

CHAPTER 6

VIDURA'S RENUNCIATION

Inside the palace, Vidura enquired about the welfare of every one of his kinsmen. Then Kunthi Devi, the Queen-mother, came in and casting her endearing looks at him, said, "At last, we have been able to see you, Oh Vidura!" She could not say more.

After some time she resumed, "How could you stay away so long, ignoring the very children whom you reared with so much love and myself and others who revere you so much. It is through your Grace that my children are today rulers of this land. Where would they be today if you had not saved them on many a critical occasion? We were the target for many a disaster; but the greatest one was your being away from us. That affected us most. Even the hope of seeing you again was extinguished in us. Now our hearts

have sprouted again. Aspirations scattered by despair have come together. Today, our joy has attained fullness. Oh, what a happy day!" Kunthi sat for a while wiping her tears.

Vidura held her hands, but could not resist his own tears. He was recapitulating the varied events of the past, in the Pandava and Kaurava groups. He said, "Mother Kunthi Devi! Who can overcome the decrees of fate? What must happen, happens. The good and the evil that men do have to result in good and evil. How can man be called free, when he is bound by this law of cause and effect? He is a puppet in the hands of this law, it pulls the strings and he makes the movements. Our likes and dislikes are of no consequence. Everything is His Will, His Grace." When Vidura was thus expounding the fundamental spiritual truths that govern human affairs, the brothers Dharmaraja, Bhima, Nakula, and Sahadeva were sitting near, wrapped in close attention.

Kunthi raised her head at last and said, "Through your blessings, we won the war; but we were powerless to save the lives of the sons of Draupadi and the son of Subhadra. Misfortune haunted us so strongly. Of course, as you said, no one can escape one's destiny. Well, let the past be forgotten. It is meaningless to worry over what cannot be set right. I must say, my thirst has now been considerably relieved; I could meet you at last. Where were you all this time? Tell us."

At this, Vidura replied that he had been on a pilgrimage to a number of holy places. The brothers listened with rapt

attention to his story, prodding him with questions. Dharmaraja said often that he was waiting the day when he too could go through all those holy experiences. He folded his palms in reverence whenever a holy shrine was mentioned and with closed eyes, he pictured to himself the sacred spot. Meanwhile, Bhima interjected, “Did you proceed to Dwaraka? Please tell us your experiences there.” Dharmaraja too added, “You must have met Lord Krishna there, isn’t it? Tell us all that happened, in full detail.” Kunthi Devi too became eager to hear his description; for, she said, “Tell us, tell us. My son is there now. You must have met him too. How are they all? I hope the old parents, Nanda and Yasoda are well, and, Devaki and Vasudeva?” A shower of questions fell on Vidura, even before he started talking.

Vidura was not overeager to answer. He talked as if he was anxious to avoid being drawn into the topic. For he had learnt from Uddhava while on the way to Dwaraka that the Yadava clan had perished and Krishna had closed His Human career. He had no desire to plunge the Pandavas into grief, when they were elated at meeting him after a long time. “Why should I, who have given them so much joy, be myself the cause for wiping off that joy,” he argued. “They are sure to know about it, from Arjuna who will be returning from Dwaraka with the sorrowful news.” So he swallowed the news that popped up quite often into his mouth. He satisfied himself and them, by describing the glory of Krishna. He said, “I did not like to visit kith and kin with these ascetic robes on; so I did not meet any of the Yadava

leaders or Nanda, Yasoda and others,” and kept quiet. He did not dilate further on Dwaraka and his own pilgrimage.

“I came to you, because I heard that you have won the war and are peacefully engaged at last in ruling over the kingdom which was rightfully yours. I felt drawn towards these children whom I had fostered from a tender age. It was affection towards them that drew me here. Among my kith and kin, I was tempted to visit only you. I did not desire to meet any others,” he said and turned towards the Vedanthic teachings which he wanted to impart. When the conversation ended, Dharmaraja prayed that Vidura might take residence at the quarters specially arranged for him and himself accompanied him to the mansion.

