

## **Advanced Course in Performance Traditions of the Mahabharata in Tamil Nadu- 2**

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**Lecture 30**

### **Pathinettam Por or the Eighteenth Day's War**

Dhritarashtra says  
"When I heard that Duryodhana, his chariot lost, his pride broken, had waded into a pond and was lying there alone, causing its water to freeze - then, Sanjaya, I lost hope of victory.

After the high tragedy of Karnamoksham, or the death of Karna, the village is ready for the climax of the festival- the killing of Duryodhana. This is narrated as a story in the afternoon, enacted as a Koothu right through the night and the day after it is performed as a spectacular ritual called 'Padugalam' where Bhima will finally kill Duryodhana.

The seventeenth day's war where Karna dies at the hands of his own brother Arjuna is the emotional tragic climax of the festival. On the other hand the Eighteenth day's war is almost treated like a comedy in the Koothu. Right through the play Duryodhana can be heard lamenting provoking much amusement among the audience. The Koothu itself is titled as "Pathinettam Por Alladhu Duriyanin Pulambal" meaning "The Eighteenth day's war or Duryodhana's lament" The Koothu begins with the entry of the Pandavas to the Kurukshetra battlefield. King of kings, Dharmarajan has come with grandeur and a emerald studded crown

The Bharata war that Dharmaraja tried to stop, took so much effort to prevent, ultimately did happen. The war has begun. For ten days, Bhishma fought aggressively, and fell on the bed of arrows. On the eleventh day the teacher, archer Drona comes. He fights furiously till the fifteenth day, and ultimately he also falls. On the sixteenth day, Karna who is described as "The one for the army, and the one for philanthropy" Karnan becomes the General. He also falls after the sixteenth, seventeenth day of war. Seventeenth day was a big defeat for Duryodhanan, he is shattered. He does not know what to do.

In Koothu when Dharmaraja asks Krishna as to who should fight on the eighteenth day of war, Krishna enigmatically invites Dharmaraja to visit the battlefield. He says Dharmaraja in the previous seventeen days of battle had always been under the protection of his army and had not actually seen the horrors of war. In the Bharatham storytelling sessions, Dharmaraja fights in the war, but in Koothu this fact is suppressed for a specific reason. Dharmaraja tells Krishna

"We have come to the Kurukshetra battlefield. Krishna says "Eighteen powerful armies have so far perished in this battlefield! Yes. Blood is flowing here like a great flood" A shocked

Dharmaraja says “Look at how they have all died, Uncle, with their blood flowing like a river. Should I be seeing this “magnificent” sight Uncle? Krishna says “That it is the will of fate, inexorable! A shattered Dharmaraja says “Look at how they all died! Young and old, all the kings are dead. Should I have come to see this “magnificent” sight, Uncle?” Krishna says “Look there! The teacher of archery, to all hundred and five of you, Dronachari lies dead there! The eight hundred and eighty six year old Bhishmachari, the son of Ganga is lying there on his death bed “Dharmaraja says ”he might die today or tomorrow! Krishna asks Dharmaraja “Have you never seen the Kurukshetra battlefield?” Dharmaraja says “Now that I have seen it, let us go back to the camp” Kattiyakaaran mocks “You want to go back, is that why you think the divinity has brought you here?”

Dharmaraja, the pacifist, is horrified when he sees the blood and gore on the battlefield and he starts having doubts that as to whether being the King was worth all the bloodshed. This scene of Dharmaraja being repelled by the violence in the battlefield is cited as the reason for Dharmaraja’s reluctance to be crowned king at the end of the battle. So, once the Great War was over, Krishna takes the guilt stricken Dharmaraja to a dying Bhishma lying on his bed of arrows. Bhishma’s Upadesham to Dharmaraja or his discourse on Dharma is finally able to make Dharmaraja accept the violence of the battle as having been necessary. Dharmaraja finally consents to be the king. Duryodhana on the other hand has no such doubts. But he is still unable to sleep on the seventeenth day’s night in grief for all the losses he and his army had suffered. The first sight of Duryodhana in this Koothu immediately provokes laughter among the audience. Duryodhana is seen with his face covered with a white cloth lamenting as to what he had done to deserve this fate. As the scene opens, significantly, Shakuni is seen standing behind Duryodhana holding a sword to his head. In this simple tableaux the real intention of Shakuni to destroy Duryodhana and the Kauravas even if it meant his own death also, is silently revealed.

Duryodhana sings “I Duryodhanan have come alone. I am the king and a wretched person! I am the king, the wretched person!” Alas! Shakuni Uncle! The scene begins with Duryodhana’s lament where he says that all his brothers, his generals and his greatest friend Karna were killed in the previous seventeen days of war. Duryodhana sings “I Duryodhanan have come bereft and alone! I am a king and a wretched person!” Chorus “I Duryodhanan have come bereft and alone! I am a king and a wretched person!” Duryodhana sings “As I am coming [he breaks down] Alas! Shakuni Uncle! Shakuni says “Don’t cry, don’t cry” Duryodhana says “I Duryodhanan have come as the death of my clan! Alas! Uncle Shakuni!” ” Chorus “I Duryodhanan have come as the death of my clan! Alas!” Shakuni says “Don’t cry, don’t cry”

“The son of the blind King spent the night sleepless, drowned in tears, consulting with Shakuni as to who can he now send as general to finish the enemies off, after Karnan’s death.

“O Uncle! Shakuni Uncle, do you see my pitiable condition? You have made all my forces fall like this.”

