrouds the light from the sky,
And clouds conceal the moon.
All lights are covered, and darkness falls.

6

The first group marches into the water,
The middle group marches into the mud.
I don't care for the group after that,
And the last group does not care for me.

7

We started in the morning and it is now evening.
The canteen is eighty miles away.
Here and there parts of the army have stopped fighting.
Oh King! Let us take some rest.

(Chorus)

Oh Arjun! Why would you kill me?
A bigger enemy, Gangewa, is here.
No matter how deadly an arrow you shoot,
You cannot harm the body. Oh Daunagir!
Your brother Gangewa is here, a bigger enemy.
No matter how deadly an arrow you release,
You cannot harm the body.

8

Oh Gangewa! Drive onward!
 Move your chariot forward or shoot your arrows.
 Arjun will retreat to save himself.

9

Two arrows are released;
 Chandar Ban is the arrow empowered by a mantra.
 Agni Ban (Fire Arrow) is released by Gangewa, setting fires everywhere.

10

Two arrows are released.
 Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
 Megh Ban (Rain Arrow) is released by Arjun,
 And it puts out all the fires.

11

Oh brave Sakuni! Come forth!
 Move your chariot forward and shoot your arrow;
 Arjun will retreat to save himself.

12

Two arrows are released.
 Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
 After releasing Sakath Ban (Power Arrow), Sakuni steps back,

13

Oh Shapkewa! Come forth!
 Move your chariot forward and release your arrow.
 Arjun will retreat to save himself.

14

Two arrows are released.
 Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
 After releasing Kuhath Ban, (Difficult Arrow), Shapkewa retreats to the rear.

15

Oh fearless, superior warrior! Come forth!
 Move your chariot forward and shoot your arrow.
 Arjun will retreat to save himself.

16

Two arrows are released.
 Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
 The superior warrior releases the Kaula Ban (Explosion Arrow) and retreats to the rear.

17

Oh Bidur! Come forth!
Move your chariot forward and shoot your arrow.
Arjun will retreat to save himself.

18

Two arrows are released.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Arjun releases the Nid Ban (Sleep Arrow) and steps back.

19

Oh Bhagadatta! Come forth!
Move your chariot forward and shoot your arrow.
Arjun will retreat to save himself.

20

Two arrows are released.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Bhagadanta releases the Chura Ban (Knife Arrow) and steps back.

21

Oh Balbhadra! Come forth!
Move your chariot forward or shoot your arrow.
Arjun will retreat to save himself.

22

Two arrows are released.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Balbhadra releases the Jagat Ban (Big Explosion Arrow) and steps back.

23

Oh, brave Pandavas, come forth!
Move your chariot forward or release your arrow.
Arjun will retreat to save himself.

24

Two arrows are released.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
King Pandava releases the Sui Ban (Needle Arrow) and steps back.

25

Oh brave King! Come forth!
Move your chariot forward and shoot your arrow.
Arjun will retreat to save himself.

26

Two arrows are released.
 Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
 The brave King releases the Sula Ban (Pain Arrow) and steps back.

27

Karna, come forth!
 Move your chariot forward and release your arrow,
 Arjun will retreat to save himself.

28

Two arrows are released.
 Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
 Karna releases the Chedan Ban (Spike Arrow) and steps back.

29

Oh Karna, come forth!
 Move your chariot forward or release your arrow.
 Arjun will retreat to save himself.

30

Two arrows are released.
 Chandar Ban is the weapon powered by this mantra.
 Karna releases the Naga Ban (Snake Arrow) and the snake bites Arjun.

31

Hanuman (the Monkey God), furious with anger, says,
 "I shall test your strength. I will kill you, Karna, and
 Take you to Lanka and destroy your brothers."

(Chorus)

If we want to save Arjun, we must appeal to Uncle Vashudeva.
 Only he can save Arjun; we have no way to save him.
 Hanuman says, Call Uncle Vashudeva
 Or I shall destroy all of Karna's brothers.
 Karna says, Oh, Hanuman, you have Garuda
 And you have Uncle Vashudeva on your side.
 He is the only one who can save Arjun; we have no other way.

