



# KRISHNA YOGESHVARA

BOOK 2 OF THE LORD KRISHNA TRILOGY

---

## THE DICE OF KUTIL DHARMA

---

SANJAY DIXIT

BLOOMSBURY

KRISHNA YOGESHVARA

BOOK 2 OF THE LORD KRISHNA TRILOGY

वसुदेवसुतं देवं कृष्णचाणूरमर्दनम्  
देवकी परमानन्दं कृष्णंवन्दे जगद्गुरुम्

## KRISHNA YOGESHVARA

---

THE DICE OF KUTIL DHARMA

---

यत्र योगेश्वरः कृष्णो यत्र पार्थो धनुर्धरः  
तत्र श्रीर्विजयोर्भूतिर्ध्रुवानीतिर्मतिर्मम

*Sanjay Dixit*

B L O O M S B U R Y  
NEW DELHI • LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • SYDNEY



# CONTENTS

[Foreword by Dr David Frawley.](#)

[Introduction](#)

## **PART I**

- [1. The Abduction](#)
- [2. The Battle of Narmada](#)
- [3. Prabhasa Tirtha](#)
- [4. The Gopis](#)
- [5. Lessons in Love](#)
- [6. The Pandavas](#)
- [7. The Departure](#)

## **PART II**

- [8. Jatil Muni](#)
- [9. Shakuni](#)
- [10. Kanika](#)
- [11. Chandrachuda](#)
- [12. Karna](#)
- [13. Dhritarashtra](#)

## **PART III**

- [14. The Graduation](#)
- [15. Offering to the Guru](#)
- [16. The Rescue](#)

- [17. The Return to Mathura](#)
- [18. Jarasandha Returns](#)
- [19. Rishi Parashurama](#)
- [20. Tantra Lessons](#)
- [21. Gomantaka](#)
- [22. Karavirapura](#)

#### **PART IV**

- [23. The Poisoning](#)
- [24. The Sinister Plot](#)
- [25. Varanavat](#)
- [26. The Ten Commandments](#)
- [27. Hidimb](#)
- [28. Ekachakra](#)

#### **PART V**

- [29. Revati](#)
- [30. Kushasthali](#)
- [31. Kundinapura](#)
- [32. Dvaraka](#)
- [33. Kalayavana](#)

#### **PART VI**

- [34. Rukmini's Wedding](#)
- [35. Syamantaka Mani](#)
- [36. Satyabhama](#)
- [37. The Eye of the Fish](#)
- [38. Indraprastha](#)
- [39. The Two Wrestlers](#)
- [40. Yogeshvara Krishna](#)

#### **PART VII**

- [41. Narakasura](#)
- [42. The Conspiracy](#)
- [43. The Dice of Kutil Dharma](#)
- [44. The Disrobement](#)
- [45. The Exile](#)

46. [Yaksha Prashna](#)

47. [Incognito](#)

## **PART VIII**

48. [The Unarmed Mentor](#)

49. [The Negotiator](#)

50. [The Inverted Tree](#)

51. [The Song Celestial](#)

*Notes*

*About the Author*



## Foreword

The figure of Shri Krishna as a great king and yogi, guiding the chariot of the warrior-prince Arjuna on the critical battlefield of Kurukshetra, is probably the dominant cultural image of India and Hindu Dharma—an iconic representation of the battle for truth and justice within and around us.

Shri Krishna is the only human figure ever designated as the Yogeshvara or the Lord of Yoga. He is also called the Yogavatara, the Avatāra of Yoga, emphasising his Divine role as a profound world teacher and his many-sided explication of the path of Yoga to union with the Divine and Self-realisation.

The Bhagavad Gita remains the most commonly studied book on Hinduism in the world, extending to the global Yoga movement that looks to the Gita for guidance in higher Yoga practices. Even Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras*, which came long after Krishna, cannot be understood apart from the Gita and its yogic principles. What the *Yoga Sutras* indicate in its short axioms, the Gita explains in depth and detail.

The Gita teaches a broad Rāja Yoga or Royal Yoga, including Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, (knowledge, devotion and action), synthesising Yoga, Samkhya and Vedānta, which were originally one broader Vedic system. Each chapter of the Gita teaches a different type of Yoga aimed at a radical change of consciousness, not merely at outer modifications of the body and mind.

The Gita explains how the human mind works, its limitations and its higher potentials, so that we can master all that we do. Yet the foundation of the Yoga of the Gita is Karma Yoga or action, which is not just service to humanity or ritual worship of the Divine, but the pursuit of one's Dharma. In the case of Arjuna, his Dharma as a Kshatriya is to fight to protect Dharma from adharmic forces, even if powerful weapons must be wielded, which result in terrible destruction.

Shri Krishna in the Gita states that he first taught the original Yoga to Vivasvan, the solar deity from whom creation arises at the beginning of the Yuga, and then to Manu, the first lawgiver of the Ārya society; then, from Manu through a line of kings of the solar Ikshvaku dynasty, a lineage that extended through history and was interrelated with all the royal families of India.

Such a Cosmic status for Shri Krishna is not just as a human person but as Purushottama, the highest Purusha or consciousness behind the universe, which is also the goal of Yoga practice. In this regard, Shri Krishna reflects Ishvara, the Cosmic Lord, who is the Adi Guru of Yoga in the *Yoga Sutras*, indicated by Pranava Om.

## **Kshatriya Yoga**

Krishna, himself a king, explains Yoga as a Kshatriya tradition carried down by kings and princes as a way of discipline, work, effort, even fighting. Krishna himself was known for his prowess as a wrestler, killing Kamsa in a match, and as a great military strategist in the Mahabharata War.

The martial arts or Dhanurveda, which Arjuna was a great master of, were also connected to Lord Shiva, Yogeshvara or Adi Yoga among the deities, and to the Rajarshi or rishi-king Vishvamitra who gave Hindus their most important 'Gayatri Mantras' for the highest light. Even later, Hatha Yoga, a largely Shaivite tradition, has its connections to the martial arts. Krishna was not unique in this Yoga Kshatriya connection or martial arts as part of the Yoga of action. Great kings like King Ashwapati of Kaikeya occur in the Upanishads as gurus and great kings are lauded from the oldest Rigveda along with Devas and rishis like Trasadasyu, Sudas and Bharata.



The Karma Yoga that Shri Krishna taught to Arjuna was one of fighting or war, yuddha, reflecting his Kshatriya Dharma, not as a war of conquest or domination but as a defence of Dharma from the depredations of adharma. This Karma Yoga Kshatriya connection was not unique to the Gita but reflected the Vedic understanding that the king or prince should serve and defend Dharma, first of all, not just simply land or a kingdom or a dynasty.

In the Mahabharata, Krishna is portrayed as a master diplomat, warrior, artist and administrator, not just as a monk or an ascetic. He was the great master of action on all levels of life and in all domains of human action, such as Sri Aurobindo portrayed him to be. This is also a part of his status as the Yogeshvara. Aurobindo noted that a yogi could do anything better than a non-yogi. Krishna embodied that overall mastery of the human being and all the domains of human life.

## **The Archetypal War between Dharma and Adharma**

In his first book of the Krishna trilogy, *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Sanjay Dixit tells the story of the birth and youth of Shri Krishna and his yogic and devotional connection with Radha and the gopis. This volume, *Krishna Yogeshvara*, tells the story of Krishna up to the time of the Mahabharata War, ending with his chariot on the battlefield as he is about to speak to Arjuna. It portrays Krishna's role as a teacher of Yoga and one who dialogued with great rishis and yogis on a vast variety of topics, described earlier in Dixit's book. His Krishna takes a rational and systematic approach to Yoga, where philosophy, science and psychology are taken to a higher level of meditative experience.

This Kshatriya side of Karma Yoga that is usually neglected is well understood and dramatically portrayed in *Krishna Yogeshvara*. Without the attitude of a warrior in both body and mind, without determined strength and the cultivation of critical insight and the relentless pursuit of excellence, Yoga remains hard to progress in and can easily get lost in platitudes and techniques. This foundation of

Karma Yoga is the basis of the other Yogas of knowledge and devotion.

Yet, besides wars on the battlefield, there is an inner battle or war of ideas fought on an ideological level that may end up on the battlefield as well. One could call it a clash of beliefs or even a clash of civilisations, such as is being noted in the world today.

Today, India is caught in a cultural and ideological war with the same groups that have long been trying to conquer the country and convert the masses out of their dharmic traditions to exclusive beliefs. This cultural clash is part of a greater battle between Dharma and adharma that is perennial in human nature—the clash of Deva and Asura tendencies within the human being and in society. This is not just a battle at a political level but also occurs at a spiritual level, including between Deva and Asura forms of thought and religion.

Religion and spirituality, perhaps contrary to those who idealise them, are fields in which the Asura or egoistic mindset is also present; in fact, it is very active, aggressive and even ruthless because in the religious realm the human person can be worshipped as a god and gain the most extensive power over other human beings, taking control of their minds and hearts as well as outer human resources of wealth, power and sexual pleasure.

Such Asuric tendencies come out in any field in which great rewards are offered, like political power or wealth. The religious realm is no different, in fact, yet more appealing to the Asura as there is nothing equal to personal adulation. The Asura gains strength by the people whose minds and prana are offered to him. Dixit outlines this battle between the Deva and Asura in human nature through Krishna's friends and enemies, with critical implications for the present society.

Religious conversion is an ideological war or a war of beliefs. It holds the Rajoguna or the need to conquer the world of the Asuric nature. It can be more insidious and devastating than military attacks. Traditional and native cultures from the European pagans to the Native American, whose cultures were marginalised or destroyed by conversion efforts, are a good example of the consequences of losing that war of beliefs. India alone of the ancient native and dharmic

traditions continues to strongly resist, but the siege is not over, having massive international support.

Today these Deva-Asura wars are occurring through our new information technology, mass media and social media, but are equally vicious and destructive as the old battlefield encounters. They involve not only religious beliefs but also political ideologies like Marxism, which are also Asuric in nature, tied to worldly power as their prime imperative. They are not so much as military wars between nations any more, but are connected to the proxy wars, terrorist attacks and economic attacks as well, so violence remains a part of their *modus operandi*.

While India did survive the Islamic invasions and British colonial rule and gained independence in 1947, these battles have not stopped but have taken more secretive or ideological forms through Marxism, Evangelicals, the Islamic State and the Muslim Brotherhood.

## **Kshatriya Ahimsa**

Sadly, ahimsa has been misinterpreted as a blind dogma of mere physical non-violence to be applied uniformly in all contexts. This has created a distortion of the Gita that has weakened the Hindus and their Kshatriya spirit. We cannot simply blame Mahatma Gandhi for it, though his ideas have been used to justify it. It has become a part of an effort to disarm the Hindus that even anti-Hindu forces have been promoting it. The idea is that true Hindus do not fight back or defend themselves from external attack but try to change their opponents with love and acceptance alone.

That thinking has a fundamental flaw. The rule of nature is that forces of aggression or Rajoguna will only give up if made to feel pain. Approaching them with peace and love, while they come at you with weapons, is seen by them as surrender, as an admission of defeat and not spirituality! Krishna made Arjuna recognise the importance of an actual war as part of Yoga, particularly when all the diplomatic efforts had failed. This example should not be forgotten. *Krishna Yogeshvara* makes this point in many places.

This excess ahimsa has gone along with the equally misleading idea that all religions are the same. This, similarly, serves to disarm

the Hindus against the forces of conversion at an intellectual level. After all, if all religions are one (which conversion-based religions do not believe or they would stop their conversions) we should not worry about conversion, which is to become blind to its dangers. Making all religious teachings the same dulls viveka or discernment.

Krishna explains faith (Shraddhā) in the Gita as sattvic, rajasic or tamasic. He does not simply equate them all as valid. Asuric faiths are also there and Asuric tendencies can be found within every human being.

Krishna shows that spirituality is a matter of dialogue, reason and experience, not to be reduced to wishful thinking. He doesn't simply tell people to believe in him and he will save them, he challenges his friends and disciples to develop their own buddhi or higher mind. This is the Krishna of *Krishna Yogeshvara*.

## **Kutil Dharma and Krishna Dharma**

The Kutil Dharma of Sanjay Dixit's Krishna trilogy epitomises the ideological assaults upon Dharma, exposing their Asuric mindset. Dixit reveals the dangers of blind faith, exclusive beliefs, authority cults and cults of the book that have too often brought human spirituality down to the level of destructive politics and wars of conversion, even genocide. His *Krishna Yogeshvara* portrays the struggle between Dharma and adharma, not just at a behavioural level but at a conceptual level as well. Unless adharma is challenged and removed at an ideological level, it will continue to do its damage.

Some may say that Sanjay Dixit with his trilogy is turning the Gita and Mahabharata into a new art of war. That he is portraying the attitudes behind conversion-based religions as a dangerous Kutil Dharma adopted by the Kauravas under Duryodhana. But, he certainly has a point. Ideologies and theologies do matter and drive our behaviour both in very creative and in destructive ways. One needs a proper strategy to deal with them, both in terms of ideas and actions, such as Krishna portrayed in his life and teachings.

Sanjay Dixit's Krishna emphasises clear discernment or viveka, not just a superficial attempt to create harmony without addressing the wrong beliefs that end up in wrong actions. Krishna knows the time

for peace but also the time for war, the time to agree and the time to eradicate wrong views. His approach to Dharma is contextual, doing what is best possible at any given moment, not dogmatic, holding to a single unquestioned response to every situation. This is a rational view—following the reasoning of Dharma, not just of the outer mind.

## Conclusion

*Krishna Yogeshvara* is a great story, with monumental characters, insightful dialogues and a dramatic flow of transformative events both at social levels and reflected in the human psyche. It vividly and realistically portrays the ancient times and situations in which Krishna lived and had to act, and the vast array of complex characters involved, bringing them alive with contemporary relevance. The book is epochal in many ways and portrays an entire civilizational crisis and its development that has affected India and all humanity.

The book contains several yogic secrets as well as keys to the most complex levels of human behaviour. It is not just about stereotypes but shows the different sides of our nature and how they clash, and the many-levelled response needed to awaken our higher nature to deal with the vicissitudes of life.

*Krishna Yogeshvara* is relevant at a deeper spiritual level as a symbol for our inner spiritual quest, which the Vedas also symbolise as a battle. We must remain steadfastly aware in a world of clashing dualities. We cannot trust mere appearances as real or even as honest, as modern advertising and political propaganda clearly show. The forces of duality are well entrenched in this world with illusion and deceit, inherent even in our distorted educational systems. Most people do not understand the long-term consequences of accepting wishful beliefs that don't cultivate a deeper awareness or power of attention within us.

*Krishna Yogeshvara* raises many questions about human life and destiny both for today and for all time. It may not provide the last word on these difficult issues but does take us to a deeper level of examination and inquiry. The yogic world should examine *Krishna Yogeshvara* for understanding the many sides of this Lord and Master

of Yoga, which takes us far beyond the stereotypes about Yoga today or the common images of Shri Krishna.

The third volume of the Krishna trilogy should make these deeper aspects of Yoga clearer and explain what we need to do today in the global Kurukshetra that is developing for us, as humanity takes on new technology without the wisdom to use it properly. Jai Shri Krishna!

**—Dr David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri)**



## Introduction

**K** *rishna Yogeshvara* is the second book in the Krishna trilogy; it is the sequel to *Krishna Gopeshvara: The Truth of Vrishnis*. *Krishna Yogeshvara* traces the life of Krishna in his maturing years—from the time he went to receive his higher education in the ashrama of Sandipani Rishi till the beginning of the Mahabharata War. This was the time when Krishna's life got entangled with the Pandavas' travails and he became their friend, philosopher and guide. This was also the time when the forces of evil were getting together to defeat the righteous forces represented by Krishna and the Pandavas. From Jarasandha and Narakasura in the east to Shakuni in the west, Krishna had formidable adversaries to counter in order to establish Dharma. His task was made doubly difficult by Kutil Dharma, which preached that politics and religion should have a common fount towards a common end; this philosophy found its allies in the Kaurava princes. Thus ensued an epic struggle, which only one person, who had mastered his consciousness to become a Yogeshvara, could accomplish along with the aid of an Arjuna. *Krishna Yogeshvara* is the story of the possibilities that may arise when the right wisdom of a Yogeshvara Krishna guides the right action of a warrior Arjuna.

Yoga, in the Indian tradition, is the ultimate union of the highest human consciousness (chitta) with the Universal Consciousness (Chit), which is akin to the union of Prakriti and Purusha in the Samkhya tradition. The entire message of Krishna's life is one of

providing the best solution according to the context. The Sanatana traditions honour context a million times more than the text, and none lived this with greater verve and spirit than Shri Krishna. It is a common failing with people reading and writing Indian stories from the prism of mythology to look at these stories literally and without context. We have to understand that most of the Indian stories are written from a state of highest consciousness. The writer was aware that the vast majority lives at the level of intellect. That is why the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and the epics are full of symbolism, figures of speech and improbable scenarios. The logic behind all Indian writing—from the ancient to the recent—is multi-valued. A modern writer of these stories attempts to bring these stories down from the level of highest consciousness to the level of human intellect.

On the other hand, the Abrahamic lens is literal and its logic is binary. Those engaged in the defence of the Abrahamic lens try and engraft symbolism into what are literal commandments. Thus, in India, we suffer from a double whammy—Indian texts are interpreted literally while Abrahamic texts are whitewashed through symbolic interpretations.

In the earlier book *Krishna Gopeshvara* and in the present *Krishna Yogeshvara*, I have attempted to correct this perspective. That is why the context is so important. This question was answered by me in the introduction to *Krishna Gopeshvara* as well. Rāma, the Maryada Purushottama, and Krishna, the Leela Purushottama, are the manifestations of the same highest human consciousness in two different contexts. One teaches through his personal conduct in a simpler yuga or era and the other teaches through his great learning of Yoga and Gnana in a more complex era. Krishna's actions are that of a yogi and are not easy to emulate. We must focus on understanding the consciousness behind those actions and not take them literally. I repeat what I had said in the first part of the trilogy, 'Listen to Krishna, Follow Rāma', as a simple prescription. However, Krishna is the higher ideal, but he cannot be followed; instead one has to become a living Krishna, which is enormously more difficult.

Coming to the story, the setting is Rukmini-centric for about half of the book. She is the quintessential opposite of Sita of the Ramayana.



Abduction is central to both the great heroines, but one's abduction led to a great war and the other's abduction set off a great reconciliation. One was abducted by the villain and the other by the hero himself. Uddhava as the great narrator is apt because he is a character in Krishna's story who keeps up with him right till his last day. I took many months to understand Uddhava's interaction with Radha and the gopis. It is one of my most elevating experiences to go through this exchange. I found the great Bhakti poet Suradasa as my invaluable aid. Bhakti as a tool to open up the deepest recesses of human consciousness can also be equal to the highest yogic practice is the invaluable lesson that I gathered from that episode.

Kutil Dharma was easier to contextualise in the present volume because of Shakuni. The brutal methods of Kutil Muni and the subtler methods of Jatil Muni have brought a lot of flak for me from the critics. They seem to find shades of contemporary ideologies in these portrayals without realising that these ideologies have been there in plain sight throughout the Indian stories. Starting with the great war between the Devas and the Asuras and continuing through the Dashavatara lore, it has always been a fight between Dharma or the Living Law and the totalitarian tyrant. Ramayana and Mahabharata are great epics that go behind the events to look deep into the minds, intellects and even the consciousness of the characters in the stories. That is why the West finds it impossible to understand our stories. The West is so used to two-valued binaries that most do not have the intellectual capacity to look at the deeper and the greater picture.

In this part, the story of the Pandavas also gets intertwined with the story of their cousin Krishna. His sister Draupadi becomes a prime cause of conflict leading to Mahabharata and Krishna partly becomes the cause of 'the great war'. Mahabharata itself is the world's greatest story, not because of the expanse it provides, but because of the deep analyses of the thinking processes of the characters, big and small.

The story of *Krishna Yogeshvara* ends with Krishna poised to impart the great philosophy of the Bhagavad Gita to his cousin, friend and disciple Arjuna. I feel gratified to have this part become a prelude to the greatest gift ever to mankind, the Bhagavad Gita.

The story of Krishna enlightens us in many ways and the greatest lesson that his life and his teaching impart is that there is no greater

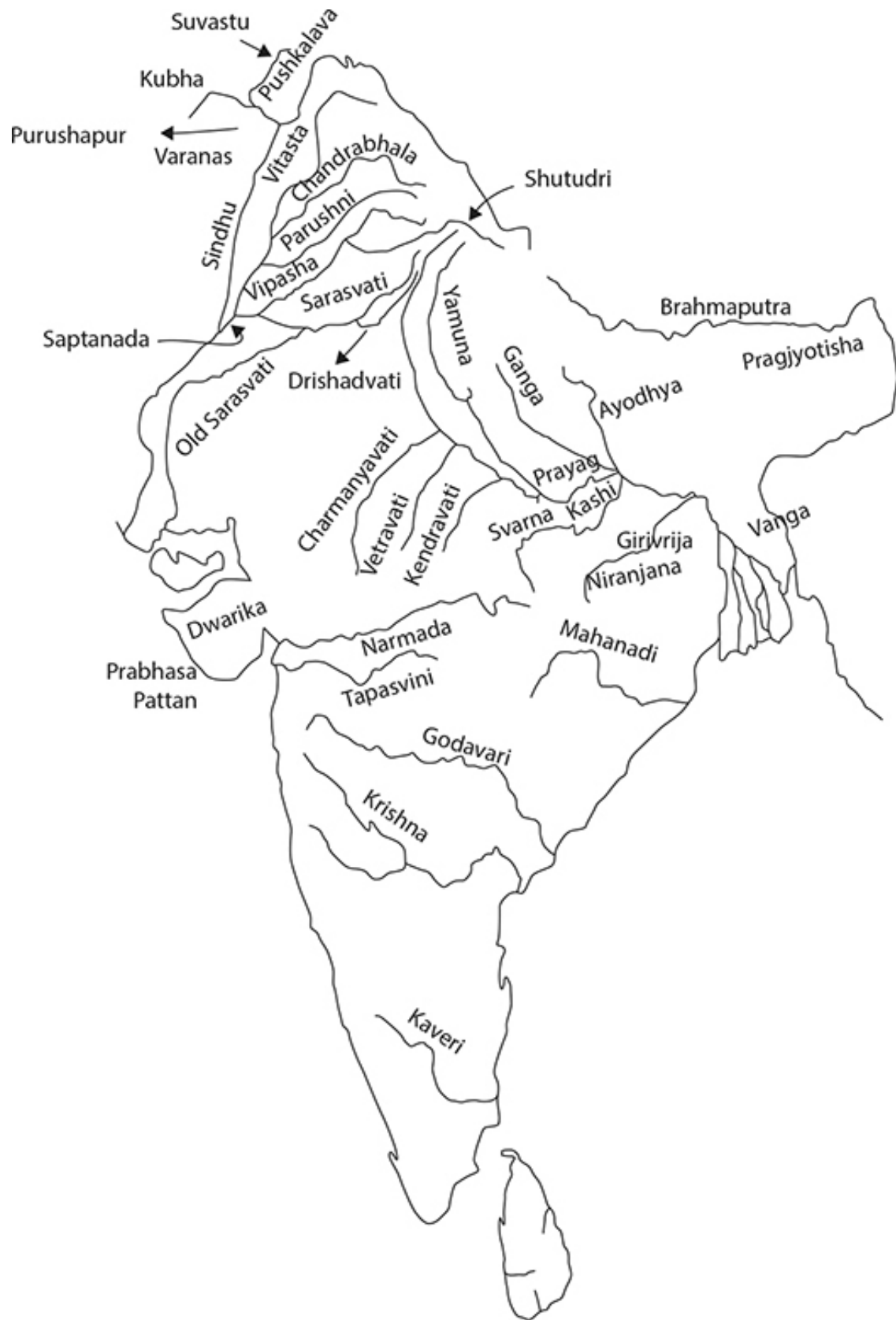
Dharma than picking up arms to defend and propagate what one considers righteous conduct. The ahimsa of the weak is not for Krishna. Krishna's ahimsa comes from consciousness and does not exclude killing for the sake of that ahimsa or for the maintenance of samatva, the supreme equanimity. It is possible to draw wrong lessons if one examines Gita from the western lens of Tolstoy, Ruskin and Thoreau. It is not for nothing that every Hindu deity carries astras and shastras. Shāstras cannot be defended without shastra is the message of all our wisdom, exemplified so wonderfully in Krishna. Krishna also understood that Dharma transcends the individual and his understanding of the organic nature of society is clearly contrasted in the book with the competing ideology of Kutil Dharma that tried to challenge Dharma with individual primacy for the purpose of aggrandising power. This classic battle between the atomistic view of society and the organic view of society continues to this day. Maybe this book will help all to view the organic nature of human affairs as the superior organisation as compared to the individual as the basis of society.

I have to once again acknowledge the great help I received in completing this book. Dr David Frawley was very kind to once again write the Foreword for this part too. The Government of Rajasthan continued to provide me with free time to enable me to complete this part. My family continued to provide me with support and strength. I must also thank Bloomsbury and the tireless pursuance of the publisher, Praveen Tiwari, who were the key to timely completion of this book.

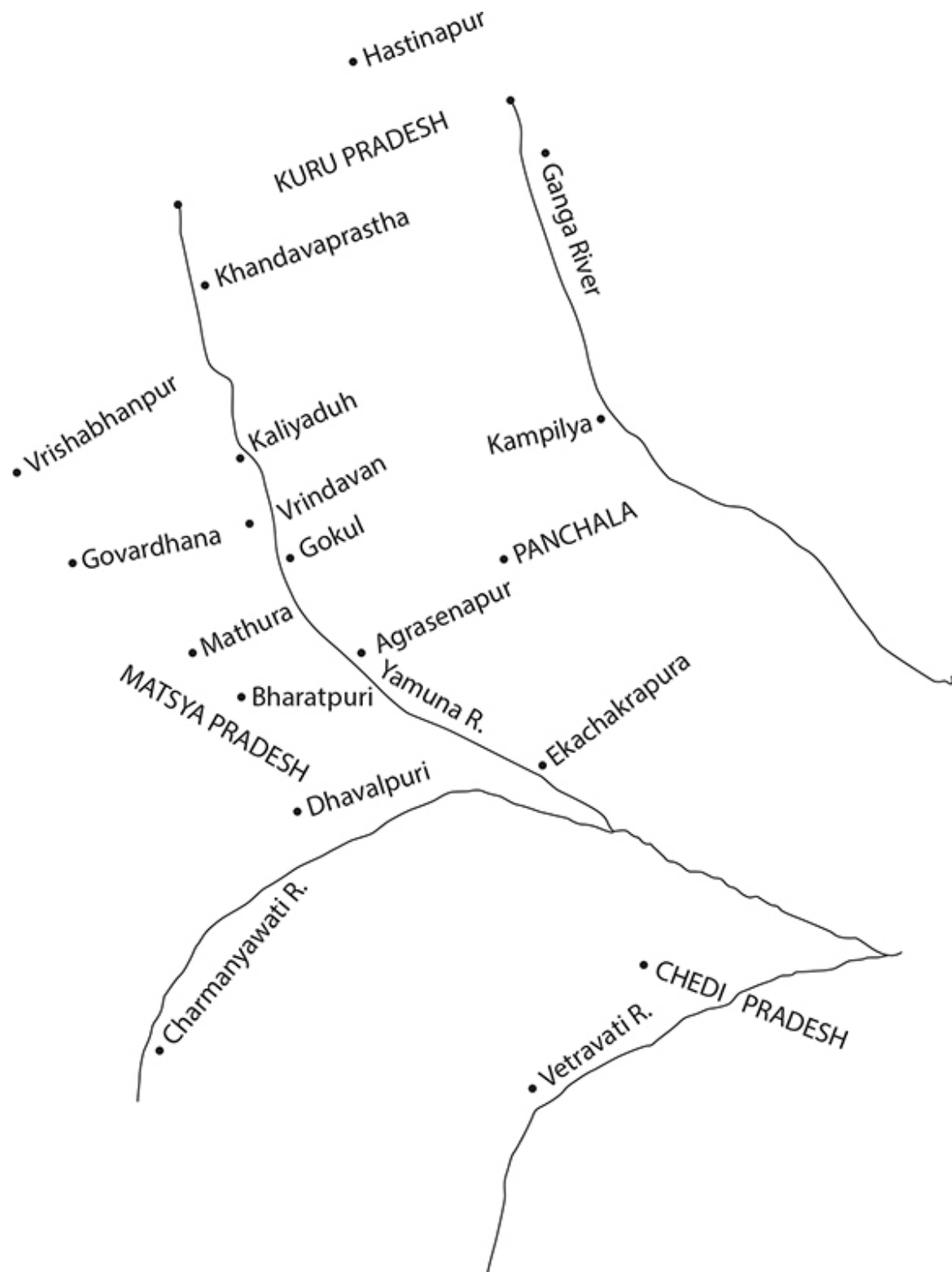
I would also like to thank Ravi Bhojak for painstakingly going through the proofs.

I dedicate this book to the memory of my father, Late Shiv Prasad Dixit, whom I lost while the book was being written.

