



Chapter 3

The Pandit of Magadh

It was early morning when Shiva left the guesthouse for the Narsimha temple. He was accompanied by Bhagirath, Drapaku, Siamantak, Nandi and Veerbhadra.

Magadh was a far smaller town than Ayodhya. Not having suffered due to commercial or military success and the resultant mass immigration, it remained a pretty town with leafy avenues. While it did not have the awesome organisation of Devagiri or the soaring architecture of Ayodhya, it was not bogged down by the boring standardisation of the Meluhan capital or the grand chaos of the Swadweepan capital.

It did not take Shiva and his entourage more than just half-an-hour to get across to the far side of the city where the magnificent Narsimha temple stood. Shiva entered the compound of the grand shrine. His men waited outside as per his instructions, but only after scoping the temple for suspects.

The temple was surrounded by a massive square garden, a style from Lord Rudra's land, far beyond the western borders of India. The garden had an ingeniously designed gargantuan fountain at its heart and rows of intricate waterways, flowerbeds and grass spread out from the centre in simple, yet stunning symmetry. At the far end stood the Narsimha temple. Built of pure white marble, it had a giant staircase leading up to its main platform, a spire that shot up at least seventy metres and had ornately carved statues of gods and goddesses all across its face. Shiva was sure this awe-inspiring and obviously expensive temple had been built at a time when Magadh had the resources of the entire Swadweep confederacy at its command.

He took off his sandals at the staircase, climbed up the steps and entered the main temple. At the far end was the main sanctum of the temple, with the statue of its god, Lord Narsimha, on a majestic throne. Lord Narsimha had lived many thousands of years ago, before even Lord Rudra's time. Shiva mused that if the Lord's idol was life size, then he must have been a powerful figure. He looked unnaturally tall, at least eight feet, with a musculature that would terrify even the demons. His hands were unusually brawny with long nails, making Shiva think that just the Lord's bare hands must have been a fearsome weapon.

But it was the Lord's face that stunned Shiva. His mouth was surrounded by lips that were large beyond imagination. His moustache hair did not flow down like most men, but came out in rigid tracks, like a cat's whiskers. His nose was abnormally large, with sharp eyes on either side. His hair sprayed out a fair distance, like a mane. It almost looked as though Lord Narsimha was a man with the head of a lion.

Had he been alive today, Lord Narsimha would have been considered a Naga by the Chandravanshis and hence feared, not revered. Don't they have any consistency?

'Consistency is the virtue of mules!'

Shiva looked up, surprised how someone had heard his thoughts.

A Vasudev Pandit emerged from behind the pillars. He was the shortest Pandit that Shiva had met so far; just a little over five feet. But in all other aspects, his appearance was like every other Vasudev, his hair snowy white and his face wizened with age. He was clad in a saffron *dhobi* and *angvastram*.

'How did you...?'

'That is not important,' interrupted the Pandit, raising his hands, not finding it important to explain how he discerned Shiva's thoughts.

That conversation... another time... great Neelkanth.

Shiva could have sworn he heard the Pandit's voice in his head. The words were broken, like the voice was coming from a great distance. Very soft and not quite clear. But it was the Pandit's voice. Shiva frowned, for the Pandit's lips had not moved.

Oh Lord Vasudev... this foreigner's...impressive.

Shiva heard the Pandit's voice again. The Pandit was smiling slightly. He could tell that the Neelkanth could hear his thoughts.

'You're not going to explain, are you?' asked Shiva with a smile.

No. You're certainly... not ready... yet.

The Pandit's appearance may have been like other Vasudevs, but his character was clearly different. This Vasudev was straightforward to the point of being rude. But Shiva knew the apparent rudeness was not intended. It was just a reflection of the mercurial nature of this particular Pandit's character.

Maybe the Pandit was a Chandravanshi in another life.

'I'm a Vasudev,' said the Pandit. 'There is no other identity I carry today. I'm not a son. Or husband. Or father. And, I'm not a Chandravanshi. I am only a Vasudev.'

A man has many identities, Panditji .

The Pandit narrowed his eyes.

'Were you born a Vasudev?'

'Nobody is born a Vasudev, Lord Neelkanth. You earn it. There is a competitive examination, for which Suryavanshis or Chandravanshis can appear. If you pass, you cease to be anything else. You give up all other identities. You become a Vasudev.'

