Sootputra: The Unsung Hero

Chapter 19 Anga:

Shaking feet's were enough of a problem, now there were people gathering all around the yagna area. I was thanking the soldiers that were holding them at bay but still to see so many people only for me was a little unnerving. I haven’t been the talk of the town at any point of my life except maybe at my birth when they must have seen a mysterious boy with golden armor and beads in his ears. Ever since that day people tried to avoid me and I too kept my social circle as narrow as possible.

But now that was going to change. The crowd had encircled the whole area around the ceremonial yagna and the gate of the palace. Duryodhan was taking care of the crowd and only let a few at a time in to the specified area in the garden for the food and gold distribution at the end of the ritual.

Heaps of gold and couple of dozen plates of fruits on silvery platter were laid out on the nearby table and more were still coming from the palace kitchen. Wondering how much wealth will be distributed today amongst the people was not helping in any way to make my mind come at ease.

The Anga looked beautiful when we saw it from the horizon as our horses approached the kingdom. The main road which we took was filled with shops and houses. The smell of hot and sweet snacks, the sound of hens and buffaloes, The cracklings of iron as the blacksmith hammered it in shape and the houses as they shimmered in the golden glitter of the rising sun was just beautiful. We brush passed the slum areas, though my eyes did catch a house with a caved in roof in there somewhere. But the highlight of it all was the palace. It wasn’t as big as hastinapur but my rest of the life was going to be spent here so My heart was neglecting to find any defects even if there were some. The white-blue marbles on the wall, big-polished staircases and three floored structure was a little daunting at first but also exhilarating. My heart pumped on the very thought of living here.

Though I haven’t seen the living space from the inside yet, my mind didn’t make any expectations. Anything in a palace was already going to be better than a house in a village or an Ashram. My main worry was the throne room and the golden helmet laced with a blue gem in front, that was sitting right next to the pandit(priest), who was chanting and preparing for the Rajyabhishek(Crowning ritual). The blue gem felt like an eye that saw through my bluffing clam and concealed composure. It knew the fear, which was because of it. It knew my legs were shaking because they were afraid to be crushed by the burden that was soon going to be bestowed on my head. The weight of the crown was so much that for a moment, the ground beneath it cracked but then the illusion went away and there it was again, staring at me with its single blue eye.

My eyes lit with a little hope as Vrushali came and laid two plates in front of the pandit. One was filled with fruits and the other with the required ingredients and items for the ritual. It had a small golden empty bowl, a silver jug filled with water and a leaf on which the immolating items were laid on. My eyes looked at her, I’m sure she must have felt it as the pandit(priest) also started looking at me. But she didn’t fret a look. She just did the step by step preparations as the pandit told her. She poured a little ghee in the bowl and handed it to me as per told.

With one hand on the bowl and other tight on her wrist just to get her attention, for her to look at me just once. See how vulnerable I feel. I just need a reassuring face. A face that say’s I’m with you. A smile from anybody that says I have your back. But she didn’t. After handing me the bowl she turned her face back and stood there. Perhaps she was enjoying this scenario. But it wasn’t fun for me.

“What are you standing here for?” Said the priest

“Go bring the rest of the ingredients and also the spares.”

“Yes, Oh wise one.” Vrushali said and left at once.

My face looked around but found no one, It’s as if I was deserted by everyone. The nearest people to me were the Brahmins, soldiers, Duryodhan and the little crowd who Duryodhan let in for the ritual.

“Bhai, Bhai, BHAI……….” In all of this commotion there was a faint sound of familiarity. Looked around but saw no one. Then at the gate he was, Shon. He was standing outside of it.

“Shon…..” I don’t know what the bhramin said when I got up and lept towards the gate to pull my brother in. But when I returned, his face was red as hot coal. As if his foot has been crushed by someone. He didn’t said a word and went to continue with the Rajyabhishek.

“Where have you been?

I was looking all around for you?”

