

Justice

“In the Hands of Torture”



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This book is a compilation of a series of articles by Poojya Swamiji, that appeared in the Monthly Journal Vicharasethu - The Path of Introspection. This series began in the June 1975 issue and concluded in the September 1975 issue. Here the articles have been presented as they were in the original series and no further editing has been carried out.

JUSTICE "IN THE HANDS OF TORTURE"

In the April issue, under the title 'Dear Souls become humans first' I was speaking about the Grandfather Bheeshma, his greatness, the masterly, though amazing, way in which he spoke and conducted himself in the battlefield, even in the most crucial and life-surrendering situations. In connection with the trend of that thought, my mind began to ponder over the behaviour of the same elderly Knower on an earlier occasion when Draupadi was subjected to inhuman torture by Duhshasana in the open assembly of the Kurus, right in front of her husbands, the Pandava brothers. I wanted to tell you all as to how this matchless Knower, Bheeshma, reacted to the whole scene then. It must give a number of lessons to the ordinary people as well as to the more devoted thinkers.

Draupadi was the much adored daughter of King Drupada. Her hand was won, much to her own as well as her father's wishes, by Arjuna's valour, and quite strangely she became the wife of all the five Pandava brothers, Yudhishtira being the eldest of them all. The role she played on several occasions throughout Mahabharata stands singular on various accounts. In fact it is true to say that she is a decisive character in shaping and finalizing the war between Duryodhana and Yudhishtira. Strictly wedded to Dharma and all the loyalties which flow along with it, she was always courageous and firm, never blind to what was expected of her from time to time. When courage and sacrifice blend with an unfailing sense of *dharma* and duty, a woman becomes truly adorable. She shines as a real guide and protector to all those who are around. Draupadi stands out as a permanent star in this context.

Whether it was a question of timely inspiration or provocation, criticism or advice, leadership or protection, Draupadi never lagged behind. The one instance when, rendered totally helpless with all the five husbands of hers enslaved by Duryodhana, she caused discomfiture to the entire Kuru assembly and finally liberated her lords can never be over-praised. For any thinker, the incident is very revealing and inspiring. It was a scene where Justice and Propriety themselves began to swing and no ultimate pronouncement could emerge.

There is a tendency among men to lower and sometimes even condemn the position of women in their society. To listen to the words of women on any matter whatever is held, is considered by many men, as fruitless, irrelevant, ignoble and demeaning. But this does not tally with the place of honour and adorability which our ancient thinkers and social reformers and law-givers had assigned to the noble womanhood. Whatever is said, it is women who bear all humans in their womb. If they can be the source of origin for men, they can as well be the source of protection and guidance as well, whenever so needed. It is true that women's minds have a strong display of their own pet emotions and emotional insight. But is not such a display necessary to lay the foundations for, as well as to build up a strong and well-knit family, which is the real fabric with which the society is woven anywhere in the world? While we take this basic truth into account, much of the unwise criticism which men in general raise about women and their typical outlook will prove out of place.

I am reminded of a Sanskrit saying of one of the *Smriti* (includes *Ve-dangas, sutras, itihaasa, purana*) authors, which rendered in English would be:

Where the role of women is rightly recognized and they are held in proper esteem, their words of criticism and advice sought and heeded whenever necessary, there alone do prosperity and dharma abide; there alone will Gods and Goddesses make their visit.

Many women have stood firm unshakably when even men have shaken and trembled. Their emotions and emotional insight have sometimes shone as a beacon light to even enemies, not to speak of friends and well-wishers. Their sacrifices too, which they make, may be taking their stand on their own characteristic sentiments, have saved and immortalized several great causes. All these taken together can only tell us about the need for evaluating the woman's role in our society more properly. Even today, if our country and its heritage is great and immortal, the real credit for it all goes to our women, the mothers and sisters of this land.

The woman is as complex as Mother Nature Herself. Nature is complex simply because only in being so she can cause and perpetuate existence. Nature has to embody both attraction and repulsion simultaneously, force and friction alike; evolution and involution equally. Only when all these opposites are concurrently at play, the elusive creation and its progress will be feasible.

Naturally there is little wonder in the woman, who too is the source of both creation and preservation, being a strange complexity of emotions, insights and what not. Though complex and multi-faceted, she is graceful and exemplary. Though soft and kind, she can be equally hard and firm. Though loving and accommodating, she can easily afford to be intolerant and unyielding.

In the Ashram during the past few days, we have been discussing about the intricacies of human behaviour, the notoriety which the

human mind can think of and work. How much can an emotion drive a man to and to what all states and situations, how far on the other hand can reason and intelligence lead and save one, was a special subject of talk. In this connection we were reading and re-reading the portions of the Mahabharata, particularly the scene in which Draupadi was humiliated and tortured and the supreme and providential way in which it all ended.

I shall mention some salient points of the whole anecdote as it is described by Sage Vyasa.

Duryodhana was always jealous and intolerant about the Pandava brothers and their prosperous and victorious life. He was bent upon destroying them by some means or other. With the consent of his father Dhritarashtra, therefore, he called Yudhishtira for a game of dice. Shakuni, the maternal uncle of Duryodhana was adept in foul play. He played on Duryodhana's side. Yudhishtira and others knew of this, yet being addicted to the game of dice, the eldest of the Pandavas accepted the invitation. In the game, as was anticipated, Yudhishtira began to lose. He was induced to stake in the game everything he possessed, kingdom, wealth, his kith, kin etc. one after the other. Yudhishtira accepted the challenge and started staking everything, things as well as people, one after another. Every time Shakuni cleverly provoked him to part with his belongings. Shakuni used teasing and wounding remarks and got the king to part with his belongings.

Yudhishtira staked his brothers – Sahadeva, Nakula, Arjuna and Bheema. All of them he lost too. Shakuni then had Yudhishtira stake himself and try his luck. Yudhishtira did so, but only to lose himself. Accepting defeat the king said: ‘Yes, I am defeated. I stand a slave and servant to Duryodhana. I am left with nothing now, not

even myself.' At this Shakuni laughed and pointed out that his wife, Draupadi, was still left behind independent, and without staking her, it was wrong for him to have staked himself. Saying this he persuaded Yudhishtira to stake Draupadi also.

Yudhishtira rose up to the occasion and describing Draupadi as the most ideal, beautiful, graceful, dutiful woman, he declared her as staked.

When the king was declaring thus, staking Draupadi, the whole assembly consisting of Kuru elders and well-wishers shuddered, but sat mute heaving and sighing. Bheeshma, Drona, Kripa and the others knew it was all wrong and unfair but seeing King Yudhishtira himself consenting to all the demands of the enemies, they could say nothing.

The dice was cast only to defeat Yudhishtira. Shakuni won and with that the Pandavas and all their belongings became Duryodhana's, losing all their freedom, power and authority outright. Duryodhana and his group who were all the time bubbling with joy and exhilaration, now exploded into a frenzy of laughter at the thought of revenge. Instigated by Karna and Shakuni, Duryodhana sent Pratikami to fetch Draupadi telling her that she had been won over by himself and his brothers. From then on they, not the Pandavas, were her Lords.

Pratikami went to Draupadi's apartment and breaking the news of her lot he asked her to proceed to Duryodhana's court as commanded by him. Draupadi shuddered at what her Lord, Yudhishtira, had done. She asked: 'Did the king *stake his wife*? Had he nothing else to stake?' Pratikami said 'No madam, he staked all and lost all, including himself.' At this Draupadi asked

the messenger: '*Did the king stake himself first or me?* Find out this first from the king and then come to take me'.

Pratikami went to the assembly where Pandavas were seated and put the question for an answer. He spoke to Yudhishtira thus: Draupadi wants to know from you: 'Whose Lord were you when you staked me in the play and got defeated? Were you enslaved first? Was it after that that you staked and made me too a slave? Your slavery or my slavery, which was the first to take place?'

On hearing these words of Draupadi, Yudhishtira, who was by then a slave to Duryodhana, became mind-less and almost dead. He was struck mute. No reply came from him to Pratikami.

Duryodhana, hearing what Pratikami said to Yudhishtira, then said: Let Panchali (Draupadi) come to the assembly herself and make this question. Let all those present here hear the talk between her and Yudhishtira.

Pratikami went to Draupadi again and reported what Duryodhana told him. He also added that there was something unwelcome and doubtful in the minds of the Kauravas and that is why they called her there.

Draupadi did not lose either her heart or reason. Reconciling herself to the plight she was driven to and taking it to be an order of the Supreme Creator, who pronounces happiness and misery alike to both the scholar as well as the unwise, she said: "Dharma or righteousness ranks supreme, shining beyond and above everything else. If dharma is upheld by its votary then dharma too will uphold him. It is totally dangerous for the Kauravas to abuse dharma. Go and tell those present in the assembly my words on the

question of dharma and propriety. I shall obey the verdict which they, the knowers of justice and righteousness, pronounce in this matter".

Pratikami went back to the assembly and spoke out the words of Panchali to the hearing of all the elders. Hearing them, the elders did not speak anything in reply, aware of the obstinacy and wicked designs of Duryodhana.

However, Yudhishtira saw in his own mind the intention of Duryodhana and so he called a trusted messenger of his and sent him to Draupadi with these words:

"Lowering your apparel below the navel, wearing but one piece of cloth having your periods as you are, come, O! Draupadi, to the assembly and stand before your brother-in-law. Seeing you thus entering the presence of elders and kings, O! Princess, the entire assembly will at heart rebuke and curse the son of Dhritarashtra."

Duryodhana, who was bent upon taking revenge on Draupadi puffed up with the idea that she was now clearly a property of theirs. Finding Pratikami unwilling and resistant to execute his order, he sent Duhshasana, his younger brother, to fetch the daughter of Drupada.

Duhshasana, gloating and reveling over the occasion, ran to the apartment of Draupadi. Calling her with the words "Come, Draupadi, come, you have been won by us in dice. Shedding all your shame and pride, come to the assembly. Go and serve your new master Duryodhana. We have rightly won you and you are now our slave. Go and serve Duryodhana. Eke your livelihood working as his dasi (servant.) You are now ours. So walk along with me to

the assembly.”

Crying aloud ‘Ha’ and covering her face with both her hands Draupadi ran to the apartment of the elderly Kuru women. Duhshasana chased her and yelling ‘stop, you rascal, where are you running’, he caught her by her hair and began to pull and drag her by force. Draupadi told him in anger and grief: ‘Do not drag me thus, who is in periods and has only one apparel on the body. It is improper for a woman to appear thus in front of an assembly, where sit several elders and veterans.’

Hearing this, Duhshasana turned all the more violent. He thundered ‘What to me if you are in your periods? What, if you have only one piece of dress on your body or have no dress at all. You are our property, which we have gloriously won in the game of dice. You are now our servant and slave. It is for us, therefore, to decide whether you must put on any dress or not.” Shouting thus he held her faster by the hair and dragged her brutally to the assembly hall, to the sight of all present there. Wailing bitterly in grief and anger, Draupadi spoke loudly to the listening of all around, her hand wrestling hard to hold her saree in position. Her eyes were fuming and the body appeared almost ablaze.

