

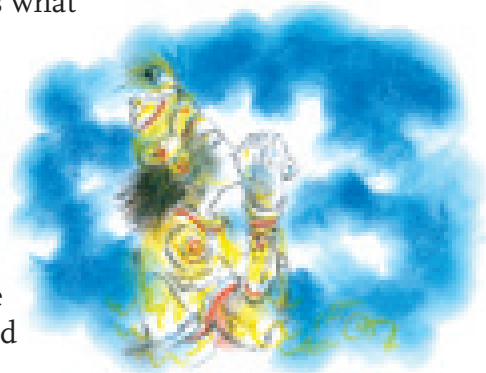
"I love the fast-paced action on the battlefield,
but the fight between Arjuna and Karna
is very sad." Sunil, 11

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.

The deadly rivalry between the royal cousins, the Pandavas and the Kauravas, can only end one way – in the mightiest of battles imaginable. The gods watch in dismay as the opponents draw up their forces.

Will the mighty warriors Bhishma and Drona survive to see the end? And what of Karna? Where will his loyalties lie – with his true friend Duryodhana, or with his brothers, the Pandavas? Lord Krishna sees what is about to happen, and is so concerned that he comes to earth to counsel the mortals, especially the distraught Arjuna.

In the last book of this exciting three-part series, the final battle fought on the field at Kurukshetra decides who will triumph and who will fall.



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MAHABHARATA THE FINAL BATTLE Veda Vyasa



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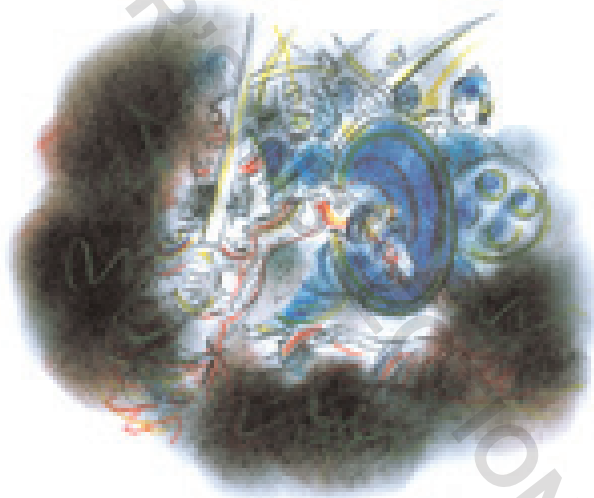


Retold by Prema Jayakumar
Illustrated by K.R.Raji



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THE CHARACTERS

Draupadi

This most beautiful of women married the five great warriors, the Pandavas, but was humiliated by Duryodhana, their Kaurava cousin. Can war between the Pandavas and Kauravas redress this wrong?



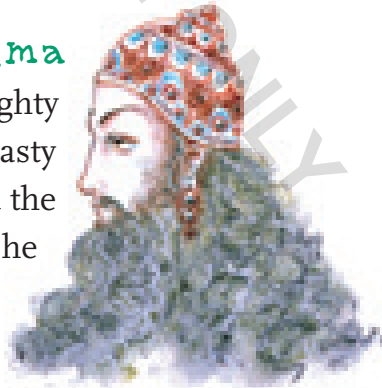
Krishna

Lord Krishna, the ninth avatar of Lord Vishnu, has sworn not to take up weapons in the great war of Kurukshetra. But does he support both sides equally? Will he be forced to join in the fighting?



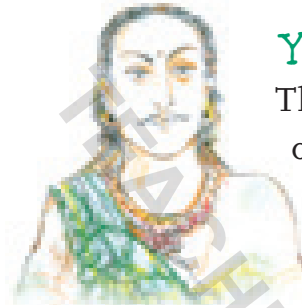
Bhishma

This selfless patriarch and mighty warrior of the Kuru dynasty loves both the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Which side will he fight for when war comes?



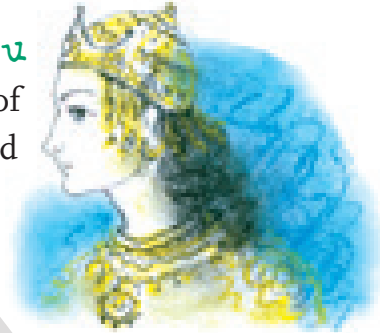
Yudhishtira

The eldest of the Pandavas was king of his own land, Indraprastha, until his cousin Duryodhana cheated him of it. Will he ever get back his title and his lands?



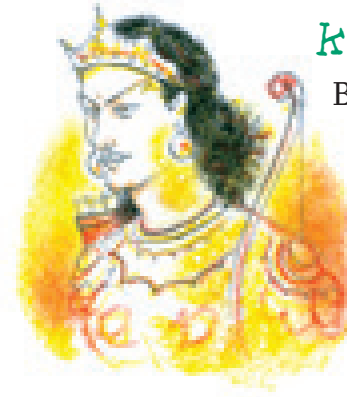
Abhimanyu

Abhimanyu is the young son of Arjuna. As famous an archer and warrior as his illustrious father, will he come safely through the war?