“Soldiers stopped me. They didn’t believed when I said you were my brother.”

“Who did that? ” I whispered to Shon

“Bhai, let it go.

It’s done. Besides look at that gem on the crown. It’s so huge. Maa would’ve fainted seeing it.”

“Sho…..”

“What?”

A familiar face calmed my heart. The fierce beating went down. The crown also lost its weight significantly.

“So, everything ready?” Duryodhan was here. I must have mistaken it but for a second but I thought I saw his lips turn when he eyes fell on Shon.

“Yes, everything is ready. We were just waiting for you as your instruction.” I said to him

“Okay, then let’s get started already.”

Bhrahmin started his chanting and lit the fire in the center. The ghee soaked wood crackled as it turned to ash in it. I did every step as told by the Bhramin and poured ghee with every chant. Suddenly there was shouting coming from behind me. There was a small commotion in the crowd present in the palace garden. The smiling faces from a moment ago just turned to fear and cautious ones.

“Angraaj, Angraaj, …….” A small man with a full grown beard and a frail body was calling my name from just a few feet's away when few of the guards caught him. He struggled to get loose but there hold was tight as they dragged him away.

“Stop, let him come.”

“But Karna, There is a pooja going on. You can’t stop it.”

“I’m not, I want to hear what he wants.”

The frail man came running and fell on my feet. He didn’t needed to do that so I told him to stand up. The ghee bowl sitting in my left hand was still half full as I stood to meet him in height.

“My family is from the slums. We are just a small group poor people.

And my daughter is now the age of marriage but I don’t have enough gold to give in dowry.

Please oh new King, I ask you to -----”

“Here you go.”

My left hand went for him. The hand which a second ago held the golden bowl filled with ghee was now empty. I handed him the golden bowl and told him to sell it.

“You’ll get much for this.

Use it well.”

“Angraaj, You can’t do that.”

The Bhramin was now up too.

“Why?”

“Karna, Acharya is right.” Durudhan said.

“Charity is always given with right hand.

For god’s sake, the left hand is use to wipe your ass.

It is cursed and dirty for any good deed.”

I stood their contemplating the words of the Wise one. Every word he said, understandable and yet It didn’t made sense to me. If the situation was different then I would’ve done it the correct way. But in this scenario my actions seemed right to me.

“How is this bad? ” I said to him

“Isn’t selfless charity more important than wondering from which hand it is given.

Your feelings and thought might change by the time you start to wonder about these things.

You might start to weigh your charity. You might start to think if I am giving less or more. Is it appropriate or should I take some away.

That is not a selfless.

When you add a value to the charity it becomes a bit……….. Selfish.

My hand only had the bowl. So I gave the bowl of ghee.” I said to the Bhramin

“Is it enough baba?” I asked the man holding the bowl.

“Yess, more than enough my king.

We would not have to beg for a month now.

Thank you.” His face lit with a light. The yellow crooked teeth showed as he gave a smile. He gave another thanks and left or more precisely to say ran towards the gate. Probably to his family.

“Karna, What are you doing?

You are arguing with Acharya.

That’s--------”

Acharya’s hand went up to stop Duryodhan. A storm was going to come from his mouth. I can feel it in my gut. Maybe another curse was on my way.

“Wow, Karna. Amazing.” A jolt went down my spine after hearing those words. His eyes widened as he scanned my face. He blessed me with eternal youth.

“Every word you spoke is right.”

“But Guru---”

“He is right Duryodhan, Charity should be first and foremost …… Selfless.

Then the rest of the things come.

That’s why a charity of a bronze coin and a gold coin comes equal in value because two people selflessly gave them according to their capability.”

“You’ve found a great king for Anga, Duryodhan.

He is unbiased and his judgment is strong.

I was a bit worried by the way he acted nervously throughout the yagna.

But now I can say that even in great adversities he will stand tall.”

“I give you my blessing. Walk tall my king.”