“..Alas, alas, dharma has left hold of the Bhaaratas. The sense of Kshatriya's duty has also receded from them. The moral and ethical decorum of the Kurus has gone into oblivion, it is obvious. Where is the manliness and courage of Drona, Bheeshma and the high-souled Vidura? Where likewise has gone the elderliness of the King (Dhritarashtra)? Dharma is too cruel, no doubt. The dharma particularly of the Kurus is all the more so. Does not anyone of the Kuru elders here behold this fierce adharm (highly ignoble act)? Is there not anyone here who can stop and prevent this wicked mon-

ster, from pulling me brutally like this, holding on to my hair?"

When Draupadi was crying and sobbing in distress like this and Duhshasana was intensifying the torture, both Shakuni and Duryodhana roared in laughter and complimented him openly saying 'well done! well done!' None else in the assembly approved the least of Duhshasana's act. All were shedding tears. Putting their heads down they sat mute.

It was now that the most respected elder Bheeshma, the grandfather of Duryodhana, broke the tense silence with his well-thought-out words. It had now become an important question of giving a clear verdict on the issue which Draupadi had raised. Bheeshma said:

"O virtuous lady, the trend and course of dharma is extremely subtle and abstruse. Therefore I am unable to give a fully appropriate reply to your question. One who has lost his freedom and consequently become a slave has no right and power to pledge another. On this basis Yudhishtira's pledging you, after having lost himself, is incorrect and invalid. But there is another side too to the question. A woman is under the lordship of her husband. On this ground when Yudhishtira was won by the enemies, you too were won as a consequence. You were enslaved. But it is by foul play and stealth that these people, claiming superiority and power, have defeated Yudhishtira. If any clever person defeats another not so clever through foul means, the latter's defeat will not be upheld by the knowers of Dharma. On this principle this game is not *dharmic*. But because Yudhishtira participated in the game with full knowledge of the consequences and willingly too, the defeat has to be reckoned with as effective. Yudhishtira is one who will forsake for the sake of dharma the whole of the bounteous earth, He himself

having consented that 'I have been defeated,' how can I hold the defeat as improper or ineffective? Being so, I am really unable to pronounce any judgement on this matter,"

Bheeshma's impartial view was that the question cannot be easily adjudged and a final verdict pronounced on it is extremely important. Even when Duryodhana and Shakuni were coaxing and teasing Yudhishtira to come to play, Bheeshma and the other elders were resentful, The whole matter was arranged in an improper manner. But how could the elders speak against it, for Yudhishtira, knowingly and willingly was accepting the offer. In that he used his freedom and sovereignty, which can never be a subject of attack for anyone. Finding an event to be wrong and disastrous and yet at the same time unable to prevent it for reasons of non-interference and the like, this is the most crucial test for one's restraint and forbearance.

To condemn something and keep away from it is easy. It is purely instinctive, for which no deeper thought or the question of dharma is involved.

Here the grandfather clearly weighs the question taking both aspects of it fully. And because Draupadi is the pivot around which the whole issue revolves and she has a grave point of dharma as to whether she is independent or not, Bheeshma became silent. The silence was not due to a confusion or ignorance, but due to the superb wisdom of his.

In so far as Bheeshma said in conclusion that he was unable to give a final verdict, Draupadi continued to explain her stand further. She clearly had the right and need to do so, because the question was still alive and even the best of knowers and elders could not

give a fitting and final answer. So she said:

"It is not that King Yudhishtira, the Pandava elder, wanted to play dice of his own volition and willingness. On the other hand, with the definite intention of making him helpless and weak, he was somehow teased and challenged to play. How can the defeat imposed upon him by a host of adversaries be just and valid?"

"I want to know how, according to what code of law or procedure, can the further play of the King, who was already defeated and had become a slave, thereby losing all independence and power, pledging another be proper and valid? What dharma is it which can uphold such an act? If with his defeat first, I, his property, too was made a slave, why was he, already defeated, made to stake me again? What was the need and meaning of that step? What is the code of propriety in it? Say this."

"If his defeat and loss imply my defeat and slavery as well, if the adversaries had concluded to this effect, would they have made the King play once again with a view to enslave and gain me separately? The fact that they did make Yudhishtira play once more, in spite of his being already enslaved, one point is quite clear and conclusive, namely my husband's defeat was not considered as my defeat by the opponents!"

"Why should I part with the independence and right: which the opponents themselves have in their own minds considered and upheld for me? So, I say that one who has already lost himself and hence become a slave has sought to pledge me, who am independent still. How can such a pledge be valid and effective? There are a number of Kurus who have daughters and daughters-in-law. They have listened to all that I have said. Also they have seen with their

own eyes the pathetic plight to which I was forced into. I now beseech them to give me a fitting reply after weighing well the propriety of the basic issue involved in this whole affair."

The story continues to tell us that for quite some time more the terrible plight of Draupadi continued. The wicked Duhshasana taking advantage of her helplessness, pulled her hair all the more. And the daughter of the Panchala king wailed in agony and distress. For a while Bheema became mad with anger at this sight and began to abuse his elder brother, Yudhishtira. Then Arjuna pacified him saying that under no provocation should his side lose their restraint. Yudhishtira's authority was never to be questioned or disobeyed, he added.

When the whole assembly thus sat mute steeped in indecision and lack of fitting leadership and guidance, Vikarna, a son of Dhritarashtra, brother of Duryodhana, rose up to speak in this strain:

'O kings and elders, did you not hear what Draupadi said. Why is none of you rising up to give her a reply? Why are you all keeping speechless? Do Bheeshma and Dhritarashtra hear all this? Is not the high-souled Vidura here? Why are you sitting as if struck by thunderbolt? Leaving aside *kama* and *krodha* (passion and hatred), thinking well in the line of justice, taking note of the gravity and importance of the whole question, let every one of the kings coming from various quarters and sitting in this assembly, speak out what occurs to him as the right and proper reply."

Vikarna's words went in vain. No one opened his mouth either for or against. Finding them all speechless, he again began to speak what he thought was proper. His view was that the pledging of Draupadi by Yudhishtira was wrong and invalid. She was the

property not merely of Yudhishtira but of the other four brothers as well. He should not consider himself alone as her Lord. Even if the act of pledging the four brothers could be held proper and valid, that of pledging Draupadi could never. Shakuni exploited his innocence and coaxing and provoking him dexterously, won him to stake her. When all these factors are taken into account, Draupadi had not become a slave. Duryodhana's side had not won her. This was his summary view.

Karna then took the floor to object to what Vikarna said. Abusing him and calling him a child, Karna upheld the slavery of Draupadi, making use of the occasion to hold Draupadi as an unchaste woman, who had now become a servant and slave of Duryodhana. An immoral woman as she was (because she had five husbands), he said, it mattered little whether she put on only one piece of cloth or none at all. Shakuni's victory was righteous, just and valid. The Pandava brothers as also Draupadi were clearly Duryodhana's property now, to be used and treated by him as he wished. All of them had been won by him fully in accordance with the codes of dharma. He added: 'We shall prove to this foolish and childish Vikarna that all these six persons are slaves to us now. Like morally decent and chaste ones, these people are not to stand before us well-dressed and erect. Let us get them disrobed by themselves and pass on their dress to us without delay, to prove their slavery and our masterhood.'

As soon as Karna spoke thus, Yudhishtira and his four brothers removed their *uttareeyam* (the upper garment) and placed it down and sat on the floor. Finding Panchali (Draupadi) not following suit, Duhshasana by force caught hold of her saree and began to pull it to disrobe her!

It was at this time that Draupadi, utterly helpless and forlorn called out the name of Lord Krishna, her Saviour, for protection. Then a miracle happened! The more and more Duhshasana pulled her dress, the longer and longer it grew until at last there were heaps of cloth piling up in the assembly, and Duhshasana in utter shame and exhaustion withdrew himself from the cruel act. The whole assembly shouted *victory to Draupadi* and cursed Duhshasana liberally. Meanwhile Bheema, unable to contain himself, seeing the innocent daughter of Drupada molested like this by Duhshasana thundered loudly to the hearing of all: "*Here now do I declare this vow, unprecedented, to be unsucceeded too, namely that I will tear open in war the chest of this wicked villain of the Bharata dynasty and drink deep his hot blood: hear ye O, Kshatriyas, this great vow of mine, which none in future will repeat.*" The whole assembly shuddered at this.

Though Duhshasana bashfully withdrew, foiled and tired, the scene did not end. The vital issue had not been resolved. The people in general raised hue and cry calling the name of Dhritarashtra. There was a big pandemonium everywhere. Everyone shouted: 'O Kauravas, give a fitting reply to Draupadi's question!'

Right then, raising his hands aloft and pleading with everyone to maintain silence and order, the all-knowing Vidura submitted as follows:

'Are you not hearing what Draupadi is asking; her tears coming in torrents as if she is Lordless and deserted? O ye assembled here, you have not answered her! Not to give reply to a grave question like this is improper, When the assembly of the Wise is approached by the afflicted, burning in distress, not to give relief is Immoral and sinful. To give relief to those who seek it is the prime duty of the Knowers of Truth and Dharma. Those who practise dharma

must rid their minds of passion and hatred, preference and prejudice, and then bring forth what is just and proper’.

Even after hearing Vidura, the entire assembly just sat speechless, unable to open their mouth. Just at that time Karna spoke aloud to Duhshasana ‘Hey’, take this maid, our slave girl, to our place’.

Duhshasana instantly pulled that virtuous lady, who was sobbing under deadly torture, turning pathetic looks on to her helpless husbands. He decried in scornful laughter ‘walk on, you wretched slave!’

Draupadi then angrily accosted Duhshasana thus: ‘You ugly beast, the lowest of men, O wicked Duhshasana, stop a while! I must get a reply to my question before I can decide what to do next. Wait till I get my answer. ‘Turning to the assembly she said:

“I pay my respects to all the Kurus sitting in this assembly. Kindly forgive me because I forgot to respect you all right early as this wretched monster dragged me like this in front of you all.” By the time Draupadi said this, Duhshasana pulled her so violently that she fell, her chest striking hard against the floor. Lying in that painful pose, she began to wail aloud explaining her condition.

“Only on the occasion of my *swayamvara*, royal wedding, that day alone, had I come out in the open and a large body of men could have a glimpse of me. At no other place have any outsiders seen me any time. Such a well-grown and well-protected princess and queen that I have been so far, now am fated to lie prostrate helpless in this assembly of powerful and heroic kings and elders. The pity is that all the honourable and wise men here look on at my miserable plight.

Draupadi continues lying prostrate in the assembly

“The sons of Pandu, who cannot even bear ‘wind touching my body’ have now been humiliated to bear helplessly the sight of this senseless, wicked villain dragging me like this, alas!

“The wife of one’s son is verily *a daughter* to her father-in-law (the father of that son). The Kuru elders present here have come to forbear and uphold dragging and pulling such a one (the daughter-in-law) unjustly and with revenge, alas! The entire lot of the Kauravas see right in their front their daughter being molested, and yet alas, they refrain from raising a little finger against this sacrilegious act. See the fateful change of times! What graver pity can be there? I, a woman, who is virtuous, graced by husbands, moral and chaste, am forced to enter this great assembly, struggling very hard to hold my dress which is forcefully being stripped by another. What is there more demeaning than this? Alas, what a great shame!

