Twitter Thread by Anshumani Ruddra



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Mahabharat - the great war - 18 days of heroism, deceit, blood and intrigue - now as a mega Twitter thread.

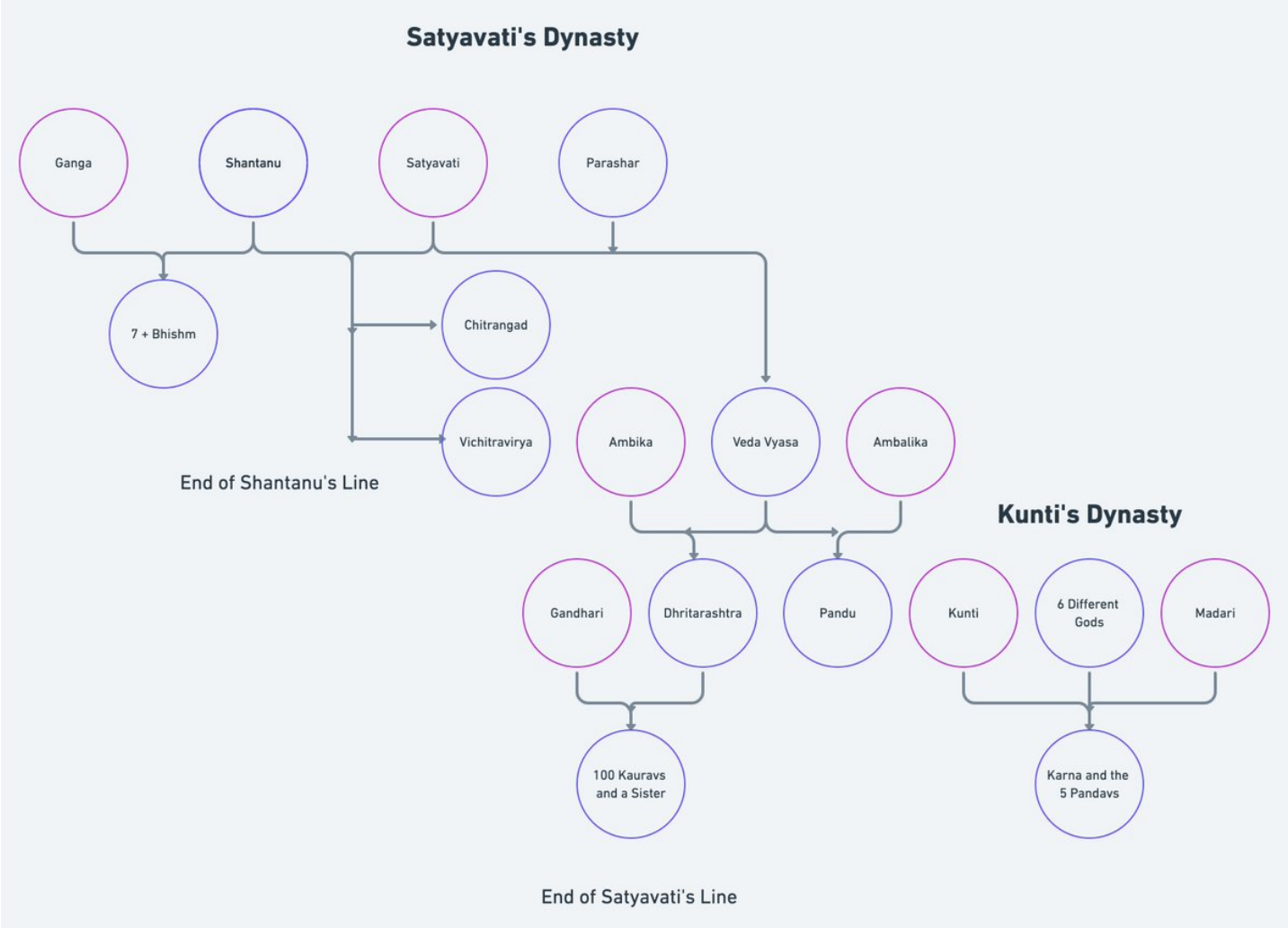
I'll add the events from a few days of the war each day.

Caveats: lots of editorialization, creative liberties and interpretations.

There will also be a lot of asides - especially around war strategy and tactics, the characters and their motivations and non-canon storylines.

Over the years, I've read multiple versions, phenomenal translations and modern retellings. So be prepared for a potpourri.

There are different ways of looking at this war. Was it a family feud? Sure - but whose family? Shantanu's or Satyavati's? Was Vyas essentially telling us his family history? And then Kunti added a twist to this tale. Here's a helpful chart:



Satyavati's two sons from Shantanu both died without children. Vyas - her first son - fathered Dhritarashtra and Pandu (and Vidur).

Pandu never fathered any children. Kunti and Madari gave birth to six demi-gods (Karna and the five Pandavs).

So Satyavati Vs Kunti and Madari.

Or was this a fight between two massive neighbouring kingdoms - the Kurus and the Panchals? While many smaller kingdoms joined the battle, most of the Pandav army (more than half of their 7 divisions) came from the Panchals. King Drupad and his son Shikhandi led two divisions.

