



OUR CULTURAL APPLICATIONS AND PRESENT APPLICATIONS AS PER MAHA BHARATA

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TOPIC: THE YAKSHA PRASHNA AND ITS MORAL SIGNIFICANCE

INTRODUCTION:-

The Mahabharata is not just a chronicle of war and politics, it is the repository of spiritual philosophy, moral reflection and ethical inquiries. Amidst its turbulent narrative, there arises luminous episodes that transcends time and circumstance and imbibe lessons of truth [satya], righteousness [dharma] and self-control [samyama]. One such magnificent incident is the Yaksha Prashna, the profound encounter of Yudhishtira, the eldest of the Pandavas and a mysterious celestial being, the Yaksha.

This episode, subtle yet majestic encapsulates the very soul of Indian culture by the reverence of knowledge and the eternal dialogue of the finite human and the infinite divine.

THE SETTING: ADVERSITY AND EXILE

This incident takes place in the thirteenth year of the Pandava's exile, a period marked by loss, humiliation and introspection. Being wronged in the

game of dice by deceit, the Pandavas wandered in the forests bearing and enduring the dual burdens of exile and humiliation. But, even in despair, Yudhishtira stood in steadfastness of his adherence to Dharma.



On one scorching afternoon, the brothers were hunting for food and water, when thirst began to torment them. At first, Yudhishtira sent Sahadeva in search of water, but he did not return. Further, he sent Nakula, then Arjuna and finally Bhima, but none returned. Anxious and weary, Yudhishtira himself set out to look for them guided by the Silena of the forest.

### THE MYSTERIOUS LAKE AND THE CHALLENGE :-

At last, he reached a shimmering lake surrounded by tranquility. The surface of the water was so still that it mirrored the sky like a plastered crystal. Near its bank, lay the lifeless bodies of his 4 brothers. Grief stricken, he cried in despair but none woke up.

Just, as he was about to scoop water into his hands, an embodied voice echoed through the air;

"Oh son of Dharma, halt! This lake belongs to me. Answer my questions before you drink water. If you disregard them, then you too shall perish them like your brothers."

Yudhishtira, even in despair realized that a celestial being is testing him. So, he replied;

"Oh, noble Yaksha, ask your questions. I shall answer to the best of my understanding."

And thus began the legendary Yaksha Prashna, which is the most embodied and appreciated discourse in the Indian literature.



THE YAKSHA'S QUESTIONS :-

The Yaksha's questions were not of warfare or worldly illusion, they were the deepest truths of the human ideology. Some questions were paradoxical & others were profound.

Yaksha:- What is swifter than air?

Yudhishtira: The Human Mind.

Yaksha:- What is numerous than grass?

Yudhishtira: The human desires & thoughts.

Yaksha: What is true wealth?

Yudhishtira: Contentment and Peace.

Yaksha: What is the strongest in this world?

Yudhishtira: A Mother's love.

Yaksha: Who is truly happy?

Yudhishtira: A man who is satisfied and independent of anyone.

Yaksha: What is the ultimate truth?

Yudhishtira: Even though millions die daily, others live with the mindset that they are immortal.

Yaksha: By what is a man truly alive?

Yudhishtira: By soul. The body is just a clay and the soul animates it.

Every question pierced through the veil of worldly illusion and Yudhishtira's answers justified that he is not controlled by anger, fear, sorrow and dilemma, the four enemies of spiritual discernment.



## THE MORAL VICTORY:-

The Yaksha Surprised by the answers of Yudhishtira, decided to give him a final challenge, he said,

"Oh Yudhishtira, I undoubtedly admire your answers. Now I will restore one of your brothers to life. Whom do you wanna restore."

Yudhishtira guided by truth & fairness replied,

"Oh Yaksha, let Nakula be revived".

The Yaksha Surprised asked,

"Arjuna & Bhima are your most powerful brothers. Why do you want Nakula".

Yudhishtira replied with serene logic,

"I am the son of Kunti and so are Arjuna & Bhima. Nakula & Sahadeva are the sons of Madri. Since, I, Kunti's son is alive, it will just only if either of Madri's sons also survive so that neither of the mother is childless".

On hearing this, the Yaksha revealed his true form. He was lord Yama, the God of death and righteousness and Yudhishtira's divine father. He said,

"Oh my son, you have mesmerized me with <sup>your</sup> ~~the~~ dharma. Because you have chosen righteousness over attachment and relationships, I restore all your brothers back to life."

## PHILOSOPHICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE:-

The Yaksha Prashna is not merely an incident of intellect, it meditates the foundations of the Indian Spirituality. This encapsulates multiple virtues that form the bedrock of Indian culture.



## I) DHARMA - THE SUPREME PRINCIPLE

The answers of Yudhishtira to the Yaksha's questions encapsulate the fact that truth transcends one's own personal gain or loss. Even at times of despair, Yudhishtira followed righteousness and truth which is a life lesson. This is in accordance with a Veda sloka:

"Dharma eva hatu hanti, Dharmo rakshati rakshitaha".  
[One who ~~protects~~ follows is protected by it and one who tries to destroy it is destroyed]

## II) EQUANIMITY AND SELF-RESTRAINT:-

Unlike his brothers, Yudhishtira did not succumb to misfortune. Even in enempharoy crises and unavoidable despair, he gathered his resilience. This is an example of the Indian conviction that, "righteousness always sustains the universe". In any extreme situations, one should always be just and should succumb to Dharma and his duties.

## III) THE TRIUMPH OF SPIRITUAL WISDOM OVER MATERIAL WEALTH

The encapsulation of the Yaksha Prashna is a great example to comment that real happiness does not lie in wealth, status and longevity but in righteousness, truth and inner balance. At the time of inevitable crisis, one should gather their ethical resilience and transcend to Dharma even when circumstances demands compromise.

## CULTURAL REFLECTION: INDIAN ETHOS AND MORALITY:



The Yaksha Prashna encapsulates a uniquely optimistic and induced fact that the wisdom comes through humility, dialogue, exposure and introspection. Unlike the rigid dogmatism of the traditions, the Indian culture has always valued debate as a spiritual exercise and experience. Here Yudhishtira's calm reasoning by divinity examines and symbolises the characteristics of an ideal sadhaka.

### RELIGIOUS CONTEMPLATION AND APPLICATION:-

Following the values given by Yaksha Prashna in real life might take us to extreme levels. Yudhishtira stood steadfast in his adherence to dharma without valuing attachment and relationships. This is somewhat similar to Bhagavad Gita's conception that "He who controls himself from within and he who finds joy within is the ultimate sage". This is also in accordance with the Indian sayings that "Divine control over oneself is the true measure of strength".

### CONCLUSION AND GUIDANCES:-

The benevolent Yaksha Prashna is considered as one of the spiritual, iridescent and most acknowledged jewel of Mahabharata. It enraptivates its learners and listeners to follow Satya and Dharma in their life most benefits. Just as Yudhishtira realised that impartiality and fairness are his duties as a son and as a king, we must also realise that our duties as a son, father, husband, mother, daughter and strictly follow them in an effective and efficient

manner to obtain Moksha. We must try to get rid of hesitation and introspection in our lives towards Yudhishtira got rid of despair and confidently answered to the Yaksha's questions. In places of work and education, we must learn the work ethics and subjugate them as per our duties. Thus, Yudhishtira's relevance from the Yaksha Prashna, encapsulates certain key facts and duties making everyone aware that "Knowledge ennobles, truth sustains and at the end Dharma alone prevails." At the end, one should learn that, intellect without morality is hollow and success without righteousness is perilous.

