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How did he manage to feed?

The war is declared. Both the parties are busy wooing supporters from all over the country. Every ruler was aware that this war will bring nothing but destruction. Whether you like it or not, they were forced to support either of the parties.

Mahabharata as such has many short stories with morals but as usual, we hung on to the main story & not the morals.

two sides call for armies to their help and lined up at Kurukshetra. The Kingdoms of Panchala, Dwaraka, Kasi, Kekaya, Magadha, Matsya, Chedi, Pandya (Malayadwaj) and the Yadus and some other clans like the Parama Kambojas were allied with the Pandavas.

The allies of the Kauravas included the kings of Pragjyotisha, Anga, Kekaya, Sindhudesa, Mahishmati, Avanti in Madhyadesa, Madra, Gandhara, Bahlikas, Kambojas and many others.

Udayan Cheraladan, the Chera King did not want war. He wanted to support neither Pandavas nor Kauravas. He came out with an amicable option that was acceptable to both Duryodana and Yudishtir.

He promised that during the great epic war, he will feed both the armies without any discrepancy or any favor.

Mudinagarayar of Murunjiyur has recorded a song in ancient Tamil Sangam Literature Puranaanoonuru (a compilation of 400 poems) describing the deeds of Chera King Udayan Cheraladan during the Mahabharata war.

The poet says that the milk turned sour by the day as war continued and the king had a tough time to please both the armies without any bias.

However in this song, the poet refrains from mentioning Pandavas or Kauravas and simply says a battle between a group of 5 on horses and a group of 100 men wearing Tumbai poo (Drona pushpa).

He also says that the battle was fought as one group abducted land of another in wrong way that goes against the principles set in Veda. He also says the Podigai Mountain is equal to Himalayas and the pride of this king belittles both of these mountains.

One should know the details of the army strength just to understand how difficult it is to feed the armies. It was a Herculean task indeed and still he decided to do that.

The combined strength of the army of the Pandavas and Kauravas in the Mahabharata war was 18 Akshouhinis. Pandavas had 7 and Kauravas had 11.

We can say, that the Akshouhini is roughly equivalent to the regiment of the modern day military. The number of 'resources' in each Akshouhini though was quite enormous.

Let's see some numbers to get an idea of what constituted an Akshouhini. To have an idea, let us consider C for chariots, E for elephants, H for horses and S for foot-soldiers.

1C, 1E, 3H and 5S = 1 Patti: 1C, 1E, 3H, 5S

“ 3 Pattis = 1 Sena mukha: 3C, 3E, 9H, 15S

“ 3 Sena mukhas = 1 Gulma: 9C, 9E, 27H, 45S

“ 3 Gulmas = 1 Gana : 27C, 27E, 81H, 135S

“ 3 Ganas = 1 Vahini : 81C, 81E, 243H, 405S

3 Vahinis = 1 Pritana : 243C, 243E, 729H, 1215S

“ 3 Pritanas = 1 Chamu : 729C, 729E, 2187H, 3645S

“ 3 Chamus = 1 Ankini : 2187C, 2187E, 6561H, 10935S

“ 10 Ankinis = 1 Akshouhini : 21870C, 21870E, 65610H, 109350S

One Akshouhini constituted 21,870 chariots, 21870 elephants, 65610 horses and 1,09,350 foot-soldiers. The total number of soldiers comes up to $(109350 + 65610 + 21870 + 21870) = 218700$.

Adding the charioteers and mahouts (assuming one per chariot and elephant), the total number of people involved in one Akshouhini comes to $(218700 + 21870 + 21870) = 262440$.

The total number of people involved in the war were $18 \times 262440 = 47,23,920$! The irony is, out of these almost 5 million people who fought the war, hardly a handful survived – Pandavas, Draupadi, Krishna, Satyaki, Ashwathama, Kripa, Kritavarma and Yuyutsu.

Another interesting thing about the Akshouhini is that it has a strong affiliation to the number 18 or 9! You add the numbers and end up in 9. Perhaps, numerological experts have something to work upon here.

These are some of the records that stands prove to the Mahabharat war and the way the armies were fed. Let us get back to our story. Everyday the death count was reported in thousands..

Still, the king was able to cook for the right number of people, horses and elephants. None were returned back without being fed. There is another untold, unpopular story on how the king was able to calculate the number of people alive and cook for them.

I am not sure how far this is true but the story is interesting one.

Prior to initiate any arrangement, he met Lord Sri Krishna. When the king was approached, he said, "every night I used to serve Kheer to Lord Sri Krishna.

I would watch and the number of nuts in the kheer he eats. Every nut represented 1 ankini. Lord Krishna would eat half-nut, quarter-nut or full nut.

I would count them and would arrive at the number of dead ones on that day of the battle." Thus, the king was able to feed the army in right quantity and without bias.