
UNIT 3 THE SEQUEL TO THE DICING: A READING

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Plot to Vanquish the Enemy
 - 3.2.1 The Motif of a Father's Blind Love for his Son
- 3.3 The Importance of Loyalty and *Dharma*
- 3.4 The Second Game of Dicing
- 3.5 Departure to the Forest
- 3.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.7 Questions
- 3.8 Hints to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit will acquaint us with the compulsions of *Dharma* that made *Yudhishthira* return to the assembly hall. It will also introduce a seminal theme of the entire book—the King's folly and his blind love for his son. This unit is meant to set the tone of war as well as its inevitability. In this sense, the “*The Sequel to the Dicing*” is an extension of “*The Dicing*” sequence. The objective of this unit is to help us trace the dramatic elements in the narrative that contribute to its epic nature.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit coheres well with the unit “*The Dicing*”. It begins with the *Pandavas*' departure from *Dhrtarastra*'s court. We are told that soon after the *Pandavas* leave the assembly hall, *Duryodhana* begins to plot against them with *Sakuni* and *Karna*. He rushes to his father, King *Dhrtarastra* and urges him to call the *Pandavas* back. They, according to *Duryodhana* have left as wounded tigers and are sure to attack the *Kauravas* once they reach home. Following this, *Duryodhana* plots another game of dice through which the *Pandavas* will be exiled from their Kingdom. He reassures his father that *Sakuni* will win the game. This will be a foolproof plan to eliminate the *Pandavas* by sending them into the forest for thirteen years. *Dhrtarastra* half-scared, half-tempted consequently orders his usher to call the *Pandavas* back even if they are already on their way. The messenger reaches *Yudhishthira* who then decides to honour the word of the king. *Yudhishthira* is fully aware of the consequences of a second game. He knows it will spell doom, and bring about war and destruction. Nonetheless, he feels compelled to obey the word of *Dhrtarastra*. Thus, the *Pandavas*, we are told, return to the hall that brings them humiliation. This hall depicts the wizardry of *Sakuni* and the misdemeanour of *Duryodhana* and *Duhsasana*. In a single game of dice, the *Pandavas* again lose to *Sakuni*. They are bound by the logic of the game—the defeated group will go into the forest (basically be exiled), and live there for twelve years followed by another year in disguise. If their identity is revealed in the thirteenth year, the cycle of the twelve year-exile would begin afresh. A simple game of dice reverses the fortunes of the *Pandava* brothers along with those of the many men and women of their

kingdom. Finally, the *Pandavas* dress in clothes made of deerskin and proceed on their journey to the forest, having lost the second game of dice.

3.2 PLOT TO VANQUISH THE ENEMY

Envy coupled with fear seems to have assailed *Duryodhana* as the *Pandavas* proceed on their homeward journey. The *Pandavas* did not lose their wealth but had their honour and dignity greatly compromised. The “*Sequel to Dicing*” begins at this point. *Dhrtarastra* believes that he is successful in controlling the situation at the dicing sequence. The damage done to the *Pandavas* by his sons is in his view reversed in the three boons he offers to *Draupadi* and returns the wealth of the *Pandavas*. However, *Duryodhana* creates fear in the mind of the King by suggesting that leaving the enemy wounded and not vanquished will be their biggest mistake and before the enemy can get back at them the *Kauravas* should strike first and win the battle. *Duryodhana* dramatically presents the anger and attitude of the *Pandavas* in such a way that *Dhrtarastra* is rattled and convinced of the *Kauravas*’ doom. The question is—why does *Duryodhana* want to call the *Pandavas* back? Is he fearful of their revenge? He humiliated the *Pandavas* and will obviously be the target of their fury. Or is he using fear as a ploy to convince *Dhrtarastra* to let them play another game of dice as he bears malice against the *Pandavas*? We might find clues in *Duryodhana*’s words to *Dhrtarastra*;

Have you not heard king, what the learned priest of the Gods, Brhaspati, said when he propounded policy to Sakra? ‘Enemy-killer, enemies must be cut down by any means before they, with war or force can do you evil!

