



CHAPTER 4

dundubhirmeghanirghoṣo muhurmuhuratādyata

Yajñas of the Great Kings: Mahābhārata

The other great epic of India, the Mahābhārata, also opens and ends with a great yajña. It is the rājasūyayajña of Yudhiṣṭhira, described in the sabhāparvan, that makes the tiny kingdom of the pāṇḍavas an object of jealousy for Duryodhana and thus sets the stage for future events. And it is the aśvamedhayajña that Yudhiṣṭhira performs after the death of Bhīṣma that marks not only the culmination of his reign, but also more or less the end of Śrīkrṣṇa's sojourn on earth, who is born into this world towards the end of dvāparayuga in order to relieve the earth of the great burden of adharma that accumulates on her with the passage of time.

The rājasūyayajña of Yudhiṣṭhira

Rājasūyayajña, as Bharata says to Śrīrāma, is a yajña that involves the subduing of all kingly dynasties on earth. And the description of Yudhiṣṭhira's rājasūya in the Mahābhārata is largely a description of how Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers, through their great valour and the unrivalled political acumen of Śrīkrṣṇa, achieve a position of pre-eminence amongst the kings. This process of the establishment of cākravartya in a polity, that by the very nature of its fundamental doctrine is constituted of small self-respecting kingdoms, ought to be of great interest to the students of political theory in India. We, however, shall deal briefly with the momentous political events that form an essential part of the preparations for Yudhiṣṭhira's rājasūyayajña.

The first suggestion that Yudhiṣṭhira perform a rājasūyayajña comes from Nārada, the roving sage of Indian classical antiquity,

who is almost an ally of *kāla*, and who, by planting an ambition here or inciting a jealousy there, keeps events moving along their destined course. Nārada's suggestion to YudhiṣṢhira in this instance is in the form of a message from king Pāṇḍu, the father of the pāṇḍavas, whom Nārada happens to meet in the heavens. While making his suggestion, Nārada also cautions YudhiṣṢhira that this kind of *yajña* can lead to great disasters and wars, and he must carefully weigh the possibilities before deciding upon undertaking it.

YudhiṣṢhira, of course, does not really need such cautioning. He thinks long and hard, and repeatedly consults with his brothers, with his counsellors, and with the great sages and ṛṣis of his time, all of whom agree that he is entirely capable of performing a *rājasūyayajña*. But even this does not fully reassure YudhiṣṢhira, who keeps worrying about his resources and capabilities for such an endeavour.

Establishing the cākravartya

Finally, he decides to seek the advice of Śrīkṛṣṇa. Śrīkṛṣṇa begins by saying that YudhiṣṢhira indeed fulfils all qualifications of a king desirous of performing a *rājasūyayajña*: *sarvaiguṇairmahārāja rājasūyam tvamarhasi*.¹ And then he goes on to offer YudhiṣṢhira an exhaustive overview of the *kṣatriyakulas* and kingdoms of the time. He assesses the strengths and weaknesses of each of these *kulas* and kingdoms, recounts their past and present alliances and their future inclinations, and enumerates the military and political obstacles and openings that each of them is likely to present to YudhiṣṢhira's ambitions of *cākravartya*.

Śrīkṛṣṇa's assessment, in brief, is that Jarāsaṁdha, the ruler of Magadha in central India, is the keystone of the established military and political arrangements of the time. If these arrangements are to be altered so as to establish the primacy of YudhiṣṢhira, then Jarāsaṁdha will have to be eliminated: *na tu śakyaṁ jarāsaṁdhe jīvamāne mahābale rājasūyastvayāvāptumeṣā rājan matirmama*.² And Jarāsaṁdha deserves to be eliminated, probably because he has violated the *dharma* of *cākravartya* by imprisoning the kings that he has subdued, and by playing the game of making different

¹ Mahā *sabhā* 14.1, p. 706.

² Mahā *sabhā* 14.62, p. 710.

kingdoms fight amongst themselves merely for the sake of retaining his superiority.

Jarāsaṁdha, however, seems invincible by ordinary military means and, in any case, Śrīkṛṣṇa does not want Jarāsaṁdha to die the honourable death that a kṣatriya achieves by dying valiantly in an armed military conflict. Therefore, Śrīkṛṣṇa himself travels to Magadha with the pāṇḍava brothers, Bhīmasena and Arjuna, and gets Jarāsaṁdha killed by challenging him to bare-handed one-to-one combat with Bhīmasena, who cannot be equalled in this mode of fighting. After the victory, Śrīkṛṣṇa, along with the pāṇḍava brothers, personally goes to the cave-prisons of Jarāsaṁdha and releases the kings that Jarāsaṁdha had held in captivity. This victory alone thus brings innumerable kings, constituting, as the epic says, eighty-six percent of all kings on earth, under the protection of Yudhiṣṭhira. And Sahadeva, the son of Jarāsaṁdha who is designated the future king of Magadha by Jarāsaṁdha himself before engaging in combat with Bhīmasena, also seeks and obtains abhaya, protection, from Śrīkṛṣṇa and thus becomes an ally of the pāṇḍavas.

Once the primary recipient of the reverence of the kings is thus removed from the scene, the rest of the task becomes relatively simple. The four brothers of Yudhiṣṭhira are sent in different directions to establish Yudhiṣṭhira's cākṛavartya over the earth. Arjuna goes to the north, Bhīmasena to the east, Sahadeva to the south, and Nakula to the west. The brothers reach the farthest corners of the known earth: across the Himālayas up to the Meru hills in the north; across the seas and up to the island kingdoms in the east; to the coast and beyond to Śrī Laṅkā in the south; and up to the coast and across the seas again in the west.

Few of the numerous kingdoms that the pāṇḍava brothers pass through offer them any resistance. Most of the kings, like the great Vibhiṣaṇa of Śrī Laṅkā and Śiśupāla of Cedi, accept the cākṛavartya of Yudhiṣṭhira after hearing of his antecedents, of the valour of his brothers and of Śrīkṛṣṇa's friendship for them. Even where a fight does take place – as between Arjuna and Bhagadatta of Prāgyotiṣapura or between Sahadeva and the vānara kings Mainda and Dvividā – it is in the nature of putting the famed valour of the pāṇḍava brothers to a proper test; and the battle often ends without any of the parties winning or losing. But, what is perhaps most remarkable is that even when a king is defeated by force of arms,

he is invariably re-installed on his throne. This happens even in the case of what are known to be essentially alien kingships, like those of the śakas, the hūṇas, the barbaras, and the mlecchas.