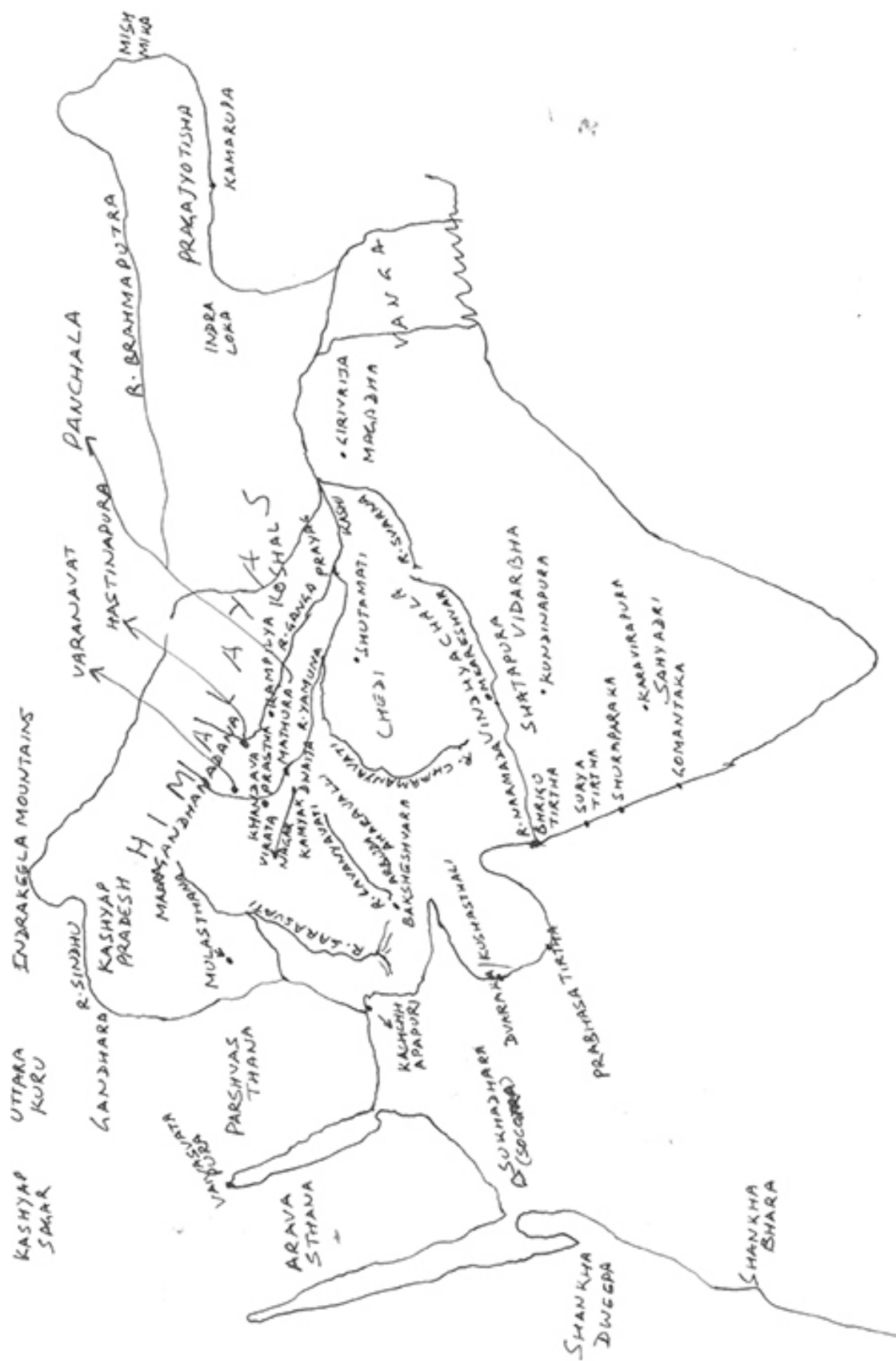
## RIVER MAP



## BRIJ BHOOMI AND NEARBY



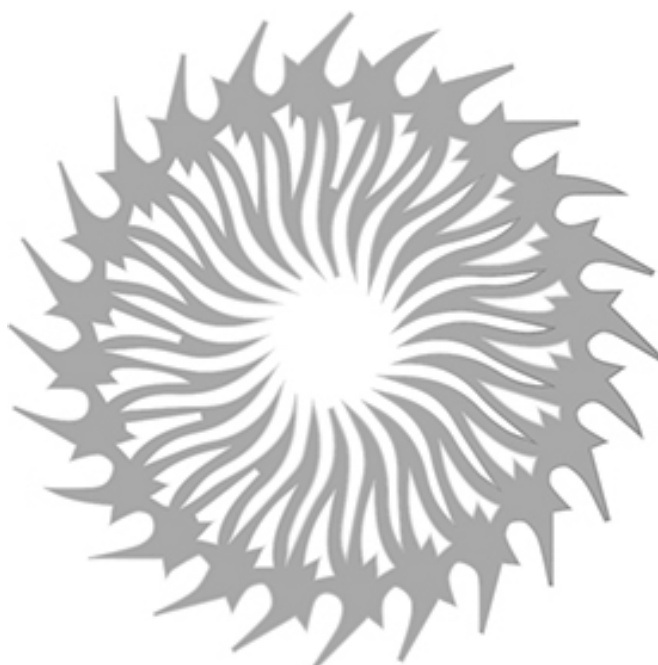
## MAP OF JAMBUDWIPA







# PART I





- 1 -

## The Abduction

The swift, two-wheeled chariot screeched to a halt next to Rukmini, as she got off from the ardhmandapa<sup>1</sup> of the sprawling Indrani temple. Rukmini had a thrill coursing through her veins. ‘Did my plan succeed?’ she thought with some trepidation.

A darkish young man with a peacock-feather-bedecked diadem over his long, curly hair was standing in a chariot at the back. He flung his hand out to Rukmini. She only half understood what was going on.

‘Rukmini, think again,’ she thought to herself. ‘You are going against your kuladharma. Your father and brother would come to eternal shame.’

Rukmini looked at the young man again. Krishna was smiling. ‘Yes, it is me. Do not worry about your kuladharma, Rukmini. In any cosmic cycle, there are times when one has to subordinate kuladharma for a higher calling. Come, hold my hand and climb up.’

Rukmini regained her confidence. Her retinue looked agape as she held the offered hand and climbed up into the chariot. The armed escort had noticed the manoeuvre. Even as the commander shouted instructions, Krishna turned the chariot around in a blink and was gone into the jungle behind the temple. There was a small clearing through which the chariot started flying. Daruka, the charioteer, was the most exceptional practitioner of his craft. He manoeuvred the

chariot through small clearings among the trees exceptionally well and was gone many yojanas<sup>2</sup> before the armed escort, who was given the task of protecting Rukmini, could figure out where exactly the abductor of the princess had gone.

Rukmini smiled at Krishna and said, ‘You cowherd, is this the way to behave with an Ārya<sup>3</sup> woman? You have abducted me in broad daylight.’

Krishna patted Daruka. He brought the chariot to an abrupt halt; the two horses in the chariot neighed loudly because of the sudden stop.

A wry smile played on Krishna’s lips. ‘Okay, princess. I am sorry for the infraction. Shall I drop you here or should I take you back to the Indrani temple?’

Rukmini was disarmed. She hid her head in Krishna’s bosom and murmured, ‘I am already in my temple.’

Krishna patted Daruka again. The chariot moved at a breakneck speed. Krishna always wondered at Daruka’s ability to keep track of the direction even in the deepest of forests. They had to reach Narmada before nightfall.

Rukmini tried to recollect the events of the day. She remembered how she had paused for a moment before stepping into the mandalas of the Indrani temple. A retinue of twenty-one sakhis<sup>4</sup> had accompanied her, a few in front but most of them trailing along behind her. She carried a thali<sup>5</sup> for puja in her hands, complete with incense, coconut, vermilion and Gangajala<sup>6</sup>. She was there to perform the customary puja to propitiate Goddess Indrani that every would-be bride of the Bhojaka clan of Kundinapura<sup>7</sup> had performed for generations.

Rukmini’s thoughts had gone back to her childhood days that she had spent in her mother’s parental home. She reminisced about the deep bamboo forests, the fishing expeditions, the climbing of the snow-clad mountains to spot snow tigers, the bamboo skirts she wore and the rituals of worshipping the Sun god. Mishmika of the Idulikā<sup>8</sup> country, which is located beyond Pragajyotisha, had married their priceless princess Lavangikā to Bhishmaka, the prince of Vidarbha, who had strayed into the Idulikā valley while he was on his way to the ancient land of Lohit. It was a case of love at first sight, a Kshātra

Karma<sup>9</sup> for Bhishmaka, and an ancient tribal right to exercise the freedom of choice of a bridegroom for Lavangikā. Rukmini's mother had passed away when she was a child, but the mother's features stood out on the daughter in her full youthful bloom.

Rukmini had inherited most features of her mother. She was tall as a reed, very stately, had sharp features, a long face and a long, flattish nose. Her slightly slanted eyes were very attractive. She could hold an ordinary man in a trance with a mere look. Her long limbs let her gain tremendous proficiency in swordsmanship. She could defeat any ordinary rathi in sword games. Only the atirathi and maharathi could claim superiority over her. That made her among the top three sword experts in the whole of Vidarbha. Her father, Bhishmaka, and brother, Rukmi, were the only other people superior to her.

Kavya gave Rukmini a nudge. She came out of her reverie. The leading part of her retinue had already reached the garbhagriha, while she had dawdled on the steps of the first mandala. She walked up gingerly, taking each step with a measured intent. With each step she took, her resolve became more and more firm. She sent Shvetaketu to her chosen man with the final ultimatum. 'Come take me on this day of my swayamvara otherwise, I will jump into the lake next to the Indrani temple after performing the puja. Either I will marry you or marry death. I know that you will preach me kuladharma, but Dharma is never fulfilled unless my Shakti unites with my Shiva. So yoke your Dharma to your Shakti.'

Rukmini had only faint hopes of a response. She remembered meeting Krishna briefly, for the first time, in an upanayana<sup>10</sup> ceremony of the sons of Yadava chiefs before they embarked on their final schooling to Sandipani Ashrama along with many rishis of Aryavarta. She had met him again at the first aborted attempt to marry her off to Shishupala in a staged swayamvara. Even at that time, she had refused to cooperate with the sham of a swayamvara. Kaishika, her grandfather, had brought up his granddaughter like a mother after Lavangikā had passed away when Rukmini was barely seven years old. She had told Kaishika even at that time that she was not going to be a pawn in Rukmi's great game to succeed Jarasandha as the emperor of Aryavarta.

She had spent nearly an hour at the puja, far longer than the custom. The purohit had reminded her, at least thrice, that she was getting late. She sat in front of Goddess Indrani with her eyes open, looking straight into the eyes of the deity. A deity is a living person in a temple. Rukmini was doing the right thing. She was trying to communicate with the Supreme through the medium of the deity. Her mind was calm. She was not beseeching the deity for any material object. She remembered Krishna telling people once that—*‘to ask for material prosperity from a deity is silly. After all, the goal of life is liberation. Why would any deity grant a devotee more chains of bondage even if he asks for it? Does the uninformed choice of a devotee matter to the highest consciousness of a deity?’*

She had got up very slowly, walked back to the outer steps of the ardhmandapa even more slowly and paused from time to time to check the distance of the lake from the outer steps. She was a fast runner, yet she wanted to be sure that she would be able to make the one hundred rope-knots distance in a minute. Her mind was prepared to take her life by jumping into the lake if he would not come.

Then there was Krishna...

The chariot was speeding away. Instead of taking the straight path out of Kundinapura towards Dvaraka through Surya Tirtha<sup>11</sup> along the Tapasvini<sup>12</sup> River, the chariot was being expertly driven through deep forests. A steep climb had begun. They were climbing the Shatapura ranges. Thick vegetation blocked their way again and again, but Krishna used his sword to slash away the obstructing branches to let Daruka have a clear path. Daruka seemed to know his way about. He had found a small path even in the midst of the thick forests of shaguna<sup>13</sup> and shala<sup>14</sup> trees, and was driving at a breakneck speed. Krishna held Rukmini with his arms around her to keep her steady on the perch. The seat at the back of the swift two-wheeled chariot had a place for only one person, but Krishna managed to squeeze Rukmini into it. From time to time, he would get up and clear the branches obstructing the path. Rukmini sat there in a trance-like state.

The ganayanayaka leading the princess's escort became indecisive for a minute. He saw an apparition come in a flash, and the princess was gone before he could even blink his eye. There was no resistance, not even a cry for help from her. He was not even sure of the route the

eloping couple had taken. They had disappeared towards the back of the temple. He knew that there was an unused trail in that direction that led to the Narmada. There was no time to think. He rushed back to the prince to take further instructions.

Rukmi was beside himself with fury. He took out his sword to strike at the neck of the gananayaka, but Bhishmaka held his arm. 'No use, Rukmi. We must first find out who has abducted her.'

Rukmi shouted at the top of his voice, 'Who else but that rascal of a cowherd! He has abducted my sister. I swear by the code of the Kshatriyas that I will hunt him down and kill him.'

Rukmi sat down with his head in his hand and started lamenting loudly, 'How will I show my face to the assembled kings? What will I tell Shishupala? What is the use of this large army camping here? I have been disgraced. My plan of marrying Jarasandha's granddaughter is also ruined. It is all your fault, father. You had allowed her to become like her tribal mother in your fondness for your dear departed wife. She was completely spoilt by the teachings of the grandfather.' Rukmi started wailing like a lost child.

Bhishmaka comforted him. 'Let us go to Emperor Jarasandha, Rukmi. He might be able to tell us a way out.'

Together, they reached the campsite of Jarasandha. When Jarasandha saw them, his heart skipped a beat. He did not want to hear of another trick by that cowherd who had already beaten him many times in battles, tactics and strategies. 'I hope they are not bringing another bad news,' thought Jarasandha.

Rukmi made no ceremony and came straight to the point. 'Samrata<sup>15</sup> Jarasandha, Rukmini has eloped with Krishna.'

Jarasandha lost his composure. He felt his head was swimming. He could not keep standing. He sat down on his seat with a thud. The seat gave way and he fell down in a heap on the floor. The situation was an exact description of the predicament he found himself in. The cowherd had beaten him to his quarry once again. Rukmi and Bhishmaka ran to Jarasandha to help him get up. He waved them off with a peremptory gesture. He was already a sight and resented receiving any gratuitous help.

'Don't bother,' growled Jarasandha, 'I can lift myself up.' Then, as if to show the strength of his leg muscles, he got on to his feet

without using his hands for support.

Jarasandha started shouting at Rukmi. ‘You dunce, is there anything you can do right? Is this the way you hope to get the hand of my granddaughter and become the mānya<sup>16</sup> of Magadha? Go and get the head of that low-born cowherd. How dare he abduct a princess! Don’t you have Kshatriya blood? Oh, I forgot. You are a new Kshatriya. That’s why your blood did not boil and you ran to me instead of running after him. Brainless, shameless and a fameless fool!’ Jarasandha was frothing from his mouth.

Rukmi ran back to collect a band of warriors and went after the trail of Krishna. By all accounts, he was supposed to have been alone. Shishupala sent a few couriers on horseback to get help from the Chedi outposts at various points along River Narmada; Rukmi sent a few along the Tapasvini and another few towards the eastern part of his own kingdom of Vidarbha.

Within a few minutes, it was known that Krishna’s chariot had gone towards the North, up the Shatapura mountains, and was probably headed towards the Narmada. Shishupala was trying to keep a cool head. He anticipated that Krishna would head towards Dvaraka. The only possible route would be to either take a boat along the Narmada to Bhrigu Tirtha<sup>17</sup>, or cross the Narmada and take a land route through Gurjara Pradesh<sup>18</sup>. Either way, he would have to go through Omkareshvara. He advised a blockade at Omkareshvara. He also anticipated that Krishna would not miss an opportunity to pay his obeisance at Omkareshvara, which was a natural place of worship for new couples.

Accordingly, a small battalion set out on horseback towards Omkareshvara through the shortest possible route. It was a well-maintained route on which horsemen could fly on their steeds.

Jarasandha was going insane. ‘Block all the routes. Get that milkman here. I want to kill him with my own hands. He has thwarted me a dozen times. How many can I count? Yamuna, Charmanyavati<sup>19</sup>, Kaliya Duh<sup>20</sup>, Gomantaka<sup>21</sup> ... the first swayamvara<sup>22</sup>, and now this one. I should have had him killed in Vrindavana itself. That idiot Kamsa was a no-hoper. Get him here ... get him ... get him!’

Rukmi was nearing Krishna on his horse Chaitanya, leading a band of a hundred selected cavalymen. The Narmada was hardly a yojana away. They had been travelling for a day and a half, and dusk was almost upon them. They planned to go to the bank of Narmada and block the route to Ujjayini and to Bhrigu Tirtha. They began their steep descent along a mountainous path that led to the river, flanked by tall hillsides.

A massive boulder blocked their path!





- [1](#) According to the principles of temple architecture, it is the first part or the entrance hall of a temple.
- [2](#) One yojana is equivalent to, approximately, twelve kilometres.
- [3](#) Noble or elite. Ārya is neither a race nor a class/caste.
- [4](#) Female friends
- [5](#) A round dish used for keeping food or puja articles.
- [6](#) The holy water of the River Gangā.
- [7](#) Near modern-day Amaravati in Maharashtra
- [8](#) River Idu, a tributary of Siang (Brahmaputra) in modern- day Arunachal Pradesh
- [9](#) Kshatriya's action
- [10](#) Thread ceremony
- [11](#) Surat
- [12](#) Tapti
- [13](#) Sagaun or teak
- [14](#) Sāl tree (Shorea Robusta)
- [15](#) Emperor
- [16](#) An honoured person, a status given to sons-in-law and their relatives.
- [17](#) Modern-day Bharuch
- [18](#) Gujarat
- [19](#) Chambal
- [20](#) Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.
- [21](#) Goa
- [22](#) Refers to an earlier swayamvara of Rukmini that had to be abandoned because Krishna was not invited. See Chapter 31 of this book.



- 2 -

## The Battle of Narmada

Rukmi looked up and realised that he was surrounded. The hillsides on both flanks would definitely have soldiers if this boulder was deliberately placed. He only hoped that his retreat had not been cut off.

In an instant brainwave, Rukmi ordered his battalion to stay in the spot and try and remove the boulder. He climbed back up the path, found a crevice leading down, went to the Narmada bank with two horsemen and waited for his contingent of one hundred strong soldiers to arrive. Little did he know that Balarama and other Yadavas had surrounded his force, and were cutting them down from the hilltops. Not one of the warriors had any hope to escape.

Night had fallen. There was no sign of Rukmi's forces. He could not go and check. It was not advisable to send his aides to find out. He thought that he would have to spend the night on the bank of Narmada.

Krishna and Rukmini went straight to the Narmada Valley and spent their first night on its left bank. Rukmini made a shelter for herself from the lessons she had learnt during her years in Shvetaketu's gurukula<sup>1</sup>. Krishna and Daruka slept in the open.

They started at the break of dawn after Krishna, as was his morning ritual, worshipped mother cow and Adiyogi Shiva. Rukmini chanted a

mantra to Kuladevi Indrani, and thanked her for guiding her as she deemed fit.

Daruka set the chariot moving with a little incantation to Surya. The path winded along River Narmada. Daruka drove the chariot without much urgency, yet at a good clip. They wanted to reach Omkareshvara before nightfall.

Krishna teased Rukmini, 'So, what were you doing your puja for?'

Rukmini gave a pregnant look. She was sharp enough to understand where she was being led.

'Krishna, you are having a loss of memory. Have you forgotten what you were preaching to my grandfather two years back?'

'So you were eavesdropping. That is not an ethical practice,' Krishna feigned wonderment.

Rukmini smirked, 'So you favour some kind of an ethical code forced by society? Then you should not have come to take me. Is this an ethical practice? Stop the chariot and let me get down.'

Krishna smiled some more. She was definitely into higher learning a lot more than he had thought.

Rukmini continued, 'What is permanent, Keshava? Society or reality? What is reality, Govinda? Stop play-acting with me. Where is your theory on the Cosmos? What were you worshipping Shiva for? Asking for a boon to kill Jarasandha?'

Krishna smiled enigmatically. '*Rukmini, you only have to focus on the inside and realisation will come to you that there is little to choose between the Cosmos and your inner consciousness.*'

The chariot screeched to a halt as Daruka suddenly motioned to Krishna and Rukmini to keep quiet. The path ahead lay in a deep stretch of the forest. Daruka was trying to listen to something. A herd of elephants was passing directly through their path. Keeping still for half an hour, they let the herd pass and then resumed their onward journey. Daruka whispered to them, 'Do not talk now. We will take a couple of hours to go through this stretch. Be still and keep quiet. This place is full of elephants. Krishna, be alert and keep your bow and arrow ready. This is the most dangerous stretch.'

Krishna took his position. Rukmini kept a close watch. Their conversation remained inconclusive.

After going through the thickly forested stretch, Daruka stopped for a while to rest and freshen up the horses. Their little recess over, Daruka let the horses go into a full gallop. He wanted to make good time.

They stopped at a wayside village to collect some food to eat. Daruka sped the chariot after a brief pause.

As they neared dusk, the chariot hit a flat plain with high hills on the left. Daruka was making good time. Krishna was alert. He patted Daruka and motioned him to slow down. He had noticed something.

High on the hills, he could see the Yadava flag. Balarama and the Yadava forces were on the top of the hills. The only conclusion would be that they had trapped the Vidarbha forces. Krishna had anticipated it right. He always wagered on a formidable general like Rukmi to make a correct tactical decision. The only problem was that Krishna could think ten moves ahead of even Rukmi.

Daruka moved the chariot very slowly. A boat should be waiting at Annapurnā Temple to take the couple across the river to Omkareshvara Island. They would spend the night in the temple, worship the Omkara form of Shiva in the morning and proceed to Bhrigu Tirtha on the river in a large sailboat. Krishna's chariot would also be pulled up on that sailboat. Sailing with the current would be easy even if there were no winds to support them.

Rukmi saw a small chariot coming towards him at a distance. As the image grew clearer, Rukmi had a sensation of fear and desperation run through his veins. He saw the red and white Yadava flag atop the chariot and froze. Was it indeed his nemesis, the person whom he hated so much, coming towards him?

Rukmi shook himself up and pushed his horse at a canter towards the incoming chariot. As they came face to face, Rukmi threw a challenge at Krishna, 'O you low-born cowherd! You think you can be equal to a Yadava prince by just being born into the Yadava kula<sup>2</sup>. You worm of a man, you acted true to your type when you cravenly slunk into the privacy of a worshipping unwed woman and abducted her. Be ready to bear the shower of my arrows now.'

Krishna laughed aloud. 'Rukmi, don't you ever look inwards? Why don't you ask your sister whether she has come with me willingly or not?'

Rukmini shouted to make herself heard across the fifty yards or so that separated them. ‘Brother, I invited Krishna to take me. I was not going to be a part of the adharmā that you wanted to impose on me. Is it proper for a brother to sell his sister to a person whom she does not want to marry by staging a fake swayamvara for cementing his own position? My mother chose her partner and I have chosen mine. Now you should bless us and join us at the Omkara ceremony at Shiva’s abode.’

This impertinence of his sister infuriated Rukmi. He aimed an arrow at Krishna and released it. Krishna easily intercepted the arrow and cut it down. The return arrow took Rukmi’s mukuta<sup>3</sup> off. The next shaft from Krishna’s bow pierced the gap in his armour near his forearm, making his bowstring arm useless. He was now a sitting duck. His two support warriors tried to outflank Krishna’s chariot, but were shot down by two arrows from the bow of Krishna. Rukmi was helplessly clinging onto his horse, but shouting imprecations continuously. Krishna prepared to take out his Sudarshana Chakra<sup>4</sup>.

Rukmini held Krishna’s hand. ‘No, Krishna. This is not Kshātra Dharma to decapitate a helpless enemy. You cannot possibly be hurt by mere words.’

Krishna gave his trademark enigmatic smile. ‘*Rukmini, shabda or word is not a mere verbal delusion which we call viparyaya. It denotes one’s state of consciousness.* It is in accordance with Dharma to minimise depravity in the land. I would never have done this if I were you.’

Rukmini had a pang of jealousy shooting through her heart. Yet, she was quick to realise that this was a diversionary tactic. She held his hand even more firmly. ‘I am not just another woman, Achyuta. I am going to be your wife. You just treat it as a request of a sister to spare the life of his brother. A defeat is bad enough. Send him back with visible signs of defeat. That would be his living death. Do not sully my Karma for your Dharma.’

Krishna shot a piercing look at a delirious Rukmi. He got down from the chariot and yanked Rukmi down from his horse. He blew his Pāñchajanya conch. In a few seconds, the Yadava army led by Balarama started descending from the hills on the left bank of the river.

Balarama came near the chariot on horseback and blessed the couple. Rukmini and Krishna touched his feet and took his blessings. Balarama held Rukmi by his locks and laughed. ‘The future emperor of India is here. Let me welcome him.’

There was a soldier in his battalion who also performed a barber’s duties. He was summoned. In the failing light, Rukmi’s head was shaved off and he was unceremoniously sent off on a donkey. Rukmi felt dead with humiliation. As the donkey trudged through the mountainous path, he found a few of his soldiers on his way back. They were the only ones who had survived the siege by Balarama’s army. Even in the bright night, they could recognise the face of their prince with great difficulty. Rukmi stopped by in a village on the way and declared his intention to become a sanyasi<sup>5</sup>. He was totally demoralised with the turn his life had taken. When the news reached Bhishmaka and Jarasandha, they reacted in totally different manners. Jarasandha lifted up his camp and went back to Girivrija. Bhishmaka rushed to be by the side of Rukmi. It took a lot of coaxing and cajoling for Bhishmaka to persuade Rukmi to return to Kundinapura where he hid in the palace of his queen Suvratā for months.

On the other side, Krishna and Rukmini, along with Daruka and Uddhava, spent the night at the Omkareshvara Temple. They got up early during the Brāhma Muhurta. Uddhava performed the usual jalabhisheka. Krishna and Rukmini performed a special ceremony for future couples.

Kapila Rishi was camping at Omkareshvara at that time. He had been a part of the sixty-four-day education enterprise put together by Sandipani Rishi in his gurukula at Avantika<sup>6</sup>. When Krishna came to know of this, he went with Rukmini to take his blessings. Kapila Muni was extremely happy to see Krishna with Rukmini. ‘My life’s mission is fulfilled. Vishnu is united with Lakshmi. Now the fifth element will arise out of the four gross elements.’

The irrepressible Rukmini chirped in, ‘What is this business of elements about, Rishivara<sup>7</sup>?’

Kapila Muni smiled, ‘Get the details from my best disciple, putri<sup>8</sup>. I have taught him the Samkhya system. This system will tell you the interplay between matter, energy and void. *You can perceive the four*

*gross elements of earth, water, fire and air with your sensory perceptions, but the subtle element of Akasha<sup>2</sup> can only be perceived through deep consciousness. That is the crucial element that produces the duality between Purusha<sup>10</sup> and Prakriti<sup>11</sup> through mutation of elemental balance.'*

Krishna nudged Rukmini who was becoming engrossed in this discussion. Rukmini insisted that Kapila Muni should perform the Omkara Puja, a request to which the Muni willingly acquiesced.

Kapila Muni led them through the puja and blessed them. He told Rukmini, *'Understand the value of Om, putri. It is this shabda<sup>12</sup> that will lead you to an understanding of the Akasha. Cosmos is within you, remember.'*

Rukmini bowed to the rishi. Krishna made a full prostration before him.

The entire entourage then got into a flotilla and started sailing down to Bhrgu Tirtha, from where they would board an ocean-going vessel to reach Prabhasa Tirtha<sup>13</sup>.

Krishna started singing a boatman's song as the boats sailed with the current.



- [1](#) Residential school
- [2](#) Community
- [3](#) Diadem
- [4](#) A boomerang weapon in the form of a discus with razor-sharp edges.
- [5](#) Renunciate or Hermit
- [6](#) Ujjain
- [7](#) An address to indicate someone who is great among rishis.
- [8](#) Daughter
- [9](#) Space
- [10](#) The Cosmos
- [11](#) Nature as on earth
- [12](#) Sound, in the context of Om
- [13](#) Prabhasa Patan near Somanatha





**- 3 -**

## **Prabhasa Tirtha**

It took about a day and a half for the Yadava flotilla to berth at the port complex of Bhṛigu Tirtha. The town was a hub of trading activities. Inland transport brought trade and merchandise from the hinterland, and great ocean-going sailing ships took them to Prabhasa Tirtha, Kushasthali<sup>1</sup>, and to the ports in Aravasthana<sup>2</sup> and Shankha Dweepa<sup>3</sup>. Vaivasvatapura<sup>4</sup> in Aravasthana and Shankhabhara<sup>5</sup> in Shankha Dweepa were the major destinations for the ocean-going ships. Ships sailed out when the wind changed its course after the rainy season.

The flotilla from Bhṛigu Tirtha docked at a jetty by the evening the next day, and the entourage relaxed for the night. They had to shift to an ocean-going fleet the next day.

Krishna and Rukmini along with the entire Yadava regiment—with horses and chariots—easily fitted into one large ocean-going ship with one hundred oarsmen and twenty-five sails. A prahara<sup>6</sup> into the day, they were into the open sea, making good time. As the sun rose over the eastern horizon the next day, they were easing into the Triveni Ghat of Prabhasa Patan, which lay at the confluence of three streams—Hiranyā, Kapilā and Sarasvati. Sarasvati seemed to be a memory from the past; the mighty Sarasvati of the Rīgveda period probably flowed in that area. To the west of the confluence of the

three streams lay the ancient Jyotirlinga of Somanatha. It would be the first stop of the Yadava contingent. They camped in the travellers' lodges between the Triveni and the temple.

Krishna quickly settled down to finish his morning routine and went looking for Rishi Sandipani. He was always expected to be in the Prabhasa Tirtha at this time of the year when the rains had receded and the winds had started flowing from the southeast. Rishi Sandipani and Krishna had spent a month or so after finishing their training in Avantika. Krishna had learnt the most advanced practices of reaching the highest state of consciousness while sitting on the banks of the Triveni. They had honoured the Somanatha linga<sup>7</sup> of Shiva in the company of Rishi Sandipani every day.

Krishna located Rishi Sandipani in the temple. As he finished his obeisance, the rishi enquired playfully about Krishna, 'How is your bride-to-be, Mohan?'

'How do you know about my bride, Rishi?' It was Krishna's turn to be surprised.

Sandipani gave an inscrutable smile. 'Let that be, Mohan. Why don't you get married on Kārtika Purnima? Let me come with you to bless the Vidarbha princess. I must compliment her for successfully negotiating a swayamvara in the best traditions of Dharma.'

'That is not the protocol, Acharya. Rukmini will herself come here to have your blessings,' interjected Krishna.

'No, Mohan. She is goddess incarnate. She does not know it. It is my svadharma, my own self-interest, that I awaken that sense in her. Only then will the pairing be complete,' Sandipani silenced Krishna.

Sandipani got up from his asana and came with Krishna to the Triveni camp of the Yadava entourage.

He settled in the dhyanamandapam—centrally located within the camp—as Krishna went to tell Rukmini that Rishi Sandipani was waiting for her.

Rukmini came out rushing. She looked flustered. 'What is this, Keshava? Why did you not ask me to come with you? This is not the proper way that you have brought your acharya to your place instead of asking me over. You will get me bad Karma for no fault of mine.'

'Don't worry about bad Karma, Rukmini. *Karma is related to your mental state, not the outward action or kriya.* Come with me to the

acharya.’

Rukmini came to the dhyanamandapam. Even as she entered the place to do her obeisance to the sage, Rishi Sandipani got up and welcomed her with folded hands, and did a circumambulation of her. Rukmini was flabbergasted. She looked quizzically at Krishna, who just shrugged his shoulders. He was as fogged as Rukmini herself.

Uddhava came running and prostrated in front of the sage. Sandipani picked him up with deep affection and hugged him. ‘Come, Uddhava, I must compliment you in checkmating Jarasandha, Rukmi and Shishupala. Come, sit with me all of you.’

Uddhava, Krishna and Rukmini sat around the Acharya. Punardatta, son of Rishi Sandipani, who was rescued by Krishna and Uddhava from the Naga branch of Vaivasvatapura, also joined in.

Rukmini opened the conversation. ‘Acharya, I am quite mystified as to why you did not let me pay obeisance to you and instead you paid respect to me?’

‘Rukmini, you do not realise what service you have rendered to the forces of Dharma. When Krishna killed Kamsa, I was travelling. I rushed to Krishna to pay respect to him and brought him over to Avantika with all the greatest rishis of Bharata. Then I organised a complete course of sixteen kalās and sixty-four vidyas<sup>8</sup>. He had got glimpses into the highest level of consciousness through the buddhi<sup>9</sup> element. Radha was the one who gave him these glimpses. Now you have given him the identity part. You are the Prakriti<sup>10</sup> element in this Cosmic Purusha<sup>11</sup>. You will realise it soon. Krishna is going to become complete only now.’

Rukmini had a pang of extreme jealousy coursing through her veins. She had heard of the stories of Radha a number of times—at times with a lot of spice thrown in—but to hear her name in such reverential terms from Acharya Sandipani was something that she could not digest. Yet, she was equally befuddled by the reverence that Acharya showed to her.

Acharya smiled cryptically. ‘I have fixed a day for the nuptial, Rukmini. Kārtika Purnima is an auspicious time for the wedding. I have a consecrated place nearby, which I had named Madhavapura to honour Krishna’s Guru Dakshina to me.’

Acharya Sandipani continued, ‘In my tradition, the bride has a special privilege in the wedding scheme. Every ritual needs her approval after full understanding. She is the vehicle of tradition and culture. It does not matter whether the man understands the meanings behind our rituals, but a rishi is duty-bound to fully tutor the woman. So, Rukmini has to undergo that bit of compulsory schooling first.’

‘Ideally, I would have loved to have Bhishmaka do the kanyadana<sup>12</sup>, but because of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding your flight, I may have to request some other man to do it. It does not matter much though,’ said the rishi.

Rishi Sandipani called Rukmini to come closer to him and ceremonially handed her over to his wife Sushushrā for educating her in the ways of Dharma.

