

First Chapter

INTRODUCTION

After the expiry of twelve years of exile and residing in an unknown place for one year, the Pāṇḍavas demanded half of their kingdom from Duryodhana; as was his promise but he refused to give even as much land as could be covered by the point of a needle, without waging war. The Pāṇḍavas sought permission from their mother Kuntī, and accepted the challenge of a war. After this decision, both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas, began preparation for it.

Sage Veda Vyāsa had great affection for Dhṛtarāṣṭra, the blind king of Hastināpura. Due to his affection, he said to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, “War and massacre of the Kṣatriyas is inevitable. If you want to see the scene of the battlefield, I can endow you with divine sight so as to enable you to see scene of war, from the place you are sitting.” Dhṛtarāṣṭra said, “I have been blind all my life. Now I don’t want to see the slaughter of my own kith and kin. But I want to hear the details of the war.” Then sage Vyāsa said, “I endow Sañjaya with this divine sight by which he will know, hear and see, not only the incidents of the battlefield but also the ideas, in the minds of the warriors and will narrate these to you.” Saying so, sage Vyāsa endowed Sañjaya with divine vision.

The battle started on the battlefield of Kurukṣetra at the appointed hour. Sañjaya stayed in the battlefield, for ten days. When Bhīṣma being badly wounded with arrows, fell off the chariot, Sañjaya conveyed the message to Dhṛtarāṣṭra who at that time was in Hastināpura. Hearing this news, Dhṛtarāṣṭra was filled with great sorrow and started to cry. Then he asked Sañjaya to narrate to him all the details of the war. Upto the twenty-fourth chapter of the Bhīṣma-Parva (section), Sañjaya narrated the incidents of the war.* At the beginning of the twenty-fifth chapter, Dhṛtarāṣṭra asks Sañjaya—

* In the Mahābhārata there are eighteen sections. In those sections there are several sub-sections. In the Bhīṣma section there is this Bhagavadgītā, a sub-section which begins with the thirteenth chapter of the Bhīṣma section and ends with the forty-second chapter.

धृतराष्ट्र उवाच*

धर्मक्षेत्रे कुरुक्षेत्रे समवेता युयुत्सवः ।
मामकाः पाण्डवाश्चैव किमकुर्वत सञ्जय ॥ १ ॥

dhṛtarāṣṭra uvāca

dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre samavetā yuyutsavaḥ
māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva kimakurvata sañjaya

Dhṛtarāṣṭra said:

O Sañjaya†, assembled at the holy-field of Kurukṣetra, eager to fight, what did my sons and the sons of Pāṇḍu, do? 1

Comment:—

‘Dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre’—In Kurukṣetra the gods performed holy sacrifice. King Kuru also performed penance there. Thus being saturated with a spiritual atmosphere, the field of Kurukṣetra has been called the field of righteousness (Dharmakṣetra).

Here by the word ‘Kṣetra’ in ‘Dharmakṣetra’ and ‘Kurukṣetra’ Dhṛtarāṣṭra means to say that this is the land of the Kurus. This is not merely a battlefield, but a land of pilgrimage, in which human beings by performing holy actions, can attain benediction in this life. Therefore, by consulting noble persons, this land has been chosen, for both mundane and ultra mundane benefits.

In this world generally, there are three root causes of disputes viz., land, wealth and woman. Out of these three, the kings primarily fight for land. Hence, there is the significance of the name ‘Kurukṣetra’ here. In the Kuru-family the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, as well as, those of Pāṇḍu, are included. Therefore, both of them have an equal claim over the land of Kuru. But

* Within the dialogue between Vaiśampāyana and Janamejaya there is the dialogue between Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Sañjaya; and within the dialogue between Dhṛtarāṣṭra and Sañjaya there is the dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna.

† Sañjaya was born of Gavalgaṇa. He possessed knowledge and righteousness like sages. He was Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s minister (Mahābhārata Ādi, 63/97).

the Kauravas refuse to give the Pāṇḍavas their share of land, so war between them becomes inevitable.