On the eighteenth day morning he wakes up, worships Surya after having spent the night crying. Duryodhana says “I tried to kill Bhima many times, I tried to burn alive the Pandavas in a raging fire! Alas! I insulted Draupadi, the sinless one, and lost my honour and was subjected to a great loss Uncle! Vowing not to give the Pandavas any land, I preferred to go to war and lost all my forces on this battlefield! Alas! Shakuni “Vowing not to give the Pandavas any land, I preferred to go to war and lost all my forces on this battlefield! Alas!” Duryodhana “Only you can tell me a way, Shakuni Uncle, to save the life of this unjust King!”

Shakuni blessed him saying “Nephew Duryodhana! May you have a long life! See where he is blessing! You can bless at an auspicious place of marriage, but can you bless someone in a house of mourning? And that too when Duryodhana is lamenting the loss of his forces, his younger brothers, elder brother, his sons, and here this man is blessing him saying “May you have a long life!”. Even Duryodhana was confused by this blessing and asked “Uncle, are you blessing or cursing me? In spite of you blessing me, I do not feel blessed as you have destroyed my entire army Uncle! You kept promising that you will help me rule the entire world, but have only made my forces perish!” Even then he did not abandon his Uncle!

Shakuni tells Kattiyakaaran “Duryodhana is lamenting over the death of his brothers!” Kattiyakaaran “Yes he is lamenting the death of his brothers” Shakuni says “My brothers were killed too, does he know of my sadness?” Kattiyakaaran asks “Your brothers also died? How? Shakuni says “We were a hundred and four brothers! Kattiyakaaran asks ”A hundred and four brothers?” Shakuni says “I had a hundred and three younger brothers, and Duryodhana was responsible for their death. Shakuni “That’s why I want to destroy my enemy family” Kattiyakaaran “That’s why I want to destroy my enemy family” Shakuni “By pretending to be a loving Uncle” Kattiyakaaran “By pretending to be a loving Uncle” ”Shakuni says “That is why I have lived with them” Kattiyakaaran says “Yes! Staying with them you kept ruining them!” Shakuni says “I will also one go the place my brothers departed! ”Kattiyakaaran mockingly says “One day you will also join them there!” Shakuni says “Yes I will join them there, but will I leave him? Kattiyakaaran “You should not leave him! You should make him suffer and die!” Duryodhana laments “I have become a wicked fool, incapable of ruling the world. I have become a pauper, waging an unjust war against the five Pandavas. I feel alone, like an abandoned tree, suffering like a serpent that has lost its mate! “O Uncle! They say ‘as you sow, so you reap’. My wicked deeds have now engulfed me Uncle!” he said

As usual Dharmaraja consults with Krishna as to who should lead the army in the last day of the battle. Krishna had always given the Pandavas, the correct advice ensuring their victory in the previous seventeen days of the Great War. Duryodhana on other hand has Shakuni as his counsel who he doesn’t realise is secretly plotting his destruction.

Shakuni “Today, it is the eighteenth day of the war! Kattiyakaaran ”Who should go and fight with whom?” Shakuni tells Duryodhana “Call Salva, the King of Madra kingdom and make him the commander! Victory is then only ours!” Duryodhana says ”So be it Uncle! I will obey you implicitly! Somehow make me victorious Uncle!” Chorus ”So be it Uncle! I will

obey you implicitly! Somehow make me victorious Uncle!” Duryodhana “Somehow show mercy on me Uncle!” Chorus “Somehow show mercy on me Uncle!” Duryodhana says ”So be it Uncle! I will obey you implicitly!” Duryodhana says “I tortured the young Pandavas terribly!” Chorus “I tortured the young Pandavas terribly!” Duryodhana “You cheated them in a game of dice and got me their wealth!” Chorus “You cheated them in a game of dice and got me their wealth!” Duryodhana says ”So be it Uncle! I will obey you implicitly!” Shakuni says “Nephew! Why are you looking disheartened? We still have Salya, with his own powerful army! Make Salya the general. Actually what Shakuni was asking Duryodhana was to send Salya also to be slaughtered! Though the scene begins with Duryodhana’s mourning that his own greed was the cause of the deaths of his brothers and his generals, his lust for power or in this case the kingdom is still as strong as ever. He asks Shakuni as to who should lead the Kauravas in the last day of war and Shakuni suggests Salya.

He asks Shakuni as to who should lead the Kauravas in the last day of war and Shakuni suggests Salya. Shakuni also says that Salya should be instructed to kill Dharmaraja first. Shakuni asking Salya to be the general with a clear instruction to kill Dharmaraja first also has another reason. Salya was one of the great generals whom none of the Pandavas excepting Dharmaraja would be able to kill. The Koothu like the Bharatham storytelling sessions, also flows back and forth in time quite easily. Dharmaraja had been given a mighty weapon by his father Yama the Deity of Dharma and Death. This had happened when he had come in disguise as a Yaksha to test Dharmaraja’s sense of justice. This weapon of Yama was the only weapon that could kill Salya. The Yakshaprashna or the questions posed by an Yaksha to Dharmaraja, is not performed in the shorter Mahabharata festivals, but is an important episode in the Mahabharata. Duryodhana tells Salya “Though seventeen days of war have been fought, I can see no positive outcome. On this eighteenth day, we should finish the Pandavas today. Duryodhana “Our enemy, the five Pandavas should die today. I appoint you the commander, go to war now, Salya Uncle!” On the morning of the eighteenth day morning Salya is appointed the Kaurava commander.