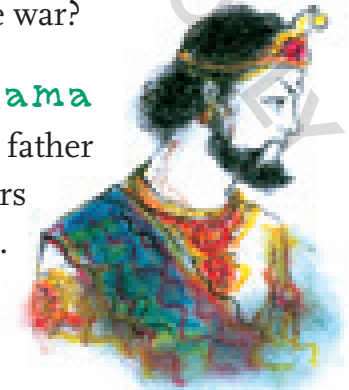
Karna

Born to a princess and the Sun God, yet fated to grow up in a charioteer's home. Unrivalled in archery, yet fated to forget his skills in a crisis, will he survive the war?

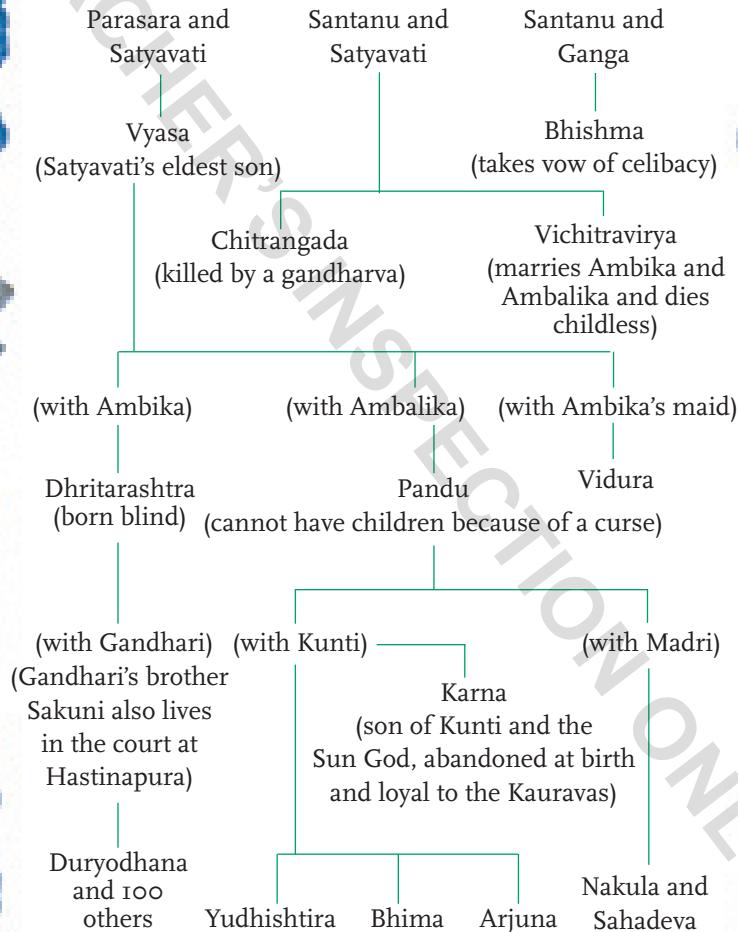


Aswathama

A brave warrior, trained by his father Drona, he treacherously slaughters the Pandavas' sleeping children. Will he ever redeem himself?



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 THE FINAL BATTLE

The rivalry between the royal cousins the Pandavas and the Kauravas, that had started when they were children, was coming to a head. Everyone in the kingdom of Bharata knew that war was in the air.

Krishna, friend to the Pandavas and the Kauravas alike, set out for Hastinapura, the Kauravas' capital, to mediate. He was accorded a grand welcome by Duryodhana, the eldest Kaurava brother. That evening at the Kuru court, before all the elders including Bhishma and the Kauravas' aging father Dhritarashtra, Krishna explained why he was there.

'I have come as a well-wisher of both branches of your family, to remind you of what happened in this court thirteen years ago. A wager was proposed and accepted for a game of dice. The loser was to be exiled to the forest

for twelve years and to live for a further year without being discovered. The winner was to enjoy the land of the loser for that period. Yudhishtira, eldest of the Pandavas, lost the game, and went to live in the forest with his brothers and his wife. Then they lived for a further year without being discovered by the Kauravas. Under the terms of the wager, the Pandavas are now entitled to have their land back.'

Duryodhana argued that the Pandavas had been found before the end of the year of hiding and so must return to the forest for another twelve years. 'Under no circumstance shall I give back the land,' he said. 'The Pandavas were never entitled to any portion of the country anyway. It belongs to Dhritarashtra, my father, and after him it comes to me.'

Krishna entreated the recalcitrant prince to think again. 'I come on a mission of peace,' he said, 'but the Pandavas will go to war if they



until they die. On the way they are followed by a mangy dog. Draupadi becomes ill and dies, and so do the four brothers one by one, leaving only Yudhishtira and the dog. Yudhishtira is told that he can go to heaven with his earthly body, but only if he leaves the faithful dog behind. Yudhishtira refuses, but the dog reveals himself as the god of Dharma, his father, and so Yudhishtira is able to go to heaven after all.

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 been more popular for ritual reading, but *Mahabharata* raises questions on the nature of morality that remain provocative even today. It is the philosophical content of *Mahabharata* that places it apart.

The date of the earliest version 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.

The author of *Mahabharata* shows that there are few clearcut solutions. Fighting should be avoided, but it becomes immoral not to fight against unacceptable exploitation and tyranny. While peace is desirable, it cannot be at any cost. Any war leaves victors looking at what they have won, and losers mourning what they have lost.

None of the characters in this story is perfect, but none is so wicked that the reader cannot find something in them to admire.

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.