32

Uncle Vashudeva sends Garuda into the sky.
 Flapping his wings, Garuda flies high in the sky,
 And every serpent hides underground in fear.

33

Seven minutes to his house and seven minutes back;
 Then prepare the potion of life and give it to Arjun.

Fan him with the fan made of fifty-two different things,
And keep him awake with a rattan cane⁶⁴.

34

Give him the potion of life to drink after mixing,
Keep him cool with the fan made of fifty-two different things,
And wake him up with a rattan cane.

35

Arjun awakes and is feeling better.
Carrying their weapons, all the Pandava brothers start towards
The battlefield of Kurukshetra.
A river of blood will flow in the fields of Kurukshetra!

36

I can see a bright forehead; it must be none other than Arjun,
One woman with five husbands, all brothers sleeping in one place.

37

Karna, You are a true prince, but how can a prince behave so lowly?
How did you adopt our name?
You are after the wealth of King Duryodhan.

38

The fox [Karna] can never have the strength of the lion [Arjun].
No matter how badly he wants it,
A naked man cannot entertain guests.

39

Weapon meets weapon.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Guna Ban (Clever Arrow) is restless and the hungry weapon is also restless;
A sacrifice must be offered.

40

Two arrows are released.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Arjun releases the Guna Ban (Clever Arrow) and
The snake that bit Arjun now bites brave King Karna.

41

After releasing the arrow, Arjun goes to see,
Saying, "I have killed a Chatriya
Whose thighs were huge and whose arms were as strong as a mountain,
Whose chest was wider than eight yards."

⁶⁴ The cane (*byat*) is a religious stick located in the puja (prayer) room in the northeast corner of the Dangaura house, called the *dihurar*. It is used to control witches and ghosts. The Tharu *Guruwas* carry this cane with them whenever they perform puja.

42

"I have killed a Chatriya,
Whose arms were as big and strong as his thighs,
Whose chest was wider than eight yards."
The challenge is yours, Bhim and Arjun, to prevent
The Kauravas from defiling their own sister-in-law.

43

Two arrows are released.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Arjun releases the Suta Ban (Sleep Arrow) and says,
"Sleep, Kaurava, go to sleep."

44

Two arrows are released.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Arjun releases the Chura Ban (Knife Arrow).
And the Kauravas' beards and mustaches are shaved clean.

45

Weapon meets weapon.
Chandar Ban is the weapon empowered by a mantra.
Arjun releases the Jagat Ban (Big Explosion Arrow) and the Kauravas wake up.

46

Oh Sakuni! Review the horoscope for tomorrow's sorrows,
To know who will live and who will die, for tomorrow will bring a deadly fight!
Many innocent kings have already died.
Now the blood bath really begins!

47

The Kauravas are gathered in battle formation.
Their line of strong wrestlers and champion archers breaks down.
"The Brahmins' papers and star charts are useless;
If this is true, I shall be without weapons in the field,"
Says Duryodhan.

48

No matter how much make-up she puts on,
A wailing woman is never pretty.
So too, no matter how much muck is thrown into the ocean,
The waters will always be pure.
Therefore, it matters little if a few soldiers of this army
Of hundreds of thousands are left behind.

49

At times all is tranquil;
At other times musical instruments create a cacophony of sounds.

But in the black night King Duryodhan is by himself;
He has not even had time to drink the water in his decorated vessel.
“Don’t be afraid, even if you must move mountains.”

50

The destruction comes not only from weapons alone:
Chariots strike elephants and thirty hundred thousand elephants roar;
Seventy-five thousand soldiers are felled by stampeding elephants.

51

Warriors flee, leaving their pennants behind.
Mahouts flee towards the city.
King Duryodhan flees, dropping his parasol.
Uttara Kumar picks it up and holds it high over his head in triumph.

(Chorus)

Oh King Duryodhan! Why did we flee,
Leaving our old and torn pennants and your parasol behind?
Uttara Kumar now holds it triumphantly over his head.

52

Don’t go herding without your cattle.
Don’t visit your in-laws without your wife.
A man’s lips are not beautiful without a moustache!
Speak twice your mantra: “Weapon, weapon.”

(Chorus)

Oh Sakuni! What can I tell them when I go home?
Because, if I go home,
Queen Gandhari will ask questions.
Do I have to tell her that all my brothers
Died in the battlefield?