There, he appointed certain persons to serve Vidura and requested him to take rest at that place. Vidura did not relish the idea of spending his time in that seat of luxury; but he entered the mansion lest Dharmaraja be displeased. He lay on his bed, reviewing the past. He sighed when he realised that the stratagems which the blind Dhritrashtra, his own brother, employed to destroy the Pandavas, the children of his other brother Pandu, recoiled on him and caused the destruction of his own clan. He admired Dharmaraja for the magnanimity he was showing towards Dhritrashtra, in spite of the fact that he had tortured the Pandavas in various ways. Dharmaraja was revering him with great faith and devotion and attending to his comforts. He felt the utmost disgust when he recapitulated the wickedness of

Dhritharashtra's heart. He was ashamed that the old man was coolly wallowing in the luxury of the palace, instead of cultivating detachment from the flimsy pleasures of the senses and attempting to realise the goal of human life, namely, Liberation, from the cycle of birth and death. He experienced an uncontrollable agony that his brother was wasting the few remaining years of life on earth.

His yogic vision told him that the Pandavas too will soon disappear; that the same Krishna who guarded them here will look after their best interest in the hereafter too. But he surmised that the blind king will suffer more, after the departure of the Pandavas. He resolved to send that unfortunate brother out into pilgrimage and the ultimate realisation of his destiny. He did not want any delay to intervene. So, he slipped out in the darkness, without being noticed by anyone, and walked straight into the residence of Dhritharashtra.

The blind king and his queen, Gandhari, were of course expecting Vidura to call upon them, for they had learnt that he had come to town. So, when Vidura stepped in, he embraced him and shed tears of joy. He could not contain himself. He listed one by one the calamities that overtook him and his children and lamented over fate. Vidura tried to console him with the profound teachings of the scriptures. but he soon discovered that the petrified heart of the old man will not melt at the application of cold advice; he knew that his stupidity can be overcome only by hard blows.

So, he changed the tune and resorted to blame and abuse. Hearing this Dhritharashtra was alarmed. He expostulated, "Brother! We are burning in agony at the loss of our hundred sons; and, you prick the wound with the sharp needles of your angry abuse. Even before we taste the joy of meeting you after so long a time, why do you try to plunge us deeper into distress? Alas! Why should I blame you for hard-heartedness? I am laughed at by all, blamed by all. I have no right to find fault with you." With head bent and resting on his palms, Dhritharashtra sat in silence.

Vidura recognised this as the opportune moment for instilling the lesson of renunciation, which alone could save him from perdition. He knew that his purpose was beyond reproach; for, he wanted them to undertake pilgrimage to holy places and fill themselves with sanctity, and meet great and good men and recognise the Lord within and thus save themselves. So, he decided to use even stronger words with a view to transform him, and the queen. Though filled with pity at their forlorn condition, Vidura had in mind the dire days when they will need all the courage that Jnana alone can give them; so, he was determined to wound them into action. He said, "Oh foolish King! Have you no shame? Do you still find joy in earthly pleasures? Of what avail is it if you wallow in the mire until you die? I thought you had enough of it and more. Time is a cobra that lies in wait to sting you to death. You dare hope that you can escape it and live forever. No one, however great, has escaped the sting. You run after happiness in this temporary world and

you seek to fulfil your desires in order to get some paltry satisfaction. You are wasting precious years. Make your life worthwhile. It is not yet too late to begin the effort. Give up this cage called home. Dismiss from your mind the paltry pleasures of this world. Remember the joy that awaits you, the world that is welcoming you, the end of this journey. Save yourself. Avoid the foolish fate of giving up this life in the agony of separation from kith and kin. Learn to die with the thought of the Lord uppermost in the mind at the moment of departure. It is better far to die in joy in the thick of the blackest forest than die in distress in the palace of this capital city. Go, go and do thapas. Get away from this place, this prison which you call, home.”