“It is the unshakeable tradition of the nobles not to bring, much less by force, a virtuous woman to the midst of an assembly. The nobles have always held fast to this tradition right from the ancient past. Dharma and chivalry warrant that this is upheld at all times. Such a basic dharma, which is ancient and immortal, has now completely vaporized and disappeared, so far as the Kuru clan is concerned. They have brought me by force to this assembly. I, who am the accredited and virtuous wife of the Pandavas, who am the beloved daughter of King Drupada, who am chaste to the core and am the avowed friend of Lord Krishna. They have compelled one like me to stand in this open assembly as if I were a criminal!

“Let the Kauravas say without delay whether I am a slave or not. Do you not, O respected elders, see this rogue hurting and teasing

me in your front? I am suffering torture for long in his hand only because you refuse to give a right reply to my moral question on basic human conduct and behaviour.

“O descendants of the Great Kuru, this unjust torture cannot be allowed to go on for long. Speak out your verdict without any further delay; say whether I am a slave or not; have I been won over or not. Come out with your decision. I shall respect and abide by what you say. Kindly come out, without reservation, with the truth your keen wisdom reveals.”

When Draupadi cried, screamed and lamented like this over her fate, the reason for which was the conspicuous silence of the Kuru elders of the assembly, the great Bheeshma opened his mouth once again. Bheeshma said:

"O virtuous lady, I have already told you what I had to say in the matter. Even the greatest of the Wise will be found dumbstruck regarding the most subtle traits of Dharma (righteousness). Whatever the strong man does is held to be righteous, and whatever the weak does is unrighteous; this is what I see now here. It is impossible for me to agree with and approve of this state of affairs.

"Now coming to your question, it is too deep and abstruse. I am simply powerless to give a correct and true reply to your question. The issue involved is not merely subtle but also hard and hidden. It is too grave indeed. However, there is something which I can say without doubt and with all firmness. This whole clan of the Kurus will die out and become mere ashes ere long.

"All these Kauravas and their upholders are blinded too much by greed and infatuation. But your husbands, the Pandavas, who are

virtuous and loyal, are not leaving hold of Dharma, despite their humiliation and woeful plight. They never swerve from the avowed path of Dharma. O daughter of the Panchala king, this state is quite compatible with you, your nature and talents. Even when tottering under pain and hardship, you do not slip from the well-laid path of Dharma,"

"The great veterans like Drona and the rest, who are unshakably steeped in Dharma, are struck mute like corpses, as if devoid of the life-current. The one and only person who must give a decisive reply to your question is Yudhishtira, the son of Dharma (Dharmaputra; Yudhishtira is also called Dharmaputra); this is my definite view. Let Yudhishtira say whether you are a slave or not; whether you have lost your independence or not. Yudhishtira alone can give the final answer."

Let Pandavas confess

In fear of Duryodhana no one but the elderly Bheeshma raised his voice to offer reply to Draupadi, who, afflicted deeply, weakened pitiably, was wailing aloud in distress like the *Kurara* bird all the while pressing her question to the Kauravas. On seeing the kings, their children and grand-children steeped in utter silence, Duryodhana said:

"O Panchali, let your husbands Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva, let these persons pronounce an answer to your question! If they declare in the midst of this assembly that *Yudhishtira is not their Lord* and they are not bound by what their *Master* Yudhishtira says and does, then I shall let you free. Let the righteous and Indra-like Yudhishtira be thus revealed to all present here as untruthful, weak and disloyal! The Kuru elders are not

speaking anything thinking of the woeful plight of your four unfortunate husbands. Though several high-souled Kuru elders are present in this assembly and they do share your agony and humiliation a great deal, none of them can speak out being awake to the adverse fate of your *accursed* husbands. If Dharmaputra (Yudhishtira) speaks out himself, I shall decide the question of your slavery either this way or that."

A number of people in the assembly praised Duryodhana for what he said commending his prudence saying "very good indeed, quite righteous." There were others as well who began to sob and bitterly say "Ah, Ah." However, the reasonable words of Duryodhana did appeal to the assembly in general and he was praised as a supporter of Dharma.

The entire attention of the assembly turned towards the Pandavas. They were curious to know "what the Lord of Dharma will say, what the victorious Arjuna would say, what the mighty Bheema will say, what the innocent Nakula and Sahadeva are going to say." There was a big uproar in the assembly. When that subsided, Bheema, raising his hands to the sight of all there, said these words:

The high-souled King of Dharma, Yudhishtira, is the Master of our family and even lineage. If he were not our Lord and Master, then we would not have tolerated all that took place in this assembly. He is the unquestioned Lord of us all. He is the Lord of all our virtues and austerity as well as of our Prana, the life force. If he is considered defeated, then we too are undoubtedly to be held defeated. It is simply my obedience and subservience to him, our elder and Master, that the one who pulled Draupadi by her hair is still standing on the floor with his life intact.

"Look at my long sturdy hands. Even Lord Indra, once caught between these, will not be able to wriggle out. Only because the noose of Dharma has tied me down, the prestige of our lineage has prevented me and Arjuna too has held me back, I am gulping in all this humiliation, agony and injustice. If even at this moment Dharmaputra (Yudhishtira) would give me his sanction, I would smash outright the whole lot of the sons of Dhritarashtra".

Hearing these words, both Bheeshma and Drona simultaneously told Bheema "Be patient, O Bheema, hold yourself back. You are certainly capable of doing all that, we know your strength and power, but wait".

Karna, Arjuna's rival and a close associate of Duryodhana, became impatient. He spoke out the following looking at Draupadi;

"There are but three persons in this assembly who are absolutely free. Bheeshma, Vidura and Drona. These persons call their own Master (Duryodhana) as the wickedest of the wicked. They do not detest committing the sin of disloyalty to the master, which is subversive to their own fame and status.

"Three are those spoken of as having no right to property - a servant, a son, a woman who has no independence. The woman wedded to a servant or a slave as well as his wealth and possessions both become *Lordless* and go to the custody of the King of the land.

"Panchali, as you have now become a slave, Duryodhana is your Master and Lord; not the sons of Kunti (namely the Pandavas). You go to the palace of Duryodhana and become one of his womenfolk. That is the right place for you. Marry now another, a son of Dhritarashtra, *whereby you will beget a status which cannot be removed by a*

game of dice. As you are a servant and slave now, such a course will not be wrong or improper.

"You are one who conducts herself independently before your husbands guided by your own vision and insight. From now on, not five, but one hundred husbands do you have. Live happily with them all, enjoying the delights of passion from all of them in good proportion. This line is quite compatible with the role of *Dasis* (slave women). Nakula, Sahadeva, Bheema, Arjuna and Yudhishtira, all of them have been defeated and enslaved. Being so, you are definitely a slave. You are enslaved by dint of your being under the Lordship of your husbands.

"At this hour, there is no purpose in thinking of the greatness of your birth, the glory of your family and lineage. Was it not after throwing into winds all these considerations that the son of Kunti staked you in the game of dice?"

These provocatively slighting words of Karna pierced the heart of Bheema who was noted for his suddenness of emotions and decision. Though his anger was inflamed beyond narration, bound by the code of dharma and justice, he looked at his elder brother with eyes turned blood red with rage. He murmured to himself, unable to control himself:

"Why should I be angry with the son of Suta (Karna)? O king (addressing Yudhishtira), I shall abide by the code ordained for a slave. If you had not pledged Draupadi, as you did, will these villainous enemies ever feel courage to stare at me or speak to me like this? By dint of your thoughtless deed, I am now forced to hear all this."

To these words of Bheema, Yudhishtira just stood speechless like a pillar. Duryodhana at that time sneeringly spoke the following looking at Yudhishtira:

"O Yudhishtira as all your brothers are under your lordship, there is no need to listen to their views at all. Because all of them are bound to abide by your Master-hood, I need to listen only to your opinion. You now say whether the daughter of Drupada (Draupadi) has been won by us or not; is she not our slave?

Saying thus to the son of Dharma (Yudhishtira), Duryodhana, blinded as he was by prosperity, corrupted by power and infatuated by his position of superiority, as if to retort to what Bheema had just remarked, turned to Panchali. Looking at her jeeringly with a smile and showing his left thigh nakedly and patting on it scornfully as if asking her to sit on his lap, he took a glance at Bheema and then burst into a slighting laughter to indicate his mastery and lordship over both.

This sight infuriated the already enraged Bheema. Whirling his eye-balls, which were copper-red, Bheema proclaimed aloud, his words echoing thunderously in the assembly hall. "Aye Duryodhana, if I do not strike with my mace and rip open that very same thigh of yours in a direct combat, let the world of my forefathers be lost to me." The whole assembly shuddered on hearing this.

Vidura now intervened and tried to put some sense, at least in this late hour, into the infatuated Duryodhana and his group:

"O kings, born of the Pratipa clan, seek ye now at least the way to escape from the hands of Bheema. Providence had already decided upon all that is taking place now and will hence. As if to comply

with Providence the descendants of Bharata are knowingly resigning themselves to this kind of an evil venture. There is no doubt about it. The sons of Dhritarashtra played, ousting all justice and propriety. Now they are arguing about a woman, sitting in a great assembly like this, alas! Abusing all codes of Dharma, they have stained and destroyed the merit and glory of an assembly like this. When Dharma is abused, the assembly of the wise stands equally tainted.

"If Draupadi was pledged before Yudhishtira pledged himself then it would have been valid. The property which one derives from another, who stands pledged already and thereby has no independence whatever, is like the wealth one gets in a glamorous dream; it can never become a solid object of enjoyment. O Kurus, you should not swerve from the path of Dharma, listening to the ill words of Shakuni."

Duryodhana at this again said: "Let Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva say with oneness that Yudhishtira is not their Lord and Master. Then I shall absolve Panchali of her servitude."

Arjuna then said: "The high-souled Yudhishtira, before he began to play dice, was the one Lord of all the Pandavas. But, after he was defeated in the game, whether he is the *Lord* of anyone at all, this has to be said by the Kauravas."

Complexity of the Issue - An Indecision

To summarize: All this meant a total and bewildering indecision about the fact of Draupadi's slavery. It was Shakuni and Duryodhana who specifically sought the pledging of Draupadi by Yudhishtira. Towards this end they even teased and coaxed the

son of Dharma. In response to this demand of his opponents in the game, Yudhishtira chose to pledge his wife. In the very course of events it so happened that this demand and its compliance, both took place after Yudhishtira was sought to be pledged and as a result he lost himself.

