

39. An epic moment

THE agonising years of torment, hope, and disillusion were over; the moment of decision had come, though it was sought now, by the sharp edge of the sword and not the soft words of Lord Krishna. The armies gathered by the Kauravas from their kingdom and from their allies were standing face to face with the forces of their Paandava cousins. Cavalry, chariotry, elephantry and infantry, eager to start the destruction of the enemy, the chief actors all dressed and equipped for the fray! Conches were blown; trumpets rent the sky with their blare. The air was tense with hope, fear, anxiety and anger. Blood in million bodies became redder and warmer; hearts pounded quicker; arms grasped weapons in deadly grip.

Dharmaraaja, the 'eldest of the Paandava brothers, suddenly, removed his footwear; he laid aside his armour; he slid from his chariot; he walked towards the opposing cohorts, towards Bheeshma, the Generalissimo of the enemy forces. Dhuryodhana, the eldest of the

Kaurava brothers, the cousin most responsible for the war, the unyielding opponent of the Paandavas, saw Dharmaraaja cross over to the aged Bheeshma. He was overjoyed; he guessed that Dharmaraaja had decided surrender, for, he was by nature against bloodshed and battles.

Dharma will guard those who follow Dharma

The four brothers of Dharmaraaja were astounded. Bheema, the redoubtable hero of a hundred contests with the Kauravas, the person most .eager for the battle to begin, felt foiled of victory. He recalled the many occasions when Dharmaraaja had stood in the way of revengeful action against the Kauravas. He feared that he would apologise and withdraw like a craven from the bloody gamble of war. Arjuna, the formidable bowman, witnessed his brother's defection with horror and anger. Nakula and Sahadheva, the twins, were struck dumb at their own helplessness.

Lord Krishna studied the situation from the seat of the charioteer on the chariot of Arjuna, which was in the front line of the Paandava army. He signed to the four of them to follow their eldest brother and do likewise. He said, "All these years you have revered' him, and trod on his footsteps. Do so now. Do not hesitate; do not doubt." Dharmaraaja was the very embodiment of *Dharma* (right action); he knew the right and he practised it whatever the consequences. He knew that *Dharma* will guard those who follow *Dharma*. He never did a hypocritical or a *non-Vedhic* act; he never took a wrong step. He went straight to Bheeshma and fell at his feet. Standing before him with folded hands and bowed head, he prayed. "Grandfather! We had no chance to experience the love of the father; he passed away too soon. You brought us up from infancy with love and *care*, and made us what we are today. We have no fight to "fight against you; but, fate has conspired to bring us now into battle with you. Please have mercy on us; permit us to raise our arms against you."

Adherence to Dharma ensured Paandavas victory

Bheeshma was naturally charmed and overjoyed at the humility and righteousness of Dharmaraaja; his eyes were filled with tears at the strange turn that destiny had taken; he blessed him and said, "Dharmaraaja! You have stuck to *Dharma*, in spite of the temptations this situation has placed before you. What a noble example you have set before the world! This *Dharma* that you follow will itself give you victory."

Next, Dharmaraaja and the brothers moved towards General Dhrona, the Brahmin Preceptor, who had taught archery to both the Kauravas and their cousins, the Paandavas. Dharmaraaja fell at his feet too and prayed, "Highly revered Preceptor! We five are your pupils; how can we rightfully take up arms against our Preceptor? The times have indeed gone awry. Pardon us, for this wrong. Permit us to engage with you in battle." Dhrona, the *Aacharya*, was visibly moved by this appeal. "Ah! How great and good, this Dharmaraaja is ! Even at this moment when the hounds of war are to be let loose to spread death and fury, he is sticking to the dictates of *Dharma!*" Dhrona was thrilled at the thought. He clasped Dharmaraaja in his arms and said, "Son! You are dearer to me than Aswathaama, for, I am drawn to him only by duty, whereas I am drawn to you by love. You are all my sons, for, I love you as such. Your right will certainly earn victory over our might."

It is this adherence to *Dharma* that ensured their victory. Or else, was there any one on earth at that time who could force the redoubtable Bheeshma to lay down his arms? Could any one excel Dhrona in archery? The Kauravas, whom Bheeshma and Dhrona sought to support were defeated because they trod the path of *adharma* (vice), while the Paandavas never deviated from the path of *Dharma*. *Dharma* gave them the skill, strength, courage and tenacity to defeat these great masters of military strategy.

The Kauravas went counter to their parents and their God. Their mother, Gaandhaari, counselled her children in a thousand ways not to continue their vendetta, against their cousins, the Paandavas. But, they did not heed her. Their father Dhritrashtra pleaded with them to desist from the path of hate; but, to no avail. They turned a deaf ear to the advice offered by their Preceptor, Dhrona, to make' peace with the Paandava cousins and give them their legitimate share of the realm. When the Lord, Sri Krishna Himself, went to them as a messenger of peace, as an Ambassador with the Mission of Peace, they refused to listen to His Divine words; they attempted even to overpower Him and put Him into bonds!

If you follow the same line of wilful blindness, you will have to meet the same fate---total destruction. The five Paandava brothers are, you should believe, worthy of your reverence and have to be regarded as your 'five vital airs,' 'five sheaths,' 'five sense-organs.' Have them as ideals to be followed; you can then win the Grace of God. The memory of their travail and triumph will act as a *manthra* to purify and strengthen you, and elevate you to the Divine status which is your heritage.

Brindhaavan, June 1974