Though the word 'Kurukṣetra' is fair and justified, because the land belongs to both the cousin groups, yet Indian culture, is so unique that righteousness is given top priority in it. Therefore, even an action such as war, is performed on the field of righteousness—a land of pilgrimage, so that the warriors may attain salvation. Therefore, the word 'Dharmakṣetra', has been used along with 'Kurukṣetra' here.

There is one more point, which needs attention. In the first verse of the first chapter of the Gītā, the first word is 'Dharma', and in the last verse of the eighteenth chapter the last word is 'Mama'. Therefore, if 'Dhar' is taken from the first word and 'Ma' from the last word, the word becomes 'Dharma' (righteousness). Therefore, the whole of the Gītā, comes within righteousness viz., by following the path of righteousness, the principles of the Gītā are followed, and by discharging one's duty according to the doctrines of the Gītā, the path of righteousness, is followed.

From these words 'dharmakṣetre kurukṣetre' all of us should know that all actions should be performed by following the path of righteousness. Every action, should be performed, not with a selfish motive, but for the welfare of all, and the scriptures should be the authority in determining what ought to be done and what ought not to be done (Gītā 16/24).

'Samavetā yuyutsavaḥ'—Duryodhana did not accept the peace negotiations despite repeated proposals from many kings. Nay, when Lord Kṛṣṇa came to intervene as a mediator, Duryodhana bluntly refused to part with, even as much land as could be covered by the point of a needle, without waging a war (Mahābhārata, Udyoga. 127/25). Thus, Pāṇḍavas had no alternative but to fight. Thus the two groups assembled to fight for their rights.

Though the two groups assembled to fight, yet Duryodhana had a keener desire for war, in order to usurp the kingdom by fair means or foul, just means or unjust viz., by hook or crook.

Thus his side was very keen to wage a war.

The Pāṇḍavas, had the virtue of righteousness on their side. For the sake of justice, they were prepared to face any hardship. Knowing the deadly consequences of a war, Yudhiṣṭhira did not want to indulge in it. But, as by obeying their mother, the five Pāṇḍavas had married Draupadī, Yudhiṣṭhira by obeying his mother, became willing to fight.* Thus, Duryodhana, and the members of his group were eager to fight for usurping the kingdom, while the Pāṇḍavas, were compelled to fight for righteousness.

‘Māmakāḥ pāṇḍavāścaiva’—The Pāṇḍavas, regarded Dhṛtarāṣṭra (being the elder brother of their father) as their father, and obeyed his order, whether it was just or unjust. Therefore, here the word ‘Māmakāḥ’ includes both the Kauravas and the Pāṇḍavas†. But the word ‘Pāṇḍava’, has been mentioned separately, because Dhṛtarāṣṭra was not fair and just to the Pāṇḍavas. He was not impartial, he had partiality‡ for his sons. So the word ‘Māmakāḥ’, has been used for his sons, while ‘Pāṇḍava’ has been used for the

* Kuntī, the mother of the five Pāṇḍavas was very forbearing. She had a unique personality. She did not desire worldly pleasures and kingdom. She asked Lord Kṛṣṇa to grant her the boon of adversity. But there were two things which always pinched her. The first of them was that villains such as Duryodhana etc., wanted to make her beloved daughter-in-law naked in the assembly. This insulting, hateful and inhuman behaviour pained her very much.

Secondly when Lord Kṛṣṇa on behalf of the Pāṇḍavas went to Hastināpura with a proposal of conciliation, Duryodhana, Duḥśāsana, Karṇa and Śakunī etc., wanted to arrest Him. Hearing this incident, Kuntī thought that those villains should be killed, otherwise their increasing sins would lead them to damnation. It was because of these two factors that Kuntī ordered her sons, the Pāṇḍavas to fight.

† Though the term ‘Kaurava’ includes both Duryodhana etc., the sons of Dhṛtarāṣṭra as well as Yudhiṣṭhira etc., the sons of Pāṇḍu, yet in this verse Dhṛtarāṣṭra has used the term ‘Pāṇḍava’ for Yudhiṣṭhira etc. So the term ‘Kaurava’ stands for Duryodhana etc.