With this, *Duryodhana* raises an alarm that the *Pandavas* have left swearing and challenging the *Kauravas* since

We have offended them and they will never forgive us: who among them could forgive the molestation of Draupadi? (71)

It appears that *Duryodhana* is fearful of the end knowing the gravity of his actions. Therefore, he emphasises the pressing need for the *Kauravas* to protect themselves and to eliminate the enemy. Note how he creates panic in his father:

Father, the Pandavas have grasped their swords, they have mounted their chariots, and they are enraged. In their fury they will annihilate us like poisonous snakes! Arjuna is going fully girt; uncovering his two great quivers, he keeps picking up his Gandiva and looks about him, panting heavily. The Wolf-Belly swiftly raises his heavy club, we hear, and is fast riding out on the chariot he has teamed. (70)

We note urgency in *Duryodhana*’s tone. He makes *Dhrtarastra* believe that the threat is real and that they have to tackle the enemies before they move out of their territory. Ironically, *Duryodhana* refers to the *Pandavas* as furious poisonous snakes out to annihilate the *Kaurava* clan. *Duryodhana*’s narrative appears more real to *Dhrtarastra* mainly because it has visual descriptions of the *Pandavas*’ behaviour and attitude. Add to this the fact that these projections are in reality *Duryodhana*’s interpretation of the *Pandavas*’ attitude as they leave the court. Do you think *Duryodhana*’s account is truthful or is it a fabrication? In *Duryodhana*’s narrative, the characters of *Arjuna* and *Bhima* are particularly highlighted for their strength and prowess among the five brothers

who are “panting” and “fast riding” back home. Duryodhana elaborates how the Pandavas looked and what they did in the following manner:

Nakula has taken his sword and his shield with the eight moons, and Sahadeva and the King have made their attitude clear with gestures. Mounted on their chariots that are equipped with all weapon gear, and whipping the chariot teams, they are rushing out to raise their army. (70)

The final purpose of Duryodhana’s speech is to create a palpable picture of the Pandavas rushing out in anger to raise an army. It is in this context that Duryodhana brings up the main intent of his description—crushing the enemy before they raise their heads in revolt against the Kauravas. In the words of Duryodhana—

We must dice again with the Pandavas, bless you, to send them to the forest: so we shall be able to bring them in our power (71)

You will notice that the question of power and supremacy has come up again. Duryodhana cannot rest easy till his opponents are wiped out so that he will be the sole heir to the entire kingdom. The threat of the Pandavas coming back to claim their right to the throne constantly worries Duryodhana. Further, all along he has been aware of the opinion of the elders in the family including his own parents who believe in the legitimacy of the Pandavas’ right to the throne. Note that the Pandavas never ask for their claim to the entire Kingdom and merely ask for the right to rule five villages. However, for Duryodhana the threat is real and imminent can take shape at any point in time.

Thus, he feels compelled to oust the Pandavas completely. He has a ready plan and he shares it with the King—

They or we, whoever it be that is defeated at the dicing, must go into the forest clad in deerskins for twelve years. The thirteenth year they should live disguised among people, and if they are found out, again go into the forest for another twelve years. We or they shall live there: so let the game go on (70)

You will notice that Duryodhana’s proposal is the result of the plot that he has thoroughly worked out with his accomplices Sakuni and Karna. He takes the final plea, before the king, of saving the kingdom –

We shall be firmly rooted in the kingdom as we embrace our allies and keep contented a vast, mettlesome and invincible army. If they survive the vow after thirteen years, we shall vanquish them (70)

Thus, Dhrtarastra believes he is saving the Kaurava clan and the kingdom in asking the Pandavas to return to his court. Contrarily, it can be argued that the king can see the doom in calling the Pandavas back and defeating them in a game of dice but still goes ahead with it for he cannot disappoint his son. This brings to question the kind of love a parent or a father has for his son. We shall look at Dhrtarashras love for Duryodhana next.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Why does Duryodhana plan to vanquish the Pandava brothers?

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3.2.1 The Motif of a Father's Blind Love for his Son

Dhrtarastra is sufficiently convinced by his son to hold another game of dice. This is when all his kinsmen advised him not to hold another game—

Then Drona, Somadatta, and the warrior Bahlika, Vidura and Drona's son, and the mighty son of the commoner's wench and Samtanu's son, Bhurisravas, and the warlike ViKarna, all of them said: 'Don't dice' and 'Let there be peace'. (71)

