

attachment that Dharmaraja had towards Dharma. But what could he do? He was rendered harmless, by the will of his eldest brother. So, he had to behave like an ineffective person.”

When Vyasa said thus, Parikshit asked him the reason why the grandfathers were so enslaved. Vyasa smiled and replied, “Son, I shall tell you that also. Your granduncle, Dharmaraja, celebrated in unprecedented grandeur the *Rajasooya-yajna* (Sacrificial ritual for paramountcy) in the Assembly hall that Maya built for him. The Kauravas were invited for the Yajna and as I said, they were struck with amazement at the magnificence and wonder; they were also filled with envy and a spirit of vengeance, as if they were insulted by the affluence and power of the Pandavas. They held counsel with wicked elements and sought some means by which they could undermine their fortune. At last they struck on a plan.

“That was the Gambling Contest through the royal game of dice. They behaved as if they were filled with filial love and as if they were motivated by the utmost affection. Their words were poisoned drops of honey, stabs steeped in butter. They persuaded their blind old father to send Dharmaraja a communication which ran thus: ‘Son, you are all brothers. Come and be together in one place and make merry over a game of dice.’ On receipt of this invitation, your granduncle who had no inkling of the wiles that the Kauravas are capable of, who had a guileless mind himself,

CHAPTER 19

PANDAVAS — AN EXAMPLE FOR KALI AGE

Parikshit prayed with tearful eyes and with such humility that Vyasa said, “Son! The Pandavas are staunch adherents of the moral law; they never deviated from the given word. They observed the rule that the defeated party has no right to challenge the victors; your grandfather and his younger brothers recognised the moral superiority of Dharmaraja, their elder brother and suppressed themselves. Or else, they would have felled the foul Kauravas to wallow in their own blood and cast their corpses to be mangled by dogs and vultures.

“In spite of this, however, your granduncle, Bhima, was straining to fall upon those vicious men like a lion chained to a tree. He was laughing cynically at the weak

accepted it and played the games they proposed, unaware of the stratagems they had planned. He was then tempted to stake his brothers and finally, even his queen, Draupadi. He did not realise that the game was full of foul movements and conspiratorial tricks. He never imagined that his cousins will land him in abject misery. So, under the rules of the gambling game, Draupadi became the property of the victors. They too, in order to wreak vengeance and cool their overwhelming passion of hatred, designed to dishonour the Queen of the Pandavas in full sight of the entire Assembly of Courtiers. Foul brains can hatch only foul plans.”

At these words, Parikshit began shedding tears. He asked Vyasa in a voice interrupted by sighs, “How did that blind Dhritrashtra, himself an Emperor, suffer this degrading behaviour towards another woman and a queen to happen? Of course, he had no eyes to see; but he had certainly ears to hear. Had he plugged his ears so that her wailings could not reach his understanding? Or, had they too become blind? The Sastras teach that no woman can be injured or insulted. She has to be given help and succour, and these rulers who ought to be exemplars to their subjects in morality and justice have the audacity to break the Sastras with impunity. How can such vicious persons be Emperors? Are they not the meanest of mortals? Only the worst sinners will contrive to insult and dishonour another’s wife, a helpless woman. I feel that this land has been torn into bits, only because such abominable persons were raised to power; at last these disasters brought about total destruction. God is not blind, is it not?”

Parikshit continued his wailing of protest. “Even ogres and barbarians respect their womenfolk. Among them, if one woman is thus insulted, they avenge it as if the entire tribe is ill-treated; when such is the case, the elders of the clan, the emperor, their preceptors, sages and learned men, were all present there and watching in open assembly, this atrocious act. Did the intelligence of those high placed witnesses suddenly disintegrate? Were their eyes suddenly blinded by some dire disease? Did they feed on grass that their taste became so beastly? Did they forget in their animality the honour of the race? And the elders! Their sense of discrimination deserted them and they must have looked pathetic caricatures of themselves.”

