

Chapter 20. Krishna Graces Droupadi

Sage Vyasa continued. “Listen, oh King! Droupadi was overwhelmed with amazement when she experienced the grace of Krishna, who granted the boon of unending folds of clothing to protect her honour. She shed profuse tears of gratitude and exclaimed in ecstasy, ‘Krishna! Krishna!’ with such a rush of feeling and zeal that those present were struck with fear. The shining splendour of her face made them suspect that she must be the veritable Goddess Sakthi, who energizes the universe.

Droupadi curses the Kauravas

“Meanwhile, Krishna manifested Himself in concrete form before your grandmother, Droupadi, and said, ‘Sister! Why are you troubled in mind? I took birth with the express purpose of destroying these evil men blinded by pride. I’ll see that the glory and fame of the Pandavas are held high for the admiration of this world for generations to come. Console yourself.’

“She fell at the Lord’s feet, washing them with her tears darkened by the collyrium in her eyes. The tresses of her long thick hair, unloosened by wicked hands, fell over His feet and covered them. She rolled on the ground round the feet.

“Her furious contentment and her angry excitement steeped the assembly of courtiers and warriors in astonishment. Krishna raised her up and, placing His hand upon her head, blessed her. ‘Rise! Tie the hair into a knot. Await patiently the events that will happen in the days ahead. Go, join your companions in the inner apartments.’ Hearing these words, Droupadi started like a serpent that has raised its hood. Her eyes shone through the veil of hair that covered her face; her glances were like flashes of lightning among the clouds.

“She stood in the centre of the assembly and, turning on Krishna, said in deliberate tones, ‘Krishna, cloth that gets torn can only be stitched; the rents can’t be mended otherwise. A virtuous bride can be given away only once. Curdled milk cannot be restored to its primal purity. The tusks of the elephant can’t be withdrawn into the mouth from out of which they came. My tresses were loosened by the foul hands of these evil men. They can never be knotted again, as formerly, to mark the happiness of a wife.’ At this, everyone sat silent with bent head, overcome with the shame of the insult to the queen.

“Krishna broke the silence. ‘Then when will you dress your hair as of old, sister? These loose tresses make you really frightening.’

The heroic queen roared like a lioness, ‘Lord, pray listen! The filthy rascal who dared touch this hair, hold it in his foul hand, and drag me into this hall must have his head broken into bits and his corpse gnawed by foxes and dogs; his wife must be widowed; she must unloosen her tresses and wail in unquenchable grief; that day, I shall dress this hair into a knot, and not till then.’

The elders in the hall were alarmed at its terrible consequences of this imprecation. They covered their ears so as not to hear more and pleaded, ‘Pardon! Peace! Quieten yourself,’ for they knew how calamitous the curse of a woman of virtue could be. The heart of Dhritrashtra, the old blind father of the wicked gang that insulted her, very nearly burst with fear. His sons tried to put on brave faces, but inside they were struck down by a tornado of panic. A wave of dread swept over the assembly, for they knew that her words would have to come true, the wrong

would have to be avenged by the punishment she has pronounced.

“To reinforce this apprehension, Krishna said, ‘Droupadi! May it happen as you have said. I shall destroy these wicked men who caused so much sorrow to your husbands. Your words must come true, for you have not tainted your tongue with falsehood, even in fun, since the moment of birth. Your voice is the voice of truth, and truth will triumph in spite of everything.’

The depredations of Kauravas against Pandavas

“This was the assurance given to your grandmother by the Lord. And the Kauravas were later destroyed and the righteousness of the Pandavas was vindicated before the world. Where *dharma* is, there the Lord is; where the Lord is, there victory is. This holy axiom was taught to the world by the Lord through this tragedy.

“How great your grandfathers were to deserve this continuous shower of grace from Lord Krishna! Their adherence to *dharma*, their unwavering allegiance to truth, these won for them that grace. One can perform costly and elaborate rites and sacrifices (*yajnas* and *yagas*), but if one only adheres to the path of *dharma* and truth, one can cross the ocean of change and grief and reach the shore of liberation. Or else, when the terror-striking sage Durvasa went into the forest to ‘burn’ your grandfather into ashes, as planned by Duryodhana and his gang, how could they be rescued? Poor Durvasa had to learn that the grace of God is more effective than the earnings of years of asceticism and denials. He who was sent to destroy departed with deep admiration of his intended victims.”