53

Oh my sister Queen Kunti, I am your uncle.
You are my nephews; I have taught you and given you knowledge.
Now I request my teacher’s fee.

54

Arjun returns home after recapturing all the property and wealth
Stolen by the Kauravas. His brothers rush to see him.
“Our strategy was right! The unified kingdom is ours once again!”

55

Queen Mother Kunti asks,
“Dear sons, what took place on the battlefield of Kurukshetra?”

56

"Oh Mother! We went to Kurukshetra and killed a Chatriya
Who had huge thighs and arms, and was as strong as a mountain."

57

"I killed a brave Chatriya,
Whose arms were as big and strong as his thighs,
Whose chest was wider than eight yards,
And who fell like a mountain."

58

Kunti replies,
"Oh Son, you have killed a Chatriya in Kurukshetra,
Whose arms were as big and strong as his thighs,
Whose chest was wider than eight yards.
And who fell like a mountain."

59

"You have killed a son of Chatriya,
Whose arms were as big and strong as his thighs,
Whose chest was wider than eight yards.
Who fell like a mountain."

60

"Oh Son! He whose thighs were big and strong,
And whose arms were strong,
Whose chest was wider than eight yards, who fell like a mountain,
Was your older brother, Karna!"

61

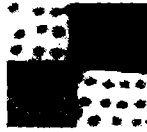
"Oh Mother, if you had only told us in advance!
We would have been close friends because of our brotherhood.
Why would I kill my older brother?
I am a sinner who killed his own brother!
My mind is greatly troubled by this thought!"

62

Queen Kunti concludes,
"I must have done many good deeds in my previous birth.
A hundred good deeds are in my past, for
Now I have all five sons in one place."



EPILOGUE



WARGAROHA

The journey to Heaven

So ends the war of Kurukshetra; the bitter rivalry between the sons of the Kuru clan has run its course. Blind King Dhritarashtra and the Kauravas' mother, Gandhari, are the only Kaurava survivors. Hastinapura has become a city of mourning; the women and children weep and lament for their slain sons, brothers, and fathers. The Kaurava patriarch Bhishma, who was fatally wounded in the battle, is still alive in the battlefield, resting on a bed of arrows. Long ago, the gods gave him the power to determine the time of his own death, and he chooses to wait to see the full sunshine of the summer solstice. While waiting, he instructs Yudhishtir— now king over the once again combined kingdom — how to be a good king. He advises him about virtue, life, and death. Content, he then asks Death to come and take him away. Death obeys and carries out his wish.

Yudhishtir and his brothers rule wisely for many years until the time comes for them to leave earth. Their arduous journey to heaven is the subject of the Epilogue, the 'Journey to Heaven.' Yudhishtir, his four brothers, and Draupadi turn the kingdom over to Parikshit, Arjun's grandson. Leaving their kingdom, they set out on the long pilgrimage to the Himalayas where they hope to be admitted to heaven.

All die on the rough journey except Yudhishtir, who is the only one considered by the gods to be virtuous and worthy enough to enter heaven. When he arrives at the gates to heaven, he does not find his brothers or Draupadi there, only Duryodhan. He asks for an explanation and refuses to enter until they too are admitted. After Yudhishtir emerges from various trials exacted by the gods, (since he would rather stay in hell with his brothers and Draupadi than live alone in Heaven), all are admitted to heaven, where they reside until they became one with the Eternal, free from birth and rebirth. Since heaven is a place with no room for malice, jealousy or anger, the Pandavas and the Kauravas are finally reconciled.

This is how the Tharu describe the ascent to heaven:

Oh, my villagers, where have you gone?
Bring rice and milk,
The chief of the village asks his people.

Queen Kunti serves the meal and invites all five brothers
And their wife Draupadi.
Four brothers and Draupadi sit down for the meal;
The four brothers and Draupadi eat the meal,
And Bhim eats two plates full.
After the meal, the five brothers gargle with milky water.

Queen Draupadi hands out betel nut, which Bhim chews and says:
"Oh Draupadi! Bring milk and rice, I'll cook a King's meal!"
Bhim blocks the door.