Salyan said, “Duryodhana, you have done the right thing now that you have appointed me the commander, that is the right thing. Yesterday you insulted me by asking me to be the charioteer to Karnan. I am here for you with my mighty army! I definitely shall make you victorious.” On the morning of the eighteenth day, this Salyan leads the army in a splendid manner. Duryodhana tells Salya “You are my life, you are my thought, you are my wealth, you are my two shoulders, you are my eyes, you are my strength. You are the unparalleled king in the battlefield among the Chariot and Elephant warriors!” You therefore should fulfil my objective,” so he praised Salya, in awe and enthusiasm.

The story of Yaksha Prashna is narrated as a dialogue in this Koothu so that people can understand its importance. During their Vanavaasam, when the Pandavas are thirsty in the forest, Dharmaraja sends his four brothers one by one to fetch water from a nearby lake; The lake is guarded by Yaksha who says that the Pandavas can only drink water if they answer his questions on Dharma, to his satisfaction. Thirst overcomes the first four Pandavas and they rush to drink the water ignoring the Yaksha’s warning and fall down dead. Dharmaraja who goes in search of his missing brothers, meets the Yaksha and answers the Yaksha questions on

Dharma to the Yaksha's satisfaction. The pleased Yaksha gives Dharmaraja a boon that he would give back the lives of two of his brothers. Bhima and Arjuna were indispensable for Dharmaraja to win the war, but he chooses Bhima and Nakula and asks for their life from the Yaksha. Dharmaraja says that in all fairness at least one child of each of his mothers should live. And so he chooses Nakula, the eldest son of his other mother Madri over Arjuna. Without Arjuna, Dharmaraja had very little chance of winning the impending war, but his sense of Dharma prevails over his desire to win the war. The Yaksha is pleased with Dharmaraja's fairness and grants life to all the four Pandavas. The Yaksha also reveals as to who he truly was; as Yama the deity of Dharma and death, of whom Dharmaraja was also a partial incarnation. The Yaksha says that the war against the Kauravas would be inevitable and they would have to fight Salya on the eighteenth day of the battle. He says that none of the other four brothers of Dharmaraja had the ability to kill Salya and that only Dharmaraja could kill him. He also gives him a powerful weapon only with which Salya could be killed. Shakuni asking Duryodhana to make Salya the general with a specific instruction to kill Dharmaraja first was like signing Salya's death warrant as Salya was totally powerless against Dharmaraja.

Krishna asks Dharmaraja "Why do you think I have you brought to the Kurukshetra battlefield? What for? Your maternal uncle, Salyan, the King of Madra has vowed that he will kill and defeat Dharmaraja. He has been appointed by Duryodhana as the Kaurava commander, and is coming to kill you! Kattiyakaaran says "He has come to fight you!" Dharmaraja is shocked" Is my maternal uncle really coming to kill me? I cannot believe this!" Krishna says "He definitely is coming for you"

On the morning of eighteenth day, Salyan is commanding the army brilliantly. Salyan is an extraordinary warrior. Karna, ate Duryodhana's food all his life, lived trying to repay his debt. But Salyan was not like that, his changing sides were because he ate Duryodhana's food once! Salyan is commanding one battalion of an army. Arjuna who first fights with him is defeated and runs away. No one was able to fight against Salyan.

"None could match Salyan in archery, wielding spear, sword. None comparable among the warriors, riding horse, elephant or chariot. Who is there to fight him with the mace, with such strong, beautiful shoulders?" That is when Krishna said "Dharma! There is none among your brothers who is a match to Salyan." Krishna tells Dharmaraja that he is the only one who can defeat Salyan . In Koothu Dharmaraja, does not want to fight against his own uncle Salya, but Salya deliberately provokes Shantamurthy's anger. It is said that when Dharmaraja was angry, he could burn the entire world with just a look from his eyes, so Dharmaraja remained tranquil, whatever the situation he found himself in. That is one reason given as to why Dharmaraja is always addressed in Koothu as Shanthamoorthy or the peaceful one.

Salya taunts Dharmaraja "You fool Dharma! Have you come to teach fishes born in water to swim? Your valour will not work against me!" Dharmaraja "Hey Salya!" Salya says "I am your uncle!" Dharmaraja asks "Have you not come to fight your nephew?" Dharmaraja asks "Have you come to fight me?" I will burn you! Salya says "Let's see!" Dharmaraja whips him Salya mocks "This is all the power you have?". Dharmaraja tells Kattiyakaaran "They

say Dharma does not get angry!” People of the world say that Dharma does not get angry! But when I get angry, you will see what I can do!” Kattiyakaaran “What will you do? Then a great battle begins between Dharma and Salyan. Salyan is amazed that at Dharma’s fighting skills! Don’t think of Dharma as an ordinary person. He is an extraordinary person, great archer . Being a king with able brothers, he did not want to show his prowess, and remained quiet. Normally the leaders would remain calm and let those under them function. A good leader will only get into the arena when others fail. That day Dharma fought with Salya and Salya burnt Dharmaraja’s chariot. The unparalleled, graceful Dharma’s son then got into another chariot, Salya breaks Dharmaraja’s chariot and he climbs on to another chariot to resume fight. He then picked the incomparable spear, given by the Yaksha and threw it at Salyan at the speed of the wind. In a split second it severed the head of Salyan! Dharmaraja warns Salya “The weapon is coming, watch out. The spear is coming, watch out!” He throws the spear at Salya, killing him.