“My king?” I said to the Bhramin while touhing his feet's.

“Yess. I live in this city. I am its pandit for all its ritual.

And one of your patrons.”

………………………….

The Rajyaabhishek was done and we were now standing in the throne room. ||

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Description of the throne room

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As I ascended towards the throne my hearts bounced like a fish out of water. Each upward step on the stairs felt heavier than the last. I faked a smile on my face to hide my true emotions. The sweat was starting to show. Clenching my fist around the handle of the sword I took every slow step.

After reaching the throne, I sat on it and in front of me saw patrons lined up behind the ministers of the court. The servants(daasi’s) and soldiers came hurried in a pattern around me. Soldiers stood behind me while the daasies stood to the side carrying a garland and the crown. The pandit came to and stopped at near me. After a bow he spoke:

“People, of Anga, today is an Auspicious day for us all.

The city which was under the command of Hastinapur will have a King of its own.

We are proud to have a king as just and capable as Karna.

We know that under his rule the capital Champapuri and this country will flourish and stay protected from all the evil of the outside world.

Every citizen, man, Woman, Child will be happy to call him Angraaj.

Our New KING Angraaj Karna.”

Too much, too much, too much. It’s too much. Why are they still standing? Why are they bowing? Why do their faces have that smile? I am going to be their king. A Sootputra is going to rule over Anga. Why are they silent? I expected someone in them will stand up and shout ‘I will not take a Sootputra as my king.’ But no one did. Blood must burst from my veins. The sweating hands were grabbing the handles of the throne so hard that they left their impression on it.

Duryodhan presented me with the garland and the pandit bestowed the golden crown on my head. Its weight was a little lighter than what I imagined during the yagna. My legs were not shaking but my mind was. The blurry vision comes and goes from time to time. The clapping and the sound of whispers and gossip stopped as Duryodhan’s hand went in the air. Every one suddenly fell silent. Their gazes upon me. I knew what they were waiting for but wished that they should just continue talking amongst them. I strengthend my heart and stoned my will.

“People of Anga.

I am your new king.

My Name?

Karna.

The protector and guardian of this city and the kingdom of Anga.

Only my rule will be allowed in this kingdom and everyone will be bound by it.

Under my rule no harm will come to Anga.

The punishment for breaking those rules, will be severe but equal for all. Be it either a slave or a king.

This kingdom will welcome all people, No one will be shunned here.

Every man will be my father or brother, Every woman will be my mother or sister, Every child will be a son or nephew.

Your problems will become mine, so don’t hesitate because if you do, you will betray me.

I’m here for you till my last breath.

|”

There was no sound a, maybe I went too far. I should’ve toned down a little. Then suddenly a cheer of and claps came from the crowd. Shon was also standing and clapping. Vrushali standing at the side gave a faint smile in her manner. Duryodhan hugged me and the ministers stood up to bow.

My head still couldn’t roll around the fact that I was a king now. Like a genuine king. The King of Anga.

The Angraaj.

This was something the childhood me would’ve never expected but now it had happened. Were my parents praying for me? They must have, cause for the first time the fear that had gripped me for the last couple of days left it grasp and I was feeling to smile. To cry the tears of while joy. The thumping had finally stopped. My shaking legs now felt that they had no energy to stand. I needed a chair to sit on. Fortunately I had just got one exclusively for me. Looking around I didn’t found Shon. My eyes laid on Vrushali, though we had our fights, She was crying while grinning. Her tears were self-effacing. Enough of a proof that she was indeed sharing in with me in this moment.

At that time I thought that I had already achieved what I set out for. Name, Fame. Kingdom, Crown. Everything. My heart was light like a feather. It felt saturated. Like I didn’t wanted anything else.

But at that time I didn’t knew that hearts can change, feelings can change. There is something that I want, something that was as of yet unknown to me. The mystery that had always pegged me for life, The kavach and kundals were only the beginning, this was related to my origins…….To my birth.