- but *Dhrtarastra* ignores them. Even *Gandhari* cautions *Dhrtarastra* to not be impulsive and pay heed to reason. She urges him to lead his sons in the right direction, “lest, broken asunder, they abandon you”. Is it *Dhrtarastra*'s fear of being abandoned by *Duryodhana* that makes him act rashly? Or is it his fatalistic view of things that makes him see his decisions as predetermined? Speaking to *Gandhari*, *Dhrtarastra* says “Surely if our line must end, I shall not be able to avert it” (72). Do you think *Dhrtarastra* could have averted the war if he took wise decisions? It appears difficult and problematic. On the other hand, *Gandhari* in the scene gives the impression of being more rational than her husband. She is not solely driven by love for *Duryodhana* and is rather governed by law or *Dharma*. As *Vaisampayana* says, “*Gandhari* tormented by grief because of her love for her son, yet yoked to the law” speaks to *Dhrtarastra*. In her speech *Gandhari* expresses her intuitive sense about things which as events unfold turn true. She speaks to *Dhrtarastra* thus:

When Duryodhana was born, the wise Steward said, 'It is better to send this defiler of his race to the next world!' No sooner was he born than he howled like a jackal, Bharata! Take notice, Kurus! He will be the end of this house! Do not prefer the opinion of children who are untaught, Lord! Do not become the cause of the ghastly perdition of your line!

As is evident, *Gandhari*'s prudence contrasts sharply with the foolishness of *Dhrtarastra*. She is against taking into account the “opinion of children” that have remained “untaught” suggesting that *Duryodhana* has learnt nothing despite his education. This distinguishes *Gandhari* from *Dhrtarastra* who being King often shows lack of reason. Contrarily, in the epic she stands out as a thinking-rational woman who does not give in to her emotions. When *Vaisampayana* says,

At the behest of the wise king Dhrtarastra, an usher spoke to Yudhisthira,”

- we catch the irony of the adjective “wise” used for *Dhrtarastra* who acts imprudently throughout. What defines *Dhrtarastra*'s actions? *Vaisampayana* gives the explanation by claiming that *Dhrtarastra* “made the challenge to the Pandavas, for he loved his son” (71)

The *Mahabharata* is at a basic level the story about a father's love for his son. Looked at from this angle, the epic appears to be a part of folklore. It can be read as the story of a single human emotion—a father's excessive love for his son and the consequence of such a love that gives precedence to attachment over duty and law. However, the epic has many layers that add to its complexity. Despite its complex structure and nuances, the *Mahabharata* retains folklorist elements as well. This motif is carried to the end of the section with *Dhrtarastra*'s final comment—“Thus Sanjaya, did the Steward give his law-minded and apt advice; but I did not heed it, for I wanted to favour my son” (86). Let us now examine the importance of loyalty and *dharma* which seems to be the code of the age, in the next section.

3.3 THE IMPORTANCE OF LOYALTY AND DHARMA

Why did *Yudhisthira* agree to go back for the second game of dice when he knew well enough that he would lose against the trickery of *Sakuni*? Concepts of *Dharma* and loyalty play an important role here. Even as *Yudhisthira* is aware of the likely consequence, that, he will be offering a sacrifice of himself and his family, he still clearly ventures to stake all? It is his unwavering commitment to not disobey the king that he agrees to go back. As he says:

It is at the disposing of the Placer that creatures find good or ill. There is no averting of either, if we must play again. Although I may know that the challenge of the dicing at the old man's behest will bring ruin, I cannot disobey his word.

Yudhisthira's words suggest a sense of inevitability of happenings. He has accorded it the will of God—“*at the disposing of the Placer*” i.e. human beings do good or ill. The fact that none can avert it has a sense of finality about it. His actions in this sense are driven by the idea of fate. The notion of *Dharma* attached to the idea of obeying the king is also at work here. As he says “*How indeed could a king like me, who guards his own Law, fail to return when summoned?*” (73). There is an assertion in *Yudhisthira's* phrase, “*a king like me*”. It points towards *Yudhisthira's* essential character that is to unflinchingly abide by the law. It is his driving force and the reason for existence. In this sense, the character of *Yudhisthira* cannot go against the grain. Do you think *Yudhisthira* is free to make the choice of returning to his kingdom without accepting the proposal of the king? Can he leave without entertaining the usher?