The eighteenth day morning, Salyan who was commanding the Kaurava army was killed. Seeing him dead, his soldiers ran away in all directions. The news reaches Duryodhanan. He is devastated. and he says “Alas Shakuni Uncle! Even Salyan has also been killed!” Now, Bhima killed each one of Duryodhanan’s brothers who were alive with his own hands. Duryodhana now had no one to call a brother at his side! All his brothers and his entire army have all been killed. Duryodhana is devastated. Hearing that all his ninety-nine brothers, all younger than him have been sent to the world beyond the clouds, having been killed by Bhima not with arrows, or his mace, but with his bare hands, a weakened Duryodhana, his body tired, starts shedding copious tears! “Alas Uncle! My brothers who would accompany me like a shadow wherever I went have all been killed by that Bhima! Alas! He has done what he vowed to do! Alas! Where is my ostentatious life, where is my army, Where are my brothers? All are gone Uncle! All are gone!”

Immediately after having killed Salya, Dharmaraja feels remorse and weeps over the body of his dead uncle. Duryodhana on the other hand is misinformed that Salya had killed Dharmaraja and he is elated by the thought. He rushes to the covered body of the warrior to gloat that his arch rival was dead. When the body is uncovered Duryodhana realises to his shock that it is Salya who has been killed by Dharmaraja. And again all that Duryodhana can do is lament.

Duryodhana weeps over Salya’s body “Alas Salya Uncle!” Kattiyakaaran mocks “It is Uncle who is dead! “Duryodhana “Is this your fate Uncle? Was this your destiny Uncle? Or is it due my wickedness that I have been ruined and lost my honour and I have driven you to your death! My dear Salya Uncle!” Is this due to Dharma’s patience? Or the fruits of the meritorious deeds of his brothers? Or is this due to the virtuous Panchali’s curse? Is this due to the evil deed of driving the five to the forest? I do not have any support left, what will I do now? Alas my dear Salya Uncle! I was happy when they told me that Dharmaraja had been killed! But that Dharman Dharma has left you slain, like a shattered mountain, slain on the Kurukshetra battlefield. Alas Uncle alas!”

As Duryodhana is lamenting, a hundred feet sculpture of Duryodhana would be sculpted in front of the stage. So Duryodhana can see exactly as to where he will be killed by Bhima on the next day of the battle. Duryodhana is also scared as to how the eighteenth day's war was going to end for the Kauravas. Shakuni asks Duryodhana to make him the general and promises that he will only return after killing the Pandavas. Duryodhana says "I made Salyan a commander according to your wishes! He went to the Kurukshetra battlefield only to die at the hands of Dharma. You promised that he will definitely kill Dharma. I am scared as to how this eighteenth day of the war will end, Uncle!" Shakuni says do not worry! Shakuni says "When we disrobed Draupadi in the court!" Chorus "When we disrobed Draupadi in the court!" Shakuni says "The imbeciles the Pandavas sat quiet" Chorus "The imbeciles the Pandavas sat quiet" Shakuni says "Will I let them live?" Shakuni says "Duryodhana I am there for you with my powerful army!"

[Storyteller] So on this eighteenth day Shakuni leaves as the next commander of the Kaurava army! When Shakuni left, it was as though the dark planet, Saturn, the Sani that had a hold on Duryodhana that was leaving. Shakuni, if you remove two letters, was Duryodhana's Sani. He came to attend Pandu Maharaja's funeral rites from Gandhara kingdom and never returned back to his own country! He only left when Duryodhana was destroyed and only then departed. Where did he go to? There, to the other world up in the skies!

Duryodhana is reluctant to send Shakuni as his general as he is afraid that even Shakuni might be killed leaving him all alone. In the Koothu Pagadai/Thugil after Ducchāsana tried to disrobe Draupadi, in open court. Four of the Pandavas except Dharmaraja had taken a vow, each promising vengeance against the Kauravas. Arjuna as per his vow had killed Karna, Bhima had killed all the ninety nine brothers of Duryodhana and Sahadeva, significantly, had taken the vow to kill Shakuni. Duryodhana is now worried that Sahadeva might be able to fulfil his vow.

Duryodhana tells Shakuni "Whenever you ask me "Bid me leave" Kattiyakaaran says "He is terrified!" Duryodhana says "My mind is troubled Uncle! That If I bid you leave and you go to battle, I remember the vow that each of the five made in our court! I remember the vow made by the youngest of the Pandavas, Sahadeva to kill you!" If by divine blessings you win, we will rule the country! But on the other hand [Duryodhana falters] Kattiyakaaran mockingly completes Duryodhana's fear "If you die!" Shakuni says "If by chance!" Duryodhana says "If by chance you die at Sahadeva's hands, Uncle!" Shakuni asks "If I die?" Duryodhana says "Uncle, let's live harmoniously in the other world, inseparable from the other as we have lived in this world! Please reserve a place next to you in the other world so that we can again be inseparable! My dear Uncle!" Shakuni says "The brothers who were your shadow are gone! Your tears and anguish over their death, however deep, cannot bring them back! Nephew! May you live long! The Kings who survive this war, are equal to the general of the Devas! Nephew, may you live long! Be blessed, you will not have any problems as I am here and I will defeat the Pandavas! Saying this Shakuni takes leave. On the eighteenth day Shakuni leaves as the second commander of the Kauravas. Sahadeva entry song "Born in the lineage of the brave and illustrious Lunar Dynasty! Chorus "Born in the lineage of the brave and illustrious Lunar Dynasty! Sahadevan "Born in the lineage of the

brave and illustrious Lunar Dynasty! Chorus “Born in the lineage of the brave and illustrious Lunar Dynasty! Sahadevan “I am the bravest of the brave! Sahadevan!” Chorus “I am the bravest of the brave! Sahadevan!”