This is perhaps one of the finest illustrations of the basic principle of Indian political doctrine according to which even a conquered and alien people retain the right to rule themselves according to their own ways and customs; in accordance with their own kula-, jāti- and deśa-dharma, and under the kingship of their own venerated leaders. The acceptance of Yudhiṣṭhira's cākravartya by a king during the campaigns of the pāṇḍava brothers never amounts to an abdication of the rights and duties of the king and his people within their domain. In the epic, such acceptance is almost always described as an exchange of mutual honours between the visiting pāṇḍava or his envoys and the accepting king, and offers of valuable gifts and other contributions towards the rājasūyayajña of Yudhiṣṭhira by the latter. This is all that is demanded and received by the pāṇḍava brothers from every king who agrees to accept the primacy of Yudhiṣṭhira, whether after a defeat in war or in warm and welcoming friendship.

Preparations for the yajña

It is after thus being accepted as the foremost amongst the kings on earth, that Yudhiṣṭhira begins to prepare for his rājasūyayajña in earnest. With the gifts and contributions brought by his brothers from their various campaigns, and with the contributions that keep flowing in every day from different kingdoms, his treasury is by now overflowing with riches. And it has become almost incumbent upon him to undertake the great yajña in order to redistribute the accumulated wealth. As the Mahābhārata puts it:

धर्म्यैर्धानागमैस्तस्य ववृधे निचयो महान् ।
 कर्तुं यस्य न शक्येत क्षयो वर्षशतैरपि ।
 स्वकोष्ठस्य परीमाणं कोशस्य च महीपतिः ।
 विज्ञाय राजा कौन्तेयो यज्ञायैव मनो दधे ॥

*dharmyairdhanāgamaistasya vavṛdhe nicayo mahān
 kartuṁ yasya na śakyeta kṣayo varṣaśatairapi*

*svakoṣṭhasya parimāṇam kośasya ca mahīpatih
vijñāya rājā kaunteyo yajñāyaiva mano dadhe*³

With the rightful contributions thus flowing in from all directions, Yudhiṣṭhira's wealth kept increasing. The accumulation reached such levels that it would have been impossible to significantly diminish it even over hundreds of years. Having thus learnt of the extent of his treasury and the granary, Kuntī's son Yudhiṣṭhira resolved that such abundance could be expended only in a yajña.

Yudhiṣṭhira informs Śrīkṛṣṇa of his resolution and obtains his consent. And immediately afterwards, he begins to issue detailed directions for the performance of the yajña. The preparations for the yajña proper then follow more or less along the lines of the yajñas of the Rāmāyaṇa. The chief priests and hosts are appointed, embassies are sent to all kingdoms to invite the kings and all their people, great craftsmen are put to the job of constructing grand houses for the visitors, which are then filled with abundant food and all possible luxuries, and the best of the cooks are engaged in preparing an unending supply of rare delicacies.

The annadāna

And the yajña then proceeds amidst a plenty of food and a grand feeding, during which the only sounds that are heard are those conveying directions to serve and respectful requests to partake of the food:

दीयतां दीयतामेषां भुज्यतां भुज्यतामिति ।

एवमप्रकाराः संजल्पाः श्रूयन्ते स्मात्र नित्यशः ।

*dīyatām dīyatāmeṣāṃ bhujyatām bhujyatāmiti
evamprakārāḥ samjalpāḥ śrūyante smātra nityaśaḥ*⁴

“Serve, serve them, keep serving!”, and “Please partake of the food. Please eat!”, such are the sounds that were being heard continuously in this yajña.

³ Mahā sabhā 33.7-8, p. 767.

⁴ Mahā sabhā 33.51, p. 770.

Having recently acquired great riches, Yudhiṣṭhira also gives away precious gifts in quantities that seem unusually large. But within this surcharged flow of gold, silver and precious stones, the paramount concern of the performers of the yajña seems to be the giving of food, and ensuring that every one is well-fed, well-nourished and in good cheer. Describing the great annadāna that takes place during this great yajña, the Mahābhārata says:

सर्वाञ्जनान् सर्वकामैः समृद्धैः समतर्पयत् ।

अन्नवान् बहुभक्ष्यश्च भुक्तवज्जनसंवृतः ।

रत्नोपहारसम्पन्नो बभूव स समागमः ।

इडाज्यहोमाहुतिभिर्मन्त्रशिक्षाविशारदैः ।

तस्मिन् हि ततृपुर्देवास्तते यज्ञे महर्षिभिः ।

यथा देवास्तथा विप्रा दक्षिणान्नमहाधनैः ।

ततृपुः सर्ववर्णाश्च तस्मिन् यज्ञे मुदान्विताः ॥

*sarvāñjanān sarvakāmaih samṛddhaiḥ samatarpayat
annavān bahubhaksyaśca bhuktavajjanasamvṛtaḥ
ratnopahārasampanno babhuva sa samāgamah
idājyāhomāhutibhirmantraśikṣāviśāradaiḥ
tasmin hi tatṛpurdevāstate yajñe maharṣibhiḥ
yathā devāstathā viprā dakṣiṇānnamahādhanaiḥ
tatṛpuḥ sarvavarṇāśca tasmin yajñe mudānvitāḥ⁵*

All were honoured with plentiful fulfilment of all their desires. That gathering was overflowing with food and varied delicacies. People everywhere were satiated. Precious stones were being given away all around.

In that great yajña, great ṛsis, knowing the hymns and their correct recitation, satisfied the devas with their singing and with the plentiful offerings of ghee and other substances in the homa.

Just as the devas were satisfied, so were the vipras, with the offerings of plentiful food and wealth. All the varṇas were similarly honoured and satisfied in that great yajña. All felt fulfilled.

⁵ Mahā sabhā 35.17-19, p. 773.

Leading Yudhiṣṭhira to the aśvamedhayajña

Yudhiṣṭhira's viśāda

At the end of the Mahābhārata war, Yudhiṣṭhira is in a state of inconsolable grief and deep remorse at the death of so many of his near and dear. He holds himself responsible for the great destruction, and wishes to renounce the victory, earned with so much effort, and to take to the life of a saṁnyāsin. Almost all his well-wishers – the pāṇḍava brothers, Draupadī, Śrīkrṣṇa himself, and even Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa, the grandfather of the kuruvamśa and the seer of the epic – try to dissuade Yudhiṣṭhira from this self-denying course. They repeatedly urge and advise him, sometimes in fairly strong words, to take the reins of the kingdom in his hands and begin performing the kingly duties of protecting the earth and undertaking great yajñas.