And Dhrishtadyumn led a division and was the overall commander-in-chief of the Pandav army. Draupadi the wife and queen of the Pandavs was the princess of Panchal (hence Panchali). Her 5 sons grew up in their maternal grandfather Drupad's palace. The Panchals had a lot at stake.

BR Chopra made us believe that this was a war between brothers, between good and evil. That a woman's honour was the reason. Draupadi is cast as this Helensque victim. While there is truth to all of this, don't forget - Mahabharat is the OG Game of Thrones.

Personal egos and affronts clash with machiavellian political ambitions. The future of many nations was at risk. Who would rule the mega kingdom that would be formed at the end of this war to end all wars? These were not just superhuman

warriors. They were kings and strategists.

There were games upon games - a never-ending onion. And just look at the players of this 3-D game of chess.

Bhishm - the grandsire - single-handedly turned the Kurus into the biggest kingdom on the map. Before he was an old man - he was first and foremost a fearsome warrior.

Bhishm is the only one in this period who came close to being an ati-maharathi - a warrior greater than all warriors. He had access to all the great weapons and had the ability to choose his time and place of death.

He was taught by the great Parashuram and once defeated him over an 18-day period in one on one combat. It was his reluctance to fight against the Pandavs that really saved them otherwise he could have single-handedly defeated all of them on the battlefield.

While he wasn't king, he was the custodian of his father's kingdom and had pretty much ruled it for generations. He wasn't going to surrender it meekly to the Panchals (even if they were supporting his beloved Pandavs).

There is Drupad - the king of the Panchals - archenemies of the Kurus. His old frenemy Dron is on the other side. His son and daughter Dhrishtadyumn and Draupadi were born out of sacrificial fire with the purpose of defeating Dron.
https://t.co/7vBPr72V13

Shakuni - the king of Gandhar - maternal uncle of the Kauravs - who as a young boy had taken a vow to destroy the Kuru clan (what the Kurus did to his family is despicable). Split between his loyalty to his nephews and his hatred of who they represented.

https://t.co/bV5Qwn8KmD

And then there is the avatar of Vishnu himself - whose only purpose was to bring balance to the force. Too many warriors, too many factions and too much evil. The ultimate sacrificial fire - a war to cleanse this world. Enter Krishn.

But even if we put Krishn the god aside - we cannot ignore the master strategist, indomitable warrior and king of the biggest independent army. Krishn loved the Pandavs. There were ties of blood and marriage between them (Kunti was his aunt, Arjun was married to his sister).

Lest we forget - we have the Kauravs and the Pandavs.

A hundred and one test tube super babies (100 sons and one daughter) vs 5 legendary demi-gods.

And there were the gods opposing each other. Surya - the sun god Vs Indra - the king of gods. Karna vs Arjun in the heavens.

Imagine the team briefings on each side before the beginning of each day. The debates on the master plan for the next morning while wounds were tended to in the evenings after the end of the day's proceedings. To be a fly on those walls. Hair-raising.

And so our pieces are set. The warriors have all gathered on one giant battlefield. 11 divisions (Kauravs) vs 7 divisions (Pandavs). The rules are simple:
- fight from sunrise to sunset
- single combat only between equals (cavalry fights cavalry, not foot soldiers)

More rules:
- no attacking those who were leaving the field/ retiring
- no interfering in one-on-one battles
- those who surrendered/ disarmed were safe from slaughter

Over the next 18 days - each of these rules was broken. Many times!

Day 1 started with a slight ahmmm delay. Arjun - in typical Arjun fashion - had an existential crisis to end all existential crises. How could he fight his brothers, his teachers, his friends and his grandsire? How did it all come to this? Was peace not an option?

Not many ancient texts have stood the test of time. But the dialog between Krishn and Arjun - immortalized as the Bhagavad Gita - is unparalleled in its timeless relevance as a philosophical treatise. We won't go into details - but suffice it to say - Krishn preached some truths.

And Arjun listened. And then he picked up his bow Gandiv. Conch shells and trumpets sounded. Horses neighed and elephants trumpeted. Men began to move and then charge forward. And the first day's battle commenced as arrows like burning meteors flew all across the battlefield.

The 1st day of the war had a clear theme - old vs young, experienced vs newcomers.

Bhishm seemed to be in a hurry to end the war. Wherever he went, scores of warriors died. But Abhimanyu held him back - hitting him nine times with his arrows and bringing down his flag.

Bhishm was overjoyed. He had to use his full strength against this young hero. War raged on. No rules were broken.

But there were casualties. King Virat lost both his sons - Uttar and Shvet to king Shaly and Bhishm.

The new kids on the block weren't a match for the veterans.

As the 1st day of war came to an end the mood in the Pandav camp was sombre. Their 7 divisions had been brutalized by Bhishm and were in disarray. The Kuru camp meanwhile was celebrating. Krishn had to console a visibly shaken Yudhishthira.

Tomorrow we will resume this thread from the 2nd day of the great war.

Ganapati - the great original scribe - did not pause while writing the Mahabharat.

This scribe, however, needs a lot of breaks.