"Kaliyug⁶⁵ has arrived," Brother Bhim says with compassion.
First to depart, Draupadi leaves for the north.
She sets out on the pilgrimage of fire.

"Kaliyug has arrived," Brother Bhim says with compassion.
Next, Sahadev leaves for the north.
"Oh Sahadev, you shall never reach the state of holiness,"
The watchman says.

"Kaliyug has arrived," Brother Bhim says with compassion.
Nakul leaves for the north. "Oh Brother Nakul," the watchman says,
"You shall never reach the state of holiness."

"Kaliyug has arrived," Brother Bhim says with compassion.
Arjun leaves for the north. "Oh Brother Arjun,
You will never reach the state of holiness by yourself."

"Kaliyug has arrived," Brother Bhim says with compassion.
"Oh, I'll never reach the state of holiness alone."

"Kaliyug has arrived," Brother Bhim says with compassion.
"Beyond this kingdom on earth, oh Brother Yudhishtir,
You will never reach the state of holiness by yourself."

⁶⁵ Kaliyug is the Age of Sin, the fourth and final era of Hindu mythology

King Yudhishtir travels to heaven,
Where he sits on the golden throne at the Palace of Indra.
Yudhishtir and Indra decide on the path
To be followed by his four brothers and Draupadi.

He left Bhim two light years behind, dead.
But how did you reach here before me?
Oh Brother, I came here through the wind.
That is the only way to heaven, so I arrived here before you

He left Arjun four light years behind, dead.
But how did you reach here before me?
Oh Brother, I came here through the wind.
That is the only way to heaven, so I arrived here before you.

He left Nakul six light years behind, dead.
But how did you reach here before me?
Oh Brother, I came here through the wind.
That is the only way to heaven, so I arrived here before you.

He left Sahadev eight light years behind, dead.
But how did you reach here before me?
Oh Brother, I came here through the wind.
That is the only way to heaven, so I arrived here before you.

He left Draupadi ten light years behind, dead.
But how did you reach here before me?
Oh Queen Draupadi, I came here through the wind.
That is the only way to heaven, so I arrived here before you.

Oh, King, we left you twelve light years behind.
How did you arrive before us?
Oh, Brothers, oh Brothers, I came here through the wind.
That is the only way to heaven, so I arrived here before you.

We,
All five brothers,
Have come here,
One by one,
Through the wind,
The only road to heaven.



GLOSSARY

Abhimanyu	Son of Arjun and Suhadra, who married Uttara, daughter of King Bairath (Virat).
Ahir	A low caste tribe of cattle herders.
Amrit	Ambrosia; the food of the gods which makes the partaker immortal.
Arjun	(Arjuna in female form) Third of the five Pandava brothers, master warrior and archer.
Aswathama	Son of Drona and last commander of the Kauravas.
Bairath	(Also, Virat) King of Matsya, where the Pandavas lived in their thirteenth year.
Ballava	Name assumed by Bhim at Bairath's court during the thirteenth year.
Bakasura	(Also, Danu) A voracious, cruel and terribly strong <i>rakshasa</i> (demon) whom Bhim killed to the great relief of the citizens.
Brihannala	Name assumed by Arjun while living incognito at Bairath's court.
Bhim	(Also spelled Bhewa) The second Pandava brother. Being born of the wind god, he excelled in physical prowess. Bhim is the Tharu's favorite Pandava brother. He is often given credit by the Tharu for deeds performed in the classic version by Arjun or some other.
Bhishma	(Also Davravrata and Gangewa) The old grandsire of the Kuru clan, Bhishma was the eighth child of King Santanu and Ganga. The Pandava brothers were put into his care for their education in the arts, the Vedas and the military arts. The supreme commander of the Kaurava army, he nevertheless was reluctant to fight his former pupils. God gave him control over the time of his own death, which occurred at Kurukshetra.
Danu	(Also Bakasura) Man-eating demon killed by Bhim.
Devavrata	Earlier name of Bhishma.
Devendra	King of the gods.
Dharmagranthi	Name assumed by Nakul at Bairath's court.
Dhritarashtra	Blind elder son of Vichitravirya and Ambika; father of Duryodhan.
Draupadi	(Durpati in Tharu) Daughter of King Draupad of Panchala; wife of all five Pandavas.