Sushushrā took Rukmini in her warm embrace. Rukmini was much taller than the rishi’s wife, yet she snuggled into the warmth of Sushushrā’s lap, her cheeks suffused and tears flowing in an unending stream as Rukmini remembered her lost mother. She was once again transported to the ethereal beauties of the Mishmika country, amidst the wafting fragrances of bamboo shoots, the fast-moving boats in strong currents of Idulikā and Brahmaputra. Rukmini immersed herself in the lap of Sushushrā, as she used to do when she was a sprightly little girl. She found the same heavenly feeling, which she had lost after her mother Lavangikā’s death from falling off a horse. Rukmini had dreamt of snuggling in her mother’s lap ever since. She just kept crying as the rishi’s wife stroked her hair and caressed her cheeks.

The rishi was watching this flow of affection from both sides. He made up his mind. ‘Punardatta, get a travel escort ready. You have to go to Idulikā, beyond Pragajyotisha, and get Lavangikā’s father to come here and do the kanyadana. He will easily remember his lost daughter after looking at Rukmini. She looks exactly like her mother.’

Punardatta bowed and left. Sushushrā lifted Rukmini up gently and took her into her quarters.

Sandipani brought the assembly to a close, instructing them to meet again at sandhya time.

When they met again in the evening, Rukmini was back to her cheerful self. Sushushrā had nursed her back to her full life. They had

chatted all day, just as a long-separated mother-daughter duo would do. Devi Sushushrā had laid out a course for Rukmini that would befit a queen. She announced it as soon as the party reassembled.

Krishna smiled playfully. ‘Mata, looks like you have got the whole course design wrong. I am not a king nor would I ever be a king. Why are you spoiling this princess by sowing the seeds of hubris in her mind.’

Gurumata was equal to the task. ‘Have you heard of the queen of hearts, Govinda? Is Lakshmi a queen or Vishnu a King? Vatsa<sup>13</sup>, you are not here on this earth to perform the Dharma of a mere raja. I have seen what you can do when you brought Punardatta back from those Vaivasvatapura Naga tribes. It is only a Rashtradharmi who could have done that. Hence, you are destined to be an Avatāra and Rukmini, not merely a queen.’ Sushushrā broke into peals of laughter as she finished her sentence.

Rukmini interjected. ‘Gurudeva, shouldn’t one know everything about her spouse before taking the seven steps of binding fidelity?’

Guru Sandipani smiled and said, ‘My child, I thought you knew a fair amount about him when you sent the message to Krishna through Shvetaketu to take you.’

Rukmini blushed and Krishna broke into laughter. ‘Acharya, she wants to know about the gopis and me. She knows all about me after she first met me at my yagyopavita samskara<sup>14</sup> at Gargacharya Ashrama.’

Acharya Sandipani thought for a while. ‘Good idea,’ he said.

‘Uddhava,’ Acharya commanded, ‘you will be part of Rukmini’s learning. Even I want to hear about Krishna’s exploits. Till date, I do not know how Krishna and you rescued Punardatta, and what all you did in Gomantaka, Karavirapura<sup>15</sup> and Kundinapura. I am also curious to know about the political manoeuvres of Rukmi, Jarasanadha, Damaghosha and Shrigālava. So you take us through all that.’

Rukmini jumped in. ‘I know about the political games of my brother better than anyone else. May I have the opportunity of recounting those stories.’

‘Why not, Vaidarbhi<sup>16</sup>? While you take your lessons in puja, dhyāna, bhakti, Prani Dharma, Rājya Dharma, Patni Dharma and

Mata Dharma, I will discuss with him the higher practices of turiya and samadhi<sup>17</sup>,’ said Sandipani.

He added, ‘The Uddhava prakarana<sup>18</sup> would be done in the evening after sandhya arati. We start tomorrow evening.’



- [1](#) Dvaraka
- [2](#) Arabia
- [3](#) Africa
- [4](#) Modern Basrah
- [5](#) Zanzibar
- [6](#) One-eighth of a day or three hours
- [7](#) Form
- [8](#) Streams of knowledge
- [9](#) Intellect
- [10](#) Identity
- [11](#) Cosmic form
- [12](#) A ritual offering of the daughter—a privilege Mother Shakti gives to a daughter's parents. A daughter is considered most auspicious.
- [13](#) Son
- [14](#) Thread ceremony
- [15](#) Modern-day Kolhapur
- [16](#) Princess of Vidarbha
- [17](#) Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy, for a description of the highest state of consciousness.
- [18](#) Episode



- 4 -

## The Gopis

Acharya Sandipani sat on a high platform right behind Uddhava who was seated on a low, flat stool with a dhurrie<sup>1</sup> on top. Acharya sat in padmasana, while Uddhava sat in vajrasana. Prayer to Goddess Sarasvati preceded Uddhava's discourse. Krishna sat passively as if the narration did not concern him at all. Rukmini was full of excitement. She sat in front of Acharya and Uddhava as if she was there to take part in a carnival. She just could not stay steady in any asana. She felt like dancing. Sushushrā pressed her hands and whispered, 'Uddhava is looking so nervous. Don't make him a nervous wreck by teasing him with your bubbling energy.'

Rukmini made the pretence of sitting quietly, though she was supercharged with an internal thrill as if she was going to meet the gopis in person. 'What was so special in those gopis that I do not have? Krishna is always quoting their example as if they were some sublime saints.'

Uddhava began gingerly.

'When Krishna asked me to go to Vrindavana and comfort the gopis<sup>2</sup>, I was quite excited to make the trip,' Uddhava became quite wistful and fell silent.

The Acharya nudged Uddhava with his staff to bring him back to reality.



Uddhava was jolted back into sense. He cleared his throat and resumed, ‘Krishna sent me to Vrindavana on his chariot with Daruka. I started out with supreme confidence as I thought it would be a child’s play to comfort young adolescent girls who had just been separated from a member of their team. So I had taken along some bark leaves with sutras to help me recollect important scriptures and agamas<sup>3</sup>. I had thought it would be a good opportunity to teach a little of what I had learnt. Guru Gargacharya had always treated me as his favourite disciple. When Krishna came, he suddenly displaced me from my perch. His utterances regarding yoga and sadhanā<sup>4</sup> seemed to come from an experienced living. So when he asked me to teach young girls of Vrindavana, I thought it was a good occasion to prove my worth in the eyes of Guru Gargacharya. So I happily started out with great anticipation. Before I left, Guru Gargacharya told me to go there with Shraddhā<sup>5</sup>.

‘However, I had not understood the full import of what Guru Gargacharya had said. Krishna’s chariot was decorated in the most delicate finery, given a new livery and the horses were bedecked in their best attire as is done at the time of a royal coronation. Vrindavana is hardly a yojana<sup>6</sup> away from Mathura. We started out one morning and had cleared the forests that lay on the way. As I approached the outskirts of Vrindavana, a gopa<sup>7</sup> spotted me from a distance. He looked bewildered for a moment, then he dropped his staff and ran back to the village shouting “Kanha has come, Kanha has come”. I too was taken aback as I did not foresee this situation. I did share the height of Krishna, and his physique, but that was all.

‘As we were about to enter the village, we came across a young gopi, about sixteen years old, sitting on her haunches and clinging to a tree trunk in an embrace. She seemed to be in a trance. She was singing a beautiful song in a low tone that I could not make out. Captivated by the tune, I asked Daruka to stop the chariot. The chariot stopped with loud neighs from the four horses as the reins were pulled in. The four-wheeled royal chariot stopped with a loud creaking sound due to the sudden stop. The chariot had stopped a few metres away from the gopi, yet it had no effect on her. She continued embracing the trunk and intermittently kept complaining loudly,

“Why don’t you come down from the tree, Kanha? I have been waiting for months now.”

‘I got down from the chariot, went to the gopi and tapped her on the shoulder. She came out of the trance and started reacting violently. She looked at my face for a minute with a bewildered look, and then started laughing hysterically. “You think you can fool me with this fancy make-up? Good attempt, bhadra<sup>8</sup>, but how will you get that smile and that look of the eyes?”

‘Saying this, she struck violently at the mukuta<sup>9</sup> I was wearing. “Throw off this mukuta, impostor. It doesn’t look good without the mayurapankha<sup>10</sup>.”

‘As the diadem fell off, my long hair flowed out. The young gopi started laughing hysterically, caught me by the hair and started pulling me towards the village.

‘Daruka came running from behind me and the gopa who had gone running back to the village emerged at the scene. A big crowd was trailing him at some distance.

“Tungā Devi<sup>11</sup>, what are you doing?” He suddenly stopped in his tracks. “This is not our Krishna,” he shouted.

‘Tungā Devi kept pulling me by the hair. “Didn’t I tell you that, Subala, you fatso?” Then the crowd got closer. It was led by four or five young gopis, with half of Vrindavana following suit.

‘The general crowd stopped at about fifty yards away. They looked as bewildered as the first gopa to see me, whose name, I think, was Subala. Then Mansukha emerged from the crowd. He knew me as he had met me with Krishna in Mathura. He shouted at Tungā Devi to let go of me, “Tunga, leave him. He is our Kanha’s brother, Uddhava. He is Kansā mausi’s<sup>12</sup> son. Let him go.” He pulled Tunga away by force.

‘A murmur of disappointment broke out among the villagers. They had been led to believe by Subala that Kanhaiya had come back. Here was an impostor, who looked like Krishna from a distance but did not have either the charm, or the smile, or the eyes, or even the complexion.

‘Mansukha gave me a tight embrace and said, “Come, let’s go to Nanda Baba’s palace. Ma Yashoda and Baba are waiting.”

‘Daruka and I were taken to Nanda Palace, if it could be called that. Nanda Baba welcomed us at the steps of his modest house built on the highest part of the village with a high plinth.

‘Yashoda chachi came running from inside the house and was about to take me in her embrace. She suddenly paused as she realised I was not her Kanha. Her heart seemed to nearly give way. Nanda realised her situation. He added helpfully, “This is Uddhava, son of Devabhaga and Devaki’s sister Kansā. Very reluctantly, Yashoda chachi embraced me. There was hardly any warmth in that artificial embrace. Rather, it seemed to me to be the labour of someone who had lost a loved one.

‘From another direction, a flood of young gopis of all types seemed to descend upon me. They were led by a beautiful fair-complexioned girl about five years older than me. She was in the fullness of her youth, radiating with joy, verve and the cadence of life itself. She carried a flute in her hands and also wore a mayurapankha in her hair. I came to know later that she was Radha.

‘Radha asked me rather imperiously, “What brings you here, Prince?”

‘I was a bit tensed from all the drama around me. I had thought that I was simply going to teach a few young girls the meaning of real bhakti, but the situation there seemed to be a lot more complicated.

‘All I could say was that I had been sent by Krishna with a message.

‘All hell broke loose as I said this. Almost all gopis shouted in unison, “liar, liar, liar, thief, thief, thief”. Another gopi, Lalita, shouted at the top of her voice, “Kanha said he would be back in three days. Now he sends his replica after months to give us a message. What does he think us to be?

‘I tried to gain time. “Look, let us meet after a while to give his message to you all.”

‘Nanda Baba interjected. “Uddhava, it is futile. Unless you give them the message, they will not let you do anything, not even let you eat or drink anything. Why don’t you just sit here and talk to them? Looks like I did not brief you that you were going into the lair of hungry lionesses.”

‘My throat had started to get parched. The gopis looked angry yet strangely suffused with some magical power.

‘Radha suggested that we go to a nearby kadamba tree<sup>13</sup>, where Krishna used to play his murali<sup>14</sup>. We went and I found myself a clump of roots that would serve as my perch for the next many months.

‘As soon as I sat down, a bhramara<sup>15</sup> started circling the gathering and kept buzzing over the gopis. Tungā Devi addressed the bhramara with a barely concealed taunt, “O bhramara, your sallies over our heads are useless, we already have a divine messenger from Krishna. Now go and sit on that shameless tree that remains green even after being separated from Krishna.”

‘The taunt was too obvious to miss. Radha tut-tutted Tungā Devi and asked me a straight question. “What is the message from Krishna, Uddhava ji?” She dawdled on the word “ji”, clearly using it as a taunt. She did not have to use that little honorific as I was much younger to her.

‘I got a little flustered but continued. “You see, gopas and gopis, your attachment to the physical form of Krishna is not right. You should not treat him as an object of affection or love. The highest form of love is the love for the nirguna<sup>16</sup> Ishvara<sup>17</sup>.””



- [<sup>1</sup>](#) A coarse carpet
- [<sup>2</sup>](#) Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.
- [<sup>3</sup>](#) Compendium of spiritual practices
- [<sup>4</sup>](#) Practice
- [<sup>5</sup>](#) Shraddhā is a concept and is untranslatable into English. It encompasses will, conviction, self-belief, an opening of the heart and much more.
- [<sup>6</sup>](#) Twelve kilometres
- [<sup>7</sup>](#) Male cowherd
- [<sup>8</sup>](#) Gentleman
- [<sup>9</sup>](#) Diadem
- [<sup>10</sup>](#) Peacock feather
- [<sup>11</sup>](#) Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy, for the introduction of various gopas and gopis.
- [<sup>12</sup>](#) Mother's sister
- [<sup>13</sup>](#) Burflower tree
- [<sup>14</sup>](#) Flute
- [<sup>15</sup>](#) Black wasp. 'Bhramara Geet' is a famous set of poetry by Suradasa that describes this episode, 'Madhubana tum kat rahat hare'.
- [<sup>16</sup>](#) Formless
- [<sup>17</sup>](#) Supreme



- 5 -

## Lessons in Love

No sooner did I utter these words that all hell broke loose again. Vishakhā, one of the close friends of Radha, shouted at me, “Where does this man Nirguna live? Does he live in these trees or in the Yamuna? Does he live in Vrindavana or in Mathura?”

‘Lalita chimed in, “Tell me, great man, how does this Nirguna Purusha<sup>1</sup> look like? Is he shyama<sup>2</sup> varna like our Shyama or is he fair? Does he play murali like our Krishna does or he is just hot air?”

‘I was slightly irritated at these interruptions. I tried to tell them that real knowledge comes from studying the Vedas and the Upanishads and instead of being attached to Krishna’s physical form, they should focus on the divine that is in him, and which connects him to the divine in them. The gopis, and even the gopas, guffawed at this suggestion, making me look like a fool. Mansukha asked, “Uddhava ji,” dawdling at the word “ji” again, “could it be that if we read the Vedas and the Upanishads, Krishna would emerge out of its pages?”

‘I persisted with my understanding of the Supreme. I said, “Look, by studying the Vedas and the Upanishads, you would understand the ephemeral nature of life on earth and the evanescent nature of Ātmā that occupies this temporary abode called the body. I will teach you Vedānta to relieve you of your sensory attachments to Krishna. You

should look at Krishna as a manifestation of the divine as in yourself, or in me, or in everyone else.”

‘I saw Radha smiling at this. Vishakhā gave me a sardonic look and sneered, “O Uddhava, we don’t have twenty minds.<sup>3</sup> The one we have is already suffused with Shyama, where is the place for anything else? All we know is that our being is one with Krishna. You are the lord of yoga, can you tell us what is the description of this state. We do not know the ways of worship and meditation that you do. When we sit down and think, all we see is our Gopāla, all we hear is his murali, and that is our happiness. Now you want to even take away that happiness? Our being is full of Krishna. There is no place for any Veda or Upanishad or any Hiranyagarbha<sup>4</sup> in this being. Why do you want to torture us in this way?”

‘I summoned up the best that I was taught by Rishi Gargacharya. “Listen, the mind is clouded by ignorance of Maya<sup>5</sup>. By learning yoga, you will be able to control the functions of the mind in a way that will enable you to reach the highest state of consciousness and unite yourself with the Brahman. Achievement of this unity is yoga. You will be absolutely blissful when you reach this state.”

‘Champakamalika asked innocently, “Yogiraja, we were absolutely blissful when Krishna was amongst us. Was that not the state of yoga? When he played his murali, we used to go into a trance. Once, we even forgot our clothes and Tungā Devi saved us. Not just that, we used to remain in that state of bliss for a very long time. Even now, when we are dwelling on the form of Krishna, we reach a similar state of bliss. What is this formless method you are telling us?”

‘Chitra asked playfully, “Uddhav jiiii, do you know about rasa and bhāva?”

‘I was very uncomfortable with these questions. I did have the theoretical knowledge of yoga, nirguna, and even rasa and bhāva but these gopis and gopas seemed to have lived that experience. I did attempt to answer them theoretically but my reply was drowned in laughter. It was deeply embarrassing.

‘Tungavidyā chimed in. “Can you make us experience the same state of devotion that Kanha made us experience when we worshipped Govardhana and it saved us from the great flood?”

‘Now it was the turn of Indulekhā to come up with another memory of the great time they seemed to have had with Krishna, “Yogiraja, when we used to have these gatherings here under the kadamba tree in the evenings, all the cows used to come and gather here hearing Krishna’s flute. Since you are the lord of yoga, I am sure you will be able to do that as well?”

‘I was getting totally unnerved. I was not ready for any test of this kind. Radha, on the other hand, was absolutely calm and was smiling as enigmatically as I had seen Krishna smile many a time.

‘Now it was time for the fat Subala to join the carnage. “Uddhava,” he said. I sensed intimacy in this form of address, which I was grateful for. “Would you play a game of throwball with us? We have not known any greater ecstasy and joy than playing this game with Krishna. He would always win. Even when the ball went to Kaliya Duh in the Yamuna, he still won. Shall I bring the ball?”

‘Before I could handle this little query, Rangadevi and Sudevi came up with the flute challenge. Each of the jibes had something to do with the little speech I had given about knowledge, yoga and the Self. I was feeling completely trapped.

‘Radha joined the fun. She threw a murali at me. “Here, Uddhava, this is Krishna’s murali. Play a few cadences and take us to the same heights of rapture as he used to.”

‘I was in a complete fix. I could write a long piece on playing a murali, complete with notes, but playing a murali was a different game altogether. I was cursing myself at the hubris that had impelled me to treat Krishna with disdain. I remembered the last sentence of Guru Gargacharya as I was leaving. I was being given a lesson in Shraddhā. This was no ordinary Shraddhā either. It was based on direct empirical evidence called pratyaksha pramana—a personal experience of the kind that I had no inkling of.

‘It was a difficult choice. I did know how to play a few notes on a murali but I was no virtuoso. The descriptions of Krishna’s mastery of the panchamahabhootas—shabda, sparsha, roopa, rasa and gandha<sup>6</sup>—were intimidating. I kept sitting and put the murali to my lips. The whole gathering howled at me in unison and said, “You don’t even know how to hold the murali properly. How will you play it?” I



looked at Radha with a bit of helplessness. She was smiling with that same enigmatic smile.

‘Tungā Devi jumped at me and snatched the murali from my hands. She stood before me, crossed her right leg in front of the left in a sort of a dance pose and held the murali to her lips with the left hand closer to the lips and the murali on the right hand away from it. “This is the way to play the murali, Yogiraja. Play this murali and you will reach samadhi effortlessly.”

‘This was another shocker. These lovely girls seemed to know even the yoga terminology. I was even more nervous.

‘Radha goaded me further. “Come on, Yogiraja, I am sure the knowledge of the Self would illuminate the notes of murali automatically.” I was in a deep dilemma—to play or not to play? If I refused to play, I would be ribbed so badly that I would have to run back to Mathura and would lose face before Krishna. If I did play, I was sure I would not measure up to Krishna’s standards after hearing about his impresario like reputation. Yet, I decided to play as I remembered Krishna’s discussion with Guru Gargacharya regarding kriya and Karma.<sup>7</sup>

‘As I tried to play the murali, the notes that came out were discordant. My audience was in front of me, all of them, had closed their eyes. Slowly, their eyes started opening. Mansukha was the first one to speak. “Uddhava ji, get the shadaja<sup>8</sup> right first.” These cowherds seemed to have an innate unity with the anahada chakra<sup>9</sup>, which unifies the cognition with shabda<sup>10</sup>. I had been studying the properties of shadaja, rishabha and gandhara<sup>11</sup>, without being able to recognise them. These companions of Krishna could instinctively recognise the svara<sup>12</sup> without ever having done any formal study.

‘I paused and made another attempt. It was passable, but this time none of them closed their eyes.

‘Radha took the murali from my hands, cleaned it carefully, prayed to it respectfully and then put it to her lips.

‘What followed was something that I cannot describe even today. A sublime breeze of music wafted through the little grove. My eyes closed spontaneously. I got transported to a world of rapture and

ecstasy. I sensed a oneness with the notes of the flute as if I was a part of the music flowing from it. It was a feeling of indescribable bliss.’

Krishna, who was listening to this account by Uddhava, added helpfully, “I know Radha could do that, especially when she played Raga Bihaga.”

Rukmini did her own little playacting of getting upset with Krishna at his praise of Radha but Acharya Sandipani waved his hand and motioned Uddhava to continue.

Uddhava pleaded his inability to put the feeling of bliss he experienced into words. He skipped this part and continued.

‘It was clear to me that these cowherds were far more accomplished in Dharma than me. I had only memorised the shāstras but these people seemed to have lived it. They had lived with an accomplished yogi amongst their midst. They were not ready to settle for anything less. Their path of devotional love seemed to lead to the same destination of oneness with the Supreme that I had only read about and which I had started experiencing only after I spent some time with Krishna. Krishna was not just a companion, but he was like a guru as well as a loved one to them.

‘It was at that time that Mansukha told me that I could learn all the vidyas<sup>13</sup> from Shri Radha Devi. I bowed at her lotus feet and she took me as her disciple. She taught me the way of losing myself and my ego through song and dance. She called this the path of Bhakti Yoga<sup>14</sup>.

‘I felt so inadequate in front of these gopis and their path of love for the Supreme that I decided to stay at the feet of these great Atmas<sup>15</sup> and learn. I had made a grandiose promise to Krishna that I would return in three days, but I could return only at the end of three months.

‘When I started for my return journey, the gopis and gopas again gathered at the edge of the forest outside Vrindavana to bid me farewell. There were more poignant scenes, but I remember only the parting words from Radha, “Uddhava, Krishna is Jagadguru<sup>16</sup>. I was lucky that he learnt a few things from me, but that is the nature of great gurus. They learn from everyone, not just from men, but also from every animate and inanimate being. If they did not, they would

not know the nature of mortality and immortality, they would not be able to distinguish between a chitta<sup>[17](#)</sup> and Chit<sup>[18](#)</sup>.”



- <sup>1</sup> Man, an allusion to the Cosmic form or Purusha of Samkhya.
- <sup>2</sup> Dark
- <sup>3</sup> ‘Udho man na bhaye das bees’—a poem by Suradasa.
- <sup>4</sup> The original proponent of yoga, later codified by Patanjali.
- <sup>5</sup> Illusion
- <sup>6</sup> The five principal elements and their properties—sound, touch, sight, taste and smell as main properties of akasha (space), vayu (air), agni (fire), jala (water) and prthivi (earth).
- <sup>7</sup> Refer to Chapter 51 of *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.
- <sup>8</sup> The base note of the Indian scale, also known as Sā.
- <sup>9</sup> The fourth chakra of the seven chakras in the yogic system of inner focal points.
- <sup>10</sup> Sound
- <sup>11</sup> Sā, re, ga—the first three notes of the musical scale.
- <sup>12</sup> Note
- <sup>13</sup> Subjects
- <sup>14</sup> Refer to the chapters on Rāsa Lilā in *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Part I of the trilogy.
- <sup>15</sup> Loosely translated as souls into English. The difference is that an Ātmā occupies a body, whereas a body occupies a soul.
- <sup>16</sup> Guru of the Universe
- <sup>17</sup> Man’s Consciousness
- <sup>18</sup> Universal Consciousness



- 6 -

## The Pandavas

Balarama shook his head vigorously in affirmation after Uddhava finished the story of his visit to Vrindavana. ‘Yes, I clearly remember that we kept waiting for Uddhava for a week and then sent messengers to him, but he had fallen so much in love with the gopis that he refused to come back. Acharya Gargacharya had planned for an upanayana samskara<sup>1</sup> for all those going to Sandipani Ashrama. Uddhava was one of them. We got a word from Nanda Baba that he would be able to send Uddhava back only after three months or so after he had got out of the charms of the gopis. So Acharya decided to reschedule the upanayana and decided to take Krishna and me to Kurukshetra. He also instructed Uncle Vasudeva to invite his relatives<sup>2</sup> to the ceremony. I do remember that all the Yadava kings and chieftains were invited. Vidarbha, Chedi and Bhoja were invited, along with many smaller chieftains. It was there that Krishna first met Rukmini. The seed of this gathering was sown on that day.

‘When we went to Kurukshetra, we settled down in an ashrama near the Kurukshetra Sarovara<sup>3</sup>. Mata Devaki had accompanied us. We were to take a holy dip in the sacred sarovara. When we reached the sarovara, there were a few Brahmins ahead of us. They loudly talked of punya<sup>4</sup> sarovara. Krishna, as usual, needled them by

disputing their concepts of punya and pavitra<sup>5</sup>, proclaiming equally loudly that the sarovara was not punya sarovara, but pavitra sarovara.

‘The Brahmins got very angry. Krishna needled them even more. “Vipravara, why do you get angry at me. If a word from me can make you angry, you are clearly not in control of your anger; rather your anger seems to possess you.” The Brahmins got even angrier. Krishna then told them, “Vipravara, you are so helpless in front of krodha, a mada and matsarya—anger, arrogance and envy—that you are not fit to be called Brahmins. You should become warriors. *Anger is useful for a warrior, useless for a sage. Arrogance is useful for a shudra, as it makes him produce more in competition with others; but envy is useless for all.*” Before the situation got any uglier, Mata Devaki arrived at the scene and told Krishna to shut up. One of the Brahmins, keeping quiet till then, suddenly got up and caught hold of Krishna. He examined him very closely, and then looked at me. He went and touched the feet of Mata Devaki and asked her, “Is this boy Krishna, Devi?”

‘There was pin-drop silence at this question. Mata Devaki was very possessive of Krishna after learning about all the attacks that had taken place on him at the behest of Kamsa. Though Kamsa was dead, Jarasandha was still around and was plotting to kill the killer of his son-in-law.

‘The Brahmin asked, “Are you Mata Devaki?” She had to say yes.

He was overwhelmed with emotions. Copious tears started flowing from his eyes. “Devaki, I am Vidura, I am the unfortunate dwivara<sup>6</sup> of your sister-in-law, Kunti.”

‘All of us touched Mahatma Vidura’s feet. Even though he was born in a Kshatriya kula, he had obtained Brahminhood through his Karmas. He blessed all of us and asked the impish Krishna, “Do you have any more questions for me?”

‘Krishna was in his usual inquisitive mood. “Please tell me, Pitamaha<sup>7</sup>, why do we express our respect to elders by touching their feet. Didn’t the Purusha Sukta place feet as the most inferior among all organs?”

‘Mahatma Vidura smiled indulgently. “My child, though your Acharya, Gargacharya, is the ablest person on this earth to answer this question, I am now honour-bound to answer this. The Purusha of

Rigveda is the Cosmic whole. In this wholeness, please tell me where will you locate the head and where will you locate the feet? The tree of creation has its roots at the top, and the roots ingest the Cosmic spirit from the top. The Cosmic Purusha can be imagined sitting in the state of shirshasana. The Prakriti is in the same state, to begin with, but then it gets modified due to the imbalance of the various guṇas<sup>8</sup>, sattva<sup>9</sup>, rajas<sup>10</sup> and tamas<sup>11</sup>, which leads to mundane creation.

*“Samsāra is a cycle by definition, so the feet and the head exist in oneness. For a lay observer, feet are the most important part of a person. Feet are the foundation. A man is able to stand with his spine erect because of our feet. That is the secret of his evolution. A man is the only creature in the universe that has the possibility of evolution along the chakras located in his erect spine—from muladhara to sahsrara chakra is an evolution path. The feet keep him erect, so the feet are like amrita<sup>12</sup>. That is why we accept charanamrita<sup>13</sup> of respected deities and gurus.”*

‘Mata Devaki intervened, “Is Kunti also here?” Mahatma Vidura fell silent and then answered, “Yes, Devaki. Kunti is also here. She has had a very unfortunate turn of events in her life. Pandu, my elder brother and her husband, died a few years back. Hastinapura has not been very hospitable to her. She keeps herself busy by visiting sacred places. This sarovara is directly linked to the River Sarasvati. Maharaja Kuru has done great penance on the banks of this river. A great penance in a place imbues it with great concentration of Shakti, which one can receive if one knows the proper way of meditation. Kunti has come here with the intention of meditating. I always go along with her to teach her meditation and bring Sulabhā along to give her company. The children are also here. Aha! It seems Arjuna is almost the age of Krishna, and Bhima might be slightly older. They are on the other bank of the sarovara. Let me take all of you there.”

‘Mahatma Vidura led us to the other side of the sarovara. An emotional reunion took place. Both the families were familiar with each other but were meeting for the first time. Devaki and Kunti took an instant liking to each other. Bhima and I got on together well. Krishna and Arjuna just stuck to each other as some long-lost brothers.

‘We played together a lot. Yudhishtira was the brooding kind. He would be thinking all the time. Bhima was the carefree soul amongst us. He was talking all the time. Arjuna had a sharp intellect. He was observant. He spoke in small but pithy sentences. Arjuna and Krishna hit it off almost immediately. The twins, Nakula and Sahadeva, were small and they followed Mata Kunti everywhere.

‘Bhima and I challenged each other to a swimming competition and went on swimming for hours. After we were through and I had won most of the contests, Bhima requested me to teach him a few tricks of gada yuddha or mace battle. We went to a nearby arena and sweated it out till a retainer called us for food. Similarly, Arjuna and Krishna wandered afar to an ashrama. Krishna told us that they were discussing the higher practices of yoga. The eldest brother, Yudhishtira, gave us a lesson on how to eat right and how to honour Nature that gave us food.

‘When night fell, we parted and went to our respective places. We stayed there for another three days. The Pandavas were travelling back to Hastinapura to begin their education with Guru Dronacharya, just as we would travel back to prepare for our destination of Acharya Sandipani’s gurukula.

‘Mata Kunti was very keen to hear about our time in Gokul and Vrindavana. On the other hand, Krishna and I were never tired of the company of the Pandavas. Mahatma Vidura collected all of us together on the final day and asked all of us to narrate our experiences. The Pandavas did not have much to tell. They had been camping with their father Pandu in the forest. Krishna and I had a lot to narrate about our experiences. Krishna regaled everyone with the stories of killing many monster warriors sent by Kamsa. I also narrated the tale of repelling the boat attack mounted by Banakantaka who had taken the name of Jatil Muni<sup>14</sup> and had become the new regent of Kutil Dharma.

‘Arjuna was very much interested in the story of Rāsa Lilā and the gopis. Krishna narrated the story with his typical nonchalance. Bhima was trying to get the story spiced up by throwing suggestive remarks. Krishna, as Rukmini will soon realise, is quite different from the image of a romantic that some people have tried to weave around him. So he went off on a tangent to educate the assembly in the



virtues of eight-fold Ashtanga Yoga. While Mata Kunti, Mata Devaki, Mahatma Vidura and Yudhishtira listened to Krishna with rapt attention, Arjuna too sat listening intently. The rest of us were looking for ways to escape this forced tutorial. As luck would have it, someone who had jumped into the sarovara to swim started drowning. Bhima and I responded to a general cry for help immediately. We were able to rescue a young man in five minutes but went back only after Krishna's session was over and Arjuna came out to look for us.

‘After the story session, we parted with a lot of effusive emotion. The two elderly ladies embraced each other and cried for over an hour. It was only after the gentle persuasion of Mahatma Vidura that the two parties would go to their resting places. We started back for Mathura at the crack of dawn with fond memories of our newfound brothers on whom fate had played a cruel joke.’