So the whole instance revolves round three parties:

Shakuni and Duryodhana on the one side, who sought and insisted upon staking Draupadi and planned their move to this effect, are the first. The second is Yudhishtira, who in response to the demand of Duryodhana, went ahead to pledge his wife and thereby lost her to the opponents. The third is Draupadi herself, whose enslavement is the issue at question. But Draupadi, not satisfied about the propriety of the whole move, is not prepared to accept her fate as claimed by Duryodhana. If Duryodhana's claim is on the basis of the developments in the game and the power he has gained over her by virtue of his success, Draupadi contends that the entire claim is baseless. If instead of contending thus she herself was prepared to accept her fate right from the time the news of her having been won by Duryodhana was broken to her, then there would have been no discussion on the whole problem at all nor the present indecision. Being the party most concerned in the issue, she had all the right to disprove what the others claimed about her fate. If Duryodhana claims ownership of her on the basis of moral propriety, namely Yudhishtira's staking and losing her, about which Yudhishtira himself had nothing further to say, Draupadi opposes the very basis of that code of propriety. She has strong reason to substantiate her stand.

Duryodhana, on his part, has become responsive to the dispute to a large measure. That is why the whole development has suffered a

temporary set-back. To wriggle out he put forward a suggestion, namely that the four brothers of Yudhishtira must say openly that Yudhishtira is not their Lord. To this, the reply from Bheema and Arjuna was that Yudhishtira was their Lord. Arjuna added that the Lordship of Yudhishtira was unquestionable until the latter lost himself in the game. After he was thus lost, what was the status of Yudhishtira, whether he had any freedom left with him at all, was to be determined by Duryodhana and his group. Yudhishtira himself was mute, and this was quite meaningful. As long as he was considered to have lost his freedom, at least externally, how and why should he say anything? His thoughts and views will have no place and relevance so long as he was a slave of another.

So the question came back to Duryodhana himself. It was now for him to say, after considering the whole series of events as they took place in their own order, whether Yudhishtira's pledging anything or anyone, after he was himself pledged and won by Duryodhana, could have any meaning and value. If Yudhishtira, from the time he lost himself to the opponents, had really become *the slave of Duryodhana*, Duryodhana was his Lord and he (Yudhishtira) had, on his part, nothing left with him to claim as 'his', what meaning and purpose was there in asking him to pledge Draupadi at all?

Bheeshma had admitted his inability to arrive at any specific conclusion, describing Dharma to be extremely subtle, grave and deep, the Dharma involved in this particular issue as all the more so. He also made it clear that in judging the hidden notes of Dharma even the best of wise people are found to fail. While Bheeshma thus withdrew, holding that Yudhishtira alone could make final pronouncement, Vidura rose up once again to say that the entire move of the Kauravas, right from the start, was based on violation of jus-

tice and moral propriety. He strongly held that the *very discussion* in an open assembly like theirs, *about a woman*, making her an object of molestation all the while, was itself fundamentally criminal, inhuman and sinful. It was a severe disgrace to the majesty of the assembly itself. The fact of Yudhishtira losing first and being asked thereafter to pledge his wife has itself invalidated Draupadi's surrender. How can then the question of her enslavement arise?

Let me complete the last part of the episode to give you a full picture of it, particularly to know how the whole impasse was resolved.

When the whole issue was thus suffering from indecision and lack of clarity and at the same time a noble and virtuous woman, for no fault of hers, was gripped under the sharp jaws of torture, suddenly in Dhritarashtra's palace a number of evil portends, ill omens burst forth, jackals entered the inner shrines where the sacramental fire was kept and began to howl; asses started braying pathetically in chorus; vultures were up on the sky en masse and began to hover around the palace. All these sounds terribly shook Vidura and Gandhari (the wife of Dhritarashtra). Bheeshma, Drona and Kripa said in chorus loudly the auspicious word ' *swasti, swasti* ' (meaning let there be well-being and peace). Vidura and Gandhari got afflicted bitterly and informed the blind king (Dhritarashtra) of the news, saying 'a number of ill omens and evil portends are taking place.' Hearing the news, the blind king became terrified. He instantly called his son Duryodhana to his side and rebuked him thus:

'Duryodhana, you have been ruined by your evil designs. You haughty fool, is it in an open assembly where the noble Kuru elders and the Wise preside that you debate upon the fate of a woman,

that too about the lofty and graceful Draupadi?' Reprimanding him thus, the intelligent Dhritarashtra, overcoming his thoughtlessness which had clouded him all this while, called Panchali to his side. Consoling her with loving words and approbation while aspiring his own good and the prosperity of his family, he told her these words pregnant with superb wisdom:

"O Panchali, you are the foremost and the noblest of all my daughters-in-law, given fully to the path of righteousness and chastity, I am pleased with you, seek of me any boon of your choice!"

Draupadi then replied: "If you choose to give me a boon, then I shall seek it from you, no doubt. I desire that Yudhishtira, who is righteous to the core and spotlessly noble be delivered free and restored to his masterhood. My wish is that dull-witted children should never say 'this is the son of a slave' looking at my son Prativindhya. He is so well nourished and protected with such royal splendour and affection, unequalled so far, that any demeanour of this kind (to be called the son of a slave) will become too much for him."

Dhritarashtra said: 'O graceful lady, I have granted you the boon as you have chosen it. I shall give you another boon, the second one. O auspicious one, seek that too from me. I am not content with the boon offered to you now.'

Draupadi then submitted: "I desire the liberation from servitude of Bheema, Arjuna, Nakula and Sahadeva with all their chariots and weapons intact."

Dhritarashtra then said: "May that be so, O sinless woman. Dear daughter, let your wish be fulfilled. Now seek of me a third boon."

Even with the two I have given, my heart is not content. Of all my daughters-in-law, you are the loftiest one given to Dharma and supreme virtues."

Draupadi then replied, 'Greed will only destroy Dharma and its pursuit, Therefore I do not propose to fall a victim to it. I am unable to seek another boon, the third one. "*The Vaishya seeks one boon: the kshatriya women choose two; three are ordained for the kings, while for the Brahmins a hundred can be sought; this indeed is the behest of the Scriptures.* O respectable king, I do not intend to flout or violate this law. My husbands, driven by fate to the midst of these ordeals, will be able to elevate themselves by virtue of their own noble deeds and attain Shreyas (final Good) by themselves."

Thus concluded the tragic, perplexing, grave and deep riddle. It is for the common thinker to understand the whole series of developments in their own respective depths and places and take lessons for his own life and those of his family and relatives. To an elevated thinker, the task will be a little more. He has to find rhythm and beauty which Providence's mysterious hands have woven inside and outside the whole episode and then revel in them for himself and also reveal their charm and magnitude for the benefit of those others who seek to know and improve their wisdom, thereby enriching their lives, deriving greater and deeper insight and inspiration.

Before making some observations myself on sacred and sublime truths the whole illustration contains, let me also reproduce the last page of the episode where Karna comes out with his own characteristic remarks on Draupadi and the role she played at this unique predicament.

Karna burst forth: I have not heard till this hour of any adorable and illustrious woman having done a great deed as was now seen to be accomplished. When the inspiration of anger and hatred overpowered the Pandavas and the sons of Dhritarashtra, it is this Krishnaa, the beloved daughter of King Drupada (the reference is to Draupadi) who brought peace and relief to the afflicted Pandavas. The Pandavas were on the verge of sinking deep into the unfathomable ocean of slavery and grief, with no straw of hope, this daughter of the Panchala King suddenly emerged as an efficient boat to rescue them to the shore."

Mystery of Providential Protection

I have narrated the whole episode, referring to its description as found in the original text of Mahabharata, that is the way in which Sage Vyasa has penned it himself. It is true that Sri Vyasadeva was a Sage of excellence in every way. And it is also true he was a great and even an unrivalled poet. Coming to a step lower and a time later, we also have the instance of Kalidasa, the famous poet noted for his unerring tongue, besides his matchless poetry. Tradition holds that whatever Kalidasa would say would become true. If it was not true when it was uttered by him, it should come true the moment it emerges from his faultless mouth.

There is a mysterious note of attunement which the human mind, heart and intelligence can reach, though the exact science of the process may not be clearly deciphered. By the superb merit of this, the hidden truths and ways of Nature and all she comprehends within Her, including the most complex humanhood, can be easily revealed. The secret primarily rests in the determination within oneself that Truth alone should be struck by the mind and that whatever is struck at this way is revealed only *for the sake of the*

knowledge and its benefit, nothing else. There should be no fear, greed or hatred, why, not even the other contaminating traits of the normal complex man, in probing into the truths of life and the world. The innate drive and inspiration towards discovering and unearthing knowledge should be the only cause and motive. It is then that the mind and heart sink deep and rise high up and touch the borders and precincts of the sublime and hidden truths.

Draupadi's challenge

From childhood I have heard of Draupadi's affliction and torture in the open assembly. It generally goes by the name 'disrobing of Draupadi'. The way in which and the purpose for which it is narrated is such that it should illustrate how an earnest devotee of God, when afflicted deeply and left with no source of external protection, gets redemption in the mysterious hands of the Supreme Providence. As much as she was attempted to be disrobed, so much more grew the length of her dress, so much so that the villainous Duhshasana got tired and had to bashfully withdraw from his attempt. The story ends there and the illustration remains complete.

Somehow I was not prepared to accept this stand and trend. How can the whole event be ended thus? It was after all a deliberate attempt, based upon stable considerations, which could not be disproved and set aside so easily. Simply because the dress grew in length, if at all it so happened, how could the effort, which was the natural fruition of a long-standing hatred and the instigation born therefrom, come to a full end? As we find in the story itself, from which it is that we know of the very disrobing and its defeat, the torture of Draupadi continued, though Duhshasana temporarily stopped his hands from pulling the saree. Draupadi at the same

time rebukingly protested that he should not touch her saying, 'Wait, O villain, my question is not yet answered. Let me first of all know whether your brother (Duryodhana) and you have any right on me, as it is on the basis of the proprietorship you claim by virtue of the rule of the game that you began to molest me; or else you have no right. But I question this very right of yours. My question is still alive and the whole assembly stands spell-bound refusing to give a final answer. An issue of propriety cannot be settled sentimentally. So stop your assault, do not touch me. I want the Kuru elders to pronounce a final verdict on my fate.'

The meaning and relevance of Draupadi's demand had to be paid heed to by everyone, including Duhshasana and his elder brother Duryodhana. That is why he stopped his assault and the entire attention then went over to Duryodhana, Bheeshma, Yudhishtira etc.

Why God?

What should one understand from this? It is all right up to a degree that we dispose of questions of God, His mystery and ways, in a purely emotional manner, saying 'it is all indescribable'. While indescribability is true, perhaps in the ultimate view, we cannot forsake description. Because we are living in a visible world, with seen objects, with relationships and institutions—moral, religious, economic, social and the like, which have a basis and purpose, all to our clear understanding, we have to give a similar description to the so-called God as well if our approach to this concept or reality has to be of a level compatible with our day to day living and needs. I cannot avoid such a statement. There is already a lot of confusion about the very religion, the way and what for it, the way in which it should be practised. Whoever is the so-called religionist,

will immediately say that his 'religion' is a matter of *pure faith*. But the pity is that only in the field of 'religion' he calls faith into aid and ends with it. The very same person may be a lawyer or a doctor, and in that field he never calls or relies upon faith so much. His very birth is not a myth, his relationship with the world and the people is also not so. So we find two distinct compartments in one man, one taking refuge under the so-called faith, the other resorting to hard and unnegatable facts and the findings based upon it.

