

## ASHRAMVASIKA PARVA

### I. ASHRAMVASAPARVA

Aashramavaasikaparva consists of three sub-parvas namely Ashramavasaparva, Putradarshanaparva and Naradaagamanaparva. On the whole, it has thirty-nine chapters and 1082 slokas.

Janamejaya asked Vaisampaayana, 'O great sage! When Pandavas got their authority, how was their behavior with the king Dhritarashtra and Gandhari, who were without the shelter as they lost their sons and relatives? How long did the Pandavas rule their kingdom?' While replying to this, Vaisampaayana said, 'When the great Pandavas obtained the kingdom, they ruled the kingdom, having headed Dhritarashtra. By following the suggestions and orders of Dhritarashtra they ruled for fifteen years.

Daily Pandavas used to meet Dhritarashtra and salute him and followed his orders. Kunti too was always indulged in the service of Gandhari. Satisfied with their services Gandhari and Dhritarashtra lived there happily. Whenever Dhritarashtra remembered his son Duryodhana, he always thought badly of Bhishma. Bhishma also used to abuse them secretly. He even used to do harm to them. At times, when he was abusing them, both Dhritarashtra and Gandhari heard those words. After listening to those words, the minds of Dhritarashtra and Gandhari became distressed. They lead fifteen years under the refuge of Yudhishtira. Tormented by the words of Bhishma, Dhritarashtra became distressed and detached. The misbehavior of Bhishma was not known either to Yudhishtira or to the other Pandavas. One day, Dhritarashtra called his friends and said thus, with a shivering tone, 'O friends! The clan of Kauravas was declined because of my mistake. I encouraged the coronation of the wicked Duryodhana. I didn't listen to the words of welfare of Srikrishna, Bhishma, Vidura, Vyasa and other great people. Pandavas are virtuous. I didn't give them the ancestral property. I realized this after fifteen years. To sanctify my sin I am following the principles. To pacify my hungry I eat very little once in two days or sometimes once in four days. Only Gandhari knows this. In a pretext of following the vow, we both sleep on the ground.' Having said thus to his friends, Dhritarashtra asked Yudhishtira to give permission to go to forest. Yudhishtira was surprised by listening to his words and said thus, 'O king! We do not know about your fasting and principles. Indeed you are our father, mother and preceptor. Indeed you are the king. I am not the king. I am your servant, who obliges your order. As Duryodhana and others were your sons, so we too are. If you go to the forest by leaving us, I too would follow you.' Thus a discussion went on between those two. In the meanwhile, Sage Vyasa came there. He said, 'O Yudhishtira! This king has grown up old now. Gandhari is a great scholar. They both cannot tolerate the sorrow caused out of their sons' wickedness for a long time. You permit them to go to the forest. All the royal sages have lead their last phase of life in the refuge of forests only. It is the supreme principle of the royal sages that they should obtain their death only in the forests. You give



permission to your father to go to the forest.’ Thus having convinced Yudhishtira, sage Vyasa had left for his hermitage.

Yudhishtira expressed his opinion of following the order of sage Vyasa to Dhritarashtra. Thereafter, Dhritarashtra left for his palace along with Gandhari. After taking the food, every body assembled in the service of Dhritarashtra. The king Dhritarashtra instructed the science of polity to Yudhishtira. He even sought permission from his subjects to go to the forest. Dhritarashtra expressed his desire to Yudhishtira that before he goes to the forest, he would like to donate to his subjects in the name of his dead sons. He fulfilled the desire of Dhritarashtra. Thereafter Dhritarashtra made Vidura to ask money from Yudhishtira to offer libations to his sons, Bhishma and others. Bhimasena objected to give money. But Arjuna convinced him. Then Bhimasena also expressed his acceptance. Dhritarashtra got relieved from the debt of sons and grandsons by performing the donations and sacrifices for about ten days. Early in the morning of the eleventh day, which has fallen on the day of full moon day of the month called Kaartika, he offered oblations those were needed at the time of journey. He finished his offerings to the Agnihotra and came out of his palace along with Gandhari to leave for the forest. Vidura and Sanjaya too followed them. Kunti also accompanied them. Though Pandavas insisted her not to go to the forest, Kunti did not listen to their words. She moved ahead with them. Though Dhritarashtra and Gandhari insisted her, she did not return back home. She strongly decided not to return back.

Following the instructions of Vidura, Dhritarashtra started staying at the bank of Ganges, along with Gandhari and Kunti. After finishing their evening rituals they moved from the bank of Ganges and went to Kurukshetra where they met a royal sage called Satayupa in a hermitage. Dhritarashtra went to the hermitage of Vyasa along with him. There he took the vow of staying at forest and returned to the hermitage of Satayupa and started residing there. Thereafter, the great sages like Narada, Devala and Vyasa came there to see Dhritarashtra. Kunti offered prayers to all. The divine sage Narada narrated them virtuous stories. The royal sage Satayupa asked Narada thus, ‘You are the knower of everything. You please tell us that to which world would Dhritarashtra go?’ Then Narada replied, ‘Once in the court of Indra, there was a discussion about Dhritarashtra. Then I heard from the Indra that Dhritarashtra would live only for three more years. After completing that, he would go to the world of Kubera along with Gandhari.’