- [1](#) Thread ceremony
- [2](#) Suhradas
- [3](#) A large pond
- [4](#) Holy
- [5](#) Sacred
- [6](#) The younger brother of the husband
- [7](#) Grandfather
- [8](#) Properties of the Self
- [9](#) Righteous
- [10](#) Like a warrior
- [11](#) Depravity
- [12](#) Nectar
- [13](#) Nectar of the feet—Sanatana symbolism. Water that washes a deity's feet turns into nectar.
- [14](#) Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.



- 7 -

## The Departure

Balarama continued his narration after a brief water break. ‘When we came back to Mathura, Uddhava had still not returned. The messengers sent to Vrindavana had come back with the news that Uddhava was busy receiving knowledge from a new guru. Krishna laughed uncontrollably at this information. He added for effect, “The man who had gone to teach has become a student himself.”

‘Guru Gargacharya was becoming restless. The rainy season was not very far. Uddhava came back at the end of three months. A thread ceremony, upanayana samskara, was immediately planned. Krishna, Uddhava and I were to leave for Avantika straight from the upanayana.

‘When we met Uddhava upon his return, Krishna teased him so much that I expected him to start crying. But there was an equanimity about him that we had not seen before. “Uddhava, it seems your brahmacharya<sup>1</sup> has been breached. You are looking lost,” Krishna teased him.

‘Uddhava remained serene. He replied, “Krishna, life is a great teacher. I was so full of myself when I went to Vrindavana. The arrogance of learning made me feel superior to those village girls and boys. I did not read the twinkle in your eyes, and I even ignored the explicit instruction of Guru Gargacharya when he told me to take

Shraddhā with me on that journey. The girls have taught me an invaluable lesson. I have learnt at their feet, especially from Radha. Your barbs have no meaning for me now. I know the meaning of real knowledge. I now know that ‘knowing is not seeing’<sup>2</sup>.”

‘We let Uddhava off without making too much fun of him as he had himself realised how hubris had clouded his learning. The preparations for the thread ceremony had started. We had very little time. Invitations were sent to all the Yadava kings—Kunti-Bhoja of Kunti, Bhishmaka of Vidarbha, Damaghosha of Chedi and all the chieftains of the various Yadava clans of Andhaka, Vrishni, Kukura, Bhojaka and even some from the Yadu lineage.

‘On the day of the upanayana, an incident occurred which has culminated into today’s gathering.’ Balarama paused. ‘I think it would be better if Uddhava narrated that incident as I was not a direct witness to it.’

Rukmini became quite uncomfortable, even as Uddhava smiled. Uddhava had become too absorbed in himself lately. To see him smile was a rare event in itself. Of late, he would be in a reflective mood most of the time.

Uddhava recounted the incident with a twinkle in his eyes. ‘We had been initiated into our vows of commitment to learning and celibacy. We were doing a round of the Mathura Square where the ceremony had been held. All three of us were going around asking for alms from the elders. As we approached the Vidarbha royal family, King Bhishmaka placed his offering in our receptacles. As his wife, Lavangikā, was no more, his daughter-in-law and Rukmini’s bhabhi<sup>3</sup>, Suvratā, offered the gifts on behalf of the ladies of the clan. Rukmini and Suvratā had their own love-hate relationship, quite usual between two sisters-in-law in an Indian joint family and more so in a royal family. Seeing Suvratā offer alms to the young brahmacharis<sup>4</sup>, the young Rukmini took out her necklace and placed it in the receptacle. That created a piquant situation in the august gathering. The elders hissed with indignation. A minor furore arose in the ladies’ section.

‘Some of the elders went into a tizzy, thinking there had been a bad omen. A younger person was not supposed to place an offering in young brahmacharis’ begging bowl.

‘Guru Gargacharya stood up. His calm demeanour had an electric effect. Complete silence descended on the gathering.

‘He chanted a hymn to Goddess Lakshmi and gave his verdict, “Ways of the Supreme are inscrutable, Maharaja Ugrasena. An innocent act of a child does not affect a sacrament or a ritual. *Rituals are only symbolisms that mimic Cosmic phenomena*. Who knows how an innocent offering by this little girl would change the course of history?”

‘The gathering calmed down. Gargacharya spoke little, but when he did, everyone listened to him and reflected.

‘I could see that Rukmini herself became quite baffled. She hid behind Bhishmaka and kept thinking about the commotion she had caused. I know from my personal knowledge that it is her reflection on Guru Gargacharya’s words that led her to take the extreme step of uniting her destiny with Krishna even though she had to go against the norms of society.

‘All of us left for Avantika<sup>5</sup> straight from the place of the upanayana. Guru Gargacharya was with us. Even though he had planned that Rishi Panini and Acharya Chandakaushika would travel with us to Avantika, they had left ahead of us because of the delay in my return. They also wanted to do advance planning of the lessons to be imparted to us, mainly because they were quite overawed by Krishna’s quick grasp and precocious knowledge. They were expecting many other rishis like Pratham Acharya, Vāchaspati, Kapila and Kanada at Avantika. Both Panini and Chandakaushika were keen to have learned discussions among themselves.

‘We started on foot. It took us three days to reach the Charmanyavati<sup>6</sup> jetty at Dhavalapuri<sup>7</sup>. A large rowboat was ready to take us to Avantika from there.

‘We left at the crack of dawn from Dhavalapuri, rowing upstream. The banks were deeply forested. Fifty rowing men rowed together at the lower deck, and were replaced by another fifty after every few hours of rowing. Three shifts operated every four hours. The passengers were at the upper deck.

‘Krishna pulled me down to the rowing line. He wanted us to help the rowing men. The rowers were thrilled to find two brahmacharis among them. The entire ambience of the lower deck got transformed

as Krishna sang songs to motivate the rowers, and rowed with them. Even though I was hesitant to join them, the sheer rapture sweeping the contingent pulled me into it. We sang and rowed till we were about to fall. Enthusiasm was such that the rowers of the first shift were not willing to give way to the second shift. There was a competition among the men to have Krishna in their midst. Even when we got tired and were no longer able to row, the men would just want Krishna to be among them. He enjoyed their company and they loved him. He sang songs with them, joined them in rowing the boat and lifted their morale to a fever pitch. I have never seen men so happy doing back-breaking drudgery.

‘We were advised not to go near the shore as the forests were infested with wild animals. Hence, we kept moving even when darkness fell. After about three days, we anchored at a clearing in the forest near a small village. The people of the village were a self-sufficient lot, growing enough food for themselves and having a large number of cows. The crew was experienced and had always used this as their replenishing point. They referred to the village as Kuntalapura<sup>8</sup>. From this point on, the river was going to enter a long gorge.

‘We moved again at dawn. After another day, we branched into the Shiprā River. In another two days, we berthed near Avantika in thick forests around noon.

‘Though I had never been to Avantika, I had met the princes of Avanti—Vinda and Anuvinda—in Mathura during Kamsa’s reign. From them, I knew that the great temple of Mahakaleshvara was located on the banks of Shiprā where Time or Kāla itself was manifested in the form of Shiva. I was curious as to why we had stopped in the forests, instead of on the banks of Shiprā near the great temple and in the great city of Aryavarta.

‘Acharya cleared my confusion. “We are not going to the town, Uddhava. Sandipani Ashrama is in the forests. A message will soon be relayed through a local whistling method. Just watch.”

‘Even as he finished his clarification to me, a young man went up a tree and gave a signal through clipped whistles—three short ones followed by a long one. A short while later, we heard the same signal repeated in the distance.

‘In about half an hour, we had a reception party led by the Avanti princes, Vinda and Anuvinda. The crew was housed in thatched quarters built near the jetty, and our party made its way through the very thick forest towards the ashrama. It was dusk-like dark even at the height of noon. Two retainers walked ahead, slashing the protruding branches and shouting warnings to keep away from thorny undergrowth.

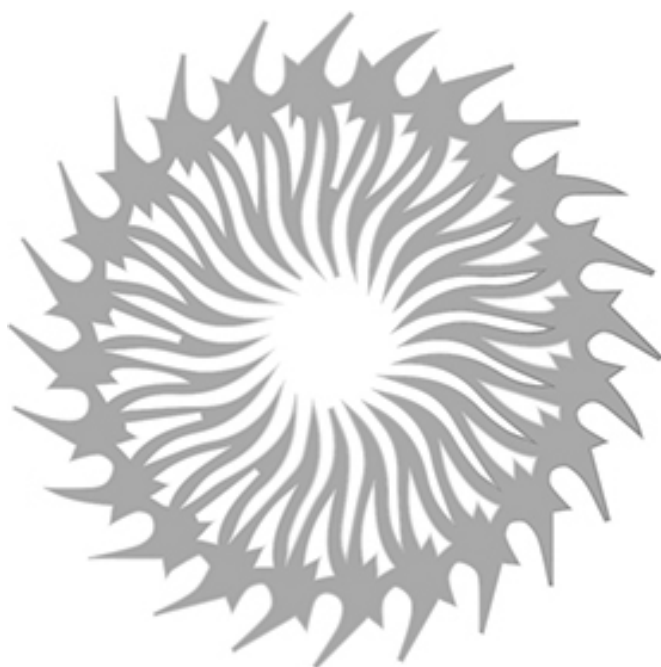
‘In a matter of another half an hour, we reached a large clearing that housed the Sandipani Ashrama. Then I saw something I would never forget in my life. Rishi Sandipani, flanked by Rishi Chandakaushika and Panini whom I had met, and half a dozen distinguished-looking rishis were at the entrance of the ashrama to receive us with Devi Sushushrā and a few ashrama boys and girls to apply kumkum<sup>9</sup> on our foreheads. I had been to Gargacharya Gurukula too, but I had never seen this kind of a welcome being given to new students. There was definitely something or someone in our party who was being given this special treatment, and it was not Guru Gargacharya.’



- <sup>1</sup> Celibacy
- <sup>2</sup> See Chapter 24 of *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.
- <sup>3</sup> Elder brother's wife
- <sup>4</sup> Celibates
- <sup>5</sup> Ujjayini or Ujjain
- <sup>6</sup> Chambal
- <sup>7</sup> Dholpur
- <sup>8</sup> Kota
- <sup>9</sup> Vermilion



## **PART II**





- 8 -

## Jatil Muni

**B**anakantaka was enjoying his newly acquired status of Jhankalputra and his new name—Jatil Muni. While fleeing from Mathura, he was all alone. He had tried convincing his guru, Kutil Muni, to come with him, but he was having his delusions of conquest. Kutil Muni was quite sure that Kamsa would kill Krishna and honour his word of installing Kutil Dharma as the official religion of Mathura. Banakantaka was not so sure as he had seen the prowess of young Krishna and Balarama in combat and archery. As it turned out, Banakantaka got his hunch correct and was now sitting in the deep forest of Khandavaprastha as the new head of an old cult, even as Kutil Muni had had his head cut off.

Jatil Muni had begun afresh. In the quasi-dharmic animistic society of the Nagas, he could not use the tools of Kutil Muni. Using the reverse Swastika was out of the question. Forcing 'Jai Jhankal' on the Nagas was equally out of question. Loud prayer calls were impossible to make. So Banakantaka, now Jatil Muni, decided to go for a major makeover of Kutil Dharma without sacrificing the essential philosophy of combining the political and religious power in one person. Jatil Muni fancied himself as that one person who had been ordained by Jhankal to carry out his mission on earth.

He spent most of his time studying the edicts and sermons of Kutil Muni and sending messages to Parshva and Gandhara clans, who

were friendly to him. He sent a message to a prince of Gandhara he knew from his childhood. His name was Shakuni.

He got a message back from Shakuni after a gap of nearly one year. He was thrilled with the message.

His studious and reclusive nature had attracted many Nagas towards him during this one year. They sometimes participated with him in his prayers and rituals, but Jatil Muni made no attempts to befriend them or to make any disciples from among them. This gradually made them regard him as a genuine selfless sanyasi. As he spoke very less, the regard for Jatil Muni kept growing manifold in the Naga population.

Jatil Muni did not fail to notice the contrast between Mathura and the forest of Khandavaprastha. He was quick to realise that the reaction against Kutil Dharma in Mathura was the result of the impatience of his guru, and also because of the brutal methodology he employed.

He started to meditate for long hours and it yielded him a new methodology.

He read the message of Shakuni with great interest. ‘Brother Banakantaka, I am happy to learn that you have founded a new cult called Kutil Dharma. The description of this new cult is very much on the lines of what I have been thinking for my nephews of the Kuru family. King Dhritarashtra is my elder sister’s husband. Yet, the kingdom is being practically ruled by Bhishma, who is a wily old fox, completely sold on the old-fashioned concept of Dharma. He keeps misguiding the disabled Dhritarashtra, who is always confused between righteousness and his own self-interest. I would be very keen to meet you as soon as possible. I think the principles of Kutil Dharma can save the land of Kurus from the wily Bhishma and a new curse which is developing in the form of Krishna.’

Jatil Muni felt faint at reading the name of Krishna. ‘Hell,’ he muttered to himself. ‘This sorcerer Krishna has infected the Kuru dynasty as well,’ he thought. ‘This would complicate things as Krishna is not an ordinary person. The guy is gifted with an incredibly sharp mind.’ He vividly remembered how Krishna’s flaming arrows had foiled his riverine attack on Vrindavana and how

arrows bearing water balloons had doused his own flaming arrows.<sup>1</sup> He was longing to meet Shakuni at the earliest.

A few weeks later, Shakuni and Jatil Muni met at Rakshagriha.

Shakuni narrated the impasse of Hastinapura. ‘You must know that Bhishma was the rightful heir of the Kuru dynasty, but he took a vow not to covet the throne so that his father could marry a crafty fisherwoman. Dhritarashtra and Pandu are the grandsons of Maharaja Shāntanu from the line of the fisherwoman, Satyawati. Bhishma is Shāntanu’s son from his first wife, Gangā. Dhritarashtra was born blind. Hence, he was disqualified from being a king according to Dharma. Pandu ascended the throne but became a renunciate. In the meantime, both Pandu and Dhritarashtra had their children. My sister’s children are called Kauravas and Pandu’s children are called Pandavas. Bhishma wants Pandu’s eldest, Yudhishtira, should take the throne. We have put forth an argument to support Dhritarashtra’s eldest, Suyodhana. The public does not like Suyodhana and calls him Duryodhana. Dhritarashtra is totally under the spell of his younger half-brother, Vidura. Vidura is a classical practitioner of Sanatana Dharma. In his righteous zeal, he keeps advising Dhritarashtra against my nephew Duryodhana.’

Shakuni paused briefly, mopped his brow and continued, ‘I must have my nephew ascend the throne but that is not possible under Sanatana Dharma. I must create an alternate narrative to be able to do that. This is why I am thrilled with this new narrative of Kutil Dharma. The question is how we can get a well-versed Kutil Dharmi into the court to counter people like Bhishma, Vidura, Dronacharya, Kripacharya and the doyen of them all, Maharshi Veda Vyasa.’

Jatil Muni could see a clear opening. He immediately offered his new disciple Kanika to Shakuni. ‘I have understood the problem. I will coach Kanika well and you place him in the inner council of Dhritarashtra. That should do the trick. I have another disciple, Chandrachuda, who I want to utilise in countering Krishna. I will have him sent to the Sandipani Ashrama where he will try and counter the crafty Krishna. We have to develop the narrative in a very subtle manner so that people do not suspect us of having any ulterior motive. So, we will have to appropriate and digest the Sanatana symbols and philosophies. Once we have the people under our spell,

we can make use of their broad plural architecture and ask them to take an oath to Jhankal by reading the Pralaya Mantra<sup>2</sup> and the Pralaya Shāstra. That will be the way to go. My guru, Kutil Muni, got killed trying to be too direct. We have to capture their education and, through education, their narrative.'

Jatil Muni became thoughtful and whispered, 'I do realise that I have to find a way of countering Krishna, otherwise, the best of our narratives will come to nought.'

Shakuni comforted his old friend. 'I don't know much about Krishna, but I am sure I can handle a callow young man like him. I need help to deal with the wizened old men like Maharshi Vyasa, Bhishma and Vidura. Dronacharya and Kripacharya are not that difficult. Dronacharya is greedy and Kripacharya is an escapist.'

Jatil Muni shook his head vigorously in disagreement. 'Don't make a mistake in underestimating Krishna. I made that mistake and I am paying for it. Kamsa thought he would kill Krishna easily, but he paid for that miscalculation with his life. Just don't make that mistake.'

Shakuni shrugged nonchalantly. He thought himself to be the foremost practitioner of war by deceit or Kutayuddha. He was of the firm opinion that *between Dharmayuddha and Kutayuddha, including its manifestations of Asura Yuddha<sup>3</sup> and Lobha Yuddha<sup>4</sup>, the latter was bound to win as the former bound itself up in too many constraints. Kutayuddha, on the other hand, believed in a war that focussed only on the annihilation of the enemy and all his support systems. It did not treat non-combatants as detached, but rather as part of a support system for the combatants. Massacres, vandalism and destruction of property of non-combatants were a common occurrence in such a war.*

Shakuni asked Jatil Muni to have Kanika brought to him. The young man was very bright. After a brief discussion with Kanika, Shakuni was convinced that he was the man who could be groomed to take on people like Vidura. He wanted to test him.

Shakuni asked Kanika, 'Tell me son, how is Kshatriya's svadharma fulfilled?'

Kanika replied without batting an eyelid, 'A Kshatriya's svadharma is fulfilled only by expanding his empire and keeping it secure.'

‘What is the importance of following Dharma in a yuddha<sup>5</sup>?’ asked Shakuni.

‘A yuddha is a yuddha. The only object of yuddha is enhancement of svadharma of a Kshatriya, that is the enhancement of his kula<sup>6</sup>,’ replied Kanika.

‘But shouldn’t the Rashtra Dharma and the kuladharma take precedence over Kshatriya’s svadharma? Vidura says that one should sacrifice one’s individual interests for the kula, interests of the kula for the town and should sacrifice the interests of the town for the country. For self-fulfilment, one should sacrifice the earth and attain liberation<sup>7</sup>,’ Shakuni quoted an oft-recited Vidura shloka, which Dhritarashtra was very fond of quoting.

Kanika listened to Shakuni respectfully and responded with a snigger. ‘In that case, a Kshatriya should not have a kula at all. However, if the kula does not remain, the Kshātra of a Kshatriya is disgraced and his existence is over.’

Shakuni got up and embraced the young Kanika. He gushed with excitement. ‘Banakantaka, this young man will do you proud. I am taking him with me. Please arrange to have his education in Kutil Dharma continued. I will set up a chain of communication with you and we will devise a foolproof methodology to destroy Sanatana Dharma from within. I agree with your subtle methods. Kutil Muni could not have succeeded with all his bludgeoning methods. I will accept Kutil Dharma tomorrow.’

Shakuni retired for the day. The next day was going to be exciting.



- <sup>1</sup> Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.
- <sup>2</sup> Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.
- <sup>3</sup> Savages' war
- <sup>4</sup> War for greed
- <sup>5</sup> War
- <sup>6</sup> Clan
- <sup>7</sup> Kulārthe tyajeta ekam, grāmārthe kulam tyajeta/grāmam janpadasyārthe, Ātmārthe prithivim tyajeta.



- 9 -

## Shakuni

**S**hakuni woke up early in the morning, before dawn, to take part in the Jhankal worship rituals in a makeshift Pralayalaya within the modest quarters of Jatil Muni. After the prayers, they assembled in the front courtyard for a strategy session. There was a new young man present in the prayers. Jatil Muni introduced him as Chandrachuda.

‘Meet Chandrachuda, Shakuni. I have trained Kanika as the master of doctrine and deception, but I am training Chandrachuda as the master of confusion. He has an indomitable capacity to confuse everyone including himself. This quality will come handy when we want to tackle Krishna. I have found out through my spies that Krishna is going to Sandipani Ashrama. I have arranged for Chandrachuda to be there at the same time.’

Shakuni wore a look of confusion, as if confused by the mere presence of the master of confusion.

Jatil Muni smiled at the look Shakuni wore. ‘Shakuni, you must try and understand the new direction I am trying to set. Kutil Dharma began by trying to propagate a religion through belief and dogma. I am trying to change that. Our attempt was to force a change and unite politics and religion. Now we will align religion with reason first, and then work our way to enter the mind of a sovereign. It is better to take over the one mind of a sovereign than to try our narrative with



millions of lay people. Sanatana Dharma is too well-rooted for us to take it on directly. We will target to convert Duryodhana to Kutil Dharma. Today, you will kneel before Jhankal and receive his blessings. Sanatanis denounce creationism, but they do not have any pramana<sup>1</sup> to prove that either. Their love for the primacy of pratyaksha pramana<sup>2</sup> can be turned into a weakness. *Now we will make kāla<sup>3</sup> as the mediating phenomenon between our religion, Sanatana Dharma and reason in order to give it a veneer of superiority.*'

Shakuni was not so well-versed in the philosophical traditions of Bharata. Gandhara, his homeland, lay on the boundaries of Parshva. The cult of Zarathustra in Parshvasthanā had been gaining ground. Kutil Muni had borrowed many concepts from the Ahura Mazda lore including the ideas of apostasy, blasphemy and evil spirits. He fancied himself as a successor of Vishtaspa<sup>4</sup> and wanted to exact revenge of his forefathers' exile by the Aryans of Bharatavarsha. Jatil Muni had become adept in digesting ideas from Sanatana plurality, twisting them and then presenting them before Sanatanis dressed up as Kutil Dharma principles. Jatil Muni had studied Shakuni before meeting him. He knew Shakuni's familiarity with Ahura Mazda principles. He laid out his plans before Shakuni. 'Shakuni, I have to transform Kutil Dharma. It must inculcate certain values not only among the people, but in the Rashtra.'

Shakuni was initially petrified by Jatil Muni's proposal. He reflected on the state of his own mind.

He had never forgiven Bhishma for getting his elder, and much revered, sister, Gandhari, married to the blind Dhritarashtra. He had opposed the match-up vociferously and doggedly, but was overruled by his father and mother. They were totally besotted with the idea of earning a seat in the Kuru pantheon. Shakuni had never got out of the idea of wreaking vengeance on the Kuru Empire. In his mind, Kuru Empire was Bhishma and he wanted to finish the Kuru Empire and inaugurate a new empire with himself as the prime minister. He would not mind if Jatil Muni would become the raja guru of this new empire. His eyes were set on Duryodhana as the emperor of this new empire. Duryodhana, among all the sons of Gandhari, held the

greatest promise. He seemed to have all the cunning, bravery and meanness that both Jatil Muni and he were looking for. With proper tutoring, he would be the tool that would give him his Gandhara Empire and Jatil Muni, his empire of Kutil Dharma. He mentally agreed with Jatil Muni that they needed a narrative for the new empire that should be vastly different from the Dharmic empires all over Bharatavarsha.

The call to submission to Jhankal went up with the first verse of Pralaya Mantra. Everyone stood up in front of the reverse Swastika hanging on the wall of Jatil Muni's side room and kneeled.

It was a small gathering of just four people—Banakantaka, now Jatil Muni, Shakuni, Kanika and Chandrachuda. Both Kanika and Chandrachuda did obeisance to Shakuni in the manner of younger disciples doing it to an elder.

Shakuni blessed both of them.

They sat down in a circle in the main room. Jatil Muni started the conversation. He recounted his initiation with Kutil Dharma in some detail. He also talked about his guru, Kutil Muni, in a very fond tone. He also wistfully recounted how they were close to converting Kamsa to Kutil Dharma in spite of Jarasandha being such a devout Sanatana Dharmi. But for Krishna... Jatil Muni sighed.

‘As I had mentioned, Kutil Dharma suffered because it did not place a rational perspective before the people at large. If we had used force selectively, instead of ramming it down the throats of the people, we may not have encountered the resistance that we did. We would have had Kamsa and his subjects with us even before Krishna could have gotten any occasion to intervene,’ said Jatil Muni.

‘I have decided to make a course correction. For people who follow Sanatana Dharma, vigyana<sup>5</sup> is a very important factor. Vigyana is based on pramana system. Pratyaksha<sup>6</sup> pramana is the most important, followed by anumana<sup>7</sup> and upamana<sup>8</sup>. Arthāprapti<sup>9</sup> and shabda<sup>10</sup> pramana are the lowest in this graded hierarchy of proofs. Kutil Muni made the cardinal mistake of trying a completely opposite philosophy and forcing his own scriptural authority down the throat of a highly evolved society.

‘We are going to do a significant course correction. We will fit our deductive reasoning based on scriptural authority into the inductive

system of pratyaksha pramana.'

Shakuni looked totally blank. Kanika nodded in understanding and Chandrachuda wore a laboured look of wisdom on his face, though totally confused.

'Let me try to make it simpler for you, Shakuni and Chandrachuda,' said Jatil Muni.

Shakuni nodded helpfully. 'You better do that. If I am finding it so complicated, how will we get young princes agree to our way of thinking. We need absolute clarity.'

Jatil Muni continued with his exposition.

'Look, Shakuni, I have studied Sanatana Dharma very deeply after escaping from Mathura. The basis of Sanatana Dharma is its view of Kāla or Time. The Sanatana view of Time is cyclical. This view is supported by empirical evidence presented through its knowledge of the movement of stars and planets. That is how it is able to make accurate calendars and is able to view the earth as round. It is quite remarkable that the rishis have been able to identify the navagrihas<sup>[11](#)</sup> from among the millions of stars that we can see up in the sky.'

'How does that help? Even I am a Sanatani, though I do not understand much beyond its rituals. What on earth are you talking about,' asked Shakuni. He was getting impatient, unable to see where Jatil Muni was headed.

'Have patience, Shakuni,' said Jatil Muni. 'This is what the Sanatanis call Purvapaksha. You have to study their methods before you can conquer them. Kutil Muni was always trying to set his own narrative without trying to understand the narrative he had set out to conquer. I was also following him blindly, adding my brawn to his ideas. We should have been smarter.'

'What Kutil Muni should have done was to cleverly position Jhankal as one of the deities of Sanatana Dharma, without insisting on absolute conformity. Different deities and different philosophies are not a taboo in Sanatana Dharma. After that, we could have preached a different theory of Kāla, positing it as linear Time, and then used deductive reasoning to derive the rest of our Kutil Dharma precepts from that.'

'Do you mean to say that if Time moves in a straight line instead of in cycles, it would help us deduce Kutil Dharma? How?' asked

Shakuni.

‘Try to understand this, Shakuni, from a simple example,’ said Jatil Muni. ‘When the notion of time is cyclical or quasi-cyclical, you can justify Karma-Samskara-Moksha paradigm. So, the Ātmā keeps moving in cycles of birth and rebirth until it achieves liberation. If you were to die today, and you had accumulated sufficient good Karma, you would be reborn again in a better circumstance. If you were to realise your true nature, and the nature of Time called the Kāla-darshana, you could transcend the cycle of Time and be absorbed in the Brahman.’

Shakuni furrowed his brow and interjected, ‘Munivara, if Sanatana Dharma is so complicated, how do so many people follow this and not your simplistic notion of Time in a straight line?’

‘That’s not the issue, Shakuni,’ said Jatil Muni. ‘If you observe Nature carefully, cyclical Cosmos, or Samsāra, can be seen in most of the natural events. That is why it is intelligible. The rishis openly proclaim that they can make you see it if you follow their discipline. My worry is that Krishna is one such person, who may be able to understand the motion of Time and become invincible.’

‘The Sanatana concepts of Rta<sup>12</sup>, Satya<sup>13</sup>, Dharma<sup>14</sup> and Rna<sup>15</sup> fit in nicely with the cyclical time. Hence, we have to position Jhankal as a deity within the Sanatana pantheon, which has a different concept of Kāla.’

‘What will you achieve if you don’t subscribe to the cyclical notion of time,’ asked Shakuni.

Chandrachuda suddenly exclaimed, ‘I have understood everything. If Time is taken out of Time, only time remains.’

Shakuni stared at Chandrachuda, not able to understand the reference or the context.

Jatil Muni doubled up in laughter. ‘Do you now understand how seriously complicated my disciple is?’

Shakuni mopped his brow. ‘But how is your Time different and why do you have to make it this complicated?’

Jatil Muni indulged him a little. ‘If Time is in a straight line, we are saved from the problem of becoming autonomous and being seriously concerned about our Karma.’ He paused to see the effect on Shakuni. He explained further.

‘The theory of Karma makes a man accountable to himself and others. Then he can keep going through cycles of rebirth based on his freely willed actions and reactions, and aim for freedom or as they call it—Moksha. Rishis can school him in all kind of yogas and wisdom. He can uphold the Cosmic Order or Rta through the help of Satya and through the instrument of Dharma by discharging his debts to ancestors, to Nature and to great men.

‘If, on the other hand, Time flows in a straight line, we can have a beginning of Time through a Creator, Jhankal in our case, and put mankind into an eternal heaven or hell after the end of Time on this earth. Then a man is accountable only to Jhankal, dependent on his mercy and compassion. As his agent on earth, we get to issue commands as if they were Jhankal’s commands and using these commands, we can suppress any other form of learning.’

Shakuni’s face lit up. He had got the drift of Jatil Muni’s plan.



- [1](#) Proof
- [2](#) Direct sensory evidence
- [3](#) Time
- [4](#) First disciple of Zarathrusta, same as Ishtasva of late Rigveda
- [5](#) Science
- [6](#) Empirical
- [7](#) Inference
- [8](#) Analogy
- [9](#) Deductive proof
- [10](#) Scriptural authority
- [11](#) Nine planets
- [12](#) Cosmic Order
- [13](#) Truth
- [14](#) Universal law
- [15](#) Debts owed to ancestors, Nature and rishis



**- 10 -**

**Kanika**

The quartet broke for a meal and then reassembled after taking rest.

Chandrachuda had brought a pair of dice. He proposed a game of dice before they resumed discussion.

Jatil Muni looked severely at Chandrachuda. He seemed to be playing his part a little too well. Shakuni's eyes lit up at the sight of the pair of dice. He supported Chandrachuda's idea. 'We should always intersperse serious discussions with some sport. It keeps the concentration going.'

Shakuni virtually snatched the pair of dice from Chandrachuda's hands. 'Let me put the knowledge of probability that Nala had been given by King Rituparna and the art of controlling the dice that was also given to Nala by Rituparna<sup>1</sup>.' Jatil Muni called for calm.

Shakuni started dealing with the dice. He told Chandrachuda to call out the numbers he wanted. Invariably, Shakuni got the numbers Chandrachuda called. The Kutil Dharmis were stunned at Shakuni's prowess with the pair of dice. They tried every combination—alternate dealing, number calling and even the board game of Moksha Patam<sup>2</sup>—but Shakuni was unbeatable. Jatil Muni was thrilled. He could sense another tactic to go with his grand strategy.

Jatil Muni said in a pensive sort of way, ‘This skill of Shakuni will come very handy. I know that some Sanatana kings and princes are very fond of the games of dice, with not a tenth of Shakuni’s skill.’

After about an hour of this fun, Jatil Muni clapped, cupped his hands around his ears and shouted, ‘Jai Jhankal.’ It was prayer time to honour the Creator. They chanted the Pralaya Mantra and completed the prayer ritual.

As they sat down to resume the discussions after prayer, Jatil Muni addressed Kanika, ‘Kanika, let us have the action plan for Shakuni. He will tell us the feasibility of this plan. Remember, our goal is to establish Jhankal’s reign in this world. Jhankal has said that the way to establish his world empire is through Bharatavarsha. We have to take his word as our command.’

Kanika bowed before his guru, Jatil Muni, and presented his plan.

