

Chapter 19. Pandavas —An Example for the Kali Age

The Pandavas lose Droupadi in the dice game

Parikshith prayed with tearful eyes and with such humility that Vyasa said, “Son! The Pandavas are staunch adherents of 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 brother 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, your grand uncle, Bhima, strained to fall upon those vicious men like a lion chained to a tree; he laughed cynically at the weak attachment that Dharmaraja had toward right action (*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.”

Parikshith asked how his grandfathers had been so enslaved; Vyasa smiled and replied, “Son, I’ll tell you that. Your granduncle, Dharmaraja, celebrated in unprecedented grandeur the coronation sacrifice in the assembly hall that Maya built for him. The Kauravas were invited for the sacrifice and, as I said, were struck with amazement at its magnificence and wonder. They were filled with envy and a spirit of vengeance, as if they were insulted by the Pandavas’ affluence and power. They held counsel with wicked elements, seeking a way to undermine the Pandavas’ 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.’”

Kauravas dishonour Droupadi

Your granduncle, who had no inkling of the wiles of which the Kauravas were capable, whose own mind was guileless, accepted it and played the games, unaware of the stratagems they had planned. He was then tempted to stake his brothers and, finally, even his queen, Droupadi. He didn’t realise that the game was full of conspiratorial tricks and foul movements. He never imagined that his cousins would land him in abject misery. So, under the rules of the gambling game, Droupadi became the property of the victors. In order to wreak vengeance and cool their overwhelming passion of hatred, they designed to dishonour the Pandavas’ queen in full sight of the entire assembly of courtiers. Foul brains hatch only foul plans.”

At these words, Parikshith began shedding tears. He asked Vyasa in a voice interrupted by sighs, “How did that blind Dhritrashtra, himself an emperor, allow this degrading behaviour toward a woman and a queen to happen? Of course, he had no eyes to see, but he certainly had ears to hear. Had he plugged his ears so that her wailing couldn’t reach his understanding? Or had they too become blind? The scriptures (*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 had the audacity to break the scriptures with impunity. How could such vicious people be emperors? Aren’t they 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 because such abominable people were raised to power; at last these disasters brought about total destruction. God is not blind, is He?"

Parikshith continued his wailing of protest. "Even ogres and barbarians respect their womenfolk. Among them, if one woman is insulted, they avenge it as if the entire tribe is ill treated. In this case, the elders of the clan, the emperor, their preceptors, sages, and learned men were all present and watching this atrocious act in open assembly. 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; they must have looked pathetic caricatures of themselves."

Krishna saves Droupadi's honour

Vyasa interrupted this tirade against the elders who sat quiet during those awful moments. "Son, Parikshith, do not jump to conclusions and confusion. Not 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. But what else could they do? When Dussasana was dragging Droupadi by the hair, right into the royal hall 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 couldn't lift their faces and cast their eyes upon the abominable gang.

"There was another reason. Sparks flew from Droupadi's angry eyes when she was so tortured, and if they had fallen on anyone in the hall they 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.

"Dharmaraja's face, so full of equanimity, had such a transforming effect. Your grandfathers Bhima, Arjuna, Nakula, and Sahadeva were watching that face while their hearts were being torn by Droupadi's struggles. As they watched, their tempers cooled. Dharmaraja's unruffled face saved everyone from cataclysm that day; or 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, right? How can anyone override the will of Lord Krishna? She wailed that not one of her masters rose to save her, although 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. 'O Shyamasundar!' she cried out, 'This is not an insult dealt to me. Nor is it an infamous injury to the Pandavas. It is an insult, an injury, to you. You are our all. We depend on you for everything. Is it just for you to 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 silently and unseen and blessed her, unnoticed. And, wonder of wonders, the sari that 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 Droupadi’s devotion. Good men and wise realised that truth (*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. Droupadi didn’t suffer the least dishonour. All the dishonour fell to the lot of the Kauravas, and the Pandavas were unaffected.

Droupadi surrenders to the Lord

“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, or 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 provocations. The fact is that travails and troubles are visited upon the pious and the Godfearing. 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.”