

"I like the part where the Pandavas spend a whole year in disguise. I think Duryodhana is very unfair to them." Tina, 10

If there ever was an epic that touches upon every conceivable human emotion and poses the most complex of questions, it has to be the Mahabharata, the most famous of stories from India.

In the second book of this exciting three-part series a single roll of the dice reverses the fortunes of the Pandavas.

The peaceful years following the division of the kingdom of Bharata are soon to end because of Duryodhana's jealousy. With his uncle Sakuni he now plots to secure the entire kingdom for the Kauravas, but will his cunning strategy work? Can the Pandavas ever win against the cunning Sakuni?

Yudhishtira, the oldest of the Pandava brothers and the architect of their misfortune, is prepared to gamble away his territory, his wealth, his brothers, himself – even his wife. What can the Pandavas do now?



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MAHABHARATA ROLLING THE DICE Veda Vyasa



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Retold by Prema Jayakumar
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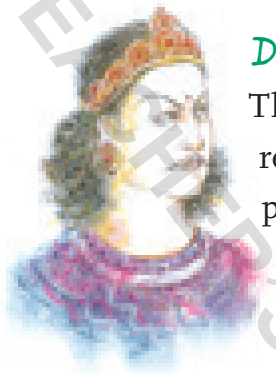
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CONTENTS

The Characters	4
Mahabharata	
Rolling the dice	7
Taking things further	55



THE CHARACTERS



Duryodhana

The regent Dhritarashtra's eldest son resents the fact that his father gave part of the kingdom to his cousins. What evil will result from his anger?

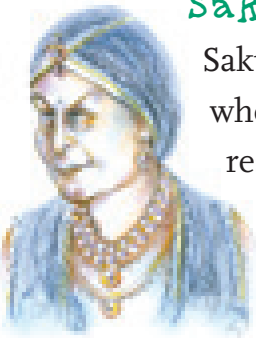
Dussasana

He is the most trusted lieutenant of his brother, Duryodhana, but his humiliation of Draupadi makes his name a byword for the ill-treatment of women. What will he suffer as a consequence?



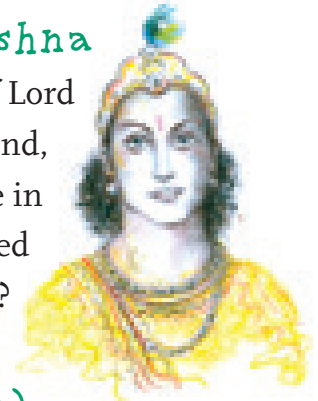
Sakuni

Sakuni accompanied his sister Gandhari when she married Dhritarashtra, and is resentful that her blind husband can never be king. Will his stratagems gain the country for his nephew Duryodhana?



Krishna

Krishna, the ninth avatar of Lord Vishnu, is the ever-present friend, counsellor and saviour of those in distress. Will his wisdom succeed in preventing all-out war?



Valala (Bhima)

Hiding his strength as Valala, a cook at Virata's palace, Bhima is forced to watch Kichaka's pursuit of Draupadi. Will he be able to keep his disguise?



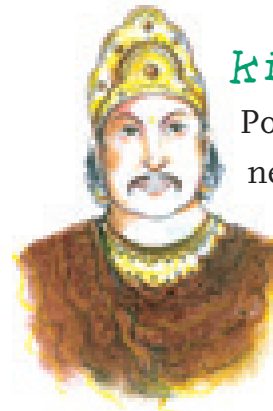
Brihannala (Arjuna)

Arjuna disguises himself as Brihannala, a eunuch at Virata's court. How will this brave warrior fare in the women's quarters?