‘My plan is to conquer the Kuru Empire through infiltration and subversion. I have studied the follies of our earlier approach with the Yadavas. We made a mistake by ravaging and destroying the temples and the deities. This united the public in favour of that little demon Krishna and our efforts were defeated. Of course, Kamsa also made some terrible mistakes in underestimating the influence of the Sanatana principles on the public. He should have never allowed Vasudeva to live, but he was too much under the dread of Gargacharya.’ Kanika paused and looked at Jatil Muni who nodded his head in appreciation.

Kanika bowed his head in supplication and continued, ‘I have prepared an action plan under three heads—infiltration, subversion and takeover. In our action plan, there is no room for direct confrontation of the kind attempted by Kutil Muni.’ Jatil Muni nodded his head in acknowledgement.

‘The first thing to do is to infiltrate Sanatana Dharma. For this, we will start by buying over a few purohits or buy a few temples outright. In these temples, we will place a Vilom Swastika and start parallel worship without disturbing the worship of the main deity. We will then run campaigns to associate miracles with the Vilom Swastika. Sometimes, we will even fake miracles. All through this, we will not let the main deity’s worship be affected. The long-term plan is to bring the worship of Vilom Swastika at par with the



worship of the main deities of Shiva, Vishnu and various devis. This may be done slowly over a period of the next five to ten years.

‘At the same time, I will infiltrate the Kuru royal court with the help of Shakuni. He would place me in close proximity of Maharaja Dhritarashtra. Once that has been achieved, I will pose as a great Sanatani preacher. I will present to him a variation of Sanatana Dharma, which is perfectly acceptable within Sanatana tradition. I will present a new concept of Kāla before him. That being within the confines of the debate tradition, Dhritarashtra will listen to me. My plan is to directly convert Maharaja Dhritarashtra to Kutil Dharma. I will need access to him, which Shakuni has promised to provide. After that, I will just have to tutor him with the theory of linear Time and eternal damnation. Being a Sanatani, Dhritarashtra will not even suspect that we are feeding him a new Dharma that seeks to topple Sanatana Dharma. We will exploit the open architecture of Sanatana Dharma, which its adherents like to think of as its strength, as a weakness.

‘After converting Maharaja Dhritarashtra, we will have to find a way of tackling Bhishma. It is possible that Bhishma or Vidura may come to know of our plan. In such a contingency, we will have to have back-up plans ready. We have to prepare some commanders who are loyal only to Duryodhana. Such commanders should be made to undertake simple territory acquisition expedition with the Vilom Swastika accompanying the battalions. After a victory, elaborate thanksgiving should be carried out to the Vilom Swastika. This would impress not only Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana but would also carry a subtle message for the public. We have to ultimately aim for a merger of the political and religious heads. So, either Dhritarashtra has to become a head of Kutil Dharma or Jatil Muni has to head a unified empire of Bharatavarsha.’

Shakuni interjected at this point. ‘I think my sister’s husband is a wimp. He does not have the stuff to stare down his brother Vidura or the patriarch Bhishma. They are men of superlative personal accomplishments and of sterling expertise—one of Shāstra<sup>3</sup> and the other of shastra<sup>4</sup>. Besides, Bhishma is pretty much an all-rounder. He is what the Bharatavarsha calls a dharma-yoddhā<sup>5</sup>. I don’t think you

can make a fool of these two. This idea of bypassing them is a non-starter. I have a better idea.'

Jatil Muni motioned Shakuni to continue.

'I think my nephew Duryodhana is the right person to blood. Firstly, he is extremely jealous of the Pandavas and very conscious of claiming the throne of Hastinapura. Dhritarashtra has got cow dung in his brain. He is too much in awe of Bhishma and Vidura. Besides, he cannot take a decision. Even for having me by the side of my sister, he had to take permission from Bhishma who has placed so many conditions on my movements and interactions. So, in my opinion, there is no point wasting the five or ten years with Maharaja Dhritarashtra. We should concentrate on a three-pronged strategy—get Dhritarashtra converted to Kutil Dharma, indoctrinate Duryodhana to become a firm Kutil Dharmi and use his friend Karna to conquer the lands of Bharata. Karna is the real warrior among the Kauravas and their friends. These boys are in the age group of ten to seventeen years right now. We should have a clear ten to fifteen-year plan in which to accomplish our target. For this, we have to get rid of the Pandavas. I will use Kanika to achieve the short-term goal of having Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana in our grip within a year or so.'

Jatil Muni was impressed with the clinical approach of Shakuni. He queried, 'So we should first have Kanika placed in Maharaja Dhritarashtra's close circle and concentrate on indoctrinating Duryodhana and Karna? Would you need more help in the form of Pralaya Shāstra experts? I am afraid I do not have many.'

Shakuni smiled indulgently, 'Munivara, Kanika is not just going to be an ordinary confidante of the Maharaja. I will infiltrate him as a rishi, a sage of the highest degree. I will have an ashrama set up on the banks of the Gangā, next to the ashrama of Dronacharya. We will produce the critical mass of Kutil Dharma from within the Kuru lands.'

Shakuni had mischief playing over his face as he finished the peroration.

Jatil Muni was suitably impressed. 'I think Shakuni is our man for the occasion. I will now initiate him into the order of Kutil Dharma.'

With this exclamation, Jatil Muni motioned to Kanika who quickly went into the prayer room and arranged for water and holy beads—a

ritual added by Jatil Muni into the simple regimen of Kutil Muni.

Jatil Muni gave the call for prayer with his hands cupped around his ears.

Shakuni was lined up in front of the Vilom Swastika in the prayer room. Jatil Muni sprinkled him with holy water from River Suvastu<sup>6</sup>. After that, he was made to recite the Pralaya Mantra five times. He was then made to kneel and place his head on a copy of Pralaya Shāstra wrapped in black velvet and held up for him by Kanika. His head was symbolically shaven with Jatil Muni just taking out a tuft from his flowing front locks.

‘I must not give your appearance away by shaving your full head. Deception and deceit are a part of Kutil Dharma. Any lie or falsehood is fine as long as you are doing it for Jhankal. This is called Jhankal-āgyā. When in doubt, just think what Jhankal would have ordered you to do in the interest of Kutil Dharma.’

‘Jai Jhankal,’ Jatil Muni shouted at the top of his voice.

‘Jai Jhankal,’ shouted the other three.

The Pralaya Mantra was chanted—‘Jai Jhankalam, Jai Jhankalam, Jai Jhankalam, Namō Namah’.

Shakuni was formally inducted into the Hall of Kutil Dharma.



- [1](#) The Mahabharata story of Nala-Damayanti also has a description of the theory of probability.
- [2](#) A variant of modern snakes and ladders.
- [3](#) Knowledge skills
- [4](#) Martial skills
- [5](#) A righteous warrior
- [6](#) Modern-day River Swat



- 11 -

## Chandrachuda

The meeting resumed after Shakuni's formal induction. The roles of Shakuni and Kanika had been formalised. The action plan had been firmed up. Even the contingency plan had been drawn up.

Jatil Muni looked at the three men seated in front him one by one.

'You know what, none of you has taken the most important factor into account,' said Jatil Muni.

'I know, we have left out Jarasandha. He also has visions of conquering the whole of Bharatavarsha. There are also some other kings like Narakasura. All of them boast of strong Sanatana lineage, but are actually bloodthirsty tyrants, having no other aim except to be the overlord of earth in the manner of Vishnu,' said Shakuni.

Kanika supplemented Shakuni. 'Jarasandha has never forgiven the Kuru clan for humiliating his brother-in-law, the king of Kāshi. The abduction of Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā was bad enough, but the episode of Ambā having to commit suicide after Bhishma defeated even Lord Parashurama to protect his svadharma is an educative episode. It shows us that Bhishma can be made to remain with Dhritarashtra if an appeal is made to his svadharma in the face of the worst infraction of wider Dharma. Bhishma is constricted by a narrow definition of Dharma.'

A sardonic smile played on Jatil Muni's lips. 'These fellows have to go a very long way. They simply do not understand,' he closed his eyes and thought.

Slowly and thoughtfully, Jatil Muni opened his eyes and stared at each of the three disciples in turn. 'Never forget Krishna.'

Saying this, Jatil Muni closed his eyes again. He was replaying the scenes from Mathura in his mind. He had himself witnessed Krishna's quicksilver reflexes, his quick-witted mind and his ability to take the best decision for the moment. He had also heard a lot about his yogic focus, his command over the shāstras and his felicity with weapons in combat.

He muttered under his breath, slowly and ponderously, '*Krishna, Krishna, Krishna...*'

Shakuni looked at Jatil Muni quizzically. 'Why on earth is he chanting Krishna's name?'

Chandrachuda read the question in Shakuni's mind. 'Munivara is praying to Krishna so that he does not get after him again,' he offered an innocent explanation.

Jatil Muni got furious at Chandrachuda. 'Idiot, you think I am scared of Krishna? Hardly. But one has to be mindful of the strengths and weaknesses of one's adversary. I am absolutely sure that Krishna is the greatest impediment to our dream of establishing Kutil Dharma in Bharatavarsha. Bhishma is too full of svadharma. The Pandavas are without a guide. Shrigālava Vāsudeva is too full of hubris. In short, there is none who does not have one or more of the ten blemishes in one's character<sup>1</sup>. Except...', Jatil Muni gave a pregnant pause, 'this boy Krishna...' If we are not able to find a way to tackle him, we will not be able to get anywhere.'

'So I have tried to tutor Chandrachuda to be in the Sandipani Ashrama and track Krishna there. I don't think he has the mental capacity to do anything except try to get into his close proximity and play the fool. It is a high-risk venture. Someone as sharp as Krishna will not miss him for long, but as long as he doesn't, it will serve our purpose.'

Jatil Muni weighed Chandrachuda. Chandrachuda remonstrated with his guru. 'You do not think much of me. Why do you want me to be by the side of Krishna at all?'

Jatil Muni gave one of his sardonic smiles. Chandrachuda was an unusually tall young man. He looked almost like a reed from a distance. Banakantaka himself had an imposing personality. Unlike the short and ugly Kutil Muni, he had all the usual Gandhara attributes. He was tall, fair and well built. He could be called handsome. Jatil Muni motioned to Chandrachuda to come close to him.

Chandrachuda came near him and kneeled. Jatil Muni patted him affectionately. ‘Look, Chandrachuda. I am not underestimating you, but I have the correct estimate of Krishna. If you stay in his company for some time, you cannot but be charmed by him. Once he has cast a spell on you, you will be lost to us. It is with this in mind that we have to instil a sense of Kutil Dharma very strongly in you. You must know that this life on earth belongs to Jhankal only. We have but one life to please Jhankal so that he may give us a place in the eternal heaven. To be able to remember this in all your waking and sleeping hours, you must read Pralaya Shāstra every day and say your prayers at least twice if you feel that doing it a third time carries a risk of exposure.’ Jatil Muni placed his hand on Chandrachuda’s head affectionately and stroked his hair.

‘You should become Krishna’s friend outwardly. Stick to him, carry out his little chores. Cling to every word he utters and memorise it. Reduce it to writing on tree barks whenever you get time. You should always be talking about what we have taught you. Talk to him of ‘vasudhaiva kuṭumbakam’<sup>2</sup>, ‘ahimsa paramo dharmah’<sup>3</sup> and ‘dayā’<sup>4</sup>. Try to moderate the element of Kshatriya in him. The most dangerous prospect for us is a combination of Brāhma<sup>5</sup> and Kshātra<sup>6</sup>. Krishna seems to combine them well. We have to disarm him by preaching pacifism to him. Whenever you are in his proximity, always recite the pacific literature I have taught you. If he counters you, you should pretend as if you are not interested in an argument. Do not get into an argument with him ever because you will not win it. Just fold your hands, avoid the argument and continue with your bhakti. Always bow your head and continue your lessons of non-violence.

‘I know that this is not a very satisfactory solution. For one, Krishna will bombard you with counterarguments for which you will have no reply. My spies have told me that he has a unique quality of

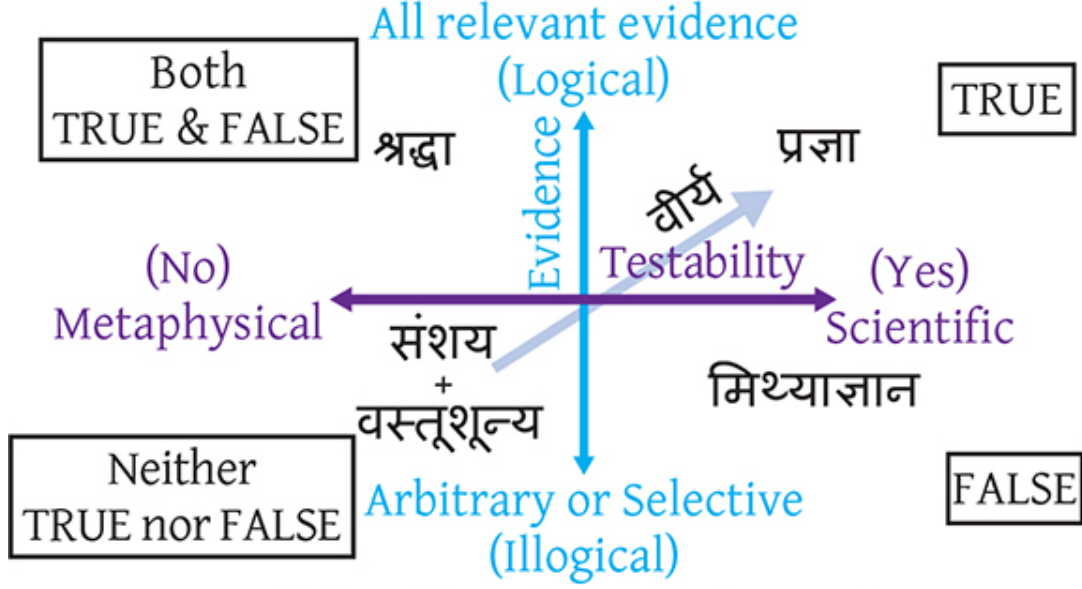
mesmerising people by his mere looks, so you should never look into his eyes. Keep your eyes down as if due to awe and respect. His voice is also captivating, so avoid listening to him too closely. Always maintain a degree of wrath against him for having killed the founder of our Dharma, Kutil Muni. Keeping your head down will also prevent Krishna from getting a good look at the emotions playing on your face. I have chosen you mainly because of your impassive face, but this will be an additional precaution.

‘I have managed to get you a seat in Sandipani Ashrama. The teaching will begin on the day of Govardhana Puja. This fact is also significant because this festival was first established by Krishna only. We are already close to the month of Ashvin, so this is the right time for you to start your journey.

‘This is also the right time for Shakuni and Kanika to travel to Hastinapura. Both of you should first approach Karna and try to convert him into Kutil Dharma. My spies have told me that he is an ardent follower of Sanatana Dharma and is a devotee of Surya Devata<sup>7</sup>. A devotee is more difficult to shake. He is full of Shraddhā. Shraddhā is not the same as the concept of blind belief in Jhankal that we have in Kutil Dharma. Our belief is unquestioning and is based on the decrees issued by Jhankal through Kutil Muni and through me. Shraddhā, on the other hand, is deep-seated and is rooted in experience and conviction. Shraddhā happens only with direct experience, which makes it difficult for us to shake it. Shraddhā happens when the mind moves from scepticism, when things appear to be neither true nor false or sanshaya, to a state where things appear both true and false, as the third state of Chatushkoti logic. We can represent it like this<sup>8</sup>:



श्रद्धा + प्रज्ञा + वीर्य = सत्य  
(Reverence + Intellect + Courage/Heroic Deeds = Truth)



श्रद्धावीर्यस्मृतिसमाधिप्रज्ञापूर्वक इतरेषाम  
(पतंजलि योगसूत्र, समाधिपाद 20)

‘It is for this reason that we have devised the method of infiltration. You have to introduce Kutil Dharma as a facet of Sanatana Dharma only, and slowly keep turning the screw. Consistent and continuous interaction is important. I have taught Kanika the way of performing fake miracles. This should, however, be avoided with accomplished people like Karna.

‘Kanika should set up a Shiva temple in which a large corner should be reserved for Kutil Dharma practices. The temple should be so designed that every year we keep expanding our corner. Also, women should be the main targets in these temples. They are easily swayed by miracles. In Sanatana households, they are the real rulers of the household. So if you are able to get the women on your side, most of the job is done. In fact, everyone should provide as many free services as possible without revealing its formal name. All Pralayalayas should be concealed within a Shivalaya. Discourses should be conducted to impart Pralaya Shāstra as just another darshana<sup>9</sup>. It is only after we have reached a critical mass that we

should make a Pralayalaya open. It may take years. However, if we are able to convert a major king, it would make things easier. Thereafter, we could aim to make Kutil Dharma as a state religion and outlaw all other forms of worship and philosophy.'

The other three nodded their heads in unison. They dispersed for the night.

Early next morning, two entourages departed from Rakshagriha. Shakuni and Kanika left for Hastinapura and Chandrachuda left to join the Sandipani Ashrama.



- <sup>1</sup> Called dashāri or the ten enemies—kāma (lust), krodha (anger), lobha (greed), moha (attachment), mada (hubris), matsarya (envy), anyaya (injustice), amanavata (inhumanity), ahankara (arrogance) and svārtha (selfishness)
- <sup>2</sup> The whole world is one family.
- <sup>3</sup> Non-violence is the greatest Dharma.
- <sup>4</sup> Compassion
- <sup>5</sup> Qualities of wisdom
- <sup>6</sup> Qualities of valour
- <sup>7</sup> Sun God
- <sup>8</sup> Courtesy: Nilesch Nilkanth Oak
- <sup>9</sup> Philosophy



- 12 -

## Karna

As the first shafts of sunlight appeared in the east, a young man of about twenty years stood with his offering to the Surya Devata up to his waist in Gangā waters. He sported a bare, broad chest, an auburn complexion, a tall mien and a proud face. His large eyes were bloodshot as if he was resentful of everything around him. A yellow garment was tied around his waist. Large rings dangled from his ears. He closed his eyes and recited a mantra to his chosen god—Surya, the Sun—who is the life-giver, the embodiment of all energy on earth. He finished his offering and turned around. Two men were standing on the bank. Shakuni was a known face. He did not know the other person.

Karna, the proud warrior, took his own time in coming out of the water. As he came out, Shakuni rushed towards him with open arms, but Karna showed no warmth of emotion towards Shakuni. Shakuni, nevertheless, made a great show of warmth towards Karna by hugging him tight. Karna remained stiff and cold. Kanika could clearly make out the one-sided effusion of love and warmth. He was a trifle disappointed. All the grandiose claims of Shakuni rested on his supposed proximity with the great warrior Karna. None of that seemed to be in evidence.

‘What brings you here, Matula<sup>1</sup> Shakuni. Don’t you know that this is my time for worship and rituals? Can’t you let me be away from

your scheming?’

All enthusiasm drained away from Kanika, but Shakuni took the indifference in his stride.

‘I have brought one of the foremost rishis—Kanika Rishi from Rakshagriha—for you to meet,’ Shakuni chimed.

‘Since when have rishis started coming to meet lay people. I was taught that we have to go to rishis and earn their favour with good deeds before they bestow their favour in the form of knowledge,’ Karna retorted. ‘Please leave me alone,’ he said caustically. ‘I will see you at your house after I am through with my daily rituals.’

Kanika was about to say something about the futility of rituals, but Shakuni pressed his hands to give him a signal to keep quiet.

Karna ignored them and went to a nearby yajñashālā to complete his offerings to the fire.

He tried to control the storm raging within his mind by watching the flow of his thoughts, but he would lose track every now and then. He realised that he was performing the ritual<sup>2</sup> mechanically. Waves of thoughts struck the shores of his mind, the roars of which became louder and louder. Karna was unable to fathom what was happening to him. An apparition rose within him. It was that of the sage Parashurama, under whom he had trained for a long time, but his cover got blown just before he was about to graduate from his ashrama. Why did he need a cover at all?

Karna was born to the charioteer Adhiratha and Radha. He had always excelled in martial arts, archery and all the qualities that were considered ideal in a Kshatriya. His excellence was, however, often jeered at due to his low-born status. Whenever he went to challenge the disciples of Dronacharya, particularly Arjuna, Dronacharya always shielded Arjuna with his claim of higher status. He remembered how Duryodhana made him a Kshatriya by conferring the kingship of Anga on him, and how he earned the discipleship of Bhagavana Parashurama by faking to be a Brahmin. That incident when he was found out and thrown out from Parashurama Ashrama always welled up before his eyes whenever he saw anyone from the royal family. Shakuni had rekindled that hurt in him. He was unable to concentrate on his worship.

He completed his routine and went home. Mother Radha was attending to her household work. She had a bowl of porridge ready for Karna. Karna came in, a little withdrawn, and sat down on his stool to study. Radha could immediately sense his discomfiture. She brought him the bowl of porridge and stroked his hair. Karna remained lost in his thoughts.

‘Karna, someone has again said something to you?’ Radha asked tenderly, not wanting to touch the raw nerve but trying to soothe it.

Karna came out of his reverie and looked up, ‘Ma, is there no way to rise above one’s birth?’

Radha kept stroking his hair. Karna felt strange emotions welling up within himself. He had earned a lot of fame as a mighty warrior. He was the only one who was considered equal to Arjuna, the favourite disciple of Dronacharya and loved by everyone from Bhishma downwards. He did not want to appear weak in front of his mother. Yet, the harder he tried to control, the more his heart jumped into his mouth. He felt he was losing control.

Karna looked up at his mother with moist eyes. Radha smiled. She understood him instinctively.

Karna hid his head in his mother’s bosom and wept. Radha kept stroking his hair and patting his cheeks. Karna gathered himself quickly. With a heavy voice, he asked his mother, ‘Ma, why did Bhagavana Parashurama treat me unfairly? Why is kula so important to learn from a Brahmin? What kind of Dharma is this that discriminates by birth?’

Radha had her heart in her mouth once again. She and her husband Adhiratha were the only ones who knew that Karna was not their real born. They had always tried to provide an education to Karna that suited his temperament, which was indubitably marked by Rajoguna, the guna<sup>3</sup> of the warrior. He had shown extraordinary felicity with weapons and combat, but Dronacharya had refused him entry into his gurukula on the ground that his gurukula was reserved only for the princes. Karna had once nearly defeated Arjuna, the Pandava prince, in an open archery competition, but Arjuna was saved by Dronacharya by denying permission to Karna to compete directly with Arjuna as Karna was the son of a mere charioteer. Duryodhana had immediately raised him to the status of a king by gifting the state

of Anga to Karna. After that, a long argument had ensued about whether Kshatriya status was achieved through Karma. Arjuna was keen to compete. He had nothing to lose being many years younger than Karna, but Dronacharya's hubris invented every facetious argument, most of them against the Sanatana doctrine of dynamic varna acquisition that would save his boast of having made Arjuna the best archer in the world.

It was at that point that Shakuni had suggested that he go into the tutelage of Bhagavana Parashurama, the best combatant and weapons expert ever born on earth. There was a little problem. Parashurama had taken a vow that he would not teach anyone except Brahmins. Karna was suggested an honourable path by Sanjaya, a charioteer's son like him. Sanjaya advised him to do tapasya and achieve Brahmin status. He narrated to him the story of Rishi Veda Vyasa, who had not just become a Brahmin, but the greatest rishi of all through his Karma. Karna was not sure how much time that exercise would take. His ego was of a high order, often clouding his better judgment. Shakuni had then advised him to fake being a Brahmin and approach Bhagavana Parashurama. Karna took Shakuni's advice. He became the favourite disciple of Parashurama, who took it upon himself to teach Karna all the knowledge he had. However, Karna's cover was blown a day before his final Dikshā<sup>4</sup> and Parashurama threw him out of his ashrama with a curse that all the knowledge he had got out of him would be of no use when he would need it the most.

Radha knew what was killing Karna. She wiped Karna's broad forehead and said softly. 'Why blame Bhagavana Parashurama, son? It was your decision to take the short cut. Pride, arrogance and greed had blinded you. Parashurama ji only did to you what was just.'

Karna was cut to the quick. 'How is it just to discriminate on the basis of one's varna? How can Dharma be nitya<sup>5</sup>, satya<sup>6</sup> and sanatana<sup>7</sup> and still be discriminatory? Is it my fault that I am born in the house of a charioteer? How is it that the Vedas say "*ishāvāsyamidam sarvam yatkinch jagatyām jagat*"<sup>8</sup>', but when it comes to putting that to practice, our elders come up short. I am sick of this duplicity. I want to rebel and fight Dronacharya, but Duryodhana does not let me do it. I am too indebted to him to displease him. I am being torn apart by this dilemma.'

Radha pushed Karna aside and looked straight into his eyes. ‘Rādheya, you are lying. You are lying not to me, but you are lying to yourself. When your ego gets the better of you and makes you take wrong decisions, it is quite usual to blame your circumstances, your elders, your youngers, your destiny, your friends—essentially everyone but yourself. You became too proud of your skills and thought you should quickly be anointed the greatest warrior of your times. Look within yourself. Ask yourself. Go into the pratyāhāra<sup>9</sup> mode. Be honest with me.’

Karna was taken aback. He had never seen his mother react so strongly. He paused and reflected. He looked inside himself but was frightened of his inner self within seconds. He looked helplessly at his mother.

Radha sensed his son’s inner turmoil. ‘Duryodhana and Shakuni are the two rogues. They want to make this entire Kaurava clan a band of dushtas<sup>10</sup>. They are playing with your little complex and using you. I support Bhagavana Parashurama. He would never have said anything to you if you had approached him with the request of training to make you a Brahmin first. He is an institution in himself. Every institution is entitled to have its rules. It would have taken you five to ten years to attain that status. You were afraid that if he made you into a Brahmin, you would lose your identity, your ego. You did not love the vidya, you only loved the status that the vidya would have given you—that of the greatest warrior on earth, bigger warrior than Arjuna. You would have got it as a Brahmin through Parashurama ji, but you would have lost your ego by then.’

Karna could suddenly see things clearly. He placed his head on the feet of his mother. He thought to himself, ‘Mother is the first guru.’





- [1](#) Mama or maternal uncle
- [2](#) A fire-offering ritual
- [3](#) Dominant quality
- [4](#) Graduation
- [5](#) Consistent
- [6](#) True
- [7](#) Eternal
- [8](#) The whole world and the larger universe are imbued by the one Ishvara—he resides equally in all beings (Ishopanishada—shloka 2).
- [9](#) Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.
- [10](#) Rogue



**- 13 -**

## **Dhritarashtra**

**K**arna got up resolutely. He wanted to follow his mother's advice. He wanted to find solutions within himself. 'No point blaming others when there is so much ignorance and avidya within.' He recalled another Ishopanishad verse taught to him by Bhagavana Parashurama.

*'Vidyām cha avidyām cha yastat veda ubhayam sah;  
avidyayā mrityum tritvā vidyayā amritmashnute'*<sup>1</sup>

Karna knew that he was getting to understand avidya but he could not earn vidya in spite of faking his way into the Parashurama Ashrama.

There was a knock at the door. Karna himself opened the door. A royal messenger was standing outside.

'Angaraja Karna, Maharaja Dhritarashtra is pleased to command your presence in his inner court. He is waiting for you,' the messenger bowed in the customary royal protocol.

'Any emergency, messenger?'

'The messenger is not privy to the inner workings of the court, Angaraja.'

Karna told the messenger that he would be there in half a ghati<sup>2</sup>. He quickly put on his royal robes keeping the royal protocol in mind and hastened to the palace.

Dhritarashtra was in the eye of a personal storm. He was born blind. Unlike nature compensating physical blindness with enhanced perception of the other senses, Dhritarashtra's physical blindness had made him lose the eyes of his mind as well. His wife Gandhari had been given to him on Bhishma's urging and much against the wishes of her younger brother Shakuni. Gandhari had adopted voluntary blindness in order to not heighten the insecurities of her husband, whose only merit was that he was born into a Kuru lineage. He was well-schooled by Maharshi Veda Vyasa himself. His self-pity had given him a very noble exterior with a scheming interior. He had a massive build, kept a royal beard split into two at the centre of the chin, wore very fine silks, but exuded complete lack of confidence to his courtiers. He was rarely sure-footed in his decisions. He always preferred to take the easy way out by postponing decisions. He always hoped that by postponing a decision, he was giving fate a chance to decide things for him. It often led to curious situations.

Another curious situation had arisen. Kunti and the Pandavas had returned with rishis after Pandu had passed away. Pandu had inherited the responsibility of Hastinapura Empire from his late father Vichitravirya. Bhishma had ordered ancient practice of *niyoga*<sup>3</sup> to be used to beget royal inheritors—Dhritarashtra, Pandu and Vidura—from Vichitravirya's wives as he happened to be impotent, but Bhishma had refused to take the mantle of kingship upon him. Many rishis had criticised Bhishma's convoluted sense of Dharma. Even Bhagavana Parashurama had questioned his convoluted sense of *svadharma*. Of what use is protecting one's *svadharma*, if the *Rashtra* would be destroyed due to your abstinence. All the rishis and an overwhelming majority of the *Sabhamandala*<sup>4</sup> believed Bhishma should give up his vow that he had sworn to the father-in-law of his late father Shāntanu. A vow made to satisfy the greed of a selfish fisherman must be forsaken in the interest of the *Rashtra*. The *shāstras* seemed to justify this line, but Bhishma would not budge.

In the alternative, the nearly unanimous opinion was that Pandu's eldest son Yudhishtira should be given the responsibility of ruling Hastinapura. Not only was he the eldest among all the Kuru princes, he was also the eldest son of the rightful king Pandu.

Dhritarashtra had been governing Hastinapura as a regent, aided by Bhishma and his half-brother Vidura. Vidura was born out of the womb of a [dasi](#)<sup>5</sup>, but had even higher status as Dhritarashtra and Pandu. He had achieved the status of a Brahmin with his pious disposition, deep studies of the shāstras, meditation and chitta nirodha<sup>6</sup>. Vidura and Bhishma formed a formidable combination, deeply resented by the cabal led by Duryodhana. Dhritarashtra simply did not have the strength of character to even think of contradicting Vidura and Bhishma. Joined by Kripacharya and Dronacharya, the formidable court of Hastinapura was blessed by the venerable persona of Maharshi Veda Vyasa. It was this spell on Dhritarashtra that Shakuni wanted to break.

When Karna reached the royal palace, he was ushered straight into the private chambers of Dhritarashtra. Dhritarashtra was seated with Duryodhana, Shakuni and one young sanyasi. Karna recognised him. He was the same person Shakuni had introduced to him in the morning—Kanika.

Dhritarashtra motioned Karna to sit even as he was listening to Kanika with rapt attention.

‘Maharaja, statecraft is an end in itself. It is not a means to achieve Dharma. The State is here and now, whereas Dharma and its inherence in the Cosmos, or Rta, is just a conjecture. We should be rooted in reality. Vedas have told us to trust our sense perceptions, but we do not make much of what is written in the Vedas. Our senses are real and notions of unified consciousness beyond the senses are mere conjectures. On the one hand, the Vedas tell us that scriptural evidence, or shabda pramana, is worthless in the absence of direct evidence, or pratyaksha pramana, and on the other hand, we seem to rely upon shabda pramana of Vedas and believe in one Supreme Consciousness or Brahman. I wish to rely on the real teaching of the Vedas, and thus, I would advise you to ignore this part as pure shabda pramana,’ said Kanika.

Dhritarashtra nodded his head in agreement. He was mightily relieved by hearing this interpretation. He remembered being taught this as viparyaya, or false knowledge, in the Gurukula, but never understood why. Kanika was putting his heart at ease.

Karna interjected. ‘I don’t know which Gurukula you are from, but simply because you have not experienced the Brahman does not mean that your pramana becomes my pramana. I have witnessed my guru in the state of unity with Brahman. He has charted out the path to experience this unity to any disciple who is willing. Even I have experienced that state briefly, though I could not maintain it. You do not seem to have had the right guru. Who are you, and who is your guru?’