I ask: is this not an incoherence? Can there not be a harmony, a greater affinity between the two?

Religion might have remained within the so-called temples, dealt with and pursued as an emotional extension of one's being. But is man merely a product and outcome of sentiments alone? In that case, there should be no discussion of knowledge or the effort to promote it in several fields.

Religion and Reason

The flat earth of the ancient religionist cannot any more be acceptable to our children or even to the present elders. That earth which was flat then has now turned to be round. It has further grown as a bubble in the bottom-less and borderless womb of space, its very weight and density to be even questioned and doubted at a certain level. Yet man continues to live here. Naturally the question arises: What is this religion according to the developed understanding of man and in conformity with his elevated pursuits. If religion cannot be described in the language of understanding, then it cannot suit the man of understanding.

I was born in a pious family. I was brought up also as that. Besides

the question of 'being brought up', I liked to grow as pious and religious. Even today I more than ever before like to be pious and unshakably so. But this was not for nothing, or with nothing to precede and follow it. In the years of my life earlier, and quest later, the so-called religion and the pivot of it, namely God, had to shed its mask and mystery. And there came a time, when I could know as clearly as I do the other seen and heard things of the world, what this wonderful God-concept and pursuit are, or at least must be.

God is not an evident fact or reality. What is evident is the object and material world, its varied constituents and contents. By God we have always meant the 'subject' presence and power within the object. That is why God, the supreme Reality and Power, calls for acceptance as well as rejection in the hands of people. Those who accept God do not have any general proof or evidence. Those who reject the Truth also do not have an absolute stand for doing so. Thus the supreme Reality and God come to be accepted by some, at the same time rejected by others. Primarily therefore it is a question of one's *prima facie* attitude or inclination. Either sentimentally or emotionally or instinctively some feel disposed towards the acceptance of the God-idea. Equally so, some others feel in the opposite direction.

Beyond this stand of the two sections of people if we have to say anything about God and Supreme Reality, it should be in the sphere of reason and argument. Either on the basis of an experience of one, or the very display of the world phenomena, their rhythm and order, one has to think cogently and arrive at conclusions either proving or disproving what he wants to posit, whether God is or not.

In India, right from the ancient days we find both spiritual philosophy as well as material philosophy equally in vogue. Both had their respective votaries. One argued in favour of God and the other against. The faith and intention of our honoured thinkers was that only those who felt the inadequacy of the material philosophy need seek and pursue spiritual philosophy, its teachings and practice. Thus everything was properly set to regiment and fulfilled the thinking of men and women.

I always say on my part that I am equally at home with those who believe in God and those who do not. In both cases it is the belief of man. What is *his* God? It is something which his mind believes in. And for the disbelievers, it is a thing which their mind does not believe in and fails to accept. Both take their position in their own minds and what the mind dictates. Whether belief or non-belief, both are equally reflections of the mind, the conclusions and decisions arrived at by man. Is God anything *more than* such faith, such conclusion, for any one, any time? Even the world is what man sees before him, and not what world sees before itself !

The mind, in both cases, is first there. It is accepted by both the groups of people. The real substance, the Supreme Reality, too is this mind, in one sense. It is the subject presence in the objects, the inward being and power in the outward objects and things.

What do I want to say by all this? My intention is to bring about a clear understanding in the matter of religion and God. I do not deny the presence of Providence. The ultimate Truth is that everything is Providence, Providence's display and only that. Though this is so, we should not confuse ourselves in the actual pursuit of our life. Life for humans is extremely complex. Complexity is all the more because of the social connections and involvements of our

life. Unlike animals and birds, which too are alike us in many ways, human life is much more organized, and hence too complicated.

Draupadi, right from the start, stood firm on her ground: 'Did the king pledge and lose himself first, or pledge and lose me first'? This was her vital question. This question of hers is evidently a creation of her intelligence. I can agree that the intelligence is a gift of God and nature, as is everything else in the world and in us. 'If the king had lost himself first, what moral right did he have to pledge me then?' This is a very legitimate point. She again argued that if the defeat of Dharmaputra meant her defeat as well, then why was he asked to pledge her specially? Are not both questions quite fundamental and reasonable? It was this question that led to the entire fate of hers in the assembly.

If she had accepted her servitude right from the time she was told of it by Duryodhana's messenger, nothing tragic as the disrobing of hers would have taken place. She refused to accompany Duhshasana, as was the order of the new master Duryodhana. This refusal was clearly her decision, an act of her choice. It was this refusal that enraged Duhshasana who then pulled her by hair to the assembly.

When her question was yet being debated and even Bheeshma confessed he could not give a verdict, which meant she persisted in her stand, even the disrobing of her body was attempted. Where does Providence come here? Was not all this a development within the region of the human intelligence, its decisions and the will exercised by the persons concerned?

When the question was still awaiting an answer and none seemed to emerge so soon, Duhshasana began his assault. This assault of

his was improper on all grounds. Human considerations like sympathy, a sense of accommodation, regard for a woman and the like, all were thrown into the air by the wicked Duhshasana. His act, even according to the custom and codes of propriety prevailing then, also in the view of the elders present at the time, was not at all just. While he went ahead with his assault and Draupadi's own husbands could not do anything, also the elders found it improper to interfere, Draupadi cried out in distress. **When all external sources of help and redress failed her, it was natural that some internal source came to her rescue in a totally unimaginable manner.** The unimaginability does not make it doubtful or unauthentic. The very origin of the world is an event unimaginable. Our imagination and reason themselves begin to work only when events and phenomena come to pass off first.

Then how can any intelligent man hold that the external and material things alone are real and carry authenticity with them? The very idea of 'external' and 'material' first of all implies its opposite and contrast, namely 'internal' and 'non-material' or 'spiritual'. Further, in the very beginning, was there any external-internal, division at all? If reason and observation and vice-versa are any guiding force in our understanding, *was not all 'this' (meaning the existence as we perceive around us), before its very origin, a mere mass of nothing which in truth can neither be described as anything nor nothing! Anything and something as contrary to nothing, existence as contrary to non-existence, internal as contrary to external, all these became thinkable and began to occupy our imagination only after all this (that we perceive now) came into being. Before it came into being, there was no difference or contrast at all.*

So our very thought that externality or materiality alone can be factual and can be accepted by us with authority is baseless. Higher

reason or pure reason clearly tells us this truth.

What value and place does an external process or development have in our understanding, the same place the internal ones also have, at least to a consistent thinker. Here, in the case of Draupadi, two are the points involved. Was her plight bearable to her? Was it bearable to the others as well? Impropriety is just another expression of the same implication. When it was not bearable by all standards and no one from outside could do anything to rescue her, naturally opened up an inner door. It is just like a man who trips on a stone is helped suddenly by another nearby, or gets hold of some support nearby. When the help is *external*, the poverty of the human mind and understanding look low upon it and regard it as quite normal, nothing impressive or providential. When it is something strange or invisible, his mind, out of its own rut of normalcy, is tempted to take it as magnificent and Godly. This is a mistake which comes out of sheer ignorance. Deluded by the spirit of distinction, man is not able to think of Providence in a uniform manner. World and life's normal happenings are taken for granted. Providence, of course, is something extra, different, superior and only occasional. Alas! see the poverty of the human mind!

Everything, right from the solid matter up to the boundless space, and even beyond, is Providence, no doubt. But Providence is not exhausted just by these. It extends far beyond. The phenomena it produces within this material range have some order, rhythm, etc. Rarely these are overruled by Providence and a strange phenomenon here and there is caused. This does not mean that: the 'out of the normal' alone is Providence, not otherwise. To look for Providence only in the extraordinary and the out of the normal is the sheer bankruptcy of our understanding.

In the case of Draupadi, I will not segregate the protection she got when Duhshasana was disrobing her and then say that that alone represents the Divine help. In fact, even after Duhshasana withdrew from this venture, the humiliation of this great woman continued. Duhshasana and others were again after her. The only force that kept all under check was her demand for a clear answer to the question about her slavery. Everyone, including Duryodhana, had to concede to this point. That is why Duryodhana changed his stand and said 'If the Pandava brothers admit that Yudhishtira is not their Master, I shall let Draupadi free'. This was quite against his earlier statement, namely Draupadi was his property and she 'should' accept his lordship.

True, that the mysterious lengthening of the saree plugged one source of Draupadi's distress. But there were other holes too, in fact larger and deeper. If her slavery was a fact and she had to accept it without question, then not merely herself but the entire Pandava brothers, her husbands, would have remained in total servitude and there would be left no way of rescuing them. The earlier dangers and misfortunes could be avoided by some physical means or other - for instance the attempt to burn them off in the wax palace - but here was a situation which none other than the great Draupadi could take up and resolve. The solution lay in the right study, analysis and understanding of what transpired and how best it could be implicated.

An event which calls for the use and application of intelligence and then for evolving the right formula or solution has no substitute. Where intelligence and its timely effort are needed, we should look for and exert the intelligence itself, none other.

For right and authentic causes, the intelligence will definitely get

the proper attunement and inspiration from the Indweller, who is the best representative of Providence. Of all the visible expressions of the Supreme, the human mind and intelligence are the most amazing and potential. Of all the weapons man can think of and wield, his intelligence is the most powerful and queer.

Think for a moment further how Draupadi's plight which hung on the fruition of her enquiry progressed further. Bheeshma repeated what he already said, adding that 'I cannot give you an answer to your question. Yudhishtira alone can give a right answer to this. But I do know and can say that very soon this Kuru family, given to immorality of the worst magnitude will meet their destruction.' The implication, of this to me, is too grave.

The best of the Knowers of Dharma (Bheeshma) clearly sees that Duryodhana's stand is wrong, his cause ignoble, and as a proof of it he also envisages the destruction of that family as a whole. Thus though the fact that Draupadi's assaulters were 'in the wrong' was evident before Bheeshma (that is why he said they would meet destruction before long), yet he found himself unable to arrive at a clear answer to the distressed Draupadi's question, despite the fact that an answer to it would alone resolve her distress. My imagination soars mystically at this point. Realize how deep and grave is the problem and its magnitude.

Vidura too followed Bheeshma to say that Draupadi was not in servitude, and it was immoral for Duryodhana to discuss about a woman in an open assembly like theirs. Even then the pathetic plight and indecision continued, with greater vigour and emotional cyclone.

Providence had really worked its magic, laid the foundation for its

own chosen purpose right from the start when conspiring Shakuni and Duryodhana began to prevail upon the innocent Yudhishtira to pledge his belongings one after another and started picking his brothers in the series. From brothers Shakuni switched on to Yudhishtira himself.

Even after Yudhishtira's pledge and loss was ensured, Shakuni and his group were not content. Their crooked intelligence told them that it was not an adequate humiliation of Yudhishtira and his brothers. Perhaps they also had in their minds the thought of Draupadi, who had earlier laughed aloud sarcastically when Duryodhana on a visit to their palace walked around lifting his dress thinking that there was water on the polished floor. In fact there was no water. Such was the glazing polish of the floor that it created an illusion of water. At other places he was tricked to walk through pools of water though the floor showed no sign of water at all and thereby he got wet. This incident really went deep into his mind, humiliation in the hands of a woman for a folly of this kind and from that time onwards he wanted to take revenge.

