Yamuna served as a natural boundary dividing Himachal and Uttarakhand when Uttarakhand state was born. On its banks, while en ‘route to Tehri region from the capital city of Dehradun is a small village. A few miles from here into the interior, Yamuna hits the plains and sheds its turbulence becoming more quiet and mellow. Primarily being an agrarian society, paddy and mustard are planted in abundance here. Despite of its proximity to the Doon valley, summers are marked by simmering heat. Literacy mission reached here long ago, but the people are still reluctant of letting go of the yoke of the traditions that they have been carrying from ages. Any talk of modernization of the methods falls on deaf ears. Still, the village is progressing, though slowly. Change takes time. The village is one of the primary suppliers of dairy products; milk primarily, to the nearby town. On the banks belonging to this village, there stands an old banyan tree, magnificent in size and age. A platform for resting has been made around the wide trunk of this tree. Panchayat sessions are convened under the shade of this tree, just like it has been since ages.

The schools in the state have closed owing to summer holidays. Kesar has come to his grandma’s place along with his mother for a few days. He must have been around 10 years old, brought up in Dehradun, mischievous and full of energy. Most of the family members come to the village at this time of the year. This is how the harmonious relations are maintained in the family even though the joint family system gave way to nuclear families a long time ago. Every night after dinner, all siblings gather around their grandmother to listen stories. Grandma narrates stories taken from Panchtantra, Jataka Tales, or the tales from Indian mythology. Of all these, Kesar likes the stories of Krishna and Prahlaad in particular.

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Members of the family used to take an afternoon nap after lunch. Kesar pretended to sleep, waiting for the time when his mother would be deep asleep, the time when he would sneak out of the house. But sometimes, sleep really did play a spoil sport when he’d wake up only after sunset. Village children would flock their herds from the grasslands to the river at this time of the day on their journey home. While the herds drank and bathed in the cool waters, children played around with water among the animals or under the great banyan. Some more adventurous types including Kesar found climbing the tree more thrilling. A child’s innocence is mesmerizing. He can easily believe that while he shuts his own eyes, the world cannot see him either. Deception and tricking are the arts of wheeler dealers, a child knows none. A child’s only concern is his sport and its fulfillment. Mother knows it all, and yet plays dumb, a little out of affection, and a little out of tiredness from the daily routine since early morning. She smiles inwardly, and simultaneously chides herself for letting her son out at peak noon.

A little distance from home, Kesar makes a run for the river. The cool shade of the banyan and the coolness of the water greet him. Elders generally have a spot a little upwards along the river shore from the place where animals drink water to carry on with their washing and bathing. But children don’t understand these idiosyncrasies. The grab the buffalos by the tails and enter the waters there itself with their herds and play in muddy waters. Kesar, belonging to a town has learnt lessons in hygiene from a very small age. But sometimes, he too sheds those lessons and joins his friends in the little pool party. Mother might not know this.

Grandma narrates that Krishna was basically a *gwala (*herdsman). He used to take lots of cows and buffalos to the jungle to graze every day. And while others carried sticks to guide the herd, he carried a flute. The music that he played was so enchanting that not only the herds, but the *Gopis* of *Brindavan* could not resist their legs from going unto him. Never did an animal go missing. And whilst all this, Krishna (affectionately called Kanha) used to play the flute, on some high branch. The void of the flute was filled in Kesar’s imagination by whistle; he learnt it from his local friends.

There is no restraint on the gallop of a child’s imagination. It can take any form like wet clay in the hands of a sculptor. Kesar found semblance to Kanha in his granny’s stories. He felt that Krishna must have been of his age when he did all what Grandma told. As a result, Kesar put a face to every single character in her stories. His mother was Yashoda, and gopis were his friends from school. And you know who must have been Krishna, right?

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“Kesar, get down fast, or else you’ll have consequences”, Mother called out angrily while she approached the tree. Evening was the time when the ladies from the village would set foot out of the houses again to get cool water from the hand pump installed near the banyan tree. This too was more of a tradition than compulsion as every house had water supply, but the water tanks got heated up in the afternoon sun. Soon after Kesar starts to climb down with little haste, her heart sinks and she pleads him to be careful, “watch out son, you’ll get hurt, be careful”. The moment Kesar’s feet touch the ground, Ma is all over him again. Kesar is confused with the juxtaposition of his mother’s behavior and her words. On one hand she is verbally beating him up with everything she can hurl, and at the same time her hands are caressing him with feathers touch, examining, searching for the smallest bruise on his tender skin.

Kesar tries to pacify her, “Ma, I did not bruise myself, I am fin…”, but she cuts his explanation short with her scarf “Hush, you’ve grown too big now hmm? Trying to cajole your Mother? Look at you, skin has started to darken due to the sun.” Kesar is too young to understand this coloration and what differences it could mean. He can only think of one question, “But Ma, Krishna too was dark colored, wasn’t he?” Mother smiles and answers, “He’s the lord of the world, can do anything, can be anything, but you are my son, right?” Kesar is naïve, unsatisfied, still. His heart has a muse, “Kanha is also dark, and I am dark too”.

Granny once told that Krishna had a *sudarshan chakra*, it was his weapon to slay devils. And while she went on with the fable, turnwise, she put the lid of a jute basket on every child’s fingers and set it into rotation, just like the sudarshan chakra. Kesar was happy beyond limits on having found such a wonderful toy. He had seen school seniors flipping and rotating notebooks and registers on their fingers like this and it was natural for a young inquisitive mind to imitate. But his father had stopped him when he tried to do it at home explaining that *Ma Saraswati* resided in books and copies and we should not disrespect them. Kesar understood and never repeated it. Call it irony or call it beauty, but we have a way of thanking and respecting each and every resource in our prayers and practice, making them holy, Godly. After having played with his Sudarshan Chakra and lots of fidgeting and fighting with the cousins for it, he finally kept it back. Once when Kesar and his mother were having street food, the hawker offered it on paper plates, that he made by tearing pages from the magazines and books he had. Kesar had innocently asked his mother, “Wasn’t he disrespecting Ma Saraswati?” Ma was tongue tied; he still remembered something which had certainly slipped out of her memory.

The mischief’s Kahna did in his childhood, were an imminent part of Grandma’s stories. How he used to steal freshly prepared butter from pots and how Ma Yashoda had tied him to a pillar so that he’d learn a lesson. She narrated how his menace grew to every household and when every mother in Gokul could not risk keeping their butter pots in their verandahs, they started hanging it from the roof supports. Kesar knew that stealing is bad, so he asked for butter instead, directly. He found the freshly curdled butter rather insipid and insisted on having a little salt on it and liked it with roti.

His holidays are almost over. Kesar is going back to the city now, with stories in head, of Krishna. He has a friend, and he wants to be like him. Slowly, Kesar would grow up, and the stories will fade. He’ll forget the Krishna who is of his age, and has fun like him. He’ll remember a Krishna we all know of. However, in the corners of his brain, these stories and fantasies would lay dormant, until next time, when they come around again. They will come around, always have, always will.

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