When Sakuni marched with the army, Sahadevan comes to oppose him. “Oh, you wicked Shakuni Uncle! You can play the dice game deceitfully, do you also know to command an army? We were living righteously, you came and spoiled it, enticed us into a dice game, usurped our country. I had vowed that day to kill you.” Shakuni mocks him saying “Nephew, this is battlefield. You cannot slay with your words, but with the bow. Take out your bow,” he said. A fierce battle ensued between Sakuni and Sahadevan. Sahadeva says “ Here I have come to kill you in battle!” [Shakuni falls down in Koothu] The Bharatham storyteller narrated the fight between Shakuni and Sahadeva as a heroic battle in which Sahadeva finally wins. In Koothu it is treated like a comedy and Shakuni falls down promptly in the place marked out for him, even before Sahadeva fights him. Duryodhana is again misinformed that Shakuni had killed Sahadeva and he is very happy only to be shattered when he sees Shakuni’s dead body on the battlefield. As Duryodhana laments over Shakuni’s body, the actors and the sponsors of the event prepare for the cremation of Shakuni. The audience enjoys Duryodhana’s wailing and the mock funeral ceremony of Shakuni begins.

Duryodhana laments “Alas Uncle! You have left me cruelly, desolate to fend for myself wandering in the streets!” Duryodhana laments “Alas uncle, you have left me all alone! On the road where mighty men like us rode horses! Uncle!” Chorus “On the road where mighty men like us rode horses! Duryodhana laments ”Today even mosquitoes cannot be seen on these roads! That’s our situation! Alas” Chorus ”Today even mosquitoes cannot be seen on these roads! Alas! Alas” Duryodhana laments “In the place Uncle! Where once lions roamed proudly! Uncle!” Chorus “Where once lions roamed proudly! Uncle!” Duryodhana “Now it is the foxes that roam! Alas!” Chorus “Now it is the foxes that roam! Alas!” Duryodhana “On the bed on which I used to rest Uncle!” Chorus “On the bed on which I used to rest Uncle!” Duryodhana “Now the dogs, the Pandavas will rest there! Alas!” Chorus “Now the dogs, the Pandavas will rest there! Alas!” [The Kattiyakaaran spits at Shakuni] Duryodhana laments “Before the Padavas search for me! Uncle” Chorus ”Before the Padavas search for me! Uncle” Duryodhana “I have to leave my Kingdom Uncle! Alas!” Chorus “I have to leave my Kingdom Uncle! Alas!” Duryodhana “Before the five Pandavas search for me Uncle!” Chorus “Before the five Pandavas search for me Uncle!” Duryodhana “I have to leave my Kingdom! Alas Uncle!” Chorus “I have to leave my Kingdom! Alas Uncle!” Duryodhana “Before the five find me Uncle!” Chorus “Before the five find me Uncle!” Duryodhana “I have to protect myself, by hiding! Uncle!” Chorus “I have to protect myself, by hiding! Uncle!” [As Duryodhana is lamenting, the Kattiyakaaran silently prepares Shakuni’s body for cremation]

There is no one with Duryodhanan now, whom he can call his own. He stands shattered, ruing all his wicked deeds he had done!.

There are no human beings who have not erred! Repenting one’s misdeeds are what make one a true man! Duryodhana “The effects of whose wickedness led me to this tragedy?”

Chorus “The effects of whose wickedness led me to this tragedy?” Seedhara Seedhara Seedhara (Sridhara), tell me Damodara It is fate that has brought upon these bad times [The chorus also joins Duryodhana’s lament mockingly] Duryodhana “Is it due to my fate that I find myself in this situation?” Alas! Uncle! Duryodhana “I am surrounded by the effects of my own wickedness!” Only now he realizes the many harms he had inflicted on the Pandavas. Duryodhana laments “What happened to all my plans? Where is my son Lakshmanakumara now? Where is Karnan, where is Bhishma? Where is my ocean of an army? Where, where, where? “I dishonoured the one with no evil.” Duryodhanan realizes now that Panchali was blameless. “I did many bad deeds, many times.” Duryodhana “I insulted the divine lady, Draupadi and the results of my abuse has led me to this fate!” Chorus “I insulted the divine lady, Draupadi and the result of my abuse has led me to this fate!” Duryodhana “Who will take the news of my plight to my parents?” Chorus “Who will take the news of my plight to my parents?” Duryodhana “Because of my own wickedness I have no son left to offer to even perform my funeral rites! Duryodhana “Who would now carry the news of my plight to my parents?”

[Mock funeral rites for Shakuni performed by the sponsors and the actors] The funeral rites for Shakuni were performed as it would be performed for a real death in the village, but with a twist. The dirge songs or the oppari which are sung at this stage, while pretending to mourn Shakuni’s death, actually mocks him. After the funeral rites are over the people who performed the cremation demand money from Duryodhana for their services. They discover that Duryodhana now neither has an army, nor does he have any money left in the treasury, to pay them.

Duryodhana “I ruled as an acclaimed king with my presence creating fear in everyone! Today I am forced to walk in fear of others! Kattiyakaaran “That’s life Maharaja, good times and bad times follow in one’s life!’ Duryodhana asks “Where can I hide myself?” Kattiyakaaran “You would still be visible being so tall, hide yourself among the dead bodies” Duryodhana sings “If I enter the armies, I will look like a dead man! This is also ... If I enter the armies, I will look like a dead man This is also ... He goes crawling, scared that Bhima might locate him. In Vyasa’s Mahabharata, Duryodhana is exhausted after his entire army had been killed by the Pandavas. He is also scared of Bhima’s wrath. He goes to Dwaipayana Lake and with control over his breath stays deep under water.