Shakuni tried to lighten the offence contained in Karna’s query. ‘Angaraja, I did introduce Rishi Kanika to you in the morning. He is a disciple of the Parshva Muni.’

Karna was unimpressed. ‘Uncle, I want to know the lineage of this rishi. Did any rishi recognise him as one or have you now got into the business of conferring even spiritual titles? I have never heard of any Sanatana gurukula from Parshvasthāna. I did hear about Kutil Dharma and its muni who led Kamsa and Chanura to their deaths at the hands of Krishna. Does he belong to that school of adharma?’

Duryodhana motioned Karna to keep quiet. He was quite enjoying the rationalisations being given by Kanika in terms of shastric wisdom. He sensed that he might be a counter to Vidura and Bhishma. Dhritarashtra had a jealous and weak mind. Secretly, he desired to be the king but he could never overrule Bhishma and Vidura and their interpretations of Dharma.

Karna obeyed Duryodhana. Though fiercely wedded to Dharma, he could never go over Duryodhana. Duryodhana was Karna’s weakness.

Kanika had been hit like a tonne of bricks. His confidence had evaporated. He felt like touching the feet of Duryodhana for bailing him out. He got up to have some water from the pitcher kept next to where Duryodhana was sitting. Their eyes met. That exchange of glances somewhat reassured Kanika. He resumed his discourse.

‘Maharaja, we follow the rational philosophy schools of Sanatana Dharma. That is why we are called Tārkikas or logicians. Unlike Sanatana Dharma and the Nyāya Shāstras, we only accept logic, which can be expressed in terms of true and false. Most of our rishis who support the classical Dharma and formless Brahman, or even the Purusha of Samkhya using the Chatushkoti logic, adds to the category

of both “true and false” and “neither true nor false”. This, according to our seers, is false knowledge<sup>7</sup>. False knowledge leads to accepting false gods.’ Kanika looked around to see the effect. Except for Karna, nobody understood what he was trying to drive at. Duryodhana liked it because it was leading to approval of deception in statecraft. Shakuni loved it because Dhritarashtra was listening to it intently, not understanding and getting confused. Karna clearly understood the sophistry behind the philosophy and its underlying logic, but did not speak as he did not want to upset Duryodhana.

At the end of the discourse, Dhritarashtra inducted Kanika as a personal advisor.

Shakuni was happy as he could get his man into the inner circle of the king.

Hours later, Shakuni, Duryodhana and Kanika huddled together to hatch a plan to get the Pandavas out of their way. They finalised to burn the Pandavas in a palace made of incendiary materials, identified Purochana as the architect and worked out a complete scheme to convince Dhritarashtra of the necessity of such a plan. They also decided to keep it a secret from Karna for the time being.

Kanika hoped to get the Pandavas out of the way, destroy the link of Hastinapura to Krishna and then get Dhritarashtra to convert to Kutil Dharma, after which Duryodhana had agreed to follow suit along with all his ninety-nine brothers. This would be the ultimate tribute to Jhankal, he thought.

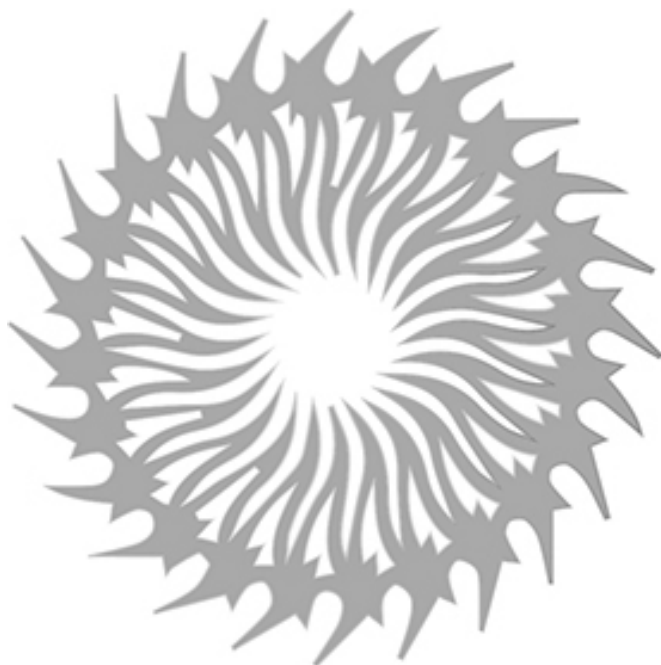
He raised his fist, closed his eyes and shouted in the solitude of his quarters, ‘Jai Jhankal’. He repeated it seven times.

A horseman galloped to update Jatil Muni of the progress that night.



- <sup>1</sup> He who knows both vidya and avidya together, crosses death through avidya and through vidya attains immortality.
- <sup>2</sup> Twenty-four minutes
- <sup>3</sup> Insemination by another
- <sup>4</sup> Council of elders
- <sup>5</sup> Maidservant
- <sup>6</sup> Power of consciousness
- <sup>7</sup> Viparyaya

## **PART III**







- 14 -

## The Graduation

**S**andipani Rishi smiled indulgently at the little contingent sitting in front of him. ‘Today the narration will be done by Uddhava,’ he commanded.

Punardatta chimed in. ‘Even I know the story from here on.’

‘Don’t worry son, you will also have your turn.’

Uddhava bowed before the Acharya and began. ‘We did not get even one day to rest. Acharya had us all assembled the same evening.

‘We were introduced to a galaxy of rishis, who were totally unconnected to the Sandipani Ashrama. Acharya Sandipani introduced the course and the principal teachers in his deep baritone. “Students, we will have an open-ended programme for this course.

The objective is to teach you the six darshanas<sup>1</sup>, the sixteen kalās and the sixty-four vidyas. All of you have been chosen carefully. Only those who have initial training have qualified for this course. Krishna and Balarama are the only exceptions. Though they have not attended any gurukula, their knowledge of the kalās and vidyas is of the highest order. In fact, there is none who can match them in the vidyas that fall under the broad spectrum of war knowledge. Krishna is highly proficient in some of the darshanas as well and also an expert in the Lalit Kalās<sup>2</sup>. I, personally, along with Acharya Chandakaushika, will take up the deeper meanings and the original

vision of the Vedas as experienced by the rishis. Rishi Gargacharya will teach you Vedānta and the meaning of Brahman. Kapila Muni is here in person to teach you the Purusha/Prakriti and Kshara/Akshara aspect of the Cosmic Force. Vāchaspati ji will introduce you to the deep aspect of Nyāya philosophy, and Rishi Kanada will take up Vaisheshika. Rishi Hiranyagarbha has just completed his darshana and will share with you the teachings of Yoga. Rishi Panini will teach the structures of language and a simplified form of Sanskrit. Bharata Muni would take care of the Kalā part of the course.

‘The class consisted of about one hundred students drawn from all over Bharatavarsha including the retinue from Mathura. The two princes of Ujjayini—Vinda and Anuvinda—were also in the class. Many students from the Parashurama Ashrama had been sent for this special class as well.

‘Chandrachuda made special efforts to stay close to Krishna. Every time he tried to get next to Krishna, Krishna would somehow contrive to have a young student from Saurashtra, Sudāmā, with him.

‘At the end of the introduction session, Acharya announced that the students would be divided into eight groups and would move among the eight great teachers assembled by Acharya Sandipani. Also, there would be a special ceremony the next morning at which all the students who had not yet had their upanayana would be initiated into their vows of abstinence, and those who had been out of the care of a guru would be reinducted into their vows. Other than Krishna, Uddhava and Balarama, and a few others like Sudāmā, most were due for a reinduction and a ritual shaving of their heads.

‘As Acharya Sandipani wound the session down to a close, Chandrachuda put his hand up. Acharya sized up this unusually tall and gangling student with a confused look on his face and allowed him to speak.

‘Chandrachuda asked with a deadpan face, “Acharya, can we choose our groups?”

‘Acharya looked at Chandrachuda severely and replied, “No. That is my job. I will put students of equal abilities in one group so that they can learn at the same pace.

‘Chandrachuda insisted that he be put in the same group as Krishna. Acharya shut him up by telling him sweetly that he had

some way to go before he could hope to be in Krishna's league. Acharya reassured him with a twinkle in his eye, "I am sure that with your intelligence and diligence, you will soon qualify for the top group. Students will keep moving from one group to the other depending upon their performance."

'The naughty Anuvinda was smiling. He had just got an idea.

'Krishna was kept in the top group. I had thought that I would also be kept in that group, but I was, instead, placed in the second group, with Balarama and the two princes of Ujjayini. Krishna had Sudāmā and some students from Parashurama Ashrama in his group. Chandrachuda, the curious man from Rakshagriha, was kept in the lowest group. All the groups had a target period in which they were expected to complete the course. The top group was given a target period of three months and the bottom one, a period of one year.

'The day began in the Brāhma Muhurta, exactly an hour before sunrise. We were expected to synchronise our time with the rising of birds. Some of us were very good at it and they were informally made group monitors to ensure that their group kept to time. Before the first ray of the sun, we would finish our asana<sup>3</sup> and pranayama<sup>4</sup> routines and get into meditational routines. Meditations were often guided by one of the great rishis. We soon realised that this preparation phase was the key to our performance during the rest of the day.

'I was surprised to learn that the rishis started speaking highly of Krishna's mastery of meditation. I think it was just the end of the first week that Rishi Hiranyagarbha announced that Krishna had mastered in a week what had taken him a lifetime to achieve. It was his accumulated Karma, he had said, that allowed him such a mastery. Clearly, high accountability was attached to one's freely willed actions in Sanatana Dharma.

'One of my most enjoyable sessions was with Rishi Panini. He showed us practical demonstrations of how Time, or Kāla, moved in a cyclical manner, related these to astronomical observations and then related the structure of time to the structure of Sanskrit language. It also made my life difficult as I would often sit till late for astronomical observations and then find it difficult to get up on time.

'Kanada Rishi was in a class of his own. After Rishi Panini had exposed us to the vastness of the Universe, Rishi Kanada brought us

face to face with the very small. He taught us ganita<sup>5</sup> and the art of calculating from the infinitesimal to the infinity.

‘Kapila Muni’s lessons in Cosmology were intriguing. We had to take the help of Rishi Chandakaushika in reconciling the duality of Purusha and Prakriti with the absolute dissolution of Yoga and the Advaita and Dvaita in Brahman. It was difficult but very engaging. Once I understood this, it became a great help in attaining higher states of meditation.

‘We had learnt the Vedas and the Upanishads earlier too, but this time we were taught the Nyāya methodology of analysis. The ordinary logic of true versus false or the binary logic was shown to be totally inadequate by the Vedic logic of what the rishis called Chatushkoti, or the four-valued logic. In other words, you did not have to apply only the logic of true or false to an event or to a theory. It could be any of the four—true, false, neither true nor false, and both true and false.

‘Krishna was the supreme master of the course. Since he was not in my group, I had no idea of what he was doing, but every rishi was full of glowing praises for him. Rishi Hiranyagarbha was once so overcome with emotion while discussing his prowess of yoga that he called him an Avatāra and wished that he could attain the highest state of consciousness in the manner of Krishna. When we pressed him for an explanation, he only said that Krishna was always in that state effortlessly, whereas even he had to make a conscious effort to reach that state, and he could not remain there all the time. He sighed as he said that and I felt both proud and jealous.

‘While we were slogging it out, we learnt that Krishna had finished the entire course in forty days, finishing the four Vedas in four days, and one hundred and eight Upanishads in eight days. Bharata Muni said that he was fortunate to have learnt four extra kalās from Krishna. Krishna then went off to learn yuddha vidyas from Sandipani Rishi while the rest of us slogged it out in the gurukula.

‘Krishna was very fond of Sudāmā, who was equal to him in learning of the scriptures. They would finish their lessons quickly and then go off into the forest. One day, Krishna came back and accused Sudāmā of cheating him and making him go hungry. Sudāmā vehemently contested Krishna’s allegation. Krishna said that Sudāmā

had roasted gram with him, given to him by Gurumata Sushushrā. They had got wet in the rain and were delayed. Sudāmā ate all the gram by himself quietly and pretended that his teeth were chattering in the cold when Krishna asked him the reason. The whole course made fun of poor Sudāmā, who was probably the smallest and thinnest among all the students. He could not get over the ribbing until the end of the course.

‘On day sixty-four, Krishna was ready for his Guru Dakshina, but we were very far away from it. All the rishis devised a novel method to keep him busy. They would have a joint discussion with him every evening for two hours. Rishi Panini admitted to me that it was their way of learning from Krishna as even the rishis were nowhere near Krishna in the depth of experience of consciousness that he had achieved.

‘At last, the day dawned when the first batch was ready to offer Guru Dakshina.’



- [1](#) Philosophies
- [2](#) Fine arts
- [3](#) Yogic posture exercises
- [4](#) Cardiac coherence coordinated breathing exercise
- [5](#) Mathematics



**- 15 -**

## **Offering to the Guru**

Uddhava continued his narration after a brief pause. ‘Guru Purnima was appointed as the day of Guru Dakshina for the first batch of six students who had been declared graduates by the rishis. They were Krishna, Balarama, myself, Sudāmā, Vinda and Anuvinda. Besides, all the other students had been taken off the special courses as all special teachers were leaving after the first Guru Dakshina. Even Sandipani Rishi would leave for Prabhasa after the rainy season got over.

‘A day before the graduation ceremony, Chandrachuda came to Krishna in the afternoon. He was obviously bunking his class. He came and sat next to Krishna. He kept sitting for a good ten minutes, trying to gather himself to say something. Krishna kept smiling to himself.

‘Finally, he gathered enough courage to speak. He began haltingly, “Krishna... My life is in danger because of you.”

‘Krishna kept smiling. “Did I ever threaten you Chandrachuda or do I look like someone who will murder people just for fun? Besides, I hardly know you except that you have come from the home of the Nagas. That, to me, is a great event as the Nagas have always avoided our gurukulas. The only Naga from a gurukula is probably the daughter of the Naga chief, Takshaka.”

‘Chandrachuda nodded his head in the affirmative. “Yes, Manimālā is the one you are referring to. She was a fine person with clear ideas but of late, she has begun to come under the spell of my guru.”

‘Krishna’s curiosity was aroused. “Who is this guru of yours?” “You might know him. He is called Jatil Muni, but his original name is Banakantaka,” said Chandrachuda.

‘Krishna sat up. “Oh, that disciple of Kutil Muni who got away from Mathura. So, you are a Kutil Dharmi. What are you doing here in this ashrama? Spying?”

‘Chandrachuda looked scared but Krishna reassured him. He had got interested in this angle. He could sense a bigger plot and he would not let go of such an opportunity just because he did not like Kutil Dharma.

‘Krishna was beginning to get the drift. “So, you were sent here to kill me?”

“No, Gopāla, I am here to convert you to Kutil Dharma. We felt that we would be able to get all the kings to convert to our creed by luring them to be the leaders of both the Dharma and the Rājya. Yet, we felt that since everyone looks up to you in these matters, if we were able to convert you, everyone would fall in line anyway,” Chandrachuda was getting breathless.

‘Krishna was back to his inscrutable smile. “So, why didn’t you try?”

‘Chandrachuda hung his head. “I could never come near you. I had been told by guruji that I would be helped by someone in the ashrama to be in the same group as you, but I was put in the last group and now I will have to spend one more year to even graduate, whereas I was sent to teach you Kutil Dharma.”

‘Krishna laughed loudly and asked, “Do you want to continue your studies?”

““What is the use of any study if it does not lead to the desired objective,” sighed Chandrachuda.

‘Krishna laughed this time. A gentle laughter like the pealing of temple bells. He kept his hand on the shoulders of Chandrachuda who was sitting next to Krishna with a slouch and said, “Chandrachuda, it seems you never understood the meaning of vidya<sup>1</sup>. Shikshā<sup>2</sup> and vidya are totally different. You can get shikshā from any ordinary



person, but you come to a gurukula to get vidya. Vidya defines and guides the human life itself, whereas shikshā simply refines your brain. Vidya equips you to go to the root of the relationship between Chit and chitta, Purusha<sup>3</sup> and Prakriti<sup>4</sup>, Jeeva<sup>5</sup> and Atma<sup>6</sup>, and Ātmā and Brahman. You came to the wrong place if your intention was to merely do your study. You should go right back.”

‘Chandrachuda was totally confused. He argued that it was immoral to discontinue an endeavour that one had embarked upon. “Morality,” said Chandrachuda, “resides in my Book and all human actions have to be tested on that touchstone.”

‘Krishna laughed uncontrollably now. He controlled himself and closed his eyes for a minute. Taking a deep breath, he spoke with grim seriousness, “Chandrachuda, when you seek morality in a Book, you do not need to raise your consciousness. Even animals have their code of morality, which comes to them instinctively. *As a human being, you are bestowed with the gift of self-awareness. Using that awareness, you can rise to the level of the highest consciousness and witness the ultimate pramana of samadhi. Vidya is what you get with an open mind; morality is what you get from a closed Book.* I would seriously advise you to go back to your Pralaya Shāstra and Kutil Dharma. It is a true form of mental slavery.”

‘Chandrachuda begged Krishna to take him as his disciple. Krishna asked Chandrachuda to serve as his spy in Jatil Muni’s camp for a few years if he wanted to become his disciple. “You have to prove to me that you have a burning desire. Nobody learns anything without the flame of desire in his heart. The good desire leads to good results. Karma-Samskara is the cycle of good and bad desires; their channelisation is done by the active intellect. Only then, the path of going beyond the intellect and Individual Consciousness, or chitta, opens up. We have the pramanas for the Prakriti, and pramanas for the Purusha. You give me the evidence of your true desire for vidya, and I will take you as my friend.”

‘Chandrachuda was overwhelmed with contrition and a sense of realisation. He lay prostrate at Krishna’s feet, tears streaming from his eyes. “I will do both, Achyuta. I will complete my time in the gurukula and then, I will go back to Jatil Muni to serve you and your cause.”

‘As Chandrachuda left, we were called for the Dakshina ceremony. Guru Dakshina was usually a simple ceremony. It was more for the disciples to express their Shraddhā towards the guru. The Dakshina was always offered and was rarely demanded by the guru. Thus, the disciples would only offer what they could afford. It was in the nature of making an offering to a deity.

‘Guru Sandipani sat on a small stool, with his feet in a small vessel. All the other great gurus, who had come to offer their learning to the one special student, Krishna, sat on a higher platform to witness the ceremony. Gurumata Sushushrā sat next to Guru Sandipani.

‘Vinda and Anuvinda went in first. As was customary for princes, they offered large maintenance grants. They washed the feet of Guru Sandipani and made their pledge. Guru Sandipani accepted their offerings and offered them a coconut each as his acceptance. Balarama went in next. He offered five hundred cows and his plough as a symbol of protection and washed the rishi's feet. Acharya accepted the cows, blessed the plough and returned it. I went in next and offered six hundred cows. I was allowed to wash his feet as a token of acceptance and was offered a coconut.

‘A strange thing happened when Krishna came to make his offering. Gurumata got up crying and stood between Guru Sandipani and Krishna.

‘She cried copious tears and admonished Rishi Sandipani. “Don’t you have a duty towards your kula and don’t your disciples have a duty towards discharging Rishi Rna, their real debt to the rishi. What are these useless symbolic offerings? You cannot let a man like Krishna be let off with a mere symbolic offering. He has to give what I ask him to give.”

‘Guru Sandipani looked embarrassed. His wife was making a scene in front of the greatest gathering of rishis that ever came together to impart their vidya to one special student; she was making him appear weak before them.

‘Krishna is never one to be caught in tricky situations. He immediately bowed down before Gurumata and offered himself. Sushushrā was quite pleased and whispered in his ears, “Krishna, your guru will not tell you this, but for all his great expertise in

teaching warfare to his disciples, he could not save his own son from being abducted by the Punyajana monsters of Shankha Dweepa.”

‘Tall, swarthy and possessing enormous strength, they would terrorise and rob settlements on the Saurashtra coast. In one such raid, they had waylaid Sandipani Ashrama in Prabhasa Tirtha and had abducted their young son, Punardatta. She had been pining for her son for over two years, but Rishi Sandipani could find none in Bharatavarsha who would be equal to the task of taking on the Punyajana monsters and their chief Panchajana.

‘Krishna immediately took a vow to restore Punardatta to Gurumata and offered it as his Guru Dakshina to the rishi. Even Rishi Sandipani, with his exalted state of consciousness, had tears in his eyes as he offered the most precious coconut of his life to his most extraordinary student ever.’



- [1](#) Learning
- [2](#) Studies
- [3](#) Cosmic Consciousness
- [4](#) Individual Consciousness
- [5](#) Individual
- [6](#) Soul



**- 16 -**

## **The Rescue**

**U**ddhava resumed the narration after everybody finished their evening sandhya vandana and had their meals.

‘A small party led by Acharya Sandipani left for Prabhasa Tirtha the day after the Guru Dakshina ceremony. They travelled on foot to Omkareshvara for three days. As the Gurumata was accompanying them, she needed help in the form of palanquins from time to time. This slowed down the entire contingent.

‘From Omkareshvara to Bhrigu Tirtha, they travelled on the same boats that we have taken this time. Changing to the ocean-going ships at Bhrigu Tirtha, they reached Prabhasa Tirtha in about two weeks.

‘After reaching Prabhasa Tirtha, they waited for the Punyajana ships to arrive. It could have been an endless wait.

‘After doing satsanga for nearly two months, the boatmen came running to the Rishi one day. The rainy season had ended even as they had arrived at Prabhasa Tirtha.

‘Krishna asked Balarama to go back to Mathura and asked me to accompany him. The Punyajana ship had been parked near the port of Dweepa Pattana<sup>1</sup>. Krishna and I secured entry in to the ship as porters and hid inside when it was about to leave. We were discovered by the sailors and produced before the captain. He was furious to find the two stowaways. He had a good mind to kill us right there but thought better of taking the decision all by himself, and decided to check with

his chief, Panchajana. The chief had us brought to him in chains. He found Krishna as a good slave material to sell in the eunuch market. He laughed derisively when he looked at Krishna. “Captain, you have brought me a good sexy kid. I will sell him in Vaivasvatapura market for a huge hoard of pearls. Many merchants would love to have him as their consort. Look at his soft features and the bewitching smile. Had he been a girl, he would have made a fine sex slave for me. Free him and take care of him. I don’t want any injury on him. Even this other boy is good. He will also fetch a good price. Free them and tend to them.”

‘This was an unexpected bounty for us. We got a full run of the ship and managed to mix ourselves with the crew. Krishna would mostly stay down with the crew. I had to willy-nilly accompany him to the rowing decks most of the times. He became very popular among the crew. Half the rowing men consisted of regular crew and the others were slaves. Most of them were from Shankha Dweepa and were dark in colour with primordial features.

‘We soon found out from the crew that Punardatta was indeed kept on board the Punyajana ship and had been sold to the royal family of Vaivasvatapura who were in the habit of buying boys of good pedigree for royal marriages and then kill them after a while.

‘The ship made a halt at Kushasthali<sup>2</sup>, took provisions on board and then sailed on towards Vaivasvatapura. One more stopover was made at Kachchhapapuri<sup>3</sup> after which we headed into the open sea with the course set for Vaivasvatapura. After sailing for a few more days, we came to know that Chief Panchajana had asked for the course to be altered towards Shankha Bhāra in Shankha Dweepa. This was an unexpected twist.

‘Krishna and I consulted with each other. If the ship did not go to Vaivasvatapura, our entire effort would be wasted and we would neither be able to redeem our vow to the Acharya nor could we be sure of being able to return to Bharatavarsha any time soon. In fact, we might not be able to get back ever again.

‘We plotted a coup. We already had the captain in our confidence. Krishna fanned his ambition and charmed him into believing that he was being exploited by the chief and actually deserved to be the chief himself. Using his charms with the crew, he caused a revolt on the

ship. Panchajana was thrown off the ship, Captain Bhikru was coronated as the new chief and the ship altered its course back to Vaivasvatapura. Bhikru gifted Krishna the powerful conch of Panchajana. Krishna promptly named the conch Pāñchajanya.

‘It took another ten days to reach Vaivasvatapura. Bhikru and his assistants gave us very important inputs about the ways of the Nagakanyās who ruled the queendom of Vaivasvatapura. They had strange customs. The Queen Mother was the presiding deity of the queendom. The elder princess was the designated successor. They changed their husbands frequently, killing the earlier one as soon as a more worthy replacement was found.

‘Krishna and I trained the crew in tactical warfare and rescue techniques. We intended to go to the city all by ourselves and bring the rescued son of Sandipani Rishi to the ship and sail away quickly. We did not really know what was in store for us. We were ready to play it by the ear.

‘We berthed at Vaivasvatapura at the far end of the jetty. The two of us got down ahead of the unloading of merchandise and tried to melt into the crowd. To our astonishment, there was a crowd present to welcome us at the exit gate of the port campus. The entourage was led by the Queen Mother herself. They carried Naga imagery on almost every part of their person. It was indeed a mystery how Naga worshippers seemed to be present in every part of the world from Pragajyotisha to Vaivasvatapura!

‘The next few days went in a blur. We found Punardatta. He was the husband of the Naga crown princess. Her younger sister, Asikā grew quite fond of Krishna, but on the third day of our arrival, the Queen Mother announced that a festival of choice would be held in the port campus where Punardatta and the new charming boy would fight each other. If they refuse to fight, both of them would be killed by King Father, the husband of the Queen Mother. The one who survives the combat of the festival of choice would become the new husband of the crown princess.

‘Asikā was greatly disappointed, and she came and cried on my shoulder. She made a proposal to me. I could not say no to her as that would have certainly meant death for me. So, I simply acted as if I was greatly interested without actually saying yes.

‘When the day of the combat dawned, Krishna conveyed to Punardatta what he wanted to do. The Punyajana ship heaved anchor, even as a small boat from the ship waited on the jetty with Bhikru and four of his strongest oarsmen. I slunk away and hid in the boat and watched the scene from there.

‘The combatants were lined up in an arena, which was only about one hundred metres away from the jetty. The arena had a massive idol of the Divine Mother—the chief deity of the Nagakanyās.

‘Queen Mother arrived with a lot of pomp and ceremony. She was seated on a raised throne with her husband sitting next to her on a smaller throne. King Father got up and announced, “On behalf of the Queen Mother and in the name of the Divine Mother, I do hereby announce the festival of choice commenced. Krishna and Punardatta will now fight until one of the combatants is killed. If none of them is killed, I will have to kill them both. Now, start.”

‘Krishna and Punardatta were both given swords as their weapon of choice. It was clear to anyone who understood swordsmanship that Punardatta was no match to Krishna, but Krishna made a fine show of fighting hard without putting a quarter of effort that he was capable of. They kept fighting till Krishna made a manoeuvre, which had Punardatta losing his sword. Yet, at the same time, Krishna’s sword also went out of his hand. They started hand-to-hand combat and moved close to the edge of the jetty. Suddenly, in a swift tackle, Krishna lifted up Punardatta. The crowd shrieked and howled expecting that Krishna would kill Punardatta by banging him against the ground.

‘Then something totally unexpected happened. Krishna swung around and threw Punardatta in a way that he fell straight into the waiting boat, where the boatmen caught him. In the twinkling of an eye, Krishna jumped onto the boat and the powerful oarsmen rowed the boat away towards the waiting ship. It took a while for the people on the shore to understand what had happened. By the time, they could gather their bows and arrows; we were out of their reach. Some powerful swimmers tried to chase us, but no swimmer could possibly catch up with a boat being rowed away by four powerful Shankhadweepi sailors.



‘In about half an hour, we were at the ship and moving into the deep sea.

‘We arrived at Prabhasa Tirtha fifteen days later. Krishna decided to make the process of handing Punardatta to Acharya Sandipani a very solemn and formal occasion.

‘Accordingly, I went in advance and informed the Acharya and Gurumata of the success of our mission. Krishna could not make the occasion solemn and formal as Gurumata Sushushrā and Acharya Sandipani ran barefoot to the jetty. The meeting of mother and son was an occasion for the gods to savour. Punardatta was bathed by the tears of Gurumata alone. I could see tears even in the eyes of the Acharya. I really marvelled at Krishna who could bring emotion even into the eyes of an accomplished yogi.

‘Then Acharya turned towards Krishna and said, “Krishna, today I bless you that you may become Jagadguru.””<sup>4</sup>



- [1](#) Modern-day Diu
- [2](#) Modern-day Dvaraka
- [3](#) Modern-day Karachi
- [4](#) Guru of the world



**- 17 -**

## **The Return to Mathura**

Uddhava paused for half an hour and resumed the narration that he was quite obviously enjoying. Rukmini, in particular, was listening with rapt attention. Krishna sat through the narration with an inscrutable face as if the story that was being recounted did not concern him at all.

Uddhava narrated the immediate aftermath of their return from Vaivasvatapura. ‘Gurumata had gone insane with joy. Even Acharya Sandipani seemed to bask in moments of great joy, only to take on his sober expression when he remembered his own teachings of “samatva”<sup>1</sup> that he was so fond of imparting to his disciples.

‘The effervescence seemed to last forever. The Acharya asked us to stay with him till he went back to Ujjayini. So, all of us took a journey back to Avantika through Bhṛigu Tirtha.

‘Before we left, Acharya called Krishna separately and told him that there were some special lessons that he needed to take from two very special gurus. “Krishna, you alone deserve those lessons. I will send my recommendations to them. It is for you to find the time to learn the art of absolute detachment in action from Guru Ghora Āṅgīrasa at Prayagaraja and from Bhagavana Parashurama at Shūrapāraka<sup>2</sup>. Once you have learnt at their feet, you would be an Avatāra.

‘In the month of Phalguna, we took the same riverine route back to Mathura that had brought us to Sandipani Ashrama. Sailing up the Shiprā with the current, we joined the Charmanyavati and landed at Dhavalapuri after about a week of relaxed sailing.

‘Advance information was sent to Mathura before we landed. When we reached Mathura, the entire city was waiting for us at the gate of the city. An ocean of multitude swallowed us in welcome. The revelry went on for days, even as I tried to be with my mother Kansā, and Krishna and Balarama tried to steal some time with their mothers, Devaki and Rohini, and their father Vasudeva.

‘Maharaja Ugrasena called a special session of the Sudharma Sabha to welcome Mathura’s first batch of Sandipani Ashrama graduates.

‘I had sensed a strange hostility in my brother Brihadbala ever since my return. Mother Kansā also seemed to be somewhat distant. I found it difficult to understand their attitude.

‘The Sudharma Sabha took place under a pall of gloom. Word had been received that Jarasandha had camped near Ekachakrapura<sup>3</sup> on the southern bank of the Yamuna and had been given passage by the Chedi kingdom. King Damaghosha of Chedi was the husband of Maharaja Vasudeva’s sister Shrutashravā. His son Shishupala was very jealous of Krishna. He was also a close friend of Rukmi, the Vidarbha prince.’

Uddhava paused and looked at Rukmini, who seemed to flare up at the mere mention of Rukmi.

‘The Sudharma Sabha began with a formal welcome of Krishna, Balarama and me, and then immediately went into side spin.

‘Pradyot took leave from Maharaja Ugrasena immediately as the Sabha was called to order and informed the Sabha that Jarasandha was only a few days’ march away from Mathura.

‘Krishna got up and requested the Sabha to postpone the felicitation of the graduates. He made a short speech before the Sabha to outline his plan of meeting this contingency.