However, the effort of Duryodhana and the others to ensure their own mastery and the slavery of Yudhishtira and the rest, was the one which landed them in exactly the opposite shore. This is how Providence works its mystic ways and fulfils its chosen ends. But for this greedy step of theirs, the outcome of the whole episode would have been different.

If you ask me why should the devoted and pious, Yudhishtira, Draupadi and the rest be subjected to this kind of abject suffering, does it fit in with the reward of goodness, there is an answer. In spite of his extreme goodness and nobility Yudhishtira did have a weakness for playing dice. When challenged and provoked, his

mind got drawn into ways and measures which his own sound reason would have, in calm moments, resented and refused. What does this indicate? He clearly had a sense of competition and challenge so far as his royal position and powers were concerned. In giving vent to this sense, he stood by his independence, never thought of taking consultation from his brothers. I am not saying it was wrong on his part to do so. But I only state that every trait and feature must have its course of resultant outcome. Goodness is rewarded in its own way, badness too equally well. Rarely does goodness reign without the least shade of its opposite, in any one. As Bhagavadgeeta says, any undertaking is associated with some defect or other.

Coming back to Draupadi, why was her saree pulled? Was it not too much for her to have been subjected to this kind of torture and agony?

Well, the answer which comes to my heart is that Draupadi's stand did naturally warrant such a development. Yudhishtira had already sent word to her that she should come to the assembly with a single dress on her body, during her 'period'. That very sight would make the elders in the assembly think gravely of the evil intentions of the Duryodhana group. By pulling her dress forcibly, Duhshasana only inflamed their hearts all the more.

Again, it was not just a rash step. Draupadi's arguments and the refusal to accept her own slavery were the pivot of the whole development. Perhaps this was something which even Yudhishtira and the rest did not envisage. He must have been quite straightforward and innocent in his mind when he staked all his things, himself and Draupadi in the game. He stood by his innocence and the spirit of the game and its fate. But to everybody's surprise and an-

noyance all that was his was won by his opponents leaving no chance of any rescue at all.

To this summary position, it was Draupadi who breathed a surprising and vital note of change and challenge. After listening to her views, and finding that Bheeshma found equal weight on both sides of the dispute, Karna said that the superiority of Duryodhana and his lordship over Yudhishtira should be demonstrated by asking the Pandava brothers to give off their dress to their Lord. At this, Yudhishtira and his brothers, without any doubt or delay, took off their upper garment and kept it on the floor. What does this tell us? Here the issue was between Yudhishtira and his people on the one hand, their slavery, and Duryodhana and his lordship on the other. Duryodhana demanded his lordship and Yudhishtira was ready to concede to it. So where is the dispute at all then? Bheeshma, on his part, did not and could not say that either the lordship or the slavery was out of place. He found arguments and propriety on both sides only so far as Draupadi's plight and stand were concerned. One should remember that this was still an undecided question.

Once the husbands accepted their slavery and took off their dress, Draupadi, as their wife, was expected to follow suit. And that was what normally one would have expected. But Draupadi had her own inspiration and course of action provoked by her great humiliation. Bold as she was she would not accept defeat even in the hands of a devil. Seeing her husbands in total servitude, with not even a ray of escape, this lady, the symbol of complex womanhood, got highly inspired and totally moved. Even with the worst of sacrifices and sufferings, she was determined to redeem her lords. This is highly commendable. More than a pious wish or attitude, it was really a great decision, a strong-willed move, which could

shake even the heaven and hell together. Before such a heroic and loyal mind and heart, nothing could stand up and fight. Even Providence can only stand in wonder and appreciation, thinking "Is my creation, at least one speck here and there, capable of rising so high in its thought and inspiration? Is it so wise and bold as to swear itself on my strength and vindicate the supreme law of Satya (Truth)? But for persons like this, how can my glory be made evident to the ignorant as well as the wise of this mortal and proud world."

At the same time, such a decision was pregnant with its own chosen ends. The decision to stand by her own independence and thereby reject her slavery unlike her husbands, was clearly Draupadi's. At the same time, the finality of her independence had not been decided by the assembly, not to speak of Duryodhana and his group. In so far as it was as yet an undecided point, Duhshasana and Karna must have had at least the basic sense not to touch Draupadi, because she was still to be given a definite answer to her question. After all, it was only the success in the game that made them assume lordship over Draupadi. This right over her was to come to them only by virtue of the propriety of Yudhishtira's pledge. Inasmuch as the very question of pledge was not decided upon to the satisfaction of the assembly and Draupadi in particular, Duhshasana was clearly wrong in his approach. Equally Karna was immature and cruel in having instigated Duhshasana to take away her dress by force.

However, in this queer world Nature has given ample chance, nay she has made ample provision even for such unjust, (shall I call it so) cruel, wild developments and instigations.

Nature's idea is that nothing what-so-ever should lie outside the

orbit of Her Creation. In Her warm embrace must come *everything* right from extreme goodness to the worst of badness. Only then will Nature be exquisite and amazing in every way. In order to incorporate alike in Her being, both beauty and ugliness, both goodness and badness, with equal vigour and glare, Nature has first made Herself neither beautiful nor ugly, neither good nor bad, but the magnificent 'neuter' of all the opposites. No doubt Her being is transcendental at all levels and spheres. In being so does she constantly frightens as well as allures the human, stimulating his deepest thought and enquiry. For the real seeker and investigator, the best of delight, nay the fulfilment of his life, consists in probing into Her mystery and wonder.

In assaulting Draupadi, Duhshasana had clearly thrown aside the basic rule and code which even the crude dacoits on the road would honour and obey. Draupadi's steadfastness, her spirit of loyalty and sacrifice, was thus pitted against the most ruthless adversary. This was the biggest, yet most pregnant fun which Providence could instrument and indulge in.

Human will is inherited from Providence of course. Its potency is marvellous, no doubt. But how far can it rise up in strength? Can it rise in revolt and begin to question the Power and Design of the Supreme, from whom indeed it has derived its own birth? Can the Creator be at any time the slave of man, the topmost of His Creation? Can the Human will ever rise above the Creator's? Duryodhana and his brothers had, it is true, been successful in enslaving the righteous Yudhishtira. But can they rise above the Supreme and its Power?

On his side, Duhshasana had his manly power and strength to assault the helpless woman of the Pandavas. But the challenge im-

plied something far graver and greater. The victim of his assault was not just the woman alone in Draupadi, whom he and his people hated, but also the Lord who dwelt in her heart, whom no one could hate, from whom none could ever get away or escape. To this Lord, devotion and piety were dearer than everything else. Duhshasana had thought that his manly strength was unchallenged before Draupadi and she could have nothing to defend herself. He forgot the basic truth that every man is born of the woman, and thus the woman is his mother and fosterer. *The blood and bone of man may be stronger, but stronger still and unyielding are the heart and mind of a loyal and dedicated woman.* Even the superior reason of man got stupefied before Draupadi's interrogation!

All this had to be demonstrated before the hetero-genous assembly, *where the choice of the wicked counted, not the voice of the wise and the elderly.* For the Providence, every event is a fun or sport. For man alone, it proves to be *a lesson.*

When those men, her husbands, who were to give protection themselves were made to stand back mute and helpless, nay when they were the ones to cause this plight to her, Draupadi found nothing left in this seen world to look to in her distress. What is an innocent mortal to do at such a time, in such an event? The only choice was to look to herself, her own within. That is what she did. The within of everyone is visible and available to himself alone, to none else.

Every human is born into this world with an *intrinsic right.* No one can dissuade or dislodge him from it. By this he is enabled to look to the Creator's hand of protection as the last resort, when the Creation's hand refuses and betrays him. *The secret of devotion or piety lies in realizing this right and resorting to it with exclusiveness in time with reliance, humility and hope.*

Many get steeped in delusion, or they are swept by pride and egoism. As a result they over-value themselves or misbelieve altogether. Thereby they miss the Supreme, the benefit of His infinite love and power. Alas!

Here we have an exemplary fusion of the two, the faithful and the faithless, the humble and the proud, the innocent and the infatuated, and their corresponding fates. A great battle for winning supremacy, no doubt. As well-known for all time ever since the dawn of human history, the faithful, the humble and the innocent had the victory; to the discomfiture of the other and to the discernment of one and all. Without combats and duels, the deeper lessons of Truth and piety cannot be let known to men and women of the world.

The *within* is truly the cause of the entire *without*. In the within lies the golden solution for all the problems caused by the without. In the within alone *originate* as well as *dissolve* all polarities, all contradictions, all opposites.

The Invisible Lord is enshrined truly in the within of each mortal. One's own within is the potent and *infinite zero* upon which subsist the *whole range of numerals* and their multiples. The cause and source are but one. And that one *reigns secretly* in one's own within. It needs great eyes to see this truth, lofty wisdom to discern it, noble and pious heart to cling to it and gain succour. Draupadi was one rare soul with the choicest blessings in this regard. With her invincible husbands tied down in total slavery with the wise elders struck dumb in doubt and indecision, with the next kith and kin (Duryodhanas) frowning with vengeance and cruelty, she looked desperately to the Power within, calling it by her own beloved name. The name means but little. The call alone matters and the

depth and reliance with which it is made. Before such heroic hearts, even the hardest rock has to melt, the ferocious river has to go dry, the tallest mountain crumble and turn to mere dust. And this is what happened in the case of Draupadi. In an instant the villain turned to a mere weakling, bashful and exhausted pitifully, to the ridicule of the noble and to the surprise of even the wicked.

In fact this imposing Universe and the entire visible things have sprung from the Invisible. Everything rests in the latter and upon it. Nothing has an abode outside the Invisible. Everything is in truth and that alone. Is not our body, of many parts and limbs, belonging to the one 'I' within it, the Spirit? So too is this single body of the universe with all its constituents and contents belonging to the one mighty 'I' within, the Almighty Spirit, the Supreme Lord.

Our left hand scratches an itch on the body, aggravating the suffering, but only to make the right hand apply medicine to heal it. The same 'I' causes the one hand to scratch and another to resist. Both of them inhere in the same body, possessed and propelled by the same spirit, the soul within. For both, the Master is the same, the only one. In this universe too, in spite of its endlessness and ramification, the process worked is the same, though it is hazy and elusive to the unwary eye. The one Lord is the owner, possessor, motivator enjoyer, sufferer, in short everything and all. He is the giver and the taker alike. He gives through one hand, but only to take through another.

Through a villain He chooses to be cruel. Through a graceful another, He chooses to be kind. He it is that tortures. He alone is the tortured alike. *The problem is not His, but ours, to know this naked mystery.* The challenge is perpetually there before every man and woman. Once man succeeds in knowing this truth, saved is he for

ever. His life will get fulfilled once and for all.

Both Grace and Cruelty, Grandeur and Filth stand in a mystic embrace in the Invisible Lord. The world is so designed that this mystic blending may be revealed constantly, in every corner at every time.