In Tamil renditions of the Bharatham and Koothu, Duryodhana goes to the lakes at the confluence of the five rivers, the Samanta Panchaka, to chant the Sanjeevni mantra to revive his dead soldiers back to life. He is also scared of Bhima discovering him before he could finish chanting the mantra and he crawls towards the lakes hiding amongst the dead bodies.

Duryodhana sings “Crawling around makes my chest sore. This is also ... Crawling around makes my chest sore. This is also ....

Before entering the waters he begs all the creatures that he might have offended either advertently or inadvertently, not to disclose his whereabouts to Bhima. In Koothu it is said that Duryodhana when he was a king had issued a royal edict that henceforth people should

not use powdered rice to decorate the front of their houses. People generally draw Kolams or designs in front of their houses using powdered rice which would be the food for the ants. The ants were very angry with Duryodhana for being denied their food and Duryodhana begins his pleading by singing to the ants asking them not to disclose his whereabouts to Bhima till he could finish chanting the Sanjeevini Mantra.

Duryodhana “Black garden ants, small ants!” Chorus “Black garden ants, small ants!” Duryodhana “I bow before you and beg!” Chorus “I bow before you and beg!” Duryodhana “Please do not disclose where I am to people who are searching for me!” Chorus “Please do not disclose where I am to people who are searching for me!” Duryodhana “They will slaughter me to pieces” Chorus “They will slaughter me to pieces” Duryodhana “This is also my fate!” Chorus “This is also my fate!” Duryodhana “Oh! Owls and foxes!” Chorus “Oh! Owls and foxes!” Duryodhana “People are searching for me. Please do not give me away!” Chorus “People are searching for me. Please do not give me away!” Duryodhana “They will slaughter me to pieces!” Chorus “They will slaughter me to pieces!” ”Duryodhana “This is also my fate!” Chorus “This is also my fate!”

Duryodhana “I was once taught a mantra by Bhringi Rishi. If I wish to resurrect my dead army with their broken weapons restored. I should go to the confluence of rivers, the shores of Samantapanchaka river, enter the waters and chant the mantra. Then my forces would be resurrected with their broken weapons restored. Then I will go and win over the fickle minded Pandavas. Duryodhana goes hides inside the tank and does vayusthambam, jalasthambam.

Ten times longer than what even long time yoga practitioners can do, he withheld his outbreath , without a hint of tiredness, through the vital veins made the nerve plexus bloom (the muladhara chakra in yoga described as lotus with four petals), then he chanted the mantras, silently. It is difficult to do for even those who have practised Yoga for long. Tirumoolar says: “Those who have learnt the art of breathing in, breathing out, controlling the breath inside, that calculation, they would rise to defeat death, but those that know such a calculation are not many.”

He controlled his breath, did vayusthambam, jalasthambam, sits inside and gives form to the mantras. The dead soldiers from Duryodhana’s armies, dead bodies were seen shaking their hands and legs. Duryodhana, in this tradition, knows the Sanjeevini Mantra chanting which he can bring his dead army to life. The recumbent figure represents Duryodhana chanting the mantra under the waters of Samanta Panchaka

Bhima notices the hands and legs of the dead soldiers of Duryodhana moving and asks Krishna as to what was happening. Bhima asked, “Kanna, what kind of a magic is this, the arms of the dead bodies are moving?” Krishna said that Duryodhanan knows a mantra, Mrityaa Sanjivani that can bring back the dead. Krishna tells Bhima “On this eighteenth day of the war, Duryodhana is chanting the mantra. If he is not killed on this eighteenth day today, tomorrow even if hundreds, thousands of Bhimas come, he cannot be killed” Bhima says “That is a very powerful mantra! He should be killed today” Bhimasenan, carrying his

mace, goes searching for Duryodhana among the dead bodies, but he is unable to see him. Then he goes out of the Kurukshetra battlefield. He sees a few hunters, and asks them if they saw a well-built man like him passing that way. They say “We saw a man well built like you, walk into the waters of that lake, with a mace in hand,”

Bhima reaches the confluence of the five rivers and is unable to see Duryodhana. He notices that there are imprints of human footprints coming out of the water but none of entering into the water. He realises that Duryodhana must have walked backwards into the water to deceive him. He realized Duryodhanan is there, called him out. Bhima “Oh sinner, come out! Because of you everyone from Ganga’s son, to Gandhara’s son Shakuni and countless number of kings are dead. Bhishmacharya, Dronacharya, you let all of them die for you and now you are hiding like a coward.”

Bhima “Elder brother come out of the water, or give up the kingdom! Because of your wretched lust for land we were driven into this unnecessary war! Come out of the water!” Bhima “Elder brother, come out of the water, or give up the kingdom!” Chorus “Elder brother, come out of the water, or give up the kingdom!” Bhima “Wretched elder brother, worst cheater elder brother! Bhima “Elder brother, come out of the water, or give up the kingdom!” Chorus “Elder brother, come out of the water, or give up the kingdom!” Bhima ”Because of your wretched lust for land we were driven into this unnecessary war!” Chorus”Because of your wretched lust for land we were driven into this unnecessary war!” Bhima “Now to achieve your wicked intentions, you are hiding in the water! Elder brother!”