‘Krishna began with an incantation to Guru Gargacharya and spoke in a measured monotone. “Maharaja, my elders and the respected members of the Sabha, I am going to suggest a solution to this impending crisis. We have beaten Maharaja Jarasandha back a

number of times, seventeen to be precise, but with the resources at his command, he can keep waging a war on us indefinitely. He seems to be in that frame of mind where he does not consider a defeat to be a defeat but would consider it a big defeat if he loses his capacity to wage a war. I am fresh from the greatest ashrama of Aryavarta, where I have learnt that *war is not limited to just fighting the army of the enemy. One has to fight the mind, energy and resources of the enemy as well.* Conservation of our own resources till the time we have the right opportunity is more important than the Kshatriya code of honour. We have to fight to win, not just fight to save our honour. Therefore, may I suggest to the Sabha that Balarama and I must be allowed to leave Mathura for a secret destination and Mathura may sue for peace with Jarasandha, telling him that we have been expelled from Mathura.”

‘A howl of protest rose from the Sabha. Sātyaka rose from his place and started shouting. Father Devabhaga went pale with the thought of dishonour. Youngsters like Sātyaki and myself rose up and started shouting our disapprobation. Brother Brihadbala, on the other hand, brightened up with this thought. He caught my hand, bade me to sit down and whispered in my ear that this was probably the chance that we should grab with both our hands and have one of us declared as the crown prince. “Since you are very friendly with him, you may not like to displace him, but you could pilot my name as the successor of Maharaja Ugrasena.” I paid no heed to this suggestion at that time.

‘Maharaja Ugrasena tried to bring order to the discussion but failed. He was never effective, not even in his youth, and it was evident that he had lost none of his incapacity.

‘Uncle Vasudeva got up. His soothing figure was the only one capable of bringing calm to the proceedings.

‘He raised his right hand. The shouts became murmurs. Slowly, the delirium died down. People resumed their seats. Some isolated cries went up from the ladies’ corners. “No compromise at the cost of Gopāla” was the refrain.

‘Maharaja Vasudeva spoke softly but firmly. “Krishna is dear to all of us. He is like a brother, a son, a friend and an inspiration to each one of us. Yet, he is my and Devaki’s real son. I have every reason to think that Krishna is right.”

‘A deep hush fell on the Sabha. Some women started crying. A young member fainted.

‘Vasudeva uncle clarified his stand. “We need to train ourselves a lot more. We need to build not only an army, but we also need to invest in weaponry. Krishna and Balarama have learnt the use of almost all the astras and shastras, but they have to train even further to be able to take on a huge army like Jarasandha’s. Sāma, dāma, danda and bheda are not just empty words of rhetoric. They have application in the real world. There are things that cannot be discussed in an open Sabha. I would urge the Sabha to understand the depth of strategy that Krishna has only hinted. *Let us not take democracy to the extremity. We have already seen the consequences of this malady. Extreme democracy ends up in Kamsa.*

‘The hush became even deeper.

‘Vasudeva uncle seized the moment. “I propose to Maharaja Ugrasena that Krishna and Balarama may be allowed to leave Mathura incognito.”

‘Maharaja Ugrasena immediately nodded his head. His instincts were always with Krishna. He secretly worshipped him as a divine hero. After all, if it were not for Krishna, he would have perished in the prison of Mathura.

‘The consensus secured, and Krishna and Balarama left the Sabha. I followed them. Krishna saw me and indicated to me to get ready. I was thrilled with the prospect of being the only person Krishna trusted. I went back home.

‘On my way home, I found Māthurs<sup>4</sup> talking animatedly, many of them crying. I could sense their deep disappointment in parting with Krishna, in whom most of them saw divine qualities. A few gopas had migrated to Mathura and the Krishna stories had started becoming legendary.

‘It is always a problem when the general populace starts ascribing superhuman qualities to their leaders. It is something that Krishna had described as the ultimate weakness of the people. He used to often say that unless everyone believes himself to be Krishna, the State couldn’t prosper or be victorious against evil. “*Exalting leaders to superhuman status is a sign of escapism in the population,*” he used to say. Dharmo Rakshati Rakshitah, or “one is protected only by

protecting Dharma”, is applicable to each one in the public. Only when each limb of the population protects his svadharma and subordinates his svadharma to larger Kula Dharma and Rashtra Dharma, the Rashtra becomes great.

‘When I reached home, I was hit by the stark difference in the mood prevalent there. Father had not yet returned, but mother Kansā and brother Brihadbala seemed to be absolutely ecstatic. Their jubilation hit me as vile. “What is this great occasion for celebration, may I ask?” I asked this question rather sternly.

‘Mother Kansā hugged me with all the passion at her command. “Krishna is going away, Uddhava. Now you can become the next king of Mathura.

‘I pushed her away gently. “Ma, I am going with Krishna.”

‘My mother virtually collapsed in my arms.’



- [1](#) Equanimity
- [2](#) Modern Sopara or Nalla Sopara
- [3](#) Modern-day Etawah
- [4](#) Residents of Mathura





**- 18 -**

## **Jarasandha Returns**

Uddhava wiped away his tears and continued. ‘Mother Kansā was full of plans, tactics and strategies to make me the king of Mathura. She had always fancied herself as Uncle Kamsa’s real sister, having inherited his cunning and temper, but not much else. She had always thought that her sons had inherited her guile. She was devastated to find that her elder son had been beguiled by a mere cowherd. In her despair, she turned to her younger one, Brihadbala.

‘She remonstrated with me but when she could not make much headway with me, she clasped Brihadbala tightly to herself and started wailing. “My elder one has been stolen by that thief Gopāla. Brihadbala will now redeem my pledge to my brother. He has to become the king of Mathura, as my father is useless and my jyeshtha<sup>1</sup> is too much bound to a script. I will tutor him into a fine diplomat and will get back the power I lost when brother Kamsa was killed by that cowherd.

‘I got up, did pranama to her and left to join Krishna for the preparations to leave Mathura immediately.

‘We left the next day before sunrise. We dressed as brahmacharis, with shaven heads and tufts of shikhā.<sup>2</sup>

‘What happened after we left is what I have heard from my mother. It must be a reliable account as she was in an excellent position to receive all the news.

‘My mother Kansā, assuming the role of a friend, philosopher and guide for Brihadbala, was able to persuade my father Devabhaga to plead with Uncle Vasudeva and Maharaja Ugrasena to have Brihadbala go as an envoy of Mathura to meet Jarasandha and convince him not to attack Mathura as the cause of his wrath, Krishna, had already left Mathura for an unknown destination. Akrura ji, otherwise the fittest man to lead such an expedition, had refused to lead it.

‘Though mother Kansā wanted Brihadbala to go alone to meet Jarasandha when the chance arose, Uncle Vasudeva put his foot down and made Akrura ji accompany him. Two days after we left, they went out to meet Jarasandha, who was camping opposite Ekachakrapura on the right bank of Yamuna.

‘Brihadbala and Akrura ji took a boat from Dhavalapuri to reach Jarasandha’s camp in about three days. They were made to wait for two days before Jarasandha granted them an audience.

‘They were led to Jarasandha’s camp by a section of fully armed soldiers, led by a battalion commander. Nearly one thousand soldiers on all four sides flanked the grand battlefield camp. Two fully caparisoned and armoured elephants with massive tusks guarded the entry to the camp. Their grand sight reminded Akrura of Kuvalayapida<sup>3</sup>. He mentioned this to Brihadbala who snubbed him with a shrug. Hurt by the impudence of the young pretender, Akrura ji decided to stay silent and let Brihadbala take the lead. *The pitfalls of entrusting responsibility to own blood, and not to the ablest, have been the undoing of many an empire.* The portents were quite obvious as the callow Brihadbala sighted Jarasandha and shrunk with awe.

‘Jarasandha did not offer a seat to Brihadbala. Akrura ji stayed right behind him. He was disgusted at the pusillanimity of the young envoy forced upon the Yadavas by an entitled member of the king’s family.

‘Brihadbala melted in the awe-inspiring presence of the massive Jarasandha. He bowed down in front of him like an invertebrate.

‘Jarasandha roared like an untamed lion, “Hey Yadava, how do you come in my presence without my quarries, those notorious brigands, Krishna and Balarama. Am I supposed to keep you as a hostage to get their heads?” “No sir,” responded Brihadbala sheepishly. “Krishna and Balarama are not worth your attention. They ran away as soon as they came to know that your forces were approaching Mathura.”

‘Jarasandha broke out into a guffaw. “You fool. You think I don’t know my enemy. So many times, that young imp Krishna has denied me. That little boy is as sharp as the edge of a sword and you are here to tell me that he has run away. It must be another low trick. Where is Magadhamādana?” Jarasandha looked around for his Senapati.

‘Magadhamādana, also known as Hiranyadhanu, stood up to attention, with his hand on his sword and head bowed. He spoke up to support Jarasandha. “Sire, this must be checked thoroughly. He is a master of encircling manoeuvre and knows how to lay traps. We must ensure that he is not leading a pincer from the Panchala side. He is responsible for Panchala denying us passage. We had lost lakhs of our troops near this place in an ambush. We should take these envoys into custody and interrogate them.”

‘Brihadbala nearly laid himself prostrate before Jarasandha. He begged him to spare them. He reeled off his pedigree to Jarasandha. He told him that he was the dearest nephew of the late Maharaja Kamsa and the son of his dearest sister, Kansā.

‘Hearing the name of Kamsa and Kansā, Jarasandha relented. He had fond memories of Kansā from his stay in Mathura. She was not only chirpy and convivial, but also looked after him and Queen Saudamini with rare affection.

‘Jarasandha clapped and asked a seat to be given to Brihadbala and Akrura ji. They were seated and given customary honours due to an envoy. Akrura ji, however, had lost all inclination to take part in any conversation after watching the abject behaviour of Brihadbala. He also rued the moment when he had passed over the chance of becoming the envoy himself. Now, it was his destiny to be witness to this craven behaviour of a Yadava princeling.

‘Jarasandha had completely softened towards Brihadbala. Yet, there was no change in his attitude towards Krishna. Avenging the death of his son-in-law had become the guiding motive of his life. A greater

purpose underlay this apparent motive. His life's aspiration had been to become the undisputed ruler of the whole known universe—from Pragajyotisha to Shankha Dweepa. If a mere cowherd could show to the world that he could not protect the honour of his own daughters, his mission objective was going to be seriously compromised, which would impair his victory campaigns. The source of his zeal to hunt Krishna lay in this important consideration.

‘After Brihadbala had regained his composure, he gave a detailed account of how “he” had managed to throw Krishna and Balarama out of Mathura. Jarasandha was not that naïve. Looking at Brihadbala, he instinctively knew that this chicken of a man possessed no such craft. He had faced Krishna in many a battles. He knew his adversary well. He had great respect for Krishna's warrior skills as well as his skills of using deception. He never forgot the rout his flotilla suffered almost at this exact point, a few years back.

‘Brihadbala compounded Jarasandha's distrust with his guileless lies. He presented himself as the future king of Mathura and offered to make Mathura a mandala under Magadha with the same arrangement as Kamsa had with Magadha.

‘Jarasandha sent both the envoys to rest and he met them again after two days. He utilised this period to confirm the truth of their assertions. When he had got the confirmation of Krishna's disappearance from Mathura and certification of Brihadbala's character as a bumbling fool pitchforked into an unfamiliar role of a negotiator, Jarasandha sent for them again.

‘In this meeting, he threatened Brihadbala with dire consequences if Brihadbala did not tell him where Krishna had gone. This was something that poor Brihadbala had no idea of. He swore innocence, begged Jarasandha, even touched his feet, and did a hundred other craven things, but Jarasandha would not relent. It was then that Akrura ji sought leave to speak in place of Brihadbala and was allowed.

‘Akrura ji spoke at length. He narrated his mission to Vrindavana, ordered by Kamsa, in which he managed to convince Krishna to Mathura. He spoke of the divine powers that he saw in that young boy of twelve years, who would now be about fifteen years of age. He spoke of his latest feat—the rescue of Acharya Sandipani's son from

the Nagakanyās of Vaivasvatapura. “If Sanatana Dharma is the quest to achieve divinity within this human frame, Krishna is probably the finest example of that achievement,” said Akrura ji. “It is, however, impossible to predict where he would have gone. He did mention to us that he had two more gurus to learn from. He mentioned Rishi Ghora Āngirasa as one of them. I do not know the second one.

‘The sober countenance of Akrura ji and the sheer force of truth in his utterances convinced Jarasandha of his sincerity. He appreciated Akrura ji’s candour. He kept them with him for another seven days till his spies went to Prayagaraja to check at the Āngirasa Ashrama. No new student had been enrolled there for more than a month.

‘Jarasandha had developed confidence in Akrura ji. He consulted him on the latest information. “The only person who would know about the other guru would be Acharya Sandipani,” said Akrura ji.

‘Weighing the options before him, Jarasandha let go of Brihadbala and Akrura ji, but not before entrusting a personal letter for Maharaja Ugrasena to Akrura ji. The letter informed him of dire consequences to Mathura if they failed to share the information about Krishna’s whereabouts in future. For good measure, he also added that they should rely on better persons than Brihadbala to handle important assignments.

‘That put paid to Brihadbala and his mother’s ambitions for him forever.’

All of them broke for the day in keeping with the ashrama discipline, even though none except Krishna wanted the discourse to break. Rukmini, in particular, was so completely glued to the narration that it took her some time to come back to reality.



- <sup>1</sup> Elder brother of husband, brother-in-law
- <sup>2</sup> Topknot on the back of the head where Sahasrāra Chakra is located.
- <sup>3</sup> Refer to *Krishna Gopeshvara*, Book 1 of the trilogy.



**- 19 -**

## **Rishi Parashurama**

**R**ukmini was up early and was waiting for the next part of the story to begin. Another prahara passed before the next part of the story began.

Acharya Sandipani made everyone sit in dhyāna for half an hour to make them focus on their inner Self.

Rukmini was having difficulty concentrating. Acharya spotted her difficulty. ‘Rukmini, do not be focussed on the method. Whatever you are comfortable in is the method. *Yathābhimatdhyānādvā*<sup>1</sup>.’

Rukmini understood. She just sat there in normal posture, admiring a rosebud growing next to the hut.

After the dhyāna was over, Uddhava resumed his narration with the permission of Acharya.

‘As we left Mathura on horseback, Balarama Dau was the most unhappy. We did not take the usual route through the River Shiprā. Instead, we crossed Charmanyavati in a forest nearly a hundred kilometres south of Dhavalapuri and moved into Chedi kingdom. We knew that Chedi kingdom was Shishupala’s domain, so we had to be careful. We rested for the night near a clearing in the forest; we made a makeshift-resting place and foraged for some food in the nearby areas. Forest was full of tubers, berries and plums. It made for a good and filling meal. We made a small fire and settled for some small chitchat.

‘Dau Balarama had been sullen all through the journey. Even as Krishna cracked jokes and indulged in banter, he did not respond. Then he burst out. “I think you are taking me for granted. It is true that I regard your judgment highly, but I just cannot reconcile to running away from Mathura like cowards. I will go back to Mathura tomorrow.”

‘Krishna tried some lighthearted banter to divert the topic, but Dau was insistent. “Unless I am convinced of this despicable flight from the enemy, I will not go any further. I will go back to Mathura and challenge Jarasandha for a fight. I will not suffer this infamy.”

‘The exchanges started becoming strained as Dau grew quite strident and started speaking very loudly even as Krishna kept smiling.’

At that point, Balarama interjected in Uddhava’s narration. He was not happy with the description. Acharya raised his hand to keep him quiet and motioned Uddhava to continue the narration.

Uddhava smiled and continued. He was aware of the famous temper of Balarama, but the presence of Acharya gave him a lot of confidence.

‘Krishna folded his hands before Dau and asked to be forgiven. He submitted to Dau and said, “Dau, Rāja Dharma is about securing the best interest of the subjects. It is not about the honour of the king, but about the honour of the public and the kingdom. The ego of the king should in no way affect the decision-making. The purpose is always more important than the process. A king should have the wisdom to comprehend the nature of his life’s purpose. That purpose ought to be secured by exercising all available choices of *sāma*, *dāma*, *danda* and *bheda*—reconciliation, allurement, punishment and subversion. It ill behoves a king to go into a frontal battle if he is not well prepared for it because it will not only bring misery to his people but would also invite sure defeat. The defeat would result in plunder and deprivation of his public and devastation of the countryside. I know that we have defeated Jarasandha seventeen times, but he commands immense resources. We have been impoverished fighting these battles, whereas Jarasandha has hardly broken a sweat. He has lost two or three lakh soldiers, yet he can muster the same number in no time. It is, therefore, hardly wise to subject Mathura to greater depredation. That



is why I am now using the subversion or bheda technique. I am aware of his weakness. He is full of ahankara<sup>2</sup> and would chase us down. Imagine carrying such a huge army down, across Aryavarta. In the meantime, we will go to Rishi Parashurama, as directed by Acharya Sandipani. We will learn the divyāstras<sup>3</sup> as the Acharya had told us to. From Parashurama's ashrama, we will go someplace where we can build defences and take care of a large army, as we had done in Vrindavana. Shvetaketu, who is in Kundinapura right now, knows the way to Parashurama Ashrama. We will take him along." Krishna finished his oration with a searching look in the direction of Dau Balarama.

'Dau Balarama eased up considerably after this lengthy explanation of Krishna's plan. He went off to sleep while Krishna and I indulged in small talk, as we revised our lessons of astronomy in the clear dark night by gazing at stars and constellations.

'We started the next morning and it took us nearly fifteen days of riding, walking and crossing of rivers, forests and two mountain ranges of Vindhya and Shatapura to reach Kundinapura.

'We located Shvetaketu with some difficulty. He had established his own gurukula and had nearly five hundred students studying there. He received us with some trepidation. He was not at all excited at the prospect of accompanying us to Rishi Parashurama's ashrama. He merely sent a guide with us, but we did come to know that we had to go to Mahendra Parvata in Shūrapāraka<sup>4</sup>. It took another ten days for us to reach there. Shvetaketu, in the meantime, had a pang of repentance and joined us just before we reached Shūrapāraka.

'In the meanwhile, Jarasandha had gone crazy trying to locate us. From Kundinapura, we ourselves sent a courier, who informed him that he had spotted us there. This news reached him while he was camping in Shutimati<sup>5</sup>, the capital of Chedi. As expected, he took the bait and began a march through thick forests towards Vidarbha. Jarasandha was furious that King Bhishmaka and Rukmi had not informed him of Krishna's presence in Kundinapura.

'Just as our planted courier reached Shutimati, we had successfully evaded the spies of Vidarbha and were well on our way to Shūrapāraka. It was a week of comfortable rides, with plenty of

watering and eating stops and all-night sleep. On the seventh day, we reached Shūrapāraka village on the Konkana coast. Mahendra Parvata lay to the east of the village, away from the coast and far away from the habitation. Shvetaketu put us up in a fisherman's hut. "Nobody can climb Mahendra Parvata without the permission of Parashurama himself. Parashurama is reputed to be immortal, but this immortality is of the line of thought of Bhārgava Rāma who fought against the injustice of the unjust ruling class. The title is willed to the most deserving disciple of Parashurama, about ten years before the date when he decides to leave his mortal body. Parashurama has to combine all the virtues of Brahman and Kshatriya—of great learning and great valour. I am sure he would agree to take you in as a disciple because you are also fighting against injustice. I will leave early morning tomorrow."

'Shvetaketu came back within a few hours. He was greatly excited. "Krishna, I am totally flummoxed. I did not even have to mention your name. As soon as I came into Parashurama's presence, he smiled at me. He said, 'Welcome Shvetaketu. But why have you come alone? You should have brought Krishna along. I already have a message from Acharya Sandipani. I saw them coming. Go get them quickly. I have to teach them the crafts that I can teach only to a deserving student.' That is why I have come back running. Come, let us go. It seems he is going to teach you the divyāstras."

'We moved quickly. The path was winding and not much travelled. It was obstructed by wild undergrowth; low branches of trees obstructed the path in many places. We had to clear the path with the branch-cutting swords we normally carried while traversing through a jungle route. Slashing and hacking through the thick vegetation, we climbed around two hundred metres to reach a clearing where a gate made of banana trunks welcomed us. On the gate was a large banner. On the banner was a Sanskrit shloka written in large letters—

*agrataḥ chaturō vedāḥ, priṣṭhataḥ saśarō dhanuḥ  
idaṁ brāhmaṇaṁ idaṁ kshātraṁ, śāpādapi, śarādapi*<sup>6</sup>

'Krishna stood before the gate for a long time, looking at the shloka on the banner and went into deep contemplation. I had to nudge him

after a while. Krishna sighed and said, *“Truly, nobody can save one’s deep convictions without backing them up with arms and valour. Tolerating intolerance will surely be the end of tolerance, as the intolerant will emerge victorious and finish off the tolerant. There is no blame of violence upon a person who kills the violent.”*

‘A greater surprise awaited us. Even as we had just entered the ashrama campus, we saw a rishi coming towards us, running at full tilt. He was a huge man, no less than seven feet tall with a broad build. He carried a quiver of arrows on his back and a large bow over his left shoulder. In his right hand, he carried a massive axe. I got frightened at this intimidating man running at us.

‘Krishna, however, was composed as ever. He also ran forward and almost jumped at the feet of the rishi, bringing his run to a halt. By the time Dau Balarama and I reached him, the guru and the shishya<sup>7</sup> were in a tight clasp.

‘Rishi Parashurama himself led us to the living quarters and attended to our requirements. He was overwhelmed with happiness. It was also clear to me and Dau Balarama that his attention was almost exclusively focussed on Krishna. Rishi Parashurama was animatedly talking about how he was not able to find a proper disciple whom he could impart knowledge of making and launching divyāstras. Dau and I discussed between us. We were not in the top league, we never were. So, I decided to concentrate on learning the best sword skills, and Dau Balarama decided to sharpen his skills with the mace.

‘Rishi Parashurama left us to relax for the night. We had to be up before four in the morning and be in the ashrama for weapons training.’



- <sup>1</sup> By meditating on anything that appeals to one as good (Patanjali Sutra 1:39).
- <sup>2</sup> Ego
- <sup>3</sup> Divine missile weapons
- <sup>4</sup> Nalla Sopara on Konkana coast
- <sup>5</sup> Near Modern-day Banda in Uttar Pradesh
- <sup>6</sup> In our front, we carry the four Vedas, and on our back, we carry the bow and arrows. This is the quality of Brahman and also the quality of the Kshatriya. We achieve our objective either with verbal sanction or with the use of arrows.
- <sup>7</sup> Disciple



**- 20 -**

## **Tantra Lessons**

**U**ddhava resumed after a brief pause to have some buttermilk and matharis<sup>1</sup>.

‘For the next three weeks, we were busy learning the finer aspects of combat skills from Rishi Parashurama. The exercises mostly involved the mental aspect. There were long hours of meditation on the weapons we were using, which took away most of the time. It was puzzling in the beginning, but as we entered the second week, I was able to understand that just weapons do not win battles. *Weapons only give expression to what is there in your mind. No just war can be won without understanding the nature of the enemy.*

‘In the second week, Krishna was taken away to another place for learning divyāstras. Rishi Parashurama announced with his characteristic candour that he found only Krishna fit for learning divyāstras because of his near-divine mental capacities. “Literacy (sākshartā), qualification (shikshā), education (gnana) and wisdom (vidya) are four different aspects of learning,” said the rishi. “All of you have come to me to polish your vidya. The diamond has been cut; I will give it the polish that it needs.”

‘He also made it clear that Krishna was different. “He is an Avatāra. An Avatāra is a human being who has realised his Self, the chitta, and has achieved a union with the Universal Consciousness,

the Brahman or the Chit. Such a human being can choose to go into eternal samadhi and be liberated instantaneously. Yet, when such a divine being consciously chooses to stay back in the mundane world to guide other human beings, he or she is called an Avatāra. Bhārgava Rāma, the original Parashurama, was one such. Rāma was the next and Krishna is now the eighth Avatāra in the present cosmic cycle. They are equal to rishis in the sense that they have the same level of wisdom and elevation of consciousness, but they are far higher than rishis because the rishis do not possess the capacity to perform the Karma of dynamic change by themselves. They have to depend on the dynamic action of Kshatriyas to put their guidance into practice. An Avatāra is a unique combination of Brāhma, or high consciousness, and Kshātra, dynamic action.”

‘He went on to explain the concept of Time or Kāla, and how the rishis and Avatāras are able to transcend Kāla and achieve liberation. “Kāla is the greatest mystery and also the easiest to understand if you are guided in the right way by a guru. You have received knowledge from the very best of rishis in the Sandipani Ashrama. Yet, you must absorb carefully what I am going to tell you. Veda, Vedānta, Samkhya, Yoga, Nyāya and Vaisheshika can make sense only if you understand the movement of Kāla first.” Rishi Parashurama paused and looked at all of us. Dau Balarama was listening but not really understanding. I was concentrating very hard and only partially understanding. I looked at Krishna from the corner of my eye. He was smiling as if he was hearing something he was used to hearing every day.

‘Rishi Parashurama also seemed to notice that smile. He laughed loudly, “Krishna, you have seen and experienced the movement of Kāla, but today I will take all of you to the abode of Kāla. You have not been there yet. I know that. So, we will go to the shmashana<sup>2</sup> tonight and meditate upon a fresh corpse. None can experience the full breadth and majesty of Kāla without understanding the physical phenomenon of death. Let us relax now. We have a long night before us.

‘An ashrama worker took us to the shmashana a little before midnight. It was the dark night of Amavasyā<sup>3</sup>. The setting was in a small clearing in the middle of a forest and it felt eerie. Rishi

Parashurama was nowhere to be seen. We sat around the smouldering fire of a fresh pyre. The flesh of the corpse had melted away and only those bone parts were left behind that would not fully burn.

‘Suddenly from nowhere, an apparition appeared on the edge of the clearing. As it came closer, we could see that it was Rishi Parashurama in black robes.

‘He performed a vigorous dance around the pyre. His every movement suggested celebration as if he was ecstatic at that person having left earth.

‘After finishing the dance, Rishi Parashurama settled down on his deerskin mat and sat in deep meditation for what seemed like an eternity.

‘Then, he slowly opened his eyes. The eyes were flaming red. He looked at me and asked, “Uddhava, why are we here?”

‘I hesitated at first. I looked askance at Krishna, but he seemed to be in a deep meditative state. I replied, “Rishi, we are here to learn the ways of Kāla.”

‘He laughed so loudly that my ears hurt. He repeated the question to Krishna.

‘Krishna looked nonchalant as ever. “I have no idea, Rishi Parashurama,” he said.

‘The rishi laughed out even louder, got up and performed another dance; then, he came near me and caught me by the scruff of my neck. As I started choking, he released the pressure. Then he whispered in my ear—

*yasyāmatam tasya matam matam yasya na veda sah|  
avijnātam vijānatām vijnātamavijānatām||<sup>4</sup>*

‘He laughed out more and called out to Kāla. I was too terrified of the situation to comprehend anything. I was feeling faint.

‘Then Krishna spoke. “Rishi Parashurama, please tell us the property of Kāla. Can we transcend Kāla? Can we detain Kāla? Can we travel backwards in Kāla?”

‘Rishi Parashurama went into meditation again. After a few minutes, he opened his eyes and started speaking in a deep baritone, with a staccato accent. “Everything in this Cosmic Order, the Rtam,

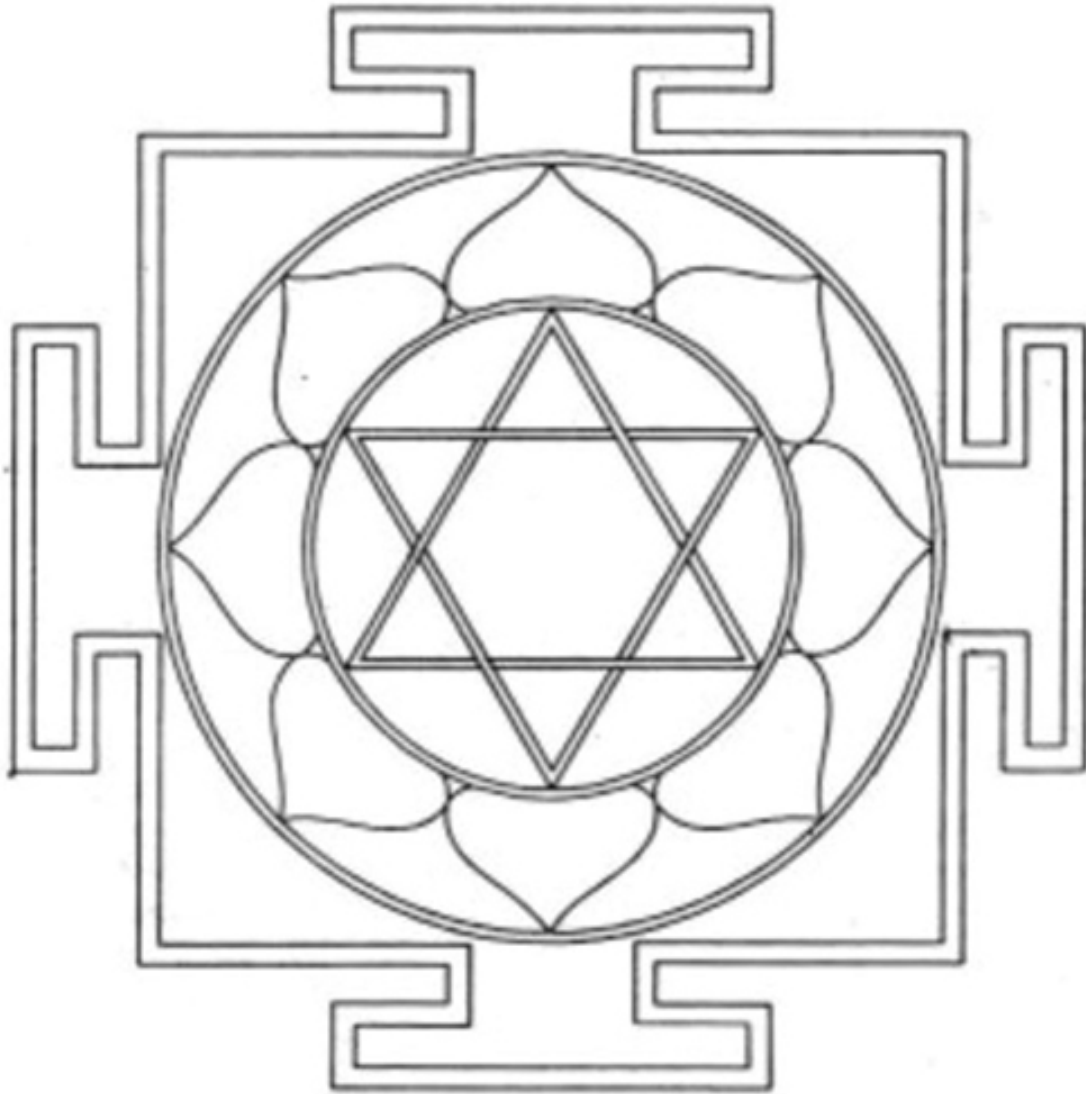
and all other universes are in the nature of curves and cycles. There is no straight line anywhere, do you understand?” He paused.

‘Krishna nodded his head in understanding. I, of course, did not understand a thing.

‘Rishi continued, “So Kāla also moves in a cycle. It is for you to recognise the cycle. Once you recognise Kāla, you transcend it. If you move through a circle, you reach the same point again and again. You can term it as moving backwards or moving forward. The arrow of time is a spiral cycle. You can roll it out and roll it back. It is definitely not a straight line. At an infinite distance, it becomes a cycle from a deeper perspective.

‘Rishi paused and drew an elaborate figure on the ash gathered over the pyre.