Draupadī, in particular, seems to find Yudhiṣṭhira's refusal to accept the throne of Hastināpura beyond comprehension. She begins to worry about his state of mental health and goes to the extent of telling Yudhiṣṭhira that he is afflicted with some kind of madness – *unmāda* is the word she uses – and the same madness is affecting his brothers too. And, she warns Yudhiṣṭhira that if he fails to suppress his unmāda, he would be inviting great trouble upon himself.

It takes such insistent urging and persuasion before Yudhiṣṭhira agrees to be anointed king of his rightful kingdom and sit on the throne of Hastināpura, the capital city of kuruvamśa. But Śrīkrṣṇa, it seems, is not yet fully reassured of Yudhiṣṭhira's willingness to fulfil his kingly responsibilities, and advises him to go to Bhīṣma and learn the way of righteous conduct from him, who, as Śrīkrṣṇa says, is the sun of knowledge that keeps shining on the kuruvamśa and with whose death that light will disappear for ever:

तस्मिन्नस्तमिते भीष्मे कौरवाणां धुरंधरे ।

ज्ञानान्यस्तं गमिष्यन्ति तस्मात् त्वां चोदयाम्यहम् ॥

tasminnastamite bhīṣme kauravāṇām dhuramdhare,
jñānānyastam gamiṣyanti tasmāt tvām codayāmyaham⁶

⁶ Mahā śānti 46.23, p. 4531.

And, perhaps not surprisingly, the first question Yudhiṣṭhira asks Bhīṣma is that:

राज्ञां वै परमो धर्म इति धर्मविदो विदुः ।

महान्तमेतं भारं च मन्ये तद् ब्रूहि पार्थिव ॥

*rājñām vai paramo dharmā iti dharmavidō viduḥ
mahāntametam bhāraṁ ca manye tad brūhi pārthiva⁷*

Those who know about dharma say that great indeed is the dharma of the kings. I however find it to be a great burden. O, great king, please enlighten me about it.

Bhīṣma, as is well known, instructs Yudhiṣṭhira in expansive detail about different aspects of dharma, and especially about rājadharmā, the dharma of the kings. The instruction continues almost till the beginning of uttarāyana, till the sun changes his course from the south to north, at which point of time Bhīṣma chooses to end his earthly life.

Urgent entreaties of sage Vyāsa and Śrīkṛṣṇa

At the end of this great instruction, Yudhiṣṭhira has still not overcome his grief and remorse. In fact, the death of Bhīṣma seems to make his grief even deeper. It is at this stage that he is advised by Śrīkṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa to perform an aśvamedhayajña and thus expiate the sin of war for which he holds himself responsible.

By this time, both Śrīkṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa seem to have been exasperated by the unnaturally prolonged grieving of Yudhiṣṭhira, and there is an edge of urgency in their advice to him. Thus Śrīkṛṣṇa tells him that one who grieves for the dead beyond what is normal is in fact putting those dear and departed ones in great grief. He, Yudhiṣṭhira, has already heard what is worth knowing and has done whatever needs to be done for the dead. Therefore, he must now get over his grief and begin performing the yajña proper to a king: *yajasva vividhairyajñairbahubhiḥ svāptadakṣiṇaiḥ*.⁸

Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa does not even care to hide his exasperation, when he tells Yudhiṣṭhira that there is hardly any use of his

⁷ Mahā śānti 56.2, p. 4560.

⁸ Mahā aśvamedhikā 2.3, p. 6100.

advising him any further, because all that is told to him seems to have little effect. As far as he, Yudhiṣṭhira, is concerned, the teachings of the elders seem to be nothing better than futile ravings of the senseless: *kimākārā vayam tāta pralapāmo muhurmuhuh?*⁹

And then he goes on to insistently implore Yudhiṣṭhira not to keep grieving like the ignorant ones, and to concentrate his mind upon the performance of great yajñas. Because, as Kṛṣṇadvaipāyana-vyāsa says:

आत्मानं मन्यसे चाथ पापकर्माणमन्ततः ।

शृणु तत्र यथापापमपकृष्येत भारत ।

तपोभिः क्रतुभिश्चैव दानेन च युधिष्ठिर ।

तरन्ति नित्यं पुरुषा ये स्म पापानि कुर्वते ॥

*ātmānam manyase cātha pāpakarmānamantataḥ
sr̥ṇu tatra yathāpāpamapakṛsyeta bhārata
tapobhiḥ kratubhiḥcaiva dānena ca yudhiṣṭhira
taranti nityam puruṣā ye sma pāpāni kurvate*¹⁰

O Bhārata, if you still believe that you are responsible for unrighteous conduct, then hear how such conduct is expiated. Those who fall into such unrighteous conduct always get over their sins by tapas, yajña and dāna – by undertaking great austerities, by performing yajñas and by giving away of gifts.

And, of all the modes of expiation, yajña is the primary for those who have the resources and the prowess. Therefore, says sage Vyāsa:

यजस्व वाजिमेधेन विधिवद् दक्षिणावता ।

बहुकामान्नवित्तेन रामो दाशरथिर्यथा ।

यथा च भरतो राजा दौष्यन्तिः पृथिवीपतिः ।

शाकुन्तलो महावीर्यस्तव पूर्वपितामहः ॥

*yajasva vājimedhena vidhivad dakṣiṇāvata
bahukāmannavittena rāmo dāśarathiryatha*

⁹ Mahā āśvamedhika 2.16, p. 6101.

¹⁰ Mahā āśvamedhika 3.3–4, p. 6102.

LEADING TO THE AŚVAMEDHA

*yathā ca bharato rājā dausyantih pṛthivīpatih
śakuntalo mahāvīryastava pūrvapitāmahaḥ*¹¹

Perform a great aśvamedhayajña. Perform it in the proper manner, with abundant recompense for those who accept your hospitality. Perform it so that all those who come, partake of food and other riches to their hearts' content. Perform a great aśvamedhayajña, the way it was performed by Rāma, the son of Daśaratha, and the way it was performed by your own great ancestor, king Bharata, the son of Duśyanta and Śakuntalā, who ruled the entire earth and who was known for his great prowess.

Yudhiṣṭhira, however, continues to indulge in his grief, and asks Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa how, after having got all his near and dear killed in this great war and having denuded the earth of all her riches, would he now find the wealth to properly perform a yajña like the aśvamedha?

Sage Vyāsa then tells Yudhiṣṭhira of the great treasure of king Marutta, who ages ago performed a great yajña in which Saṁvarta, the recluse son of ṛṣi Aṅgirā and brother of Bṛhaspati, the priest to the devas, officiated as the chief priest. Saṁvarta's power was such that even indra could not resist his invocation. Indra, the foremost amongst the devas, had been trying to subvert the yajña of Marutta and had even dissuaded Bṛhaspati from participating in it. But, when invoked by Saṁvarta, indra could not but appear in the yajña and accept the offerings along with other devas. For such a great yajña, Marutta collected immense wealth, which could not be expended even after the generous offerings made to all those who attended that yajña. The great and varied riches that were thus left over from the yajña were deposited by king Marutta in a treasury built at the yajña grounds near the Meru hills across the Himālayas.

Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa advises Yudhiṣṭhira to bring this left-over treasure of king Marutta for his aśvamedhayajña. This brings some cheer to Yudhiṣṭhira and he begins to consult his counsellors about the possibility of his performing an aśvamedhayajña.

¹¹ Mahā aśvamedhika 3.9-10, p. 6102.

Watching Yudhiṣṭhira continuing to grieve inconsolably after the departure of Bhīṣma, Śrīkrṣṇa in fact seems to have come to believe, like Draupadī earlier, that Yudhiṣṭhira's continued distraction with grief and remorse is a kind of disease, that needs to be treated urgently. Therefore, he sets about explaining the Indian understanding of disease to Yudhiṣṭhira, telling him that mental and physical diseases are mutually dependent, that one cannot arise without the other. Both result from an imbalance in the essential attributes of the body or the mind. Śrīkrṣṇa goes on to advise Yudhiṣṭhira that his mind seems to have lost its natural proclivities: he does not know any longer how to be happy in happiness and how to grieve in grief. He is only lost in past memories, and this is nothing but a mental aberration: *sa tvam na duḥkhī duḥkhasya na sukhī susukhasya ca smartumicchasi kaunteya kimanyad duḥkhavibhramāt.*¹²

Śrīkrṣṇa is worried about this state of affairs. He, therefore, reminds Yudhiṣṭhira that while he is immersed in the memories of the battles he has fought with Bhīṣma and Droṇa, a much bigger battle is ahead of him. This is the battle that he has to fight within himself, in his own mind. This is also the battle that he has to fight all alone: no servants, brothers or friends can be of any help to him. And, Śrīkrṣṇa goes on to warn him of the unimaginable disasters that are likely to befall him if he fails to win this battle and pull himself out of his diseased state of mind.

To win this war against his own desires and griefs, Yudhiṣṭhira must learn to concentrate his energies on some great task, and Śrīkrṣṇa's explicit advice to Yudhiṣṭhira is to undertake the performance of an aśvamedhayajña: *yajasva vājimedhena vidhivad dakṣiṇāvata.*¹³

Rāmarājya of Yudhiṣṭhira

The teachings of Bhīṣma, of Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa and, of course, of Śrīkrṣṇa, finally begin to have a soothing effect on Yudhiṣṭhira. He begins to feel deeply consoled and free of grief and remorse. Thus returned to a state of health, he makes up his mind to perform great yajñas and begins to apply himself to the fulfilment of his kingly responsibilities.

¹² Mahā āśvamedhika 12.7, p. 6125.

¹³ Mahā āśvamedhika 13.20, p. 6127.

Yudhiṣṭhira's kingdom soon begins to flourish, and his reign begins to approach that great Indian model of ideal times, the rāmarājya. In fact, as the epic describes it, Yudhiṣṭhira's reign has all the characteristics that are associated with rāmarājya: There are plentiful and timely rains; there is no hunger, thirst or disease; everyone endeavours to conduct himself righteously, even animals take care to avoid hurting each other; cows yield plentiful milk, bullocks are strong and docile; the earth is laden with rich crops and, like kāmadhenu, the celestial cow, offers all the wealth that anyone wishes for; and the great dynasties of kings flourish and multiply many-fold.

Description of the ideal rājya of the Indians' dreams presented here is perhaps the most elaborate to be found anywhere in Indian literature. Sage Vaiśampāyana, the narrator of Mahābhārata, recalling the times when Yudhiṣṭhira ruled in Hastināpura, to king Janamejaya, the grandson of the pāṇḍavas, says:¹⁴

यथा मनुर्महाराजो रामो दाशरथिर्यथा ।
 तथा भरतसिंहोऽपि पालयामास मेदिनीम् ।
 नाधर्म्यमभवत् तत्र सर्वो धर्मरुचिर्जनः ।
 बभूव नरशार्दूल यथा कृतयुगे तथा ।
 कलिमासन्नमाविष्टं निवास्य नृपनन्दनः ।
 भ्रातृभिः सहितो धीमान् बभौ धर्मबलोद्धतः ॥

*yathā manurmahārājo rāmo dāsarathiryathā
 tathā bharatasimho'pi pālayāmāsa medinīm
 nādharmaṃyamaḥbhavat tatra sarvo dharmarucirjanah
 babhūva naraśārdūla yathā kṛtayuge tathā
 kalimāsannamāviṣṭam nivāsya nrpanandanah
 bhrāṭṛbhiḥ sahito dhīmān babhau dharmabaloddhataḥ*

Yudhiṣṭhira, the lion of the bhāratas, ruled, protecting and nurturing the whole earth, as it was protected and nurtured by Manu, the great king, and by Rāma, the son of Daśaratha. While Yudhiṣṭhira ruled, there was no adharma, all were inclined towards dharma – it was as if kṛtayuga had dawned again. Knowing that the cycle of time was moving nearer to the beginning of kaliyuga, the dear and wise king,

¹⁴ Mahā āśvamedhika 14, pp. 6129-31.

Yudhiṣṭhira, along with his brothers, went beyond bounds in acquiring the might of dharma.

ववर्ष भगवान् देवः काले देशे यथेप्सितम् ।

निरामयं जगदभूत् क्षुत्पिपासे न किञ्चन ।

आधिर्नास्ति मनुष्याणां व्यसने नाभवन्मतिः ॥

*vavarṣa bhagavān devaḥ kāle deśe yathepsitam
nirāmayam jagadabhūt kṣutpipāse na kimcana
ādhirnāsti manyuṣyāṇām vyasane nābhavanmatih*

Devas granted rains, at the right place and the right time, to fulfil all wants. The world became free of all disease. There was no hunger or thirst anywhere. There was no mental suffering, and nobody was led astray by temptation.