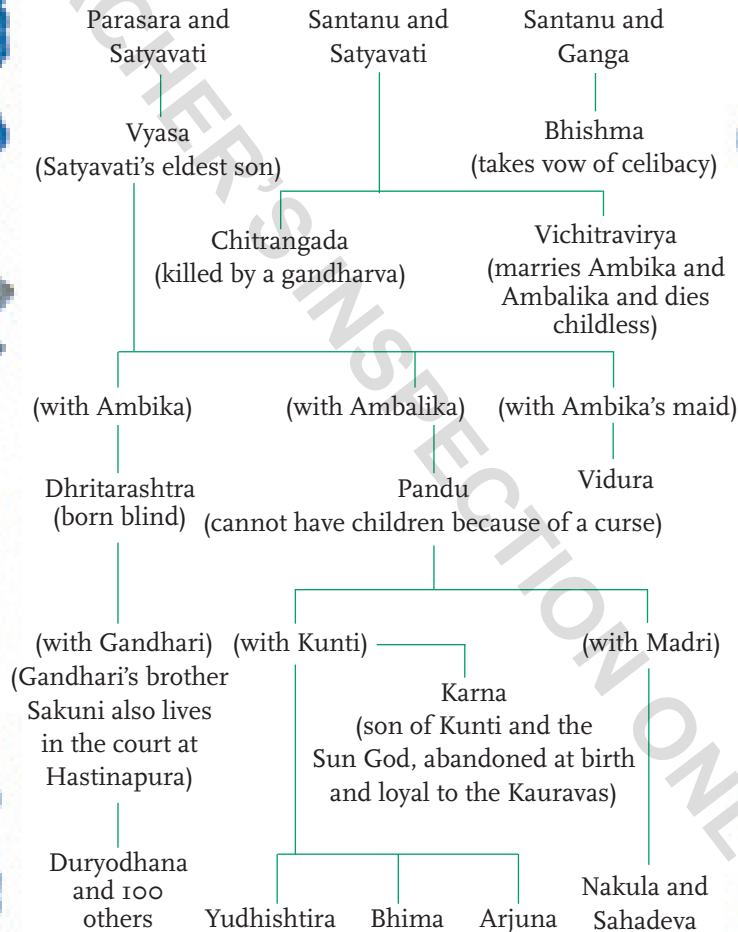


Kichaka

Powerful Kichaka has never brooked opposition. He falls in love with his sister's beautiful maid. What end will he meet?



THE FAMILY TREE OF THE KURU RACE



Gandhari's 101 children are called **The Kauravas**
Kunti's and Madri's 5 children are called **The Pandavas**

MAHABHARATA ROLLING THE DICE

The kingdom of Bharata was divided. After much persuasion by his royal counsellors, the blind regent Dhritarashtra had granted part of the kingdom to his nephews, the Pandavas. In the arid region of Khandava, the five Pandavas – Yudhishtira, Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva – had built a wonderful new capital called Indraprastha. They lived there happily with Draupadi, the princess they had all married.

Indraprastha was prosperous and peaceful. Over time, more princesses came as brides of the Pandavas. These marriages, with daughters from powerful families, extended the influence of the princes. One of Arjuna's brides was Subhadra; she was the sister of Krishna, the ninth avatar of Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe.

Dhritarashtra continued to rule over the rest of the country from his palace in Hastinapura. But all was not well. The eldest prince, Duryodhana, was an unhappy man. Was not the entire kingdom of Bharata his by right? Surely the Pandavas deserved no part of it. He must somehow win it back.



One day Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas, called his younger brothers together. 'Our country is prosperous and peaceful,' he told them. 'It is time we gave the gods their due. We must conduct a fire sacrifice in their honour. It will be an opportunity to invite our friends and relatives to our new home.'

Bhima and the other brothers were very happy to show off their beautiful new capital to their envious cousins. 'Duryodhana won't

be able to bear the sight of our prosperity,' they said to each other. 'Let us by all means invite our cousins.'

Invitations were sent to all the royal families of nearby states. At Hastinapura their invitation was received with great interest. Duryodhana and his brothers had heard a lot from travellers about the new city, and they were very curious to see it for themselves. Intrigued, they set out.



Back in time

Ramayana and *Mahabharata* are the two epics that united India even when the country was geographically divided into a number of small kingdoms. *Ramayana* has always been more popular for reading out loud, but *Mahabharata* raises many complex questions about the nature of morality that remain provocative even today. It is the philosophical content of *Mahabharata* that makes it especially important.

The creation of the earliest version of *Mahabharata* has been placed tentatively in the eighth century BCE. The author is concerned with the nature of morality, and questions the values that were taken for granted at that period of India's history.

In *Mahabharata*, the eternal dilemma of human life is examined. What justifies a war? When is it moral to take up arms, to kill innocent people? When is deceit permissible? When does the desire for peace border on cowardice?

These questions are eternal, and there are no simple and clear-cut solutions. Maybe the

only answer is that at some stage it becomes immoral *not* to fight against exploitation and tyranny. While peace is desirable, it cannot be at any cost. And every war leaves defeated losers as well as triumphant victors.

None of the characters in this story is perfect, yet nobody is so wicked that there is nothing to admire in them.

Major places and festivals

- Hastinapura, in the state of Uttar Pradesh, still exists, though today it is just a small town. It is believed that Indraprastha was located near to the city of Delhi. Kurukshetra, where the final battle took place, is in Haryana.
- Kasi or Benares, on the banks of the River Ganga, is the heart of Hinduism, and its most important pilgrimage centre.
- The most important temples dedicated to Lord Krishna in North India are at Mathura, where he was born, and at Brindavan, where he grew up.