Vyasa interrupted this tirade against those elders who sat quiet during those awful moments. He said, “Son, Parikshit, do not jump to conclusions and confusion. No one of the elders in that assembly was in favour of the wicked behaviour of Duryodhana, Dussasana and others. They warned them of the consequences of their iniquity; what could they do if those foul men perpetrate sin? When Dussasana was dragging Draupadi by the hair, right into the royal hall which was filled with courtiers and others, the agony of Vidura, Bhishma, and Drona was beyond control. Words are inadequate instruments to describe it. Tears flowed in streams down their cheeks. They could not lift their faces and cast their eyes upon the abominable gang.

“There was another reason, too. Sparks flew from the angry eyes of Draupadi when she was so tortured; and if

they had fallen on anyone in the Hall, he would have been reduced to ashes! Luckily she was looking only at your eldest grandfather, Dharmaraja. His fortitude and equanimity were imprinted on her mind; so, the assembled men were saved from destruction. Or else, Duryodhana, Dussasana and the rest of that foul brood would not have survived at all.

“The face of Dharmaraja, so full of equanimity, had such transforming effect. Your grandfathers Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva were watching that face, while their hearts were being torn by Draupadi’s struggles. As they watched, their tempers cooled. Dharmaraja’s unruffled face saved everyone from cataclysm that day; else, all would have been consumed in the fire of her anger, making the battle of Kurukshetra superfluous.

“Nothing can happen unless God wills it so, isn’t it? How can anyone override the Will of Lord Krishna? She wailed that no one of her masters rose to save her, though she called upon them and reminded them of their prowess and valour. Just then, the thought of Krishna, the Saviour, flashed like lightning and filled her drooping heart with courage. ‘Oh Shyamsunder!’ she cried out, ‘This is not an insult dealt to me. Nor is it an infamous injury dealt to the Pandavas. It is an insult, an injury, dealt on you. You are our all. We depend on you for everything. Is it then just that you should now tolerate this cruel injury being perpetrated on our honour? We have dedicated our hearts to you. Listen, I have dedicated myself to you. Perhaps, you are not content

with what we have so far offered at your feet. Let your Will prevail.’ Thus, she surrendered fully and unreservedly, to the Lord.

“At this, the Guardian of the forlorn, the Saviour of those who surrender, the Lord, took upon Himself the burden of rescuing her from distress. He moved in silent and unseen, and blessed her, unnoticed. And wonder of wonders, the sari which the human ogres were attempting to remove in order to disgrace her was rendered endless. Everyone, including the tormentors, were stunned at the demonstration of Krishna’s Grace and Draupadi’s devotion. Good men and wise realised that Sathya and Dharma can never come to harm. The tears of joy that rolled from their eyes gave proof of the exaltation they experienced. The wicked Dussasana fell down, exhausted and humiliated. Draupadi did not suffer the least dishonour. All the dishonour fell to the lot of the Kauravas, and the Pandavas were unaffected.

“Can God permit the just and moral Pandavas to suffer humiliation? The harm that the Kauravas planned to inflict on the Pandavas recoiled on them only. This was the direct consequence of the Grace that Lord Krishna showered on your grandfathers and grandmother and of the devotion and faith they had reposed on Lord Krishna.

“Intending to declare to the world the intense devotion of the Pandavas and its efficacy, and also to hold them up as examples for the Kali Age that was to come, the Lord

contrived this thrilling drama. There is nothing more in this than that purpose of the Lord. You may be subjected to calumny, insult and dishonour; you may be plunged into poverty or pain; but the person who has surrendered to the Will of God will welcome each of these gladly and bear it with equanimity. The Lord will never give up His children. Those devoted to God have to be patient and calm, under the most poignant provocation. The fact is, the pious and the God-fearing are those who are visited by travails and troubles: in order to teach mankind these great truths, Krishna enacted this drama, with the Pandavas as the cast. Every incident in their lives is but a scene in His Play.”