ब्राह्मणप्रमुखा वर्णास्ते स्वधर्मोत्तराः शिवाः ।

धर्मः सत्यप्रधानश्च सत्यं सद्विषयान्वितम् ।

धर्मासनस्थः सद्भिः स स्त्रीबालातुरवृद्धकान् ।

वर्णाश्रमान् पूर्वकृतान् सकलान् रक्षणोद्यतः ॥

*brāhmaṇapramukhā varnāste svadharmottarāḥ śivāḥ
dharmah satyapradhānaśca satyam sadviṣayānvitam
dharmāsanasthaḥ sabbhiḥ sa strībālāturavṛddhakān
varṇāśramān pūrvakṛtān sakalān rakṣanodyataḥ*

All varṇas, beginning with the brāhmaṇa, were secure in the knowledge of the excellence of their respective dharma. Truth governed dharma, and the truth resided in its proper objects. Firmly established in dharma, and in the company of the noble, Yudhiṣṭhira constantly endeavoured to protect the women, the children, the sick and the aged. Similarly did he endeavour to protect the time-honoured varṇas and āśramas.

अवृत्तिवृत्तिदानाद्यैर्यज्ञार्थैर्दीपितैरपि ।

आमुष्मिकं भयं नास्ति ऐहिकं कृतमेव तु ।

स्वर्गलोकोपमो लोकस्तदा तस्मिन् प्रशासति ।

बभूव सुखमेकाग्रं तद्विशिष्टतरं परम् ॥

*avrttivr̥ttidānādyairyajñārthairdīpitairapi
āmuṣmikaṁ bhayaṁ nāsti aihikaṁ kṛtameva tu
svargalokopamo lokastadā tasmīn praśāsati
babhūva sukhamekāgraṁ tadviśiṣṭataram param*

Those without livelihood were given livelihood. Yajñas were provided for with abundant riches. There was abundance all around. Thus, there were no worldly worries left for anyone, and there was no cause to fear the world hereafter either. While Yudhiṣṭhira ruled, the world indeed had become like the heavens. Happiness on earth was, in fact, even greater than in the heavens.

नार्यः पतिव्रताः सर्वा रूपवत्यः स्वलंकृताः ।

यथोक्तवृत्ताः स्वगुणैर्बभूवुः प्रीतिहेतवः ।

पुमांसः पुण्यशीलाढ्याः स्वं स्वं धर्ममनुव्रताः ।

सुखिनः सूक्ष्ममप्येनो न कुर्वन्ति कदाचन ॥

*nāryaḥ pativrataḥ sarvā rūpavatyāḥ svalankṛtāḥ
yathoktavṛttāḥ svaguṇairbabhūvuḥ prītihetavaḥ
pumānsaḥ puṇyaśīlādhyāḥ svaṁ svaṁ dharmamanuvrataḥ
sukhinaḥ sūkṣmamapyeno na kurvanti kadācana*

Women exuded beauty. They were all well dressed and properly bejewelled. They were chaste in their devotion to their husbands. Their conduct was proper in all respects. They thus, with their inherent qualities, created an aura of affection and love all around.

Men were steadfast in virtue and propriety. They followed their respective dharma. Being happy in themselves they did not ever indulge in even the slightest of the vices.

सर्वे नराश्च नार्यश्च सततं प्रियवादिनः ।

अजिह्ममनसः शुक्लाः बभूवुः श्रमवर्जिताः ॥

*sarve narāśca nāryaśca satataṁ priyavādināḥ
ajihmamanasaḥ śuklāḥ babhūvuḥ śramavarjitāḥ*

Men and women always spoke pleasingly. They had no trace of false-heartedness. There was a lucid transparency about them. And they were thus free of all strain and fatigue.

भूषिताः कुण्डलैर्हरैः कटकैः कटिसूत्रकैः ।

सुवाससः सुगन्धाढ्याः प्रायशः पृथिवीतले ॥

*bhūṣitāḥ kuṇḍalairhārāiḥ kaṭakaiḥ kaṭisūtrakaiḥ
suvāsasaḥ sugandhāḍhyāḥ prāyaśaḥ pṛthivītale*

All men and women on earth were well-ornamented. Their ears, throats, wrists and waists were adorned with jewels. Their bodies were covered in fine raiment, and they wore pleasing fragrances.

सर्वे ब्रह्मविदो विप्राः सर्वत्र परिनिष्ठिताः ।

वलीपलितहीनास्तु सुखिनो दीर्घजीविनः ॥

*sarve brahmavidō viprāḥ sarvatra pariniṣṭhitāḥ
valīpalitahīnāstu sukhino dīrghajīvināḥ*

The venerable ones were all conversant with the essential truth about the universe. They were well-versed in all śāstras. They lived long happy lives, and yet their skin did not wrinkle and their hair did not grey.

इच्छा न जायतेऽन्यत्र वर्णेषु च न संकरः ।

मनुष्याणां महाराज मर्यादासु व्यवस्थितः ॥

*icchā na jāyate'nyatra varṇeṣu ca na saṁkaraḥ
manuṣyāṅām mahārāja maryādāsu vyavasthitāḥ*

O great king Janamejaya, there was no coveting of what was not one's own. There was no confusion amongst the varṇas. All were steadfast in the discipline of their dharma.

तस्मिञ्छासति राजेन्द्रे मृगव्यालसरीसृपाः ।

अन्योन्यमपि चान्येषु न बाधन्ते कदाचन ॥

*tasmicchāsati rājendre mṛgavyālasarīsrpāḥ
anyonyamapi cānyeṣu na bādhanṭe kadācana*

When that indra among the kings ruled, even the wild beasts and their prey, and the snakes and insects, never caused any trouble, either to one another, or to anyone else.

गावः सुक्षीरभूयिष्ठाः सुवालधिमुखोदराः ।

अपीडिताः कर्षकाद्यैर्हृतव्याधितवत्सकाः ॥

*gāvaḥ suksīrabhūyiṣṭhāḥ svāladhimukhodarāḥ
apīditāḥ karṣakādyairhṛtavayādhitavatsakāḥ*

Cows were well-built. They had well-formed heads, bodies and tails. They gave abundant and nourishing milk. They were never ill-treated by the husbandmen or any others. They had calves that were free of all disease.

अवन्ध्यकाला मनुजाः पुरुषार्थेषु च क्रमात् ।
विषयेष्वनिषिद्धेषु वेदशास्त्रेषु चोद्यताः ॥

*avandhyakālā manujāḥ puruṣārtheṣu ca kramāt
viṣayeṣvamiṣiddheṣu vedasāstreṣu codyatāḥ*

People did not while away their time. They worked towards the fulfilment of the puruṣārthas, the human objectives, in the proper order. They constantly engaged themselves in the acquisition of vedas and sāsāstras, and in the fulfilment of their desires, which were always in conformity with dharma.

सुवृत्ता वृषभाः पुष्टाः सुस्वभावाः सुखोदयाः ॥

suṁvṛttā vṛṣabhāḥ puṣṭāḥ susvabhāvāḥ sukhodayāḥ

Bullocks were well-built and healthy. They had an impressive demeanour and pleasing nature. And, they were a source of happiness for the husbandmen.