Also, consider the question—Is *Yudhisthira* bound by law? The related idea of being bound by oath is another significant motif reiterated time and again in the narrative. *Karna* as we see in the unit on “*Temptation of Karna*” tells both *Krsna* and *Kunti* that he is bound by oath to remain loyal to *Duryodhana*. *Bhisma*, too is, stuck by his oath of not marrying and not assuming kingship—“*for the sake of my father and family I swore a difficult oath,*” says he, “*to be neither king nor father. And here I live confidently, keeping my promise*” (107). *Bhisma* despite others compelling him in desperate situations to take the position of a king (“*When Indra no longer rained on the kingless kingdom, the subjects hastened to me, driven by hunger and fear*”) rejects the offer and keeps his promise—“*The wailing of the subjects failed to shake my mind and recalling the code of the strict (adherence) I kept my promise*”. The oath taken then assumes a sacred attribute and characters are unswerving in their resolve in the *Mahabharata*. This discussion brings us to the second dicing game that takes places in the *Mahabharata*. We shall examine that quickly in the next section.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Compare the responses of Dhrtarastra and Gandhari towards Duryodhana's wish to hold a second game of dice? Which one of the two do you find more rational?

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2) Discuss Yudhisthira's essential character trait. Why could he not disobey the king?

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3.4 THE SECOND GAME OF DICING

In this case, we are told that the “great warriors” the *Pandavas* return to the hall that has brought them much ignominy. But they do so with poise and calm. *Vaisampayana* begins recounting the tale thus—“*They sat down at their ease to resume the dicing, crushed down by fate, for the destruction of the entire world*”. Note how the range of the event gains almost cosmic proportions—a small incident such as dicing relevant only to two concerned parties eventually engulfs the entire world in the wake of its destruction. The active agency of fate and the complete submission of human beings to it are reinforced here. Had the *Pandavas* proactively intervened and refused to play the game, how would the events have unfolded? Would it have changed the future course of events?



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Nonetheless, *Yudhisthira* “*compelled by his shame and his love for law, again had to go to the game. Though he understood, wise as he was, he returned to the game worrying, ‘will it not spell the Kurus destruction?’*”. The law again hinders free choice. We witness that *Yudhisthira* is worried about the destruction of the *Kuru* clan—destruction that would be caused by the game. He accepts the challenge to stake his kingdom and comfort trading it off for exile in the forest for twelve years and a thirteenth in incognito. Having lost the game to *Sakuni*, the *Pandavas* set off on their exile to the wilderness. At this moment, an exhilarated *Duhsasana*, we are told, cries out.

Now the wheel has begun of the great-spirited king, the son of Dhrtarastra! The sons of Pandu have been overcome...The Parthas have been thrown into hell, for a long time, an endless time, fallen from happiness, bereft of their kingdom, for years without end (74)

Duhsasana seems to believe in his victory and the *Pandavas*' eternal state of despair. *Duhsasana* is shown breaking into the verse form to sing of the *Kauravas*' triumph. He urges *Draupadi* to abandon the *Pandavas* and choose a man of wealth from the *Kurus*. To quote from the text:

*Having seen the fine-clad reduced to deerskins
And penniless, homeless, in the woods,
What joy shall you find, you Yajnaseni?
Now choose a husband who pleasures you!*

*For all the Kurus are here assembled
Forbearing and masterful and quite rich
Choose one of them to be your husband
This turn of the tide should not distress you.* (75)

Duhsasana's reference to *Draupadi* hints at his continued interest in her from the *Dicing Scene*. It was also a way of divesting the authority of the *Pandavas* vis-à-vis the woman they married. He further claims "Why wait on the *Pandavas*? They have fallen," and urges her to rethink by suggesting, "It is useless to wait for barren seeds". The *Pandavas* have been stripped of their powers. The metaphor of "barren barley" or "fruitless like barren sesame seeds" is used for them to indicate their impotency as males and by extension as owners of Kingdom and wealth. It is at this point when their manhood is challenged, that *Bhima* "the Himalayan lion" threatens the "jackal" *Duhsasana* with dire consequences. He says, "I shall make you remember" your words "when I hurt yours in battle". However, *Bhima* fiercely angry "kept to his law". We are reminded time and again in the text that law/righteousness is supreme to the *Pandu* brothers while their counterparts *Duryodhana* and his tribe work with cunning and deceit. Thus, *Bhima* claims "Abuse, rough and cruel is possible with you *Duhsasana*: for who else would dare to boast when he had won wealth with trickery?" This is followed by *Bhima*'s horrifying pledge –

*... the Wolf-Belly son of Partha shall not go to the happy worlds,
if he does not rip open your chest and drink your blood in war!* (76)

