

Mahābhārata
As Taught by Swami Dayananda Saraswati

This is the fifteenth part of the serial article, continuation from Oct 2024 newsletter.

In the meantime Dhrtarashtra's mind worked to find what else they could do to get rid of the Pandavas. He called for Shakuni. Shakuni was Duryodhana's uncle. Shakuni, also known as Kanika, was another small fellow, a past master in scheming. Dhrtarashtra told Shakuni that Duryodhana wanted to rule, and he asked Shakuni what should be done. Shakuni had one word of advice, "You cannot have them alive. You must destroy them. Whatever you do to them, nobody should know. Keep telling the people that you are fond of the Pandavas, while inside you search for the means to be permanently rid of them. For the public you weep and cry, but make sure the Pandavas are killed in some effective way."

Duryodhana naturally went forward with the plan he was working on with Dhrtarashtra. One of the court ministers was Purocana, a trusted fellow schemer, one who would not leak information. Duryodhana enlisted his support and promised him restitution for his contribution and his diligence. Duryodhana told Purocana, "The Pandavas will be sent to Varanavata, but you go there first. Go there and build a palatial house made of lac, of wax. The house should not look or smell like wax, but it should be all wax. Perfume it properly so no one can get the smell of wax. Furnish it properly and make it comfortable and suitable for guests. This is where the Pandavas will be told to stay for one year. Kunti will be with them, and in time the people in our city will accept the Pandava absence. Do not begin the torture too soon. Let the Pandavas get to feel safe and secure and then torch the place. Make sure that in every room of the wax house there is a large pot of oil and ghee. Quietly hide combustible materials throughout the house. Do not fail to do this." Purocana readied his best horse, gathered some trusted aides, rode to Varnavrata and began building.

Yudhisthira soon learned that the Pandavas would be asked to leave the Hastinapura palace for some time. Certainly he questioned why they were being sent away at the same time the king seemed to be trying so hard to be kind and considerate. Yudhisthira knew this was not a vacation, not for fun. There was

somehow more to it. When Bhishma asked Yudhisthira what was up, Yudhisthira said, "Oh, this is my uncle's desire to give us some kind of a break." Bhishma noted the sarcasm in Yudhisthira's voice, but he did not suspect how much jealousy and enmity there was behind Dhrtarashtra's move. Bhishma only saw Dhrtarashtra's attention to the welfare of the children, he did not think this man would lose his head like that.

The people, the citizens, advised the Pandavas not to leave. They suspected that some harm might come to them, that there was some plot. Yudhisthira told them, "This is the command of my uncle, who is now my father and who is the king." The preparations were completed and the Pandavas left their homes and went to Varnavata. The people of Varanavata received them with due pomp and were excited to have the royals live amongst them. The Pandavas moved into a house that was theirs for ten days while Purocana, a little away from town, finished the construction of the special wax house. Soon Purocana came to the Pandavas and told them that their new home was ready and invited them to take up residence there as the king had ordered.

Yudhisthira knew something was up. When he had taken leave of Bhishma and Vidura, Vidura, who was fluent in a dialect that Yudhisthira also understood, had said cryptically, "People must live alertly. When you go to strange places, there can be weapons more powerful than swords and maces and arrows. In the way that a rat has to run from fire, one has to be ready to escape from perils. One should enjoy the freedom of clear skies and bright stars and be ready to go out and see them. One has to keep all the senses alert." Vidura spoke in a way that he knew that Yudhisthira would have a very good idea what was being said. Vidura was a minister in Dhrtarashtra's court, and he had spies who informed him exactly what was going on in the palace. Kunti asked Yudhisthira about Vidura's conversation in that uncommon language. She wanted to know what it was that was said that had to be concealed. Yudhisthira said, "I think Vidura wanted to warn me about the possibility of someone plotting against us. Mostly it seemed to be about fire and the need to be able to escape the heat like rats do. We must wait and see."

To be continued...