Shaunaka said:
Why indeed did King Janamejaya, at the end of the snake sacrifice, ask
Vyasa’s disciple of great austerities to tell him the story of his ancestors, oh
son of Soota? Please tell me that, oh man of great intellect. You are all-
knowing, you see everything, and there is nothing unknown to you.

Soota said:
When the snake sacrifice had been completed, the eighteen ritviks,
exhausted, their eyes weary from smoke, fell asleep.

When all of them thus fell asleep, the son of Parikshit, remembering the
words of the smritis that say that on no account should sages fall asleep at
the end of a sacrifice, sprinkled on those great sages water that had been
sanctified through mantras by rishis and abhicharakas, wishing to wake them
up.
But instead, the sages, in the meantime, became unconscious and entered a long-lasting swoon, seeing which he became sad.

Then the brahmanas present in the assembly told Janamejaya: “Fie upon you, oh king! What you have done is a shame! You have killed the brahmanas. You have just committed eighteen brahmahatyas. Go and visit numerous teerthas and after that you shall be purified.

In the meantime, an incorporeal voice was heard there, which said, as if bringing the king overpowered by worry back to life: “To absolve yourself from the sin of brahmahatya, oh king, make a cloth with a veil and embedded with eighteen precious stones. Wear it and listen to the Bharata, the eighteen-parva story of the Pandavas, here itself, and then you shall be purified.”
Listening to these words and encouraged by the sages, he wore a cloth as instructed by the incorporeal voice and bowing down before Vyasa, the son of Satyavati, asked him to tell him the story of his ancestors. That story I shall now tell you, oh great sages, please listen to it.

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– Translation: Satya Chaitanya