This sets the scene for the impending battle and fear increasingly grips the *Kauravas*. *Bhima*'s calamitous words speak of the disaster that is to come, as follows:

*I shall kill Duryodhana, Arjuna shall kill Karna, and Sahadeva shall
kill Sakuni, crook with the dice. And this grave word I shall once
more solemnly utter in the middle of the hall—the Gods shall make
it true when there will be war between us: I shall kill this Suyodhana
with my club in the fight and I shall push his head into earth with
my foot; and of this hero with words this harsh and evil Duhsasana,
I shall drink the blood like a lion!* (77)

That war between the two groups would take place appears inevitable at this stage. Add to this the fact that *Narada*, the "greatest of divine seers", appeared after the departure of the *Pandavas* and "stood before the Kurus; and amidst great seers he spoke this ghastly words: "Thirteen years from now the *Kauravas* who are here will perish, through *Duryodhana*'s guilt and *Bhima*'s and *Arjuna*'s might". Having spoken thus, *Narada* disappears. This in a way, seals the fate of the *Kauravas* who have begun to believe in their might. *Duryodhana*, *Karna* and *Sakuni* rush to *Drona* and offer "the kingdom to him", thinking he might save them from peril. But *Drona* is aware of their fate. He tells *Duryodhana* and the entire gathering that "the twice born have said that the *Pandavas*, who are sons of Gods cannot be killed" (83)

Note that the *Pandavas* being sons of gods are immortals. In this sense they are human beings with the attributes of gods. But they are not ordinary human

beings—in that, they have superpowers given to them by the gods. In a way, the *Pandavas* are semi-god figures who are a blend of the human and the divine. They are humans because they are bound by earthly ties, (even Gods and Goddesses are known to be bound by earthly ties, don't you think?) and thus, project certain weaknesses. Emotions work on them and affect their behavior even as they are largely governed by *Dharma* and righteousness.

In the context, the purpose of this narrative appears to be defining the good and bad in life and how they work in our midst. However, it is also about how to live one's life along codes of law and ethics—accordingly, *Vyas*, the writer of the epic suggests that the gods facilitate our living and rescue human beings in times of need. Thereafter, the second game of dicing that the *Pandavas* lose, they must go into exile. The next section examines their departure.

3.5 DEPARTURE TO THE FOREST

The *Pandu* brothers after having lost in the game of dice prepare for their journey to the forest to live as ordinary folks for a period of twelve years. *Vidura* speaks to them before their departure and offers a view of their past which has been full of adventures and learning. We understand through *Vidura*'s speech the versatile and adaptable nature of the *Pandavas*. He says, “*Long before when you lived in the Himalayas, Savarin of Mount Meru instructed you. So did, in the town of Varnavata, Krsna Dvaipayana, so Rama on Bhrgu's Peak, and Sambhu by the river Drsadvati*”. First, we may note that *Vidura* emphasises the knowledge of the *Pandavas* that they had gained by living in diverse regions outside the Kingdom, away from the comforts of home—something that *Duryodhana* and his brother never obtained. Knowledge, thus, comes to the *Pandavas* from different sources. Secondly, the *Pandavas* are being compared to *Rama* and *Sambhu* who, too, have similar experiences. That the *Pandavas* are equated with *avatars* of gods is a reiteration of their godliness. *Vidura* adds “*Near Anjana you have also listened to the great seer Asita, and your priest Dhaumya has steadily seen Narada lest you lose in the world-to-come this resolve that the seers honour*”.



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Note that the *Pandavas*'s priest *Dhaumya* has been in constant touch with *Narada* who in turn has direct interaction with the gods. Together their task it appears is to ensure that the *Pandavas* continue to tread the path of

righteousness and not err on the way. Certainly, these experiences add to the resilience and wisdom of the *Pandavas*. *Vidura* seems to be suggesting that moving out of the kingdom has always brought the *Pandavas* many boons and that the present exile will be an addition to their knowledge. He claims: “*Pandava, with this resolve you surpass Pururavas Aila, with your ability the other kings, with your obedience to the Law the seers*”. Certainly, the constant movement of the *Pandavas* from one region to another would have made them alert to their surroundings. Their understanding and awareness will be strengthened and the complexities of situation will awaken their critical senses. They will be more humanised in the process of living as ordinary folks in villages and forests. This may not have been possible had they had remained limited to their kingdom and looked at life from that vantage point. Calling these gifts that make a person, *Vidura* finally tells *Yudhisthira*:

In the gift of yourself you are like the moon. Get your sustenance from water, forbearance from earth, all heat from the orb of the sun. Know that your strength comes from the wind and your own origin springs from the elements (79)

The suggestion here seems to be that staying close to nature would add harmony to their lives.

