

CHAPTER 8

DHRITHARASHTRA TRANSFORMED

Dhritharashtra and Gandhari reached the forest, along with Vidura. Vidura searched for a site where they could practise austerities. He also advised them on the best means of seeking self-realisation. They spent the days in holy company and holy thoughts.

Meanwhile in Hasthinapura, as soon as the sun rose, Dharmaraja woke up, finished his ablutions and performed the ritual worship of the “Household Fire.” He gave away in charity the usual daily gifts to the needy. He then proceeded on foot towards the palace of Dhritharashtra, his paternal uncle, as was his wont, for he never began his daily round of duties without taking on his head the dust of his feet. The king and queen were not found in their chambers. So he waited for some little time expecting them to return thereto,

searching for them all around, even while he was waiting anxiously for their return. He noticed however that the beds were not slept upon, the pillows did not bear marks of use, the pieces of furniture were undisturbed. He doubted for a moment that the rooms might have been reset by someone after use, but no, some fear got hold of him that they must have left; so, he hurried towards the room of Vidura to discover that he too had fled. His bed was unused.

The attendants reported that the sage did not return to his room from the king and queen to whom he had gone. As soon as he heard this, Dharmaraja had a shock. He went back to the palace and searched every room with great care and his worst fears were confirmed. His hands and feet shivered in despair. His tongue became dry. Words did not emerge from his mouth. He fell on the floor, as if life had ebbed out. Recovering, he blabbered indistinctly. He called on Vidura more than once, and the officers around him became afraid of his future. Everyone rushed to the presence, asking, “What happened?” sensing some calamity. They stood in a circle, awaiting orders from the master.

Just then, Sanjaya came there, all of a sudden. Dharmaraja rose and caught hold of both his hands: “My parents have gone; alas, I found their chambers empty. Why did they behave like this? Have they disclosed anything to you, tell me. If I know where they have gone, I could fall at their feet and crave pardon for all my failings. Tell me quick, Sanjaya, where have they gone?” He too had no knowledge of their whereabouts. He only knew that Vidura must be at

the bottom of the whole affair. He too shed tears, and holding Dharmaraja's hands in his, he said in a voice that shook with tremor, "Lord and Master, believe me, I am speaking the truth. Of course, Dhritharashtra used to consult me and ask for my suggestions even in small matters; but in this affair he has acted without discussing with me or even informing me. I am struck with wonder at this act. Though I was near him, I did not in the least know about his journey. I cannot also guess why he should have done so. I never dreamt that he would deceive me thus. He showed me some respect and had some confidence in me. But he has played me false. I can only say that this is my bad luck." Sanjaya started weeping like a child.

Dharmaraja consoled him, saying that it was really the consequence of his own sins, and not Sanjaya's. "The extent of our bad luck can be gauged from this. Our father left us even while we were children. This uncle brought us up from that tender age. We were revering him and tending him as both father and uncle. I must have perpetrated some error out of ignorance. I am incapable of doing so, consciously. Both uncle and aunt were broiling in the agony of the loss of their hundred sons. I was eager to offer them some little peace, and so myself and my four brothers were wholeheartedly serving them so that they might not remember the anguish of their terrible loss. We took care that no little point was missed while serving them. There was no diminution of reverence or affection. Alas, that they should have left this place! What a tragedy, what a terrible blow!" lamented Dharmaraja.

"My uncle and aunt are both aged and weak; besides, they are blind. I cannot understand how they managed to leave this place. How they must be suffering now! Not even one attendant accompanied them. Of what benefit are these large numbers that I have? Groping along, they might have fallen into the Ganges, by now. Oh, how unlucky I am! I fostered them both like the apple of the eye and at last, I have allowed them to meet this tragic fate." Dharmaraja was beating his breast and expressing his deep distress.

The brothers heard the lamentation and they flew fast to the side of the weeping Dharmaraja. Kunthi, the mother, also inquired anxiously the reason for the grief. She peeped into the chambers and not finding Gandari or her brother-in-law, she asked Sanjaya what had happened to them. Sanjaya could not reply. He could only shed tears. "Where have they gone, in their aged and helpless condition? Tell me," she cried; but no one could answer. Meanwhile, Dharmaraja called the brothers to his side and made some gestures which they could not understand aright. Then, he mustered courage and rose from the ground. He managed to narrate to them the happenings since sunrise. He asked Bhima to send forces in all directions to search for them and find them, for they would not have gone far, since they were blind and could not travel fast; they must be groping their way.

Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva obeyed their brother's order and sent troops in all directions. They rummaged all the roads, lanes and by-lanes, peeped into wells, searched

in all tanks and lakes, but could find no trace of the blind couple. Believing that they must have fallen into the Ganges, they got experts to scour the banks and even dive into the waters to discover their fate. All their efforts were in vain. So, the Pandava brothers were sunk in grief that they could not save the king and queen from that horrid fate.

Meanwhile, Dhritharashtra and Gandhari were joyfully contemplating on God, seated in prescribed postures with their minds rigorously under control. When they were thus lost in Divine Contemplation, and immersed in that supreme joy, a huge forest fire swept along, consuming them too in its fierce onslaught.

Vidura had a great desire to cast off his body at the holy centre of Prabhasaksethra, and so, he escaped the fire; and filled with joy at the immense good fortune of the couple, he continued his pilgrimage and reached the place which he had chosen as the scene of his exit. There, he cast off his body, which was composed of the five elements, and which therefore, was material and momentary.