In the Mahabharata it is Dharmaraja who provokes Duryodhana to come out of the water and he uses unusually harsh language against his cousin. Duryodhana is now a broken man as he has lost all his brothers, his army and his only son and says he has no reason left to fight. He tells Dharmaraja that he can take his Kingdom back while he himself would depart to the forest to lead the life of an ascetic. For Dharmaraja this declaration of Duryodhana is unacceptable and he challenges him to come out and fight. Duryodhana says now that he is now alone, he cannot fight the five Pandavas together. Dharmaraja says that Duryodhana can choose as to who among the Pandavas that he would like to fight with and also gives him the choice of weapon to fight with. Dharmaraja wants to settle the battle there and then and Duryodhana chooses to fight Bhima with his mace. Krishna is furious with Dharmaraja’s stupidity for suggesting this as he knows that even Bhima would not be a match for Duryodhana with his mace. He says that Duryodhana cannot be defeated in straight battle by Bhima and that Duryodhana can only be killed by deceit.

In Tamil traditions it is Bhima who taunts Duryodhana, while Dharmaraja keeps silent befitting his name as Shantamurthy. Provoked by Bhima, Duryodhana comes out of the water without completing chanting the Sanjeevini Mantra and fights Bhima.

[Duryodhana’s sings the Sanjivini Mantra and the screen here becomes the surface of the lake! He would soon emerge from the screen to enter the stage] Duryodhana “I am standing here devastated by my own cousins! Please come to make this fruitless tree, Duryodhana

achieve victory! Varahi come, give your blessings. Neeli Panchakshari Nirmali, come. Let my dead soldiers, and broken weapons come back live!”

Bhima is screaming for Duryodhana to come out. Hearing only silence in return he starts hitting the waters with his mace. Realizing that he would not allow him to chant the mantra anymore Duryodhana lifts his head up and Krishna laughs. Duryodhana curses Krishna “Even after seeing me in this predicament, you have betrayed me, you treacherous man!” Duryodhana says “Alas Shakuni Uncle!” [Bhima and Duryodhana fight with a rope separating them] Duryodhana laments “Alas! Uncle!” Duryodhana says “Due to the scheming of my Uncle Shakuni I lost my mind! [Duryodhana again invokes his deities] Again Bhima and Duryodhana fight

In the Mahabharata when Bhima and Duryodhana start fighting, it is Vyasa who intervenes and says that Kurukshetra was not the correct venue for their battle. He suggests that they should fight at Samanthapanchaka where Parasurama had once fought and killed the Shatriya Karthavirya Arjuna. In the Koothu rendition both Duryodhana and Bhima jointly come to this decision and say that that the land of Kurukshetra would not be able to withstand the ferocity of their fight, and decide to continue their fight the next morning at Samanthapanchaka. The Koothu would end on this note and the Kattiyakaaran would make an announcement that in a few hours the audience will see the ritual Padugalam where Bhima will finally kill Duryodhana. Now the stage is set for the last spectacular ritual, Padugalam or ‘The Battlefield’ where Duryodhana would be finally killed by Bhima.

“In that conversation between Bhima and Duryodhana, he will refer to it (the statue of the dead body of Duryodhana being made) and say, “see you are being made, tomorrow you are going to be sacrificed. The Koothu does not create an illusion. It moves freely, moves across times, back and forth, with great freedom. When as a modern theatre person we see this in the village, we see what remarkable things the Koothu possesses. If you are not aware of these things, you might think of them as ordinary. When you see this, with awareness you will see “aaha, how wonderful this is. There is a Duryodhana here, there is another Duryodhana there as a dead body. Showing him that icon, he speaks to this Duryodhanan, says “this Bhoomi cannot withstand our fight. Tomorrow we will go and fight on a bronze field where Kartaviryarjuna fight took place.”

They close the story then with that announcement. Now the stage is set for the last spectacular ritual, Padugalam or ‘The Battlefield’ where Duryodhana would be finally killed by Bhima. In most villages, at this juncture there would be the third convergence of ritual, storytelling and theatre where all three enactments of the particular episode would be performed simultaneously. The other occasion being when Arjuna in his disguise of a eunuch, rescues the cattle of the Virata kingdom from the Kaurava armies. This convergence of all three forms of enactment serves to underline the significance of the particular episode being enacted. In this case, it is of the killing of Duryodhana, both within and outside of oneself.

In this vast universe engulfed by water, the fifth Veda, the Mahabharata, was composed to stand firm along the four Vedas. The Rishi with undiminished powers of Tapas, and the King

among Rishis, Vyasa, composed the Mahabharata with Vinayaka using his tusk as the pen and the Great Mountain Meru as the slate. We begin this invocation by praising Vinayaka, to whom we bow down and show our affection.

“Only for the land greedy Duryodhana, in whichever village the Mahabharata is celebrated, his idol will only be made from mud even in villages that spend twenty lakhs to thirty lakhs Rupees for the festival. The Goddess Panchali, Arjuna and Krishna will all have bronze icons, but for Duryodhanan no village makes even an icon out of wood, it is always a mud statue. For Duryodhana who coveted land, they have made a gigantic statue out of mud. Dear elders and ladies, listen carefully! Our feet should not step on Duryodhana’s statue. Everyone listen carefully! He was a headstrong man who would not bow before anyone! Duryodhana lived as luxuriously on earth as Indra in Devaloka! He may have been a good or a bad person that does not matter! But our feet should never touch him! Only mother Panchali can climb over his statue and tie her hair. Our feet should not even touch his statue! Why our even our feet should not touch him is because Duryodhana was wicked all his life. As a symbol of his wickedness Duryodhana is lying there alone after seeing all his armies killed! If our feet touches that wicked Duryodhanan, we may inherit some of his wicked thoughts!”