Drona	After he learned the military arts from the master Parashumara, Drona then became the teacher of the five Pandavas and the one hundred Kauravas. Even though he fought on the side of the Kauravas, he had a warm spot in his heart for Arjun, his most favorite and best student.
Drupada	(Also spelled Draupad) Father of Draupadi.
Dushasana	Duryodhan's brother, he dragged the humiliated Draupadi by her hair to the assembly hall. Dushasana was killed at Kurukeshtra by Bhim, who in his elated victory drank the blood from his heart and Draupadi, her honor vindicated, washed her hair in his blood.
Gandhari	Dhritarashtra's wife and the queen mother of the Kauravas.
Gandiva	Arjun's potent bow.
Gangewa	Another name for Bhishma, son of Ganga.
Guru	Revered teacher.
Guruwa	Tharu priest.
Hanuman	Wise and learned Monkey God.
Hastinapura	(In Tharu, Hasanpur.) Capital city of the Kauravas.
Indra	King of the gods.
Indraprastha	Capital city of the Pandavas.
Jatasura	(In Tharu, Jatiya.) A demon killed by Bhim.
Jayadrath	Prevented the Pandavas from saving Abhimanyu, he was attacked by many Kauravas. Arjun killed him to revenge his son's death.
Kanka	Yudhishtir's assumed name at King Bairath's court.
Karna	A peerless warrior, son of Kunti and Surya, the sun god Surya. A Kaurava commander and the main enemy of Arjun, Karna was killed by Arjun, who did not know that Karna was his oldest brother. Karna was never properly respected because he was thought to be the son of the low caste charioteer who raised him.
Kichaka	Brother of Bairath's (Virat) wife Sudeshna. He made unwanted advances to Draupadi when she was working in disguise as a servant at Bairath's court. He was killed by the furious Bhim.
Kunti	Wife of Pandu, mother of three of the five Pandavas conceived by the gods. From the sage Durvasa she had received a mantra which, when repeated, would give her a son from any god she called upon. Out of youthful curiosity, she called to Surya and bore him a son. Then, ashamed, she set him afloat in a basket on a river, where a childless charioteer picked him up and raised him as Karna.
Mantra	An incantation of powerful words.
Meru	(Mt. Kailash) The holy mountain and site of the palace of Indra. In the epilogue the Pandavas, reaching for heaven, climb Mt. Meru.

Nakul	Fourth brother of the Pandavas; twin of Sahadev.
Pandu	Second son of Vichitravirya and Ambalika, who succeeded to the throne of Hastinapura because his older brother Dhritarashtra was blind. Father of the Pandavas.
Pariksheet	Son of Abhimanyu and grandson of Arjun, Pariksheet was crowned King after the Kurukshetra holocaust claimed the lives of the Kauravas and after the Pandavas had died.
Puja	Worship.
Purain	A plant similar to the lotus.
Ravana	Demon King of Lanka in the epic story, <u>The Ramayana</u> .
Sahadev	Youngest of the Pandavas; twin of Nakul.
Sakuni	He played dice on behalf of the Kauravas and defeated Yudhishtir in a fixed game. Brother of Gandhari, he came to the court and eventually became the conniving, wicked advisor who pushed Duryodhan into aggravating the conflict with the Pandavas.
Santanu	King of Hastinapura; father of Bhishma.
Sikhandin(i)	Re-incarnation of Amba who, when rejected by Bhishma, was born a man to take revenge on Bhishma. He (she) was responsible for Bhishma's death when Bhishma refused to fight a woman (a woman turned into a man).
Subhadra	Wife of Arjun; sister of Krishna; mother of Abhimanyu.
Sudeshna	Queen of Bairath (Virat), whom Draupadi served in disguise.
Susharma	King of Trigarta. A supporter of the Kauravas, Susharma attacked Matsya, the kingdom of Bairath, and was defeated, unaware that he was fighting the disguised Pandavas.
Swarga	The heaven of Indra, open to mortals who lived a moral life on earth.
Swayamvara	A husband-choosing competition at which eligible bachelors compete to win the right to marry a young woman.
Tantripala	Name assumed by Sahadev at Bairath's court.
Trigarta	Kingdom of King Susharma.
Vagadanta	King of Magadh.
Vashudeva	Brother of Kunti and father of Krishna.
Vichitravirya	Younger son of Santanu; king of Hastinapur; and father of Dhritarashtra and Pandu.
Virat	(also, Bairath) King of Matsya, where the Pandavas lived incognito during their thirteenth year of exile.
Vyasa	Son of the sage Parasara, he complied and dictated the story of the Mahabharata story to his scribe Ganesh.
Yama	God of death and dharma, and father of Yudhishtir.
Yojan	A large measurement of land.