However, as the *Pandavas* depart for the forest they project their will and attitude dramatically which, stands in contrast to their actions. They submit to the authority of *Dhrtarastra* by returning and agreeing to play the game of dice; follow the law and take it seriously. When they lost the game, which they knew they would, they take the proposal seriously and venture to live in the forest for twelve plus one years. However, while they proceed with their onward journey they display their anger in various ways. Their demeanour is found to be far from submissive. This is described by *Vidura* to *Dhrtarastra* who is eager to know the response of the *Pandavas* after their lethal defeat at the game. *Vidura* tells *Dhrtarastra* the manner in which they leave for their exile:

Kunti's son Yudhisthira has covered his face with his shawl, and Bhima Pandava has spread his arms wide as he goes. The left-handed archer follows the king, scattering sand, and Madri's son, Sahadeva goes with his face all streaked. Nakula is much distressed in his thoughts and is walking with his whole body lined with dust, behind his king, he the handsomest man on earth. Krsna of long eyes, hiding her face in her hair, beautiful and crying much, follows the king. Dhaumya is chanting the gruesome Chants of Death, lord of the people, and as he walks the tracks he holds up kussa grass in his hand. (81)

Dhrtarastra finds this manner of the *Pandavas* rather absurd and asks *Vidura* “*Why are they travelling in these strange ways?*” *Vidura* has only described to *Dhrtarastra* the manner of their going. He now adds his interpretation to this description. This provides meaning to each action of the *Pandavas* which finally appears intimidating to the ever inconstant *Dhrtarastra*. *Vidura* does not shy away from criticising *Dhrtarastra* for his actions and lays the blame squarely on him by suggesting, “*Even though with your deceitful connivance your sons took his riches and kingdom, the mind of the wise king Dharma does not stray away from Law*” (82). *Vidura* tells *Dhrtarastra* that *Yudhisthira*, “*although consumed by fury over the trickery, refuses to cast his evil eye*” on *Dhrtarastras*. “*That is why the Pandava king goes with his eyes covered*”

as *Yudhisthira* had said “*Lest I burn these folk down to the ground if I look at them with my evil eye*”. Seldom do we ever find *Yudhisthira* speaking in this manner. Anger is not his characteristic trait. Here, however, he displays it on this occasion and in fact speaks of its intensity—that his glance is enough to burn the enemy down.

Vidura offers to explain *Bhima*’s strange gait suggesting that he is aware of his great strength that equals none. To quote, “*That is why he is going that way, with his arms extended wide, showing his arms, proud of the bulk of his arms, ready to employ them on his enemies*”. Note that *Bhima* is angry throughout in this scene but we are told that he remains within the bounds of law and does not try to circumvent it. He pledges to kill his enemy and shows his might here but does not use it on anyone.

Next, when *Vidura* describes the gestures of *Arjuna*, the dramatic effect of the scene gets further heightened. The metaphor of scattering sand enriches the meaning of such an act. We are told that in the act of departing, *Arjuna* is seen

... scattering about sand to forecast the number of enemies that will burn with his arrows. Just as his grains of sand are separated one another, as severally shall he loose on his enemies the showers of his arrows, *Bharata* (82)

His actions appear as a prophecy ensuring the death of his enemies. *Nakul* and *Sahadev*, on the other hand, are covered with dust and streaks respectively projecting their rebellion and anger through the act.