As the storyteller is describing the battle between Bhima and Duryodhana, two Koothu actors would don on the roles of Bhima and Duryodhana at the temple of the guardian deity of the village. An idol of Draupadi and Arjuna would also be placed next to the sculpture where Duryodhana would be finally killed. Samayam Ganachari Kumara Vargams, the ones who would do rituals sitting in the pit around the sculpture of Duryodhana are requested to go Panaiathu Amman temple and return wearing new clothes. Gandhari has deputed the five alive, Kaurava warriors, Bhishmachari on his bed of arrows, Kripachari, Kritavarman, Ashwatthaman and Sanjaya to guard Duryodhana till he finishes chanting the mantra. The Samayam, GanachariKumaravargam, the five priests of the Dharmaraja/Draupadi Amman temple now don on the role of the five warriors and are placed around in pits dug around the sculpture. As long as these warriors are guarding Duryodhana, Bhima would be unable to reach the sculpture to finally kill Duryodhana. Krishna notices the dead warriors coming to life and realises the reason why. He realises that he has to ensure that Bhima kills Duryodhana before he can finish chanting the mantra. For this to happen, he has to take care of the five warriors guarding Duryodhana first. He immobilizes these warriors by weaving a magic web around them. In the village, the magic web of Krishna becomes five pieces of yellow cloth with which the villagers drape the Samayam Ganachari Kumaravargam with. Only after this is done can the actor playing Bhima reach the sculpture representing Duryodhana. The five warriors placed around the sculpture also represent the five senses which give one the illusion of being a distinct self, independent of the world. The five senses have to be quelled before the exaggerated sense of self which Duryodhana represents can be killed. Once Duryodhana’s senses have been quelled, he finally realises that he and the world are not two distinct separate entities, but rather are part of the same continuum. Duryodhana’s final transformation begins at this stage.

“I lost my mind because of Uncle Shakuni! I lost my honour in the kingdom, Sivane, Oh god, god, god. Duryodhana laments “Bhimane, Bhimane! My younger brother! Sridhara! Sridhara! It is my own brother! “Is it my fate that led me to this wretched state? Alas Uncle!”

The actors playing Duryodhana and Bhima fight around the sculpture. Their fight proves inconclusive and Krishna, to hasten proceedings asks both Duryodhana and Bhima to declare as to where their life breath rested, or as to the point where they were most vulnerable. Bhima replies truthfully that his life breath rested on his forehead while Duryodhana lies by saying the forehead was the point where he was most vulnerable. Krishna, who knows where Duryodhana was vulnerable, immediately points towards the thigh. Bhima understands Krishna’s indication and when both Bhima and Duryodhana reach the thigh of the sculpture the actor playing Duryodhana steps away and Bhima breaks the thigh of the sculpture. An idol of Draupadi would be placed on top of the sculpture of Duryodhana and the actor playing Draupadi would braid her hair with the ‘blood’ from the broken thigh of the sculpture. With the killing of Duryodhana, the three journeys of the Pandavas reaches its fruition. The journeys began with Bhima breaking out of the waters of the Yamuna with the strength of a thousand elephants gifted by the Nagas, the journey continues with the rebirth of Arjuna and the Pandavas at the potters house at Panchala and finally becomes Dharmaraja’s journey when he brings back his brothers to life by answering the Yaksha’s questions correctly.

After the killing of Duryodhana, the Samayam Ganachari Kumaravargam are released from being custodians of the custodians of the Dharmaraja/Draupadi temple and the sacred thread the ‘Kappu’ is untied from their wrist. Their role in the festival is of course not yet over as they have to perform an another important ritual the next day before the coronation of Dharmaraja

“Then a lady comes wailing wearing a black sari, she does not know Duryodhana and comes crying and beating her breasts. The teens there join and start wailing too beating their breasts, and it like jugalbandi between the lady in the black dress and the youngsters. Now an actor painted black and wearing a black sari would be carried around the sculpture of Duryodhana on a ladder. She would be carrying a broom and a dust pan in her hands.”

In most festivals she would be identified as Mrithyu, the deity of death coming to mourn all the slain warriors in the war with their widows and children She would sing the dirge song or the ‘oppari’ for Duryodhana, but in most festival villages this mourning would become a boisterous celebration with the young men in the village joining in the fun. Jyestha, or Moodevi, the goddess of misfortune mourns “Alas! My son!” [Seetharaman sings dirge songs or ‘Oppari’] In Kazhiyur, the woman in black was identified as Gandhari, the mother of Duryodhana mourning her son. This seemed farfetched as in all depictions of Gandhari even in Koothu, she is always seen as a woman with a blind fold covering her eyes, as Gandhari had taken a vow not to see the world which her husband himself could not see. The figure being identified as Mrithyu, mourning the enormous loss of lives in a needless war seems closer to the narrative. This again serves to underline the anti-war position of the festival itself. This ritual ends with the figure of Mrithyu/Gandhari being carried away the same way she was brought in. Like most village temple festivals, the Mahabharata festivals of Tamil

Nadu, also end in a firewalk. A shallow pit of twelve feet by four feet is usually dug and filled with burning pieces of charcoal. With this ordeal by fire, the festival would be complete for most of the participants. What is left are the funeral rites for Duryodhana and the other warriors who died in the Great War and the coronation of Dharmaraja which will be performed on the last day of the festival, concluding the Mahabharata celebration at Kazhiyur.