अतीव मधुरः शब्दः स्पर्शश्चातिसुखं रसम् ।
रूपं दृष्टिक्षमं रम्यं मनोज्ञं गन्धवद् बभौ ॥

*atīva madhuraḥ śabdaḥ sparśaścātisukhaṁ rasam
rūpaṁ dṛṣṭīkṣamaṁ ramyaṁ manojñaṁ gandhavat babhau*

All objects of senses acquired a pleasing character: *śabda*, sound, became melodious; *sparśa*, touch, became extremely soothing; *rasa*, taste, became highly nourishing; *rūpa*, vision, became pleasing to the eyes and the mind; and *gandha*, smell, became gratifyingly fragrant.

धर्मार्थकामसंयुक्तं मोक्षाभ्युदयसाधनम् ।

प्रह्लादजननं पुण्यं सम्बभूवाथ मानसम् ॥

*dharmārthakāmasamyuktaṁ mokṣābhuyadayasādhanam
prahlādajananaṁ puṇyaṁ sambabhūvātha mānasam*

The mind reached a state of piety and tranquillity and was properly directed towards dharma, artha and kāma; and thus it became the means for achieving perfection in this life and mokṣa beyond.

स्थावरा बहुपुष्पाढ्याः फलच्छायावहास्तथा ।

सुस्पर्शा विषहीनाश्च सुपत्रत्वक्प्ररोहिणः ॥

*sthāvarā bahupuṣpādhyāḥ phalacchāyāvahāstathā
susparśā viṣahīnāśca supatratvakprarohiṇaḥ*

The trees were laden with flowers. They provided abundant fruit and shade. They were pleasant to the touch and were free from all toxins. Their foliage was beautiful, their bark was healthy, and healthy saplings sprouted from them.

मनोऽनुकूलाः सर्वेषां चेष्टा भूस्तापवर्जिता ।

यथा बभूव राजर्षिस्तद्वृत्तमभवद् भुवि ॥

*mano 'nukūlāḥ sarveṣāṃ ceṣṭā bhūstāpavarjitā
yathā babhūva rājaraṣistadvṛttamabhad bhuvi*

Everyone always acted in an agreeable manner. Earth became free of all tāpa, all discomfort. In fact the righteous ways of Yudhiṣṭhira, who was a ṛṣi amongst kings, began to be reflected in the whole world.

सर्वलक्षणसम्पन्नाः पाण्डवा धर्मचारिणः ।

ज्येष्ठानुवर्तिनः सर्वे बभूवुः प्रियदर्शनाः ॥

*sarvalakṣaṇasampannāḥ pāṇḍavā dharmacāriṇaḥ
jyeṣṭhānuvartināḥ sarve babhūvuḥ priyadarśanāḥ*

The younger pāṇḍavas acted according to the wishes of their elder brother, Yudhiṣṭhira. They followed dharma scrupulously, acquired all auspicious characteristics, and became pleasing to all.

सिंहोरस्का जितक्रोधास्तेजोबलसमन्विताः ।

आजानुबाहवः सर्वे दानशीला जितेन्द्रियाः ॥

*siṃhoraskā jitaśrodhāstejobalasanvītāḥ
ājānubāhavaḥ sarve dānaśīlā jiteन्द्रियाḥ*

They, the pāṇḍavas, were lion-chested, they had long arms reaching up to their knees, and they positively glowed with the strength of their intellect and body. They were generous in giving. They had conquered anger. In fact, they had brought all their senses firmly under their control.

तेषु शासत्सु धरणीमृतवः स्वगुणैर्बभुः ।

सुखोदयाय वर्तन्ते ग्रहास्तारागणैः सह ॥

*teṣu śāsatsu dharaṇīmṛtavah svaguṇairbabhuḥ
sukhodayāya vartante grahāstārāṅaṇaiḥ saha*

While they ruled the earth, the seasons remained in their natural aspects, and the stars and planets occupied configurations that boded happiness.

मही सस्यप्रबहुला सर्वरत्नगुणोदया ।

कामधुग्धेनुवद् भोगान् फलति स्म सहस्रधा ॥

*mahī sasyaprabahulā sarvaratnaguṇodayā
kāmadhugdhenuvad bhogān phalati sma sahasradhā*

Earth yielded abundant crops, and all precious stones. She had become the provider of all goodness. Like kāmadhenu, the celestial cow, the earth offered thousands of luxuries in a continuous stream.

मन्वादिभिः कृताः पूर्वे मर्यादा मानवेषु याः ।

अनतिक्रम्य ताः सर्वाः कुलेषु समयानि च ।

अन्वशासन्त राजानो धर्मपुत्रप्रियंकराः ॥

*manvādibhiḥ kṛtāḥ pūrve maryādā mānaveṣu yāḥ
anatikramya tāḥ sarvāḥ kuleṣu samayāni ca
anvaśāsanta rājāno dharmaputrapriyaṅkarāḥ*

The kings, who always endeavoured to please dhramaputra Yudhiṣṭhira, ruled without violating the customs and practices of the kulas and the discipline of public life, that had been evolved since the ancient times by Manu and others.

महाकुलानि धर्मिष्ठा वर्धयन्तो विशेषतः ।

मनुप्रणीतया कृत्वा तेऽन्वशासन् वसुन्धराम् ॥

*mahākulāni dharmisthā vardhayanto viśeṣataḥ
manupranītayā kṛtyā te'nvaśāsan vasundharam*

The kings, established in the ways of dharma, took special care to let all the great kulas flourish. And, they all ruled the earth in accordance with the precepts of Manu.

राजवृत्तिर्हि सा शश्वद् धर्मिष्ठाभून्महीतले ।
प्रायो लोकमतिस्तात राजवृत्तानुगामिनी ॥

*rājavṛttirhi sā śaśvad dharmisthābhūnmahītale
prāyo lokamatistāta rājavṛttānugāminī*

All over the earth the ways of the kings were perpetually and firmly established in dharma. And, as generally happens, people followed the ways of the kings.

एवं भारतवर्षं स्वं राजा स्वर्गे सुरेन्द्रवत् ।

शशास विष्णुना सार्धं गुप्तो गाण्डीवधन्वना ॥

*evaṁ bhāratavarṣaṁ svaṁ rājā svarge surendravat
śaśāsa viṣṇunā sārḍhaṁ gupto gāṇḍīvadhanvanā*

Thus ruled king Yudhiṣṭhira, protected by Arjuna with his gāṇḍīva bow, and blessed with the friendship of Śrīviṣṇu in the form of Śrīkrṣṇa. Yudhiṣṭhira's rule in Bhāratavarṣa was indeed like the rule of indra in the heavens.