Still, *Draupadi* is “*dressed in her sole garment, disheveled and weeping in her courses, her cloth wet and besmirched with blood*”. Note that the *Dicing Sequence* has shown us *Draupadi* at her most vulnerable—dressed in a single cloth stained with blood. She has been successful in winning her five husbands back from King *Dhrtarastra* and is about to leave the city of *Indraprastha* when they are called back to the assembly hall. In that semi-clad state, she comes back to the place of her disgrace and once again in a final game of dice, loses the wealth that was initially restored to the *Pandavas* by the king. Dressed in that same cloth she leaves for her exile. Thus, humiliation and rage makes *Draupadi* curse the family of the *Kauravas* in the following manner:

They because of whom I got this way, thirteen years from now their wives will have their husbands dead, their sons dead, their kinsmen and friends dead! Their bodies smeared with the blood of their relatives, their hair loosened and themselves in their courses, the women shall offer up the water to the dead, no less, as the Pandavas enter the City of the Elephants! (82)

You must have noted that *Draupadi*’s curse is meant for the women of the house of *Dhrtarastras*. She refers to the wives of the *Dhrtarastras* who will see their husbands’ dead and mothers who will see their sons’ dead. There is a shift in foci as *Draupadi* speaks of the suffering of women in battles. The scope of personal rivalries becomes broadened to include friends and kinsmen; wives and children. *Draupadi*’s references are to women whose bodies will be smeared with the blood of their loved ones. Her blood stained clothes become symbolic of the blood that will be smeared on the clothes of the *Kaurava* women when the *Pandavas* return from exile. She specifically refers to those

women ‘*being in their courses*’ and offering “*water to the dead*”. Note the irony here. ‘*Being in their courses*’ signifies fertility and reproduction which is a celebration of life. But *Draupadi* suggests that they will in such a time be offering prayers to the dead. *Draupadi*’s pivotal presence in this scene broadens the scene of animosity which is no more limited to rivalry between the two sets of brothers but confrontation and destruction of an entire clan and a civilisation.

Vidura’s final comments on *Dhaumya*, (the family priest of the *Pandavas*), creates a dramatic scene as *Dhaumya* has “*fashioned the kusa grass that is dedicated to Nirrti and leads their procession, chanting the chants that are devoted to Yama*”. The reverberating atmosphere created by the chants to death makes a terrifying scene for the beholder, as is evident from *Dhaumya*’s declaration “*When the Bharatas have been killed in the war the gurus of the Kurus shall likewise sing these Chants!*” Certainly this episode shows in detail the procession of the *Pandavas* and like any procession it carries its share of spectacle and drama. The narrative evokes both awe and fear. It is equally worth noting that as the *Pandavas* leave the place

... on all sides the anguished town people are crying, ‘O Woe! Our protectors are leaving! Look at this calamity!’ (83)

Interestingly, the populace of the town is on the side of the *Pandavas*. The common people show faith in the *Pandavas* and bemoan their departure. In fact, they consider the *Pandavas* their protectors and thus, in a way negate the authority of *Dhrtarastra* who rules the kingdom. The cry of the common people is accompanied by the fury of nature that, seems to react to the injustice meted out to the *Pandavas*.

As *Vidura* tells *Dhrtarastra* “*When these superior men in this fashion departed from the City of Elephant, lighting flashed on the cloudless sky and the earth trembled*”. We are made to understand that nature too rebels against this act and joins the *Pandavas* in their fight. *Vidura* goes on to add, “*Rahu swallowed the sun when no eclipse was due*” and “*meteors exploded widdershins*”. This fosters the idea that sending the *Pandavas* away was no less than a natural calamity. Also, it leads to chaos and misrule even in the domain of the gods. It makes the beasts even angrier. To quote, “*Beasts of prey roared forth with vultures, jackals, and crows around the temples and sanctuaries of gods and the watch towers of the palaces*”. This signifies ill omen and grave consequences. *Vidura* thus, speaks of the various portents that loom large over the future of the *Kauravas* who are well on their path to destructions.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have discussed the following: one, the motives behind *Duryodhana*’s appeal to call the *Pandavas* back for a second game of dice; two, *Dhrtarastra*’s weaknesses and his blind love for his son that makes him act impulsively; three, *Yudhishthira*’s state of mind in accepting the proposal of the king. We have also critically identified the difference between description and its interpretation, the way it was offered first by *Duryodhana* to *Dhrtarastra* and later by *Vidura* to *Dhrtarastra*. We have looked at the individual aspect that each *Pandava* carries with him/ her, while heading to the forest. The unit has highlighted the dramatic quality of this section of the epic that makes it cosmic in proportions.

3.7 QUESTIONS

- 1) What is the significance of the Pandavas' gestures as they left for exile in to the forest?
- 2) Comment on the importance of the law and individual's free choice in the Mahabharata.

3.8 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Refer to Section 3.2

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Refer to Sections 3.2 and 3.2.1
- 2) Refer to Section 3.3



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