When Dhritarashtra and others went to the forest, the subjects and Pandavas were very much distressed. Since they were continuously recollecting their mother, they did not participate fully in their royal affairs. Once a desire aroused in their mind, to see their mother Kunti. Sahadeva expressed his desire first. Draupadi also expressed her desire to see Gandhari, Kunti and father-in-law. King Yudhishtira started towards the forest along with his brothers, women and old people. In the hermitage, Pandavas saw their mother Kunti, Gandhari and Dhritarashtra and saluted them. Sanjaya introduced the hermits to Pandavas. Yudhishtira enquired Dhritarashtra about the whereabouts of Vidura. He asked where Vidura was and he was not to be seen. While replying to that Dhritarashtra said, ‘He is performing a terrific penance. Without food he was managing to survive only on wind, because of which, he became very weak. In this deep forest, at times



only Brahmins could see him.’ While Dhritarashtra was telling thus, Yudhishtira saw Vidura from a long distance, who was naked and lean and thin. When he saw the hermitage, he immediately returned back. Yudhishtira followed him alone. He went into the deep forest and stood in a secluded place by taking the support of some tree. Yudhishtira also stood in front of him. With the help of Yogic energy, Vidura has entered into the body of Yudhishtira. Then Yudhishtira decided to perform the funeral of Vidura. In the meanwhile, he heard a voice from some unseen person as, ‘It would not be fair to perform funeral to his body, as he was leading the life of a saint. He will obtain the worlds of Santaanika. One should not lament for him.’ After hearing to the words of the unseen voice, Yudhishtira immediately returned back to Dhritarashtra and narrated him all that had happened. Pandavas were sitting near Dhritarashtra. At that time, even the sages like Satayupa and sage Vyasa along with his disciples assembled there. Sage Vyasa praised Dharmaraja and Vidura as virtuous persons and asked Dhritarashtra, ‘O king! Which desired object would you like to obtain from me? I will fulfill your desire if you want to see, listen to or touch any one?’

## II PUTRADARSHANPARVA

Sage Vyas asked Dhritarashtra to express his desire. After listening to the sage’s words, Dhritarashtra said, ‘o Holy sage! My life is blessed by meeting people like you. I am sanctified by seeing you all. Now, I am not scared of the nether worlds. But because of the wicked behavior of Duryodhana, all my sons were killed. All the kings have passed away. Being greedy of kingdom my sinful and foolish sons have destroyed my clan. As a result of that, I won’t get peace.’ On seeing the melancholic state of Dhritarashtra, Gandhari became grief-stricken and said thus, ‘O sage! By now the king has spent sixteen years lamenting for his dead sons. But till now, he didn’t get peace. O lord! bless us by doing any such thing by which my lord, I and Kunti, would obtain peace.’ Kunti recollected her son Karna, who was born secretly. When Vyasa insisted, Kunti revealed the birth secret of Karna and requested him to relieve her heart-burning sorrow. While consoling her, the sage said thus, ‘O daughter! There is no fault with you in this. The fault of human will not be blamed when it is the action of divine. You remove your mental anxiety.’

Following the advice of sage Vyasa, everyone reached the bank of Ganges. Pandavas, Dhritarashtra and others sat near sage Vyasa. Vyasa entered into the water of Ganges and invited all the people of Pandavas and Kauravas. Thereafter, Kauravas, army of Pandavas, Bhishma, Drona and others, all the kings, Virat along with his sons, Drupada, five sons of Draupadi, Abhimanyu and Ghatotkacha, came out of the water. Then with his strength of penance, sage Vyas gave divine eyes to Dhritarashtra. Gaandhaari too was endowed with the power of divine knowledge. They both saw their sons and relatives, who were killed in the war. The women who came there were delighted by meeting their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons. Their grief was vanished. Having wandered there for a night, those warriors disappeared in the Ganges, when sage Vyasa had dismissed them in the water. Followed by the suggestions of sage Vyas, the pious women got relieved



from their bodies and having entered into the Ganges, they went to the worlds of their husbands. When people heard this, they all were surprised and delighted.'

Janmejaya got a doubt that how could the dead persons once again obtain the same form. While replying to this Vyshampayana, the disciple of sage Vyasa said thus, 'The body is born out of action. Hence, without experiencing the fruit of all actions the body won't get destroyed. The five elements such as earth and others are eternal. In the cycle of this world, the union of the five eternal elements with the non-eternal physical body will always take place. When the non-eternal physical body gets destroyed, then these eternal five elements depart from them, but will not be destroyed.' With the blessings of sage Vyasa, Janmejaya could see his father Parikshith. Having obtained the permission of Dhritarashtra, Yudhishtira went back to Hastinapura along with his brothers.

### III NAARADAAGAMANAPARVA

Pandavas lead the period of two years, after returning back from the forest. One day, sage Narada, came to Yudhishtira. After greeting him with the hospitality, when Yudhishtira asked, he replied thus, 'O king! when you all have returned from the forest, king Dhritarashtra, along with Gaandhari, Kunti, Sanjaya, Agnihothra and priests left Kurukshetra and went to the Ganges. Once, Dhritarashtra took bath in the Ganges and went towards the hermitage. In the meanwhile, forest-fire blazed in the forest from all directions. As they were weak, Dhritarashtra and your mothers could not run from there. Dhritarashtra asked Sanjaya to move fast from there. Following the instructions of Sanjaya, those three followed the path of Yoga and were fainted and turned into ashes in that forest-fire. But Sanjaya could rescue.' After listening to this, Pandavas became grief-stricken. Narada said to Yudhishtira, 'O king! Dhritarashtra was not burnt by this worldly fire. It was heard that Dhritarashtra sacrificed the three fires, when he performed the sacrificial rituals, through the priests, before he started for the forest. Those priests, left those fires in a secluded forest and went back to their places. Those fires roused and burnt the entire forest. Dhritarashtra, who was burnt by his own fire, obtained the best place. Do not lament for him.' Narada further said, 'O king! Perform your duty by offering libations to those three.' Yudhishtira went to Ganges and offered water. On the 12<sup>th</sup> day, he performed the death ceremony and went back to Hastinapura along with his brothers.

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