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Ganguli

The Mahabharata: A Modern Retelling

Volume 11: The Widows Lament



Fantasy

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Chapter 1396

Om. Let us honor Narayana. Let us honor Him, the most honorable Nara. Let us honor Her, the goddess called Saraswati. Jayatu Bhava!

“Janamejaya said,

‘Duryodhana and all the men fell – what, O wise man, did King Dhritarashtra do when he heard the news? What did Mahatma King Yudhishtira of the Kurus, Dharma’s son, do? What did the three survivors of the Kuru army (Kripa and the rest) do? Now that I’ve heard all that Aswatthaman did, tell me what happened after the common judgment. What did Sanjaya tell the blind, elderly king?’

And Vaisampayana said,

‘Once he had lost his hundred sons, King Dhritarashtra, troublingly grievous due to the loss, miserable, and resemblant to a tree whose branches had all been snapped off, was overcome with anxiety and lost his voice. Naturally quite wise Sanjaya, nearing the king, said: *Why grieve, O king? Grief serves no purpose. Eighteen Akshauhinis of men, O king, were slain. The world is isolated and almost utterly deserted. Kings from various lands worldwide joined your son in battle and were all slain. Now let us properly perform last rites for fathers, sons, grandsons, kinsmen, friends, and teachers.*

Childless, advisor-less, and friendless, King Dhritarashtra, quite powerful, suddenly hit the ground like a wind-uprooted tree. He said: *I have neither sons, advisors, nor any friends and must surely now wander the earth, sorrowful. If I have neither kinsmen nor friends, am like a bird with clipped wings, and am decrepit, why should I live? My realm and kinsmen taken away from me, me without eyes, I cannot, quite wise one, shine on earth; I’m like a dulled luminary. I ignored the advice of Jamadagni’s son’s friends, ignored the divine rishi named Narada, and ignored island-born Krishna.*

During the assembly, Krishna did me some good by saying: 'Form a truce, O king. Give your son the entire realm and give the Pandavas their five villages.' I foolishly ignored him and now truly regret it. I ignored the just advice of Bhishma. Having heard of the slaughter of Duryodhana, one with a taurine roar, having heard of Dusasana's death, and having heard of Karna's and Drona's death, my heart strangely did not implode. I do not, O Sanjaya, recall what wicked thing I did in the past to warrant the punishment I'm now enduring, fool that I am. Surely I committed great sins in past lives and the supreme, holy commander is punishing me by great grief in this life. Fate ensured my kinsmen's deaths and the deaths of my well-wishers and friends in the last part of my life. What other man is there more troubled than wretched me? The Pandavas should see that I, today, am truly set on taking the path that leads to Brahma's worlds.

As King Dhritarashtra gave into lamenting thusly, Sanjaya spoke to him in order to quell his grief: Quell your grief, O king. The elders declared what The Vedas concludes, what scripture concludes, and what the holy writings have concluded, O king. You heard what wise men said to Sanjaya when he was troublingly grievous at his son's death. Well-wishers advised you when your son, O king, acquired a youth's pride, but you ignored it. You wanted results and did not, jealous, do that which would have done you some good. Your knowledge has stabbed you like a sword. You often supported the wicked and your son had Dusasana for an advisor as well as the wicked-souled son of Radha, the equally wicked Sakuni, the one who comprehended poorly named Chitrasena, and Salya. Your son's behavior turned the world against him. Your son, O Bharata tribesman, ignored Bhishma, the honorable Kuru chief, as well as Gandhari, Vidura, Drona, O king, Kripa (Bharadwata's son), mighty-armed Krishna, wise Narada, many other rishis, and the immeasurably powerful Vyasa. Though naturally powerful, your son was only a little clever,

arrogant, eager to fight, wicked, lawless, and unhappy. You're naturally educated, wise, and always honest. People so righteous and so naturally wise are never stunned by grief. None of those men respected Virtue; all they wanted to do was fight. That's why the Kshatriyas were annihilated and that's why your enemies' fame is greater. You took on the role of mediator but gave no goodly advice. Judgement does not suit you and you judged unfairly. Now, a man should always, from the get-go, plan so that he ends up regretting nothing. You loved your son, O king, so you always aimed to please Duryodhana. Now, you must repent. But, it ill-suits you to grieve – he who wants honey without thinking of the possibly bad outcome will, due to greed, meet with destruction. Such a man must repent as you must. He who gives into grief is never enriched; grieving ensures one does not reach one's goals; he who gives into grief cannot be liberated. If you blanket hot coals with your hem and are burned when the flames grow higher thereby, you're a fool if you grieve for the injury. You and your son fanned the Partha-fire with words and the ghee you fed it with was greed; the fire then flared and was ready to swallow. Your sons, like moths, leapt into that fiery flame. So, it would not suit you to grieve – the enemy-arrow's fire has swallowed them all. Both scripture and the wise would call your tears, O king, inappropriate. They, like sparks, singe the dead men you weep for. Quell your grief with wisdom; strengthen yourself from within to bear it.

That's how the king was soothed by Mahatma Sanjaya. Vidura then, enemy-scorcher, continued, proving his great wisdom.'”

Chapter 1397

“Vaisampayana continued,

‘Listen, O Janamejaya, to the nectar-like words Vidura said to the son of Vichitravirya; how he gladdened that taurine man: *Arise, O king! Why be prostrate on the ground? Strengthen yourself from within to bear it. O king, all creatures are mortal. Any embodied creature will one day be destroyed; what goes up must come down. That which is united will one day separate; all life dies. The holy destroyer, O Bharata tribesman, carries away both heroes and cowards. Why, taurine Kshatriya, shouldn't Kshatriyas fight? A pacifist seemingly escapes war and survives. But, when it is one's time, O king, one cannot escape. Now, life comes from nothing and returns to nothing one day – that's the way it goes. Why grieve? Grief does not unite one with the dead and it does not kill oneself. So, why give into sorrow? Death carries anyone and everyone away, even a god. Death neither prefers nor hates anyone, supreme Kuru. Like the wind severing the top of a grass-blade, taurine Bharata tribesman, Death is omnipotent. It can be likened to creatures marching in a parade – it doesn't matter which one Death comes to first. So, O king, it ill-suits you to grieve for those slain in battle. Scripture would have us believe, assuming it is some measure of truth, each one earned a supremely lofty end. Each one knew The Vedas; each kept to his vows. Each one faced the enemy and died. So, why feel sorrowful? Before birth, they were invisible and in an inconceivable realm; now, they are invisible again. You do not belong to them and they do not belong to you. So, why has their disappearance made you grievous? If slain, one earns Heaven. If one slays, one earns fame. So, when it comes to humanity, to be slain or to slay earns one great merit. So, to fight is not without reward. Surely Indra has*