'But you were a Chandravanshi before you earned your right to be a Vasudev,' smiled Shiva, as though merely stating a fact.

The Pandit smiled, acknowledging Shiva's statement.

Shiva had many questions he wanted answered. But there was a most obvious one for this particular Vasudev.

'A few months back, the Vasudev Pandit at the Ramjanmabhoomi temple had told me that my task is not to destroy evil, but to find out what evil is,' said Shiva.

The Vasudev Pandit nodded.

'I'm still digesting that idea. So my question is not on that,' continued Shiva. 'My query is about something else he said. He had told me that the Suryavanshis represent the masculine life force and the Chandravanshis represent the feminine. What does this mean? Because I don't think it has anything to do with men and women.'

'You can't get more obvious than that, my friend! You're right, it has nothing to do with men and women. It has to do with the way of life of the Suryavanshis and Chandravanshis.'

'Way of life?'



'Prince Ugrasen has been killed?' asked Bhagirath.

'Yes, Your Highness,' said Siamantak softly. 'The news is from a source I trust implicitly.' 'Lord Ram help us! This is all we need. King Mahendra will think Ayodhya arranged the assassination. And you know how vengeful he can get.'

'I hope that he doesn't think that, Your Highness,' said Siamantak, 'It's the last thing we need.'

'Their spies have been following us,' said Nandi. 'I'm sure they have a report of our whereabouts and movements since we have entered the city. We cannot be blamed.'

'No, Nandi,' said Bhagirath. 'King Mahendra can also think that we hired assassins to do his son in. By the way, where are the spies?'

'Two of them,' said Drapaku, pointing with his eyes in the direction of the spies. 'They

are quite amateurish. 'That tree doesn't really hide them!'

Bhagirath smiled slightly.

'It could be Surapadman,' said Siamantak. 'Everyone in Swadweep is aware that the younger Magadh Prince is ruthless. He could have arranged the killing to claim the throne.'

'No,' said Bhagirath, narrowing his eyes. 'Surapadman is by far the more capable son of King Mahendra. For all his faults, the king of Magadh does respect capability, unlike some other rulers I know. Surapadman practically has the throne. He doesn't need to kill his brother for it.'

'But how come there is no public mourning as yet?' asked Drapaku.

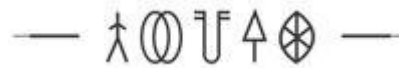
'They're keeping the news secret,' said Siamantak. 'I don't know why.'

'Maybe to arrange a credible story to give at least some respectability to Ugrasen's memory,' said Bhagirath. 'That idiot was quite capable of stumbling upon his own sword!'

Siamantak nodded before turning towards Drapaku. 'Why does the Lord want to spend so much time in the temple alone? It's quite unorthodox.'

'That's because the Lord himself is quite unorthodox. But why are we keeping his identity secret in Magadh?'

'Not everyone who believes in the legend is a follower of the Neelkanth, Drapaku,' said Bhagirath. 'The present king of Magadh does not follow the Neelkanth. And the people here are loyal followers of the King. The Lord's identity is best kept undisclosed here.'



'You know what makes humans special when compared to animals?' asked the Pandit.

'What?' asked Shiva.

'The fact that we work together. We collaborate to achieve combined goals. We pass on knowledge to each other, so every generation begins its journey from the shoulders of the previous generation and not from scratch.'

'I agree. But we are not the only ones who work in a pack. Other animals, like the elephants or lions, do it as well. But nobody does it on the scale that we do.'

'Yes, that's true. But it's not always about collaboration. It is sometimes about competition as well. It's not always about peace. Many times, it's also about war.'

Shiva smiled and nodded.

'So the key point is that we humans are nothing individually,' said the Pandit. 'Our power flows from all of us. From the way all of us live together.'

'Yes,' agreed Shiva.

'And if we have to live together, we must have a way of life, right?'

'Yes. Some method for all of us to collaborate or compete with each other.'

'Most people believe there are many hundred ways of life in the world,' said the Pandit. 'Every civilisation thinks that it is unique in some way.'

Shiva nodded in agreement.

'But if you actually distil the way people live, there are only two ways: The Masculine and the Feminine.'