Try with all your might, the world cannot be otherwise. For those who yearn for Grace, there is enough of it to descend. For those who wish to revel in cruelty, there is equal chance and scope. It is merely a question which of the two one wants, in which way one's mind turns and works.

Draupadi's own mind and feeling really worked the miracle before her. If she had not sought the help, sought it so frantically, that which happened would not have been. *It is the will of the human that produced the display of the Divine.* Like the star of the firmament, the Divine and its potency are always there. There is no dearth of them any time. Yet It chooses to manifest only when some earthly creation first invokes it and yearns for it. Duhshasana, standing in the same assembly, right in front of the one he assaulted, believed in his own might and displayed it openly. Draupadi, on the other hand, believed not in her might but that of the Invisible, and so she made it manifest copiously. The Lord and His might were in both, inside as well as outside, but to the one it was nothing and nowhere, while to the other it was everything and everywhere; *The difference is wrought by the human.* Even now believers believe in their belief. Disbelievers believe in their disbelief. Both are strong in their stand and reason. Both are motivated by their minds and hearts.

Truth and God impartial

The Indweller is impartial always. He is made partial and is seen to be so by virtue of the different men and women. He helps you the way you want and seek. For, ultimately, He has nothing to lose or gain. The gain and loss, if at all, are to us, the mortals. One butchers out of one's own instigation and motive. In a sense the Indweller is made to give him the instigation he needs. But the desire, the demand, comes from the butcher. Equally so one is moved to protect. Here too the inspiration and motive come from the mortal man. The Lord merely plays the role He is made to, wanted to. The house is made the way the owner wants it. The architect is there only to plan it the way the owner wants.

It is this superb neutrality that makes the Indwelling Lord what He is, preserves His glory untarnished forever. The moment He were to shift from this position, He would descend to be a mortal as so many others are.

The whole game of life is crowned with its destined glory and fulfilment once the seeker recognizes this supreme truth and remains seated in it as much as he can. The fall, if at all, will be to this recognition and the abidance in it. Our scriptures and scriptural stories are designed to lead man to the enquiry of this nature. Even Draupadi's plight and role guide the true seeker only to the sublime enquiry for truth.

The seeker's enquiry is deep and persisting. Far from superficiality it has to sink deep and rise high, be deeper than the oceans and higher than the sky. The young boy Nachiketas is made to enquire from the God of Death (in the Kathopanishad) as to what lies beyond the ken of both *morality and immorality*. Morality is man-

made. It has its specific relevance to immorality, again another concept of man. May be the latter is inferior to the former. But what of that to the Supreme Reality? The immoral inspirations come from one's own within, the mind and intelligence. The moral ones too emerge from the same twins, mind and intelligence. If the Indweller is said to be within everyone, it becomes a paradox. God is at the back of both. He would be the cause of both. If both morality and immorality are thus motivated by Him, why prefer one and abhor the other? What exactly is the difference between the two? Is there any difference at all? Are both to be identified with God and hence accepted or both eschewed regarding them as of humans?

The true Yearning

So Nachiketas presents his yearning in an exemplary way.

He says: 'Only if you see anything supreme rising above both *dharma* and *adharma*, tell me what it is, not otherwise.'

In the last chapter of Bhagavadgeeta too we find the concluding verse of Sri Krishna, the great succour for one and all:

"Abandon all considerations of *dharma*, cast them aside and then seek me out, the one and only one." Evidently, the supreme truth is one, its only description is 'oneness'. And that one is different from everything else, all twos and threes. *Dharma* and *adharma*, both together, constitute a pair in the world of man, the intelligent mortal. They are a typical set of two, like the so many other comrades of theirs. All the twos are born of the three, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. But the Truth of God or Self is above and beyond these three, as the so many twos created and preserved by them. That is how the Self becomes *Gunateeta* (*beyond the gunas*)

Can the seeker feel inspired to seek It? Can he elevate himself to that level? Then alone will he deliver himself from mortality. The enquiry for the Truth in finer stages is not for the weakling and the unsteady. It is for the most heroic hearts and minds, the most penetrating intellects. As Mundakopaniṣad puts it:

नायमात्मा बलहीनेन लभ्यः ।

न च प्रमादात् तपसो वाप्यलिङ्गात् ॥

Naayamaatmaa balaheenena labhyah

Na cha pramaadat tapaso vapyalingat

This Self, though it dwells within the body of every seeker, is not available to the fragile minds, brittle minds. Nor can it be obtained by means of improper austerities. *It is not enough if you do austerity.* Ranging from early rising and bath, starving, fasting, half-fasting and the like to the various meditations initiated into by a variety of preceptors, austerities are multiple and colourful. But all these *need not* be the proper ones for knowing the Self. Find out the proper one and pursue it if you can.

At one stage I feel like saying *God is created in the image of man.* Yes, *man imagines God and makes Him the way he wishes.* He can make any mistake in so doing. And all such mistakes will bring in their troubles and dangers. In the whole field of God, there is little which man does not make himself. And this is how a lot of confusion and fight prevails.

Where did Duhshasana lose, and where did Draupadi gain, if they really did so? This is a conflict which should be understood and then resolved. Our Scriptures present a number of conflicts and contradictions. That is their way. The intention is to make the intelligent man and seeker think for himself, enquire deeply and find

out what he wishes to. Then he has to stabilize his understanding and faith in what he has found out firsthand. To make his search safe and fruitful, there is every help and guidance given.

The triplets of Dharma

Sincerity of purpose is the one quality that counts everywhere in all our actions and pursuits. To be sincere all have an equal chance and power. Even the weak and the unintelligent can raise sincerity in themselves as much as their more blessed counterparts. It needs no greatness of position, power or superiority. You find in the instance we discuss, both Duhshasana and Draupadi equally sincere. The womanly weakness and inferiority did not stand in the way of Draupadi arousing the best notes of sincerity from within her. The child can be as much sincere as the grown up. So, none can complain of unequalness or lack of opportunity in this sublime virtue.

Sincerity arises from sentiments and emotions, or say feelings. It is a kind of total identification with the object or purpose in hand. There is no need for reason or anything subtler like that to evoke sincerity at any time. In India there have always been a number of spiritual seekers and saints, whose pursuit was dominated by sincerity of purpose and total identification more than anything else. Steeped in sincerity many have gone to several extremes, which would have normally been considered wrong and disastrous. But they were extraordinarily saved from the disastrous consequences. Why? Only because, they had their stand in sincerity. The mere dint of sincerity, however much wrongly placed it was in the eye of reason, is the only force and power which saved them. This is but a natural law, a fundamental one, governing the human heart and life.

But mere sincerity will not be adequate, as perhaps the instance of Duhshasana suggests. What is further needed is an important enquiry. *The motive and ideal must be good.* Goodness is the ultimate watchword. Well, the question arises as to what goodness consists of. Goodness can have several facets and expressions. But briefly it lies in giving freedom to the others as much as one wants it for oneself. One should let others live just like one seeks to live oneself. In the pursuit of our life, we should not take away or interfere with the others' lives. The needs, urges and ideals of life are there for one and all. And each should consider them as relevant and necessary.

A consideration of this nature instantly brings in *the need for restraints in oneself.* A number of restraints applying to the body and senses on the one hand and to the mind, intelligence and heart on the other thus call for adoption and pursuit. Restraint is thus the third virtue, quite imperative as the others. Every misbehaviour, interference and assault arises only when restraints are lacking. Duhshasana failed to apply the restraint needed and that is why he assaulted Draupadi. Yudhishtira, standing on the opposite side, displayed it copiously. Bound by his own promises, he removed his garment just when Kama demanded it and laying it on the ground he stood mute as a loyal servant of the enemies. Bheema now and then erupted, no doubt, lacking restraint, but when admonished he checked himself.

One takes to thieving only because he lacks restraint. One takes to stealth due to the same instigation and cause. In any walk of life, it is greed and misplaced feelings and thoughts that pull a man to the wrong course of life.

In the Bhagavadgeeta, though many things are discussed and laid down as the foundation and pursuit of *dharma*, there is one point

which alone ranks supreme. It is placed as the first and last limb of Dharma and Wisdom. *Indriya-nigraha* or *indriya-niyamana* is this fine virtue – restraint of the senses. In describing the *stitha-prajna*, the *guna-ateeta*, the bhakta as well as the knower, Sri Krishna repeatedly stresses upon the one limb, namely restraint of the senses. When one's senses are restrained, he becomes a lover of everyone, even of the enemy. He is also loved by one and all. All quarrels, fights, competitions and conflicts, all have their origin in lack of restraint. In pursuing and practising the right type of restraint in the right and feasible manner, lies the golden solution for all human problems, both individual and social.

In the case of Draupadi's humiliation, Duhshasana respected only his own feelings and views. He threw aside those of Draupadi as well as the several others including some of the best elders like Vidura, Bheeshma, etc. Where a check and restraint had to be applied he deliberately did not. For that mistake, he alone was responsible. Naturally it brought its own consequences. The indweller in him did not interfere with his trend of thinking or values. Those whose feelings were interfered with and thereby got wounded and pained were Draupadi herself and then her husbands, besides the elders like Bheeshma and Vidura. Each of them came out with his own counter thoughts and measures.

Draupadi found Duhshasana impossible to bear. But she could not do anything to resist him bodily or externally. Her husbands, who were the ones to give her defence were standing helplessly mute. Naturally *her sincerity and need both turned to the Indweller*. She used her wits and powers in desperation to bring the Indwelling Power to an extraordinary measure of protection. Why not? That was her wont, decision and challenge. She was moved more by the dire need of the hour and the spontaneous feelings of her heart. It was

not so much reason. Reason arises only when the background of calm and composure is first there. Draupadi's mind gave forth reason, but that was earlier when the news of Duryodhana gaining her in the game was broken to her by Pratikami. She sternly responded: "Whom did the king stake first, himself or me?"

But now the situation was far more unnerving and sudden. It was an instance of molest, that too right in the midst of an open assembly by an act of pulling her dress. Probably that was the first time when a woman of the land was ever submitted to a plight such as this.

Naturally a flood of emotions and feelings surged up in her heart. It gave vent in the form of a hectic call for protection. The within - the presence dwelling within whatever we see outside, being the cause of everything be it the vast space or the numberless galaxies, here too the within could produce the necessary extraordinary phenomenon.

God's identity absolute

God and His Power are not anything remote or separate, as many are prone to think. He may be transcendent, but surely He is immanent. Everything is He himself, not the least different. Like a pinch of sugar dissolved in a cup of water, His nature and Power are fused in everything created, animate as well as inanimate, and are found to exist in one form or other. Every form of existence has its own specific place and importance. Nothing is inferior or superior. The crow flies because of its power, which is truly the power of God Himself. The mosquito too bites in exactly the same manner, deriving its motivation from the same single source.

The humans too are fused into the being of God. God's power is fused in them as sugar in water. It is this power that makes the body breathe and function. The mind thinks because of it. The intelligence reasons due to the same Power and source. In the working of the body and likewise in that of the mind and intelligence, nothing except God's power becomes manifest. It is but a question of knowing this supreme Truth.

