

The Sword and the Saffron

Tilak

Memory-based biography

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Chapter 1:

Foundations of Tradition

Growing up in a Rajputana Hindu family was like being enveloped in a tapestry of history and tradition, each thread vibrant with stories of valor and strength. The air in our ancestral Haveli was always thick with a sense of pride, a constant reminder of the legacy we were part of. But if there was one day that truly brought this to life, it was Vijaya Dashami. This day was more than just a festival; it was a sacred reconnection with our warrior roots.

I vividly remember being about ten years old, standing beside my father in our courtyard. He towered over me in his crisp white kurta, his safa wrapped in the majestic hues of saffron and gold. These colors symbolized the spirit of our lineage—courage and honor—and they made my young heart swell with pride. Vijaya Dashami was a day of tradition, a day when the oldest sword from our family heritage—a slightly rusted but beautifully engraved talwar—was brought out from the wooden trunk in our prayer room.

The Shastra Puja, or worship of weapons, was a solemn ritual that my grandfather performed with great reverence. He would place a marigold garland around the sword's hilt and smear it with a saffron tilak. I can still hear his voice in my mind, "You are a Rajput, not just by blood, but by your courage and honour." His eyes, a mix of sternness and kindness, told tales that words could not. This sword, he would say, protected our people. Our values must do the same.

After the Puja, we would proceed to the courtyard where a bonfire awaited us, representing the burning of Ravana's ego. My father would lift the sword high, performing a ceremonial move that was slow and graceful, an act filled with respect rather than aggression. It was a tribute to our past, our dharma, and our identity. The air was electric with the hymns of devotion, and as saffron tilaks were applied to our foreheads, I felt a symbolic mark of strength and devotion take hold.

The women of the family played their part in this mosaic of tradition by lighting earthen lamps and humming folk songs of valor. The songs were like whispers from our ancestors, wrapping us in their warmth and wisdom. They prepared dishes rich with ghee, served with pride and a deep sense of belonging. Each bite was a taste of history, a reminder of who we were and where we came from.

Even today, the tradition continues. My grandfather may no longer be with us, but my father has taken up the mantle, holding the sword with that same reverence. I stand beside him, older and taller now, yet the awe I felt as a child remains unchanged. There's an unspoken understanding that one day, I will be the one holding that sword, with my children watching me, just as I watched my father and grandfather before him.

It's not just about the sword or the ritual; it's about the stories, the respect, the silent vow to never let our roots fade. That's the true power of tradition. It binds generations together, not merely through duty, but through love and honor. As I reflect on these memories, I realize how deeply they have shaped my identity. They are the foundation upon which my life's journey is built, a constant reminder of the legacy I carry and the future I must honor.