'And what do these ways of life mean?'

'The masculine way of life is "life by laws". Laws that could be made by a great leader, perhaps a Vishnu like Lord Ram. Or laws that come down from a religious tradition. Or collective laws decreed by the people themselves. But the masculine way is very clear. Laws are unchangeable and they must be followed rigidly. There is no room for ambiguity. Life is predictable because the populace will always do what has been ordained. Meluha is a perfect example of such a way of life. It is obvious, therefore, why the people of this way of life live by the code of Truth, Duty and Honour. Since that's

what they need to be successful in this system.'

'And the feminine?'

'The feminine way of life is "life by probabilities". There are no absolutes. No black or white. People don't act as per some preordained law, but based on probabilities of different outcomes perceived at that point of time. For example, they will follow a king who they think has a higher probability of remaining in power. The moment the probabilities change, their loyalties do as well. If there are laws in such a society, they are malleable. The same laws can be interpreted differently at different points of time. Change is the only constant. Feminine civilisations, like Swadweep, are comfortable with contradictions. And the code for success in such a system? Unmistakeably, Passion, Beauty and Freedom.'

'And no one way of life is better?'

'Obviously. Both types of civilisations must exist. Because they balance each other.'

'How?'

'You see, a masculine civilisation at its peak is honourable, consistent, reliable and spectacularly successful in an age suitable for its particular set of laws. There is order and society moves coherently in a preordained direction. Look at the Suryavanshis today. But when masculine civilisations decline, they cause horrible turmoil, becoming fanatical and rigid. They will attack those that are different, try to "convert" them to their "truth", which will lead to violence and chaos. This especially happens when an age changes. Change is difficult for the masculine. They will cling even more rigidly to their laws, even though those laws may be unsuitable for the new age. Masculine civilisations enforce order which is welcome when they are strong, but is suffocating when they decline. The Asuras, who were followers of the masculine way, had faced similar problems when their power started waning.'

'So when fanaticism causes rebellions born of frustration, the openness of the feminine brings a breath of fresh air.'

'Exactly. The feminine way incorporates all differences. People of varying faiths and belief can coexist in peace. Nobody tries to enforce their own version of the truth. There is a celebration of diversity and freedom, which brings forth renewed creativity and vigour causing tremendous benefits to society. The Devas, who were followers of the feminine way, brought in all this when they defeated the Asuras. But as it happens with too much freedom, the feminine civilisations overreach into decadence, corruption and debauchery.'

'Then the people once again welcome the order of the masculine.'

'Yes. The feminine Deva way was in decline during Lord Ram's times. The country was corrupt, immoral and depraved. People clamoured for order and civility. Lord Ram ushered that in as he created a new masculine way of life. Very intelligently, to prevent unnecessary rebellions, he never decried the Deva way. He just called his rule a new way of life: the Suryavanshi path.'

'But can you really say the masculine and the feminine only exist at the level of civilisations?' asked Shiva. 'Doesn't it really exist within every man and woman? Doesn't everyone have a little bit of the Suryavanshi and a bit of the Chandravanshi within themselves? Their relative influence within the individual changing, depending upon the situations he faces?'

'Yes, you are right. But most people have a dominant trait. Either the masculine or the feminine.'

Shiva nodded.

'The reason why you need to know the two ways of life is because once you have discovered evil, you would have to tailor your message depending on which people you speak to. You will have to convince the Suryavanshis in one manner and the Chandravanshis in an altogether different manner in the battle against evil.'

‘Why would I need to convince them? I don’t think either the Suryavanshis or Chandravanshis lack in courage.’

‘It has nothing to do with courage, my friend. Courage is only needed once the war begins. To begin with you need to persuade the people to embark upon the war against evil. You will need to influence them to give up their attachment to evil.’

‘Attachment! To evil!’ cried a flabbergasted Shiva. ‘Why in the name of the holy lake would anyone be attached to evil?’

The Pandit smiled.

Shiva sighed. ‘Now what? What’s the explanation for stopping the conversation at this moment? I’m not ready? The time is not right?’

The Pandit laughed. ‘I can’t explain it to you right now, O Neelkanth. You would not understand. And when you discover evil, you would not need my explanation in order to understand. Jai Guru Vishwamitra. Jai Guru Vashisht.’