To look for God's Grace as if it were something away and separate from what already is in us and everywhere else, is the sheer poverty of true wisdom. To view only the extraordinary phenomena, sudden strokes of miracles like what happened in the case of Draupadi, as an act of God's Grace is also a poor wit of man. As God is equally present everywhere, the real seeker should try to think of him alike in all events and causes. That is the road leading to enlightenment and redemption.

The prompting of Draupadi's intelligence when she was first told of her servitude to Duryodhana, by which she torpedoed the whole attempt of the Kaurava camp headed by Shakuni, was equally an act of God's Grace and protection. The continuous lengthening of her dress when Duhshasana forcefully pulled it asunder was none the more. One was internal, the other external. If at all, the seeker should try to find his inspiration in both. To stress one and thereby lower the other will cut across his own ultimate object and ideal. Differentiation is sometimes dangerous. It may lead him far too astray.

Intelligence, the Supreme Creation

Of all the things created by the Supreme, the human within, the mind and intelligence of the human, are the most superb. They are

the most potent. From the mind can arise the most august feelings and urges like love, kindness and sacrifice. Equally so, from it can emerge the most corrupt feelings and urges like hatred, cruelty and selfishness. Because the mind is the seat and source of these opposites, the scope and tussle of man is perpetually there to bridle the mind the way he wants and the way that is the best. But for this mystic swingingness, our life would become stale and even inert.

Likewise the intellect of man too can drift in the two directions, the creative and the destructive, the useful and the useless. Because the drifting is sure to be there, it becomes an uphill task to have it produce the best and the most fruitful.

That is how right from the ancient times when our Seers began to probe into the hidden truths of Nature and the secret of supreme Goodness, they hit upon *the Gayatri* as the most needed and fruitful prayer and desire. More than the usual prayer, it is a creative thought where the thinker determines for himself the path he wants to tread. The Gayatri mantra is very simple and lucid, precise and firm in its content and import. *May our intelligence be 'properly' propelled by the Indwelling Lord, who is worshippable, and whose brilliance we meditate upon.*

The suggestion is very clear and should make everyone think what it means to him or her.

Coming back to Draupadi's plight and the way it was resolved, even the withdrawal of Duhshasana did not terminate the whole issue and liberate her and her lords. The debate and indecision continued. When no decision could be arrived at, suddenly Dhritarashtra's palace was rebounding with evil portends caused by birds, animals, etc. The news was reported to the old King. He got terri-

fied. In his mind he was already sure that the designs of Duryodhana and Shakuni were bad and disastrous. But the insistence of his son and his own parental ties of attachment prevented him from sternly preventing Duryodhana from what he was proposing to do. Now that the evil portends were also there, Dhritarashtra felt all the more sure that his family would soon be on the verge of annihilation. So he hurried to get Draupadi to his presence and speaking to her in gentle terms of approbation, he granted her three boons; As a loyal wife and as a wise moralist, she chose only two of them by which she gained the freedom of Yudhishtira and the four brothers. She refused to avail of the third boon, regarding it as superfluous to her purpose and stressed the need for avoiding greed. She also declared, 'With my husbands set free, I want nothing more. Whatever is needed by me, they will accomplish.' What greater prudence and moderation can one think of?

Here the sudden emergence of evil portends is also an act of Providence. First was the *intelligent enquiry* of Draupadi as to who got staked first. Second was the visible protection given to her when molested by Duhshasana. Third is the emergence of evil portends. All these are steps in the same ladder, leading to the same height of purpose. One should not overstress one step or underrate another. Each is in place and has the same importance as that of another.

The Value of Dharma

Let me end the narrative on this important episode of moral and ethical complexity. Let us see what this story tells us, the men and women of the present day in the context of our lives and problems.

Whether it is devotion to God, the Almighty, or morality and ethics in one form or another, in truth this is but a *pursuit of man*, which

he takes up for the merit and protection which it is capable of giving him. Righteousness has its value, place and usefulness for man. It is this usefulness that makes righteousness desirable, nay imperative. To consider that righteousness is a law born from the unseen heavens is not so much proper. The same is the case with devotion to God. Belief in God and the pursuit of devotion are meritorious for the intrinsic value and usefulness which they hold for man. These again are man's wont, decision and pursuit.

Knowing that this is so, it is for the devotee and moralist to make his devotional and moral pursuits as true and proper as possible. Under the garb of devotion or morality, none can expect a license for committing wrongs and excesses. Like a false step, knowingly or unknowingly done by any other person, the error made by the devotee and moralist is also sure to bring in its wake its specific consequences.

Insofar as Yudhishtira, much against his wishes or those of others, including Sri Krishna, chose to play dice with Shakuni and as the first step began to offer valuable and great stakes, describing his riches and power in eulogical terms, it was natural that he was led to the consequences of the venture. In a game one loses or gains. And in this case Yudhishtira lost. It is true that he was a great *Dharmishtha* (moralist). But the fact is that even then he played the game, agreed to play with Shakuni, knowing fully well that the latter was an adept in foul play. When the game progressed, at every stage Yudhishtira tried to win, but could not and did not. Naturally the fate of the loser had to be accepted and faced. Was not this that happened?

So even the best of the righteous has to face the inevitable consequence of what he does, knowingly and even unknowingly. There

is nothing in righteousness which can insulate him from the consequences of what he does. Now one may ask. What is then the special protective power of righteousness or *dharma*?

In spite of the worst consequences and the righteous having to face them, he will find an ultimate course of redemption. It is true that the redemption will not always be easy or fast. As hard and painful as the consequences are, so hard and slow will the redemption also be. But redemption is sure to come. That is where *dharma* derives its unique merit. It becomes worthy of man's option and pursuit. Dharma protects when protected and preserved, is the one infallible assurance.

You find this clearly demonstrated in this episode. Holding on to *dharma* Yudhishtira hazarded to play the game, though he knew well the stealth and its aftermath in the process. But the refusal to play would tantamount to cowardice and withdrawal in fear. Duryodhana should not have caused the play in the manner he did. Once he chose to challenge Yudhishtira, it was not right for him to back away from the game. A true *Dharmishtha* must preserve his *dharma* at any cost. Whatever consequences may be ahead for him, he should not flinch from its pursuit. Fearing deceit and on that account withdrawing from a venture that faces the *Dharmishtha* in the natural course of his life is not heroic or exemplary. In the pursuit of *dharma*, *dharma*'s own damage alone need be considered and avoided.

Once he chose to play, Yudhishtira did his part as was customary in a heroic manner. One after the other, he began to lose his stakes. Further, each time a new stake was offered, particularly that which his opponent, Shakuni, wanted and insisted upon. It was in that strain. Yudhishtira offered himself first and then at the insistence

of his adversary staked Draupadi too.

If while clinging to *Dharma* and its pursuit a *Dharmishtha* is exploited by his adversary by fair means or foul and is made to take disastrous steps designed to destroy him, well, what is the solution? Where lies the protection for the votary of *Dharma*? To this, the answer lies in the very sequence of things that took place in the game. Shakuni and Duryodhana had their evil intentions. In making them pursue these, the Supreme Power had seen to it that their object of attack, namely Yudhishtira, was destined to be saved. Just like the passage for escape had been built in the wax palace, which was later on set fire to, here too Providence had made the hole for escape. In the former, the escape hole lay outside the palace. The latter was built right within the body by making the intelligence shortsighted. What precisely did Shakuni and Duryodhana plan to ensure, namely the slavery of Draupadi, that indeed became the lever for escape and means of redemption for the opponents.

Draupadi, the complex woman

Now let us think of Draupadi. Draupadi was bold and shrewd. She as a typical woman could take stock of the situations with a practical touch. But along with heroism, exclusive loyalty and faithfulness, she had enough of competition and intolerance towards the Duryodhana brothers. She had spoken teasingly about Duryodhana, Karna and others, and that is what provoked the latter's wrath and cruelty. Her morality and steadfastness were good and rewarding, but her other traits and indulgence too were equally damaging in their own way. One does not mean an escape from the other. Each has its own law of compensation.

But nonetheless she was exclusive in her personal loyalties and ide-

als. Her nature was such that in the pursuit of her loyalties she would brook no resistance or opposition. Although Arjuna was the one who won her hand after hitting the target with the bow in the marriage assembly, Kunti, the mother of Arjuna, accidentally pronounced her as the prize to be equally possessed and shared by all the five sons of hers. Without the least doubt or resentment, she honoured and accepted this verdict of her mother-in-law and abided by it throughout her life. Arjuna and his other three brothers had accepted the elderliness and leadership of Yudhishtira in all matters. That indeed became the law for Draupadi too. All this clearly reveals the greatness and exclusiveness of her thinking and decisions.

As a true woman, complex and strong in her emotions and sentiments, Draupadi did embody a sentimental side also within her. A woman would cease to be a woman if she is weak in the display of timely sentiments. Giving vent to her sentiments liberally on the one hand and pursuing the best and hardest ideals on the other, this indeed is a curious moral mixture. It cannot but bring a mixture of reciprocal developments and outcomes. And that is what took place.

Who, particularly which woman, will indeed have the courage and timely prompting to resist heroically, without succumbing, the assault of a tyrant like Dushasana, who had not merely the might of position but also the strength of righteousness (at least until Draupadi questioned it) to do what he did? Indeed it was no small heroism, no ordinary decision. By making such a decision and showing such heroism, Draupadi had proved herself exceptionally strong and adorable in her mental and moral mettle and ideals. Naturally on two accounts her step was pregnant with untold consequences. One was that like a strong whirlpool attracting the substances float-

ing on the surface near about into itself, her thoughts and feelings would inevitably warrant their own reciprocal outcome. Secondly only a heroic mind will be tested in an extraordinary manner. By means of the first the natural laws of the mind are fulfilled, and by the latter a great elevation and reward are accomplished. Both are quite in place and promoting too in their effects.

To be a strong and exclusive moralist or devotee does not mean to be soft and be gentle always or to pass through an easy and challengeless life in the world. As high and deep, as strong and exclusive, are one's ideals and pursuits, so hard and tough will be the trends and ordeals they will call for. No hardship or test can be an excess for such a person of pure ideals and pursuits. By stepping into such hardships and trials, the devotee and the moralist strengthens and glorifies his decision and pursuits on the one hand. On the other, he allows Nature or Almighty to reveal to the rest of the world how rewarding and redeeming an exclusive pursuit can be though attended with a number of risks and battles.

Even today it is not the lakhs and crores of mortals who eat their daily bread, grow outwardly and in the end breathe their last, perhaps leaving to their posterity some bounty in the form of houses and other riches that constitute the backbone of mental and moral civilization of the mankind and their deep-rooted culture. Instead it is those rare few, mostly countable in fingers, who, right from the start or soon later in their life set before themselves sublime values and sound standards in the pursuit of which they make, with pleasure and willingness, any extent of sacrifices and risks. Of all such people, the assiduous moralists (righteous and dharmic persons like Yudhishthira) and the exclusive devotees (like Meera and others) rank supreme. It is because of instances such as these and the historic influences which they have perpetuated in our society

right from the ancient days, that even today at least one man here and another woman there are born whose hearts and minds get inspired to make the highest of seeking and the deepest of yearning.

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