BARKA NAACH BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Beswick, Ethel (1996). The Hindu Gods. New Delhi: Crest Publishing House. A necessary guide to the countless Hindu gods and goddesses, it makes an excellent reference.
- Coomaraswamy, Ananda K. and Sister Nivedita (1967). Myths of the Hindus and Buddhists. New York: Dover Publications, Inc. Very helpful in shedding light on the Mahabharata in the larger context.
- Dutt, Romesh C. (1995). The Mahabharata; Epic of the Bharata. New Delhi: Crest Publishing House. In 1898 an intrepid Englishman translated many verses into English using the original Sanskrit meter and couplets. Reading Duff's poetic language as an alternative to the more academic prose translations makes a good interlude.
- Ganguli, Kisari Mohan (1997). The Mahabharata of Krishna – Dwaipayana Vyasa. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharwal (4 volumes). This book is for those who wish to immerse themselves in the Hindu epic. In 4 volumes and 4600 pages, it offers a verbatim prose translation of the epic. Based on the Bengali text and Bombay editions, it is a superb reference guide, even if one does not read it from cover to cover.
- Knappert, Jan (1995). Indian Mythology, an Encyclopedia of Myth and Legend. London: Diamond Books. Another useful overview of Hindu mythology.
- Krauskopff, Gisèle (1989). Maîtres et Possédés. Paris: Edition du CNRS. Krauskopff is the premier researcher of Dangaura Tharu culture. The Barka Naach is one integral part of this book.
- McDonaugh, C.E. (1984). The Tharu of Dang. Oxford: University of Oxford, PhD Dissertation. A documentation of the life of the Tharu of Dang Valley.
- Munshi, K.M. (1983). Krishavatra, Volumes I to VII. Bahvan's Book University. Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. A series of books devoted to different aspects of the epic.
- Narasimhan, Chakravarthi V. (1998). The Mahabharata. New York: Columbia University Press. An English prose translation which contains excellent background information: an index of the verses; a list of alternative names which are frequently used, e.g. Krishna is referred to in the Mahabharata by eight different names and Arjun by fourteen; an extensive glossary; genealogical tables. This version is based mainly on the Poona version, but also draws upon the Bengali text.
- Rajagopalachari, C. (33rd edition, 1996). Mahabharata. Mumbai: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan. Probably the most popular English prose version of The Mahabharata.

- Rao, Shanta Rameshwar. (1991). The Mahabharata. Hyderabad: Orient Longman Limited. A good edition to start with for a novice in the study of Indian culture and epics. Written with great clarity and intended for young people, it has fine illustrations and a good bibliography for future reading and understanding.
- Schwartzberg, Joseph E., editor, et al. (1992). Historical Atlas of South Asia. New York Oxford: Oxford University Press. This atlas offers clear maps of the geography of The Mahabharata.
- Suri, Chander Kanta (1990?). Characters from the Mahabharat. Volumes 1 through 22. New Delhi: Books for All. A collection of 22 booklets, each devoted to the life of a single character of the Mahabharata.
- Varadpande, M.L.(1990). Mahabharata in Performance. New Delhi: Clarion Books. This volume presents, with many photographs, the Peter Brooks' westernized performance of the Mahabharata produced in 1984, and shows the universal appeal of the epic.
- Verma, Manju Rami, (1991) Ethical Elements of Mahabharata. New Delhi: Commonwealth Publishers. Helpful, as two-thirds to three-quarters of the epic is devoted to philosophical and ethnic discourses.



KURU FAMILY TREE