The aśvamedhayajña of Yudhiṣṭhira

Preparing for the aśvamedha

Śrīkrṣṇa tarries in Hastināpura till Yudhiṣṭhira's reign is well established in the image of rāmarājya. He spends this time roving around the hills, forests and the pleasant river-banks of the kingdom with his dear friend, Arjuna. And, on the request of Arjuna, he teaches him again, in a different form, what he has already taught him at the beginning of the war through the Bhagavadgītā. The Anugītā that Śrīkrṣṇa teaches now, of course, embodies the same sanātana truths about the universe and man's place and role in it, as are taught in the Bhagavadgītā. But the teachings in Anugītā somehow keep returning to the centrality of anna in the plan of the universe and in human life, and even to the details of how anna

is the cause of both disease and health, of birth and death. It seems as if, at the end of the hectic events of the war, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa wishes to bring the thoughts of everyone back to the essentials of ordinary life, and to re-establish the sanctity of the ordinary, of which *anna* is perhaps the foremost attribute.

It is only after teaching the *Anugītā* to Arjuna, and after reassuring himself that Yudhiṣṭhira's reign is securely established, that Śrīkr̥ṣṇa returns to his people in *Dvārakā*. And before leaving, Śrīkr̥ṣṇa promises to return for the *aśvamedhayajña* of Yudhiṣṭhira.

While Śrīkr̥ṣṇa is away in *Dvārakā*, *Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa* visits Yudhiṣṭhira again and directs him to endeavour to perform the *aśvamedhayajña*. Yudhiṣṭhira and his brothers then decide to undertake the long journey across the *Himālayas* to discover the hidden treasure of king *Marutta*.

Śrīkr̥ṣṇa returns to *Hastināpura* even before the *pāṇḍava* brothers return from their journey. And preparations for the *aśvamedha* begin in earnest as soon as the *pāṇḍavas* arrive with king *Marutta*'s treasure. On the advice of *Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa*, Arjuna is assigned the responsibility of escorting the *yajña* horse through its journey across the earth, *Bhīmasena* and *Nakula* are asked to look after and protect the kingdom during the *yajña*, and *Sahadeva* is charged with the care of the royal family.

Yudhiṣṭhira then sends Arjuna after the *yajña* horse, with the advice that during his campaign across the earth he should try his best to avoid war, and should endeavour to respectfully invite all the kings to the *yajña*.

Re-establishment of cākravartya

Arjuna's journey however leads him into fierce battles with innumerable kings. It seems that none of the *kṣatriyas* whose near and dear are killed in the *Mahābhārata* war is willing to yield primacy to the *pāṇḍavas* without a battle. And the *kirātas*, *mlecchas* and *yavanas*, who are defeated earlier, are impatient to assert themselves again. The battles that Arjuna has to engage in are therefore so numerous that sage *Vyāsa*, the seer of *Mahābhārata*, feels that he cannot possibly describe all of these, and chooses to describe only the ones that happen to be especially fearsome.

The battles that sage *Vyāsa* describes seem to involve the sons and survivors of almost every great king felled in the *Mahābhārata* war. Arjuna has to engage in separate battles with *Sūryavarman*,

Ketuvarmaṅ and Dhṛtavarmaṅ, the heirs to the Trigarta kingdom; with Vajradatta, son of Bhagadatta, the king of Prāgjyotiṣapura; with those of the warriors of Sindhu who survive the death of Jayadratha in the Mahābhārata war; with Meghasam̄dhi, the grandson of Jarāsam̄dha of Magadha; with the son of Śakuni, the king of Gāndhāra; with Citrāṅgada of the Gandharvas; and with the son of Ekalavya, the king of the Niṣādas.

All these battles are life and death struggles. In fact, the battles that the pāṇḍava brothers fight at the time of the rājasuyayajña of Yudhiṣṭhira seem to be almost like friendly contests in comparison with the ones that Arjuna has to fight now. And, it is only because Arjuna is bound by the advice of Yudhiṣṭhira to avoid war, that he does not end up killing any of the sons and survivors of the great kings felled in the Mahābhārata war. Many of the battles are in fact saved from a more serious culmination by the timely intervention of the women of the various rājakulas, who, fearing the end of the kula, themselves arrive on the battlefield and make their men accept the primacy of the pāṇḍavas.

Arjuna himself is almost felled in one such battle. King Babhruvāhana of Maṅipura, who happens to be a son of Arjuna from Citrāṅgadā, fatally hits Arjuna with a sharp arrow, and it requires the extraordinary powers of his Nāga wife, Ulūpi, to revive him.

It is no wonder that when Arjuna finally returns from these battles, he is greatly weakened in body, and he sends a special message to Śrīkṛṣṇa that he should advise Yudhiṣṭhira to make no incautious move during the yajña and to ensure that all the kings who come to the yajña are received in great honour, that all of them are treated as the great amongst the great, and none of them is given any cause for feeling slighted. Because, Arjuna feels, the earth cannot bear another carnage caused by jealousies amongst the kings, or perhaps he feels that it is beyond him now to engage in another war.

The ferocity and number of battles that Arjuna has to engage in throughout his journey across the earth in the wake of Yudhiṣṭhira's aśvamedha horse, probably, explains the urgency with which Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa and Śrīkṛṣṇa insist that Yudhiṣṭhira perform an aśvamedha; their almost impatient exasperation at Yudhiṣṭhira's indolent indulgence in his grief; and the dire premonition of great disasters likely to follow such indolence that both Śrīkṛṣṇa and Draupadī express so strongly.

The great war of Mahābhārata, it seems, has destroyed the consensus around the cākṛavartya of Kuruvamśa. Many of the kings may have been defeated and killed in the war, but their survivors and sons would see no reason to accept the pre-eminence of the pāṇḍavas. The polity is therefore in imminent danger of disintegration, and it is essential that Yudhiṣṭhira undertake the āśvamedhayajña to bring the younger kings and warriors back into the consensual fold of his cākṛavartya. Śrīkr̥ṣṇa, Kṛṣṇadvaipāyanavyāsa, and also Draupadī, see this, and that is perhaps what gives an edge of urgency to their efforts to pull Yudhiṣṭhira out of his self-denying grief.

And, as we have seen, it takes almost all the valour and military skill of Arjuna, and almost the last reserves of his strength, to rebuild the consensus, when Yudhiṣṭhira does finally decide to perform the āśvamedhayajña.