‡ Dhṛtarāṣṭra had a partial outlook because he thought that Duryodhana etc., were his sons while Yudhiṣṭhira etc., were Pāṇḍu’s sons. So he never checked Duryodhana from committing evil deeds such as poisoning Bhīma and throwing him into the water, trying to burn the Pāṇḍavas alive in the house made of lac, gambling with Yudhiṣṭhira by foul means, sending an army to the forest to destroy

sons of Pāṇḍu. Thus, his feelings find expression in his speech. It was because of his partial attitude, that he had to suffer the torture of the destruction of his family. Therefore, every human being should learn a lesson, that he should not be partial to members of his house, street, village, province, country and sect, because partiality leads to conflict, rather than love and goodwill.

The term 'Eva' (also), with the term 'Pāṇḍavāḥ' has been used to point out the fact, that the Pāṇḍavas should not have waged war because they were righteous to the core. But they also came to the battlefield, to wage war. So what did they do there?

[**'Māmakāḥ' and 'Pāṇḍavāḥ'***—Sañjaya will explain the word 'māmakāḥ', from the second to the thirteenth verses to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Seeing the army of the Pāṇḍavas, his son Duryodhana told Droṇācārya, the names of the chief generals of the Pāṇḍava-army, in order to cause hatred in his mind against the Pāṇḍavas. After that, Duryodhana named the principal warriors of his army, praised their skill in warfare. In order to please and cheer up Duryodhana, Bhīṣma blew his conch loudly. Hearing the sound of his conch, the conchs and trumpets etc., of the Kaurava-army blared forth. Then, from the fourteenth to the nineteenth verses, Sañjaya explains the word 'Pāṇḍavāḥ', as was asked by Dhṛtarāṣṭra. He says, Kṛṣṇa, a supporter of the Pāṇḍavas, seated in a chariot, blew his conch. After him Arjuna, Bhīma, Yudhiṣṭhira, Nakula and Sahadeva etc., also blew their conchs. The terrible sound of those conchs rent the hearts of the army of Duryodhana. After that Sañjaya, while talking about the Pāṇḍavas, starts the dialogue between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna, from the twentieth verse.]

the Pāṇḍavas and so on. The reason was that Dhṛtarāṣṭra had the feeling that somehow or the other if the Pāṇḍavas were killed, his sons would rule over the whole empire.

*Describing 'Māmakāḥ' and 'Pāṇḍavāḥ' separately Sañjaya uses the words 'Duryodhana' (1/2) and 'Pāṇḍavāḥ' (1/14).

‘Kimakurvata’—‘Kim’, has three meanings—doubt, reproach (blame) and question.

The incident of the war cannot be doubted, because after ten days of fighting when Bhīṣma fell off the chariot, Sañjaya conveyed the message to Dhṛtarāṣṭra, at Hastināpura.

There cannot be reproach (blame) also because Dhṛtarāṣṭra did not blame his sons and the Pāṇḍavas, for the war, when the war was already going on.

Therefore ‘Kim’ means a question here. Dhṛtarāṣṭra questions Sañjaya to relate him all the incidents in details, and in sequence so that he may understand them properly.

Appendix—‘My sons’ (māmakāḥ) and ‘Pāṇḍu’s sons’ (Pāṇḍavāḥ)—this distinction caused attachment—aversion which led to war and commotion (stir). The result of Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s attachment-aversion was that all the hundred Kauravas were killed while even a single Pāṇḍava was not killed.

As curd is churned, a stir is caused in it by which butter is extracted, similarly the stir caused by the distinction between ‘my sons’ (māmakāḥ) and ‘Pāṇḍu’s sons’ (pāṇḍavāḥ) caused yearning for benediction in Arjuna’s mind by which butter in the form of the Gītā came into light.

It means that the commotion produced in Dhṛtarāṣṭra’s mind caused war while the commotion produced in Arjuna’s mind revealed the Gītā.



Link:—Then Sañjaya answers his question—

सञ्जय उवाच

दृष्ट्वा तु पाण्डवानीकं व्यूढं दुर्योधनस्तदा ।
आचार्यमुपसङ्गम्य राजा वचनमब्रवीत् ॥ २ ॥

sañjaya uvāca

dr̥ṣṭvā tu pāṇḍvānikam vyūḍham duryodhanastadā
ācāryamupasaṅgamyā rājā vacanamabravīt