When Vyasa was thus proudly reminiscing about the Pandavas’ devotion to the Lord, Parikshith raised his head in wonder and asked, “What did you say? Did Durvasa suffer defeat at my grandfather’s hands? Ah, how fortunate I am to be born in the dynasty that has proved itself superior even to that great sage! Tell me, Master, what happened? Why did Durvasa go to them and what was the result?”

“Listen, *Maharaja*,” Vyasa continued, “Your grandfathers spent their days happily in exile in the jungle, with their fame for hospitality unimpaired through the grace of Lord Krishna. To them, the jungle was more filled with joy than Hasthinapura. The hearts of the great will be so full of divine content and equanimity that they won’t be affected by the ups and downs of fortune. A fragrant flower will please one with its captivating scent whether it is held in the left hand or the right; so too, whether in the sky or forest, in the village or city, on the heights or valley, the great are equally happy. They know no change, as your grandfathers demonstrated in their lives.

“When the good are happy and living in peace, the bad cannot tolerate it; they develop intense headache. The bad have to contemplate the loss and hardships that the good undergo in order to be happy! The loss suffered by the good is the gain of evil minds. The sweetness of the cuckoo is bitter to the ear of the crow; similarly, the unmolested happy life of the Pandavas gave misery and pain to the Kauravas in the capital.

“But, what more could they do? They had heaped on them as much grief as they could; they had cast on them all the abuses they could. Finally, they drove them out of the kingdom itself. They sent them into the forests on empty stomachs.

“Empty stomachs! Yes. That is what they imagined. But the truth was different. For their frames were saturated and filled with Lord Krishna. To fight against such God-filled bodies is only to engage in a hopeless fray. That’s why the Kauravas took their material possessions from them and sent the bodies away from the kingdom. After the game of dice, all properties and possessions were taken away. The Kauravas tried their worst to create dissensions among the brothers and spread heinous scandals, affecting one or the other. But the brothers respected

truth and stuck to truth, so nothing could separate them. The fact that nothing could make a dent on the happiness of the Pandavas consumed the Kauravas like forest fire.

Duryodhana plots to provoke Durvasa against the Pandavas

“At the moment of despair, Durvasa who was the very incarnation of rage, came to Hasthinapura with ten thousand disciples, determined to spend a four-month retreat in the royal city. The Kauravas knew very well Durvasa’s ascetic powers, as well as his weaknesses and vagaries. So they invited him to the palace and lavished their hospitality on him and his followers during their four-month stay. They planned to use the sage for their wicked stratagem, so they showed extraordinary enthusiasm to provide for every want of his and of everyone in his huge entourage. They ensured that Durvasa had no cause to be disappointed or dejected or discontented. For four months, they served him with fanatic zeal. When the sage flew into fits of rage, they hung their heads and, with folded hands, put up with all the fire poured on them. Thus, the holy visitor was mollified and won over.

“One day, when Durvasa was resting after a delicious meal, Duryodhana approached him and sat reverentially on one side. The sage spoke to him thus. ‘O King, your service has pleased me much. Ask me any boon, no matter how valuable or how hard, and I shall grant it.’

Duryodhana was prepared with the boon he wanted from Durvasa. He was glad the time had come for asking. He exhibited great humility when he prayed that it might be granted. ‘Master! Your pleasure at our service is itself as valuable as a million boons. That expression of appreciation is enough for me. What do I need in riches or fame? Even if I acquire sovereignty over the three worlds, I can find no joy in it. I am grieving that, while I could serve you for four months, my brothers, the Pandavas weren’t with me here. Let them also save themselves by rendering this unique service; that is my desire. Please go to their resort, with all your disciples, and give them a chance. My elder brother, Dharmaraja, is such a staunch follower of *dharma* that, in spite of our protests and prayers, he chose to go into the forest rather than break his word. I hear that even there he is rendering magnificent hospitality to millions of guests and visitors. He can serve you with more luxurious banquets and festive dinners there. If you have a mind to shower your pleasing grace on me, I request just one favour: When you go to the Pandavas, go after Droupadi has eaten her meal!’ Duryodhana fell at Durvasa’s feet, to propitiate him more. The sage understood the stratagem and burst into laughter.