The great annadāna

Preparations for the āśvamedhayajña are complete with the return of Arjuna with the horse. The yajña proper begins almost immediately afterwards, at the beginning of the spring month of Caitra. And once the yajña begins, the stupendous effort that goes into its preparation seems to be forgotten. The great political significance of the enterprise also seems to become irrelevant. And a great annadāna comes to occupy the central place in this probably most remarkable of the great yajñas described in the Indian classical texts. Describing the scenes of the yajña, the narrator returns again and again to the unending feeding that is going on there, and the great display of skills and scholarship that is taking place around that great annadāna:

एवं प्रमुदितः सर्वं पशुगोधनधान्यतः ।
यज्ञवाटं नृपा दृष्ट्वा परं विस्मयमागताः ।
ब्राह्मणानां विशां चैव बहुमृष्टान्नमृद्धिमत् ।
पूर्णे शतसहस्रे तु विप्राणां तत्र भुञ्जताम् ।
दुन्दुभिर्मैघनिर्घोषो मुहुर्मुहुरताडयत ।
विननादासकुञ्चापि दिवसे दिवसे गते ।
एवं स ब्रवृते यज्ञो धर्मराजस्य धीमतः ।

अन्नस्य सुबहून् राजनुत्सर्गान् पर्वतोपमान् ।

दधिकुल्याश्च ददृशुः सर्पिषश्च हृदान् जनाः ।

जम्बूद्वीपो हि सकलो नानाजनपदायुतः ।

राजन्नदृश्यतैकस्थो राज्ञस्तस्य महामखे ॥

*evam pramuditam sarvam paśugodhanadhānyataḥ
yajñāvātām nṛpā dr̥ṣtvā param viśmayamāgatāḥ
brāhmaṇānām viśam caiva bahumr̥ṣṭānnamr̥ddhimat
pūrṇe śatasahasre tu viprānām tatra bhun̄jatām
dudubhirmeghanirghoṣo muhurmuhuratādyata
vinanādāsakṛccāpi divase divase gate
evam sa vavṛte yajño dharmarājasya dhīmataḥ
annasya subahūn rājannutsargān parvatopamān
dadhikulyāśca dadṛśuḥ sarpiṣaśca hradān janāḥ
jambūdvīpo hi sakalo nānājanapadāyutah
rājannadr̥śyataikastho rājñastasya mahāmakhe¹⁵*

The sight of the yajña grounds—overflowing with joy and densely filled with cattle, cows, foodgrains and all kinds of wealth—left the visiting kings lost in great wonder.

There was no end to the food being offered to the brāhmaṇas and vaiśyas. Drums were sounded after feeding a hundred thousand of the revered guests, and the yajña grounds were resounding with the thunderous sounds of the drums being beaten again and again. As the days passed by, the beating of the drums became so frequent that it seemed as if they were being sounded continuously.

Thus proceeded the yajña of dharmarāja Yudhiṣṭhira, whose intellect was always perfectly directed. In that yajña, people saw numerous heaps of food that rivalled the mountains, and they found rivers of curds and lakes of ghee.

And it seemed as if in that great yajña of king Yudhiṣṭhira the whole of Jambūdvīpa with its numerous janapadas had gathered together.

This great annadāna was taking place under the direct supervision of Bhīmasena, the most accomplished cook of the times

¹⁵ Mahā āśvamedhika 85.35–40, p. 6283.

ĀSVAMEDHA OF YUDHIṢṬHIRA

of Mahābhārata, whose reputation indeed rivalled that of the legendary cook, Nala. It was the instruction of Yudhiṣṭhira that Bhīmasena should personally and continuously supervise the feeding. It is no wonder that while he served, nobody was left hungry or in sorrow, none was to be found in a state of destitution or misery, and, in fact, no one present in that yajña felt himself to be merely one amongst the multitude:

न तत्र कृपणः कश्चिन्न दरिद्रो बभूव ह ।
 क्षुधितो दुःखितो वापि प्राकृतो वापि मानवः ।
 भोजनं भोजनार्थिभ्यो दापयामास शत्रुहा ।
 भीमसेनो महातेजाः सततं राजशासनात् ॥

*na tatra kṛpaṇaḥ kaścinna daridro babhūva ha
 kṣudhito duḥkḥhito vāpi prākṛto vāpi mānavaḥ
 bhojanam bhojanārthibhyo dāpayāmāsa śatruhā
 bhīmaseno mahātejāḥ satataṁ rājaśāsanāt*¹⁶

The epic concludes the description of the āsvamedha of Yudhiṣṭhira thus:

मत्तप्रमत्तमुदितं सुप्रीतयुवतीजनम् ।
 मृदङ्गशङ्खनादैश्च मनोरममभूत् तदा ।
 दीयतां भुज्यतां चेष्टं दिवारात्रमवारितम् ।
 तं महोत्सवसंकाशं हृष्टपुष्टजनाकुलम् ।
 कथयन्ति स्म पुरुषा नानादेशनिवासिनः ।
 वर्षित्वा धनधाराभिः कामै रत्नै रसैस्तथा ।
 विपाप्मा भरतश्रेष्ठः कृतार्थः प्राविशत् पुरम् ॥

*matṭapramattamuditaṁ suprītayuvatījanam
 mṛdaṅgaśaṅkhanādaiśca manoramamabhūt tadā
 diyatāṁ bhujyatāṁ ceṣṭam divārātramavāritam
 taṁ mahotsavasamkāśam hṛṣṭapuṣṭajānākulam
 kathayanti sma puruṣā nānādeśanivāsinah
 varṣitvā dhanadhārābhīḥ kāmāi ratnāi rasaistathā
 vipāpmā bharataśreṣṭhaḥ kṛtārthaḥ prāviśat puram*¹⁷

¹⁶ Mahā āsvamedhika 88.23–24, p. 6289.

¹⁷ Mahā āsvamedhika 89.42–44, p. 6293.

YAJÑAS OF THE GREAT KINGS: MAHĀBHĀRATA

The yajñabhūmi was filled with people, who seemed to be intoxicated with pleasure. There were beviés of young women, all of whom were radiating joy. Sounds of the continuously playing drums and conchés made the yajñabhūmi, the yajña grounds, greatly pleasing to the mind.

“Give, keep giving! Serve, keep serving!”, such were the commands that were heard unceasingly through day and night in that yajñabhūmi.

Those, who had come from different countries to that yajña, kept talking for long about the large numbers of healthy and satiated people that filled the yajñabhūmi and the great festivity that it occasioned.

After letting riches, luxuries, precious stones, and food rain in torrents, that foremost among the bhāratas returned to the capital, having accomplished what he had set out to do, and thus having cleansed himself of all sins.