“This,” explained Rishi Parashurama, “is the description of the fecundity of the universe. Once the five fundamental elements of space, fire, water, air and earth combined with the transformative energy represented by the downward-pointing triangle, called Nature or Shakti, and the consciousness represented by the upward-pointing triangle, called Shiva or the experiencing Self, the manifestation happens. The downward triangle is āpa or water, the upward triangle is agni or fire, the circle around is vāyu or air, the square is the enclosing prithvi or earth and the space in between is filled by Akasha or space. The yantras represent the manifestation of sublimated energies in different forms. The substance is always in the Universal Consciousness, or Brahman. Brahman is not that the eyes

can see, but it is that by which the eyes can see. When Shiva and Shakti fuse into Brahman, unlimited energy is released, fusing everything into one. You can also see other manifestations. Look at Shree Yantra, which represents Lalita Tripurasundari, in a set of forty-three interlocked triangles. He drew it on the ash again.



‘He continued, “The play of consciousness, energy and intellect is depicted in various ways in tantra philosophy. While you are able to find the Brahman within through yoga and Samkhya, and even through jnana, here is this method of finding the Brahman in the elements, in the Nature itself. This is truly the divine in every little nook and cranny of the universe. I will now teach you the tantric way to liberation. The Mahamrityunjaya Yantra, which helps you to get detached from your intellect like the outer skin of a dry gourd separates from its inner matter. There is a huge misconception that the

Mahamrityunjaya Mantra, which is nothing but a physically crafted mantra, helps you conquer death. They are fools. Mrityu is not death because it is not a cessation. It is just a new beginning. Once you understand the nature of Kāla, you will welcome it and not be afraid of it. Why would any sane person wish to remain attached to this body form? As soon as you have discovered your Self, the body ceases to matter. It is then just a vehicle to take your energies to the highest chakra. The vāk or the reflection of shabda of Akasha is divided into four parts. The one that you utter in your wakeful state through your lips is called vaikhari, the one you communicate in your dream state through your imagination is called madhyamā, the mode of communication in your deep sleep state is called pashyanti and the one that is attained in the state of highest consciousness is called parā. I know that Krishna has a mastery of parā as well, but he does not realise what it is—why and how. This is what I am telling you today.”

‘I was in a state of deep concentration and was startled to realise that Rishi Parashurama has come to an end of his narration. I had just been introduced to another aspect of great erudition of our traditions, an external aid to awaken the kundalini within. The rishi gave us a pendant of a snake trying to eat itself by swallowing its tail, making a perfect circle. “This,” the rishi announced, “is Kāla.”

‘He did something unusual. He worshipped Krishna with his receptacle made of a human skull. He pronounced Krishna as an Avatāra and instructed him on how to combine the qualities of all the four varnas in himself. “Brāhma and Kshātra are the greatest qualities,” he said, “but in human existence, vaishya-like and shudra-like qualities are equally important as that is what allows human beings to remain in a state of service to the highest consciousness of Self and the Universe, and to be useful to the other human beings by being able to provide goods and services. Let me reiterate something that you would have seen at the entrance of the ashrama—

*agratah chaturō vedāh, prishthatah sasharo dhanuh,  
idam brāhmam, idam Kshātram, shāpādapi, sharādapi”*

‘Then he told us that he had taught Krishna not only the divyāstras but had also given him the secrets of a new metal that can be used to

fabricate those weapons. “You cannot use divyāstras without having experienced Nirvikalpa Samadhi<sup>5</sup>,” said the rishi.

He gifted his own mace to Dau Balarama. Then, he produced a huge disc and gave it to Krishna. “This is the Sudarshana Chakra that I have taught you about. Now, this is yours. My task on this earth is now coming to an end. I will wait till the beginning of the Kali Yuga. You will know when that happens.”

‘He smiled enigmatically and told us the way to Gomantaka. “You will meet Jarasandha at Gomantaka after you have fabricated your new weaponry. I will make sure that he reaches you only after the rainy season is over.”

‘He bade us goodbye. We started downhill from Mahendra Parvata before the crack of dawn.’



- <sup>1</sup> An Indian snack made up of deep-fried maida (refined wheat flour) pancake
- <sup>2</sup> Cremation place for Sanatana followers
- <sup>3</sup> New moon
- <sup>4</sup> Of the one who has not come to a conclusion and is open, he has the potential to know. Of the one who has formed a definite opinion, he has closed the door to knowledge. For those who [think they] know, they do not know. For those who [think they] do not know, they know. (Kena Upanishad 2.3).
- <sup>5</sup> The samadhi in which no duality remains



**- 21 -**

## **Gomantaka**

Uddhava took a long breath and started his narration again.

‘The route to Gomantaka was through a heavily forested region. It was raining most of the time even though it was nearly the end of the rainy season, and we had great difficulty finding clean ground for setting our night camps. Rishi Parashurama had given us rations and sent guides and helpers. We always preferred to cook our own food, but the terrain was so difficult that we often had to take the help of the little contingent sent to escort us.

‘Shvetaketu had gone back to Kundinapura. It was his job to send our quarry, Jarasandha, to the trap that we were going to lay for him. With the rainy season in full swing, we were quite sure he would not be able to reach us for six months with the mass of troops and weaponry he was carrying. We also wanted the weather to be dry when we met him.

‘About ten days into the journey, the rain stopped and we started enjoying the clear sunshine and starry nights approaching the month of Kārtika. We had to ford many rivers on the way. We were travelling a narrow strip of land between mountains on one side and the sea on the other. Ferocious mountain streams made our task very difficult. We tried to imagine what it would be like when the massive army of Jarasandha will reach this terrain. Forests were a way of life all over Aryavarta, but the sheer density and undergrowth of these

forests were quite different from what we would find in the Uttarāpatha regions. The forests there had a lot more of clearings, ponds and grasslands within the canopied forests. This forest gave you no clear sight of the sun, and the water always seemed to be hurrying towards the sea.

‘After a difficult journey of nearly a month, we arrived at a mighty river.<sup>1</sup> It looked impassable. We had to wait on its bank for nearly a week before the current became manageable and a boatman agreed to take us across. We had entered the Gomantaka area. We were met by some fine young men of the Garuda tribe, who took us to their mountain abodes. We were on top of a long and flat ridge that sloped on both sides. The slope was more than five hundred meters towards the west and about one hundred meters towards the east. We were on top of a flat land inhabited by the Garuda tribe. The land was blood red and we saw a number of elementary forgings being used by the tribe.

‘Krishna immediately set about ingratiating the elders and youngsters of the tribe. As instructed by Rishi Parashurama, he was able to get the tribe on his side. He engaged the youngsters with stories and music and set about digging the metal ore that had given its red colour to the soil and rudimentary forgings to the tribe. He set a big furnace fuelled by wood. There was an initial difficulty as most of the wood from the forest was damp, but we slowly got going. At the end of two months, we had our first supply of divyāstras made from a new black metal, much more superior to the copper bows, arrows and maces we were used to in Aryavarta. Krishna called it “Lauha Dhatu”<sup>2</sup>.

‘Krishna and Dau Balarama started organising training camps for the youngsters. There was a murmur of protest among the elders. Even though they liked us, they had a big issue in becoming a part of a fight they suspected they were getting drawn into. The tide was turned by the young prince of the tribe who declared his loyalty to the strangers from Mathura because they had taught him new self-confidence and shown him that it was better to have a glorious and short life than a long uneventful life. Reluctantly, the elders gave their support to us and the youngsters enthusiastically displayed their new sport of glory—the sport of combat and battle.

‘Prince Vainateya spoke up in front of the gathering with great conviction, “We must know that there is something higher in this world beyond the affairs of our tribe. That something is called Dharma. Even an animal can live a life and die, but a human being must live and die with honour and dignity. There is no honour and dignity greater than protecting Dharma, the order of nature. When we follow Dharma, our Karma gives us the wherewithal to beat the wheel of Time. We must not let this golden chance of a lifetime go waste. I will live and die for Krishna and Balarama. Those who want to support us are welcome. Even otherwise, every Garuda youth has already committed his life to me.”

‘This punch line from Prince Vainateya did not leave anyone with a choice. Since the Garuda youth knew their forests so well, they laid booby traps all the way down to the east of their ridge. The western side was too steep for a large army to come up the hill.

‘Krishna trained some of the youth into intelligence gathering and sent about fifty such agents down into the countryside to guide the incoming army of Jarasandha to the elaborate trap laid out for them.

‘Exactly as expected, we got news just before the hard summer was about to set in that a large army had crossed the Sahyadri mountains. Our trained intelligence operatives had given them an accurate location of Krishna and Balarama. Jarasandha could not believe his luck. However, the crafty general that he was, he sent his own operatives to confirm our presence. We conveniently made our presence known to these operatives. The stage was set. Jarasandha moved into the Gomantaka mountain slopes in the beginning of vaishakha, when the heat was just beginning to dry up the wood and the twigs.

‘Jarasandha’s army was being led by a huge retinue of elephants in the vanguard, horse-drawn chariots in the middle and infantry taking up the rear. The infantry was a mix of bowmen and lancers. The chariots and elephants were arrayed in flanks so as to create a passage for the infantry down the middle when required. An army of nearly twenty thousand lumbered up to the mountains, where Krishna had expertly laid the trap. The trap consisted of fat-laced ropes carefully interconnected and hidden by dry twigs. The rope was laid out in a huge circle of nearly three-kilometre radius. An opening was left for



the army to walk into the trap. Once that was done, our front guards were to encircle the enemy troops by joining the ropes.

‘On the day of Vaishakha Amavasyā, Jarasandha camped at the foothills below our ridge. He wanted to attack us the next day, but before the attack, he also had a plan to encircle the hill in order to close off the escape routes. He did not want us to escape to the sea.

‘On the night of Amavasyā, the encirclement was complete. Having full regard to the rules of Dharma Yuddha, we waited for the first rays of dawn to bathe our Gomantaka ridge. There was a mighty waterfall down the ridge towards the west, which we fondly called Dugdhasāgara. Krishna stood on top of the ridge on the eastern side above the place where the enemy army had camped and blew his Pāñchajanya conch.

‘That was the signal. Dau Balarama lit the fuse on our side of the rope. The fire spread along the rope, consuming the twigs under which the rope had been concealed. The dry undergrowth was the next to catch fire. As the fire spread along the rope to the circle of the three-kilometre radius, the whole forest underneath us seemed to catch fire.

‘What happened next was a complete rout. The elephants in the front line panicked and rushed back. The charioteer got crushed under the massive feet of the elephants. The fire started engulfing the entire army. As the infantry tried to escape the marauding elephants, they got trapped in the fire that had started erupting all around them. The men ran helter-skelter, but the fire was burning from all sides. The dry twigs and undergrowth fuelled the fire into a massive inferno, engulfing the men from all sides.

‘A complete carnage followed. Jarasandha was bringing up the rear. As the fire started from the front, he just about had enough time to get out of the way of the gridlock, and barely escaped the blaze. He retreated and waited a little distance away from the fire. He was accompanied by Damaghosha, the Chedi king and father of Shishupala. In addition, the troops and commanders of the Yadava chieftain of Karavirapura—Shrigālava Vāsudeva—were also with him. He did not want to go back to Karavirapura and tell Shrigālava Vāsudeva that he had lost all troops and commanders of his state. A

forlorn, lonely Jarasandha lost his entire army and could do nothing except wait for the fire to die down to check the fate of his army.

‘Jarasandha was distraught. He wanted to conquer the known world. Yet he was not able to conquer two young boys. That the boys, especially Krishna, drew him into a trap by playing on his hubris and destroyed his entire army was a thought that gnawed on his entrails.

‘The lore of Krishna grew even more.’



<sup>1</sup> River Mandavi

<sup>2</sup> Iron metal



**- 22 -**

## **Karavirapura**

The gathering retired for the night.

Uddhava took up the next day's narration only after a long debate. Uddhava said that he had left for a different mission and Balarama said that he did not want to narrate it as he was briefly absent from the action. Both of them urged Krishna to narrate the events, but Sandipani Rishi turned down the idea. He asked Uddhava to continue the narration. Thus, Uddhava continued the narration.

'I had a nagging doubt about the fate of the poor soldiers who were brought this great distance by a vain king, only to perish in a trap of fire. "Where would you place these soldiers, Gopāla, in the scheme of Dharma? They had no enmity with us. Jarasandha had sworn enmity with us. He has managed to escape with his royal retinue, whereas these poor soldiers and their animals have lost their lives for him. This does not seem to be the right way for Dharma to operate."

'Krishna answered, "Uddhava, no soldier is forced against his will to take part in a war. There is no conscription in Aryavarta. These soldiers joined an army for the twin objectives of serving their land and for a generous pay or artha. Even if they are draftees, they enjoy superior status within their communities. Fighting for their king is their svadharma and dying for him in a war is their natural Dharma. They have done it consciously and they must be treated as a part of the overall persona of their king. If the king is vile, those fighting for

him partake the king's character. It is, therefore, not right for us to grieve for them. They have earned their liberation by an honest performance of their job. Their dedication to the job they took up in their life is beyond their Self. One cannot say the same for the king who launched the attack. If his actions were dictated by anything other than the advancement of Dharma, he would not be that blameless in the observance of his duties. Karma, Uddhava, is not the same as kriya. Conscious kriya is Karma, and it comes out of the higher recesses of mind."

'My doubts had been clarified. I got a peek into the complexities of artha and Karma.

'Jarasandha had retreated. Krishna reckoned that it was the right time for us to draw Shrigālava Vāsudeva away from Jarasandha. Krishna sent me as an advanced envoy immediately to seek an audience with Shrigālava, and wait for him in Karavirapura, even as he gathered the Garuda warriors and followed with a proper royal army and retinue in a manner fit for a king to call in a king.

'Dau Balarama threw a fit at this plan. He opposed it vehemently. He had had enough of this vagrancy. He took his mace and plough, and left. Krishna had to follow him and had to use all his wiles to convince him to stay. Finally, he agreed to accompany Krishna to Karavirapura. On the way, the king of Chedi, Damaghosha, husband of Vasudeva's sister Shrutashravā and father of Shishupala also joined him.

'I reached the gates of Karavirapura and introduced myself to the guards of the city as an envoy of Krishna Vāsudeva of Mathura. The guards laughed at my introduction and refused to give me passage. This was a strange infraction of established diplomatic conduct. In Aryavarta, no envoy or even messenger would be stopped at the city gates. His smooth passage up to the king's palace would be a given. It was only in the king's palace that his credentials would be examined, and if found satisfactory, he would normally be ushered straight into the presence of the king if a court would be in session. Otherwise, he would be lodged with the highest respect and comfort and would be given an audience at the earliest. The customs in this country appeared to be strange indeed.

‘We had reached Karavirapura towards the afternoon. We were made to wait till the evening and then the gates of the city were closed on our face. We had to camp outside the gates for the night.

‘When the gates opened the next day, a whole battalion of troops came storming out and surrounded our little band of ten people. I tried to remonstrate with them that I was an envoy, but the battalion commander shouted at me at the top of his voice, “You filthy killer of Kamsa, you have the gall to take the name Vāsudeva for yourself. I will drag you to the king. He will settle your fate forever.”

‘Saying this, he manacled me as well as my charioteer and guards. We were taken to the King Shrigālava Vāsudeva. He had a forbidding presence. In his diadem, he seemed over seven feet tall, with a massive broad frame that looked even more imposing in full armour. On the way to the palace court, we were filled in with the exploits of the fearsome king. Apparently, Shrigālava harboured visions of divinity. There was no difference between his idea of being the highest divine with a combination of temporal and spiritual power in himself, and that of Kamsa. He had issued a diktat to be addressed as Bhagavana, had built temples of himself and had forbidden all worship within his kingdom except of himself. If anything, he was a few streets ahead of Kamsa. Kamsa was, at least, scared of his father-in-law Jarasandha and had outsourced such activities to Kutil Muni. Shrigālava had no such inhibitions or limitations. Jarasandha had a functional alliance with Shrigālava. Jarasandha’s ideology was no less vulgar. He also aimed to be the divine of the Universe, but he operated as a bhakta of Lord Shiva. The motivation-action dialectic did not matter to Jarasandha. For him, kriya was Karma and Karma was kriya.

‘Shrigālava sized me up and loudly bellowed in a hoarse voice. “You stupid Māthur<sup>1</sup>, you thought you could come to my abode, the heaven of Shrigālava, and could go back alive.”

‘I tried to remonstrate. “Honourable King, I am only an envoy. Niti says that envoys are exempt from punishment.”

‘Shrigālava Vāsudeva went into a paroxysm. “You filthy human being. I am Bhagavana, not a king. Looks like I need to teach you that,” he shouted at the top of his voice, commanding the troops to

throw us all into jail. He also instructed them that we should all be put to hard labour.

‘Before we knew anything, we were all in an open compound with big fences on all sides. I was surprised to find Punardatta there. He had been employed in Karavirapura as a military trainer for Prince Shakra when the king became annoyed with him over a trifle and threw him into this open prison. Almost every acharya in the kingdom was also in jail. They were there for the crime of having refused to accept Shrigālava as Bhagavana.

‘In the evening, I was taken aback to find Shvetaketu there. He had accompanied Jarasandha from Kundinapura and had been recommended for employment to Shrigālava by Jarasandha. Shvetaketu had taken up the employment as he had hoped to join Krishna and Uddhava back when they returned from Gomantaka. I tasked Shvetaketu of informing Krishna and Balarama of my plight.

‘Krishna and Balarama were already on their way to Karavirapura when they received the message from Shvetaketu. This was an unexpected turn of events. Krishna did not anticipate Shrigālava’s vanity to be at the level of a Kutil Dharmi. Since the reality was now out, Krishna made up his mind and using Damaghosha’s troops, he mounted a blitzkrieg operation against Karavirapura.

‘Mounted on a swift two-horse chariot, driven by Vainateya, Krishna challenged the guards at the Karavirapura gate, killed them and was at the palace gate in no time. He blew his conch Pāñchajanya to challenge the king. There was complete panic in the palace. Nobody expected the formidable city guards to be overcome without any resistance. The king and his commanders had become so full of vanity by thinking they were gods that it never crossed their petty minds that someone could even think of venturing near their territory. They thought that people would be so overawed by their god-like status that they would be trembling with fear at the very mention of his formidable prowess and his status as a self-proclaimed god.

‘Shrigālava was furious at the impudence of this new impostor. “How dare he call himself Vāsudeva. There is only one Vāsudeva in the universe, the son of the seventh Vasu. The eighth Vasu is Bhishma. I am the inheritor of Shiva’s crown and the Lord of the

Universe. I alone deserve to be honoured and worshipped. There is none in the world who is my equal. This man has to be destroyed.”

‘Saying this, he started getting ready to slay the impostor, Krishna Vāsudeva. The ritual of getting ready was so elaborate that had the challenger not decided to abide by the time-honoured code of the warriors, he would have been a sitting duck.

‘Krishna waited a good three hours for the challenge to be fully met. Shrigālava neither allowed his commanders and his troops to take on the small band of Krishna and Balarama due to his vanity, nor did he come out quickly to meet the enemy head-on.

‘Finally, he appeared at the head of a large army, seated in full magnificence in a four-wheeled chariot. The chariot was resplendent in its decorated finery. Shrigālava occupied the back portion of the chariot, while the charioteer sat in the depressed front of the carriage. The languorous chariot was too unwieldy compared to the swift two-wheeled chariot of Krishna.

‘Shrigālava roared in a practised baritone as he faced Krishna, even as his army started manoeuvring to outflank the small band of warriors accompanying Krishna and Balarama. Damaghosha tried to reason with his old friend, but he was shouted down by Shrigālava, who called him a traitor to Bhagavana Shrigālava.

‘Dau Balarama got down from his chariot with his plough; then, along with three sword-wielding soldiers, he waded into the foot soldiers trying to outflank him from the left, while Damaghosha’s soldiers stopped the outflanking manoeuvre from the right.

‘Shrigālava launched into a long diatribe on the virtues of adhering to Shrigālava worship, and how Krishna was an apostate for breaching the code and deserved to be killed. At that moment, Krishna manoeuvred quickly on his light chariot and warned Shrigālava to be ready as he was about to strike. Shrigālava countered him with a shower of arrows, which Krishna easily avoided by ducking and moving his chariot around. As Shrigālava exhausted the first burst of arrows and reached for the quiver to load more, Krishna’s charioteer moved the chariot close to Shrigālava. Krishna took out the Sudarshana Chakra and hurled it at Shrigālava Vāsudeva. The Chakra is a boomerang. It decapitated Shrigālava and was expertly retrieved by Krishna. Shrigālava’s head fell in the chariot



and his torso tumbled out in the front. Karavirapura army surrendered to Krishna.

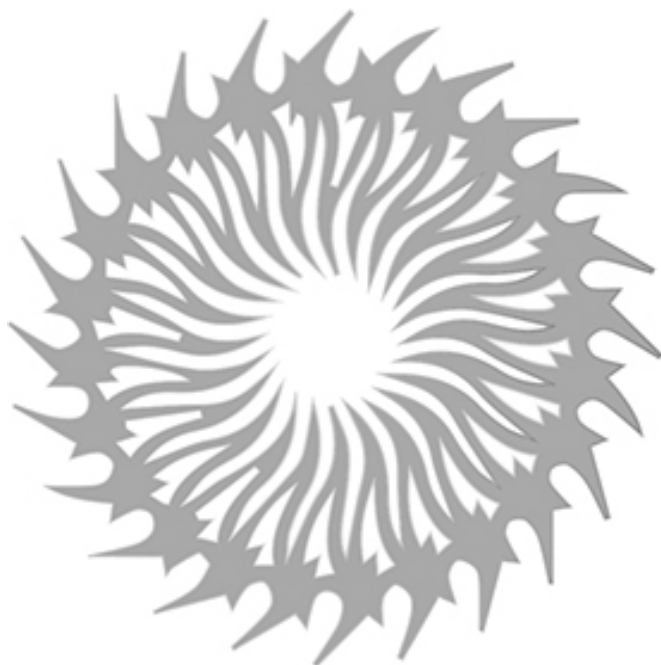
‘Krishna, Dau Balarama and Damaghosha came together to free me, the acharyas, Punardatta and to redeem Shvetaketu. We stayed there till Krishna and Balarama could convince the widowed Queen Padmavati to crown Prince Shakra as the new king. She did not believe them initially and it took a lot of convincing from Damaghosha to make her agree. She never thought that her husband would be killed to re-establish Dharma in Karavirapura and not for capturing territory.

‘After crowning Shakra as the king, our caravan moved towards Ujjayini.’



<sup>1</sup> Resident of Mathura

## PART IV





- 23 -

## The Poisoning

Vidura finished his daily puja routine and proceeded to the palace of Dhritarashtra, his half-brother, as was his customary routine.

He wore a simple long white loincloth with a white angavastram over his shoulder. His tuft of hair was tightly braided on his shaven head. Though born from the womb of a maid girl, he had attained Brahminhood through his virtuous conduct and knowledge.

The guards let him through as usual. He proceeded to the inner chambers of his brother's room. The door was open and two soldiers stood guard. They respectfully gave way to Vidura. Vidura was revered in the whole of Aryavarta for his saintly disposition, his wisdom, his equanimity and his intellectual honesty.

He heard loud arguments coming from within the chambers and paused at the door. He was well aware of the aphorism that one who barged in when two persons were talking was considered a fool.

He could hear three familiar voices and an unfamiliar one. He could recognise the voices of Duryodhana and Shakuni. Karna also seemed to be there. The fourth unfamiliar voice was from the person who was doing most of the talking.

‘Maharaja, Dharma does not permit you to sacrifice your Rāja Dharma. Your first duty is to your kula, the family. I have composed a shāstra that declares it to be a deep sin to prefer someone else's son

over your own. All is fair in pursuit of securing your family's safety.' This was the voice of the unknown person.

Duryodhana was now speaking, 'Pitaji, we need not confine ourselves to a Cosmic definition of Dharma. Our Dharma is to expand our influence and power, become an imperial power in the process and imbue our subjects with our vision of Dharma. All this talk of infinity is useless unless we have finite goals. You spend so much time in the company of Pitamaha Bhishma and Mahatma Vidura that you have lost all sense of the vigour required to run a country.'

Dhritarashtra seemed to protest. 'Duryodhana, let us not start vilifying our Sanatana Dharma for our selfish interest. I may agree with you on the desirability of having you as my successor, but we cannot forget that the actual successor of Maharaja Shāntanu was Pitamaha Bhishma and he gave it all up for Dharma, so how can we start a new form of Dharma here.'

Karna intervened to say that the word Sanatana indicated Sanatana substance and not a Sanatana form of Dharma, 'Who knows where this world has come from and where it will go? We follow the rishis out of respect for their conduct, but do we really know the truth of all the experiences they claim to have?'

Shakuni's voice filtered through. 'Bhima is a mortal danger to Duryodhana, Maharaja. *Niti says that enemies should be pre-empted and not allowed to inflict damage before they are neutralised.* All the boys are going for water sport tomorrow. That glutton is very fond of milk. I will lace his milk with poisonous seeds. Once he drinks the milk and goes into the water, he will faint there and be gone. People will think that he has drowned in the river.'

Dhritarashtra kept quiet. Shakuni nodded to Duryodhana to take that as his consent.

At this point, Vidura made a loud entry, with the customary obeisance to his elder brother.

The gathering was startled into sudden silence.

'Hello, brother Dhritarashtra. You seem to be having a great company right now.' He turned to his left where Shakuni and Duryodhana were seated. 'Oh, Shakuni and Duryodhana together? Ishvara save us!'

Duryodhana did not like this sudden intrusion. He made a face, but he could not insult his uncle. Even in Kutil Dharma, there was no provision for insulting elders unless they came into direct conflict with Jhankal.

Shakuni tried to sound normal. 'We came to be with Maharaja. He was not keeping well.'

Vidura smiled sardonically. 'Yes, I can see that Maharaja is not keeping well. Most of his ailments are in his mind.'

The laconic comment did not go down well with Duryodhana who was about to let go a barb, but Shakuni stopped him with a pleading look.

Vidura looked at the unknown person in the mix and remarked. 'I don't think we have met.'

Shakuni introduced him, 'Please meet Rishi Kanika.'

'Which gurukula do you head, Rishi Kanika?' Vidura asked with a flourish and a twinkle in his eye. He was capable of recognising an impostor when he saw one. There was not one gurukula that he did not know of in the entire Jambudwipa<sup>1</sup>, not just in Bharatavarsha. In his days as an ascetic student, he had done a great amount of travelling all over Jambudwipa and had met every rishi, big and small. Rishi was not a title that was given casually in Bharatavarsha. There were clear rules and unless a majority of the existing rishis agreed, nobody could be conferred that title.

Kanika became uncomfortable. Dhritarashtra did not have the acuity to analyse and recognise people, but Vidura was the perfect son of Maharshi Veda Vyasa. Nobody could escape his sharp eyes. He knew the behavioural weaknesses of his elder brother. He was now more than sure that what he had overheard was for real.

He did not stay long with Dhritarashtra, rather unlike what his routine was. He made an excuse and left the palace. He visited Kunti and the Pandavas and asked them to abandon the water sport plan, scheduled for the next day.

Yudhishtira was reluctant. He had agreed for the sport and the Pandavas fancied their chances of beating the Kauravas. Vidura was in a quandary. If he let out the secret he knew, there was a chance that Bhima would start a riot. If he did not, Bhima would not live. He devised a ruse.

‘I know that Bhima is a bit slow in the water. Except for Bhima, all of you would beat the Kauravas hands down, but I have a solution for that too,’ Vidura said.

Bhima was suddenly interested. Normally he found Vidura quite boring. It was Yudhishtira who enjoyed his company the most.

Vidura told Bhima that he had an Ayurvedic liquid preparation that would increase Bhima’s speed in the water. Bhima was thrilled. Vidura went back, prepared an antidote solution for the poisonous seeds that were going to be administered to him the next day, came back and gave it to Bhima to drink.

The water sports teams left at the crack of dawn to a place north of Hastinapura, on the Gangā. The princes’ retinue had all the paraphernalia of the pompous royal court. In about an hour, the princes, both the Kauravas and the Pandavas, reached the appointed place. Guru Dronacharya was there to conduct the sport. He formed teams of the princes, divided the competition in team events and also threw in individual events. One of the most anticipated events was a swimming race between two hulks—Duryodhana and Bhima.

After some ball sport played between a mixed team, a break was announced for food and drink. Duryodhana and Bhima were going to face off next. It was the showcase event that everyone was looking forward to. Their rivalry was also well known—that Bhima would beat Duryodhana in every little or big competition and would thrash him whenever he got an opportunity. Bhima, however, was not a great swimmer and the Kauravas looked forward to this event with much anticipation.

Duryodhana was ebullient. He sought Bhima and fed him rather solicitously. Bhima laughed at Duryodhana with big guffaws, thinking that he was scared of him and was trying to make up. Duryodhana was only attempting to administer the poison to Bhima, which he did in a glass of buttermilk.

Duryodhana had been told that Bhima would fall unconscious in about fifteen minutes. Nothing of that kind happened. On the other hand, Bhima got more and more chirpy and boisterous. Duryodhana kept delaying the event making one excuse or the other. At the end of one hour, he had to jump into the water with Bhimasena for the event. He was badly distracted at the failure of the big plot.

Before he knew, the event was over and Bhimasena had won the event. A huge round of applause rent the air. The sound of those claps consumed Duryodhana like fire consumes wood. He fell ill and was not able to take part in any further competitions. The sport was called off early and the party returned to Hastinapura much before dusk.

Duryodhana sought out Shakuni. Shakuni met the prince with much excitement, hoping to hear the good news of their biggest thorn having been removed from their path. As he saw Duryodhana, his heart sank. There was not a trace of any glow on Duryodhana's face. On the other hand, he looked glum and distraught.

Shakuni clasped Duryodhana in his grasp and whispered in his ear, 'Tell me the good news.'

'What good news?' Duryodhana muttered. 'Nothing happened. I gave him the same buttermilk combination that your people had given me. Not only did nothing happen, but that damned fatso actually beat me in the race.'

They had no idea about the antidote.





<sup>1</sup> Asian continent



**- 24 -**

## **The Sinister Plot**

Duryodhana looked at Shakuni in great dismay. His faith in his maternal uncle was badly shaken. Shakuni, on the other hand, was his usual complacent self. After all, his whole idea was to wreak vengeance on the Kuru clan and Duryodhana was only grist to his mill that ultimately desired the extinction of the very Sanatana Dharma that had wronged his sister. It was a different matter that his sister would probably never know his officious concern for her. If only she knew.

Shakuni stroked his hair thoughtfully and wondered aloud whether the plot had leaked out. Karna made a snide remark that he did not know about Kutil Dharma but no Sanatani would ever betray a cause.

Duryodhana quickly doused the fire. He had two of his closest aides on the brink of verbal blows. One was a devout Sanatani and the other an equally devout schemer against the Sanatana.

Kanika was their next logical stop. They would require his services for the next venture. They were not sure that Dhritarashtra would approve one more venture so soon. Failure of this venture would also have to be communicated to Maharaja.

Duryodhana and Shakuni made way to Kanika's place. Karna left them for his sandhya-pujana. Duryodhana knew that it was futile to persuade Karna. He was very strict about his priorities.

Kanika was busy with his evening prayers in his personal Pralayalaya. Shakuni and Duryodhana had to wait in his sleeping room as there were only two rooms in his makeshift hut. Duryodhana heard the Kutil Dharma prayer for the first time ever—‘Jai Jhankalam, Jai Jhankalam, Jai Jhankalam, Namoh Namah.’ It was accompanied by long discourses in a language Duryodhana did not understand. ‘It is the language of the Parshva people,’ informed Shakuni.

Kanika emerged after about half an hour. His face fell when he was informed that their elaborate plan had fallen through.

‘Never mind, Shakuni,’ said Kanika. ‘We do not regard Rājya as an organism. In our Kutil philosophy, it is the individuals that make up the society. The rights of the individuals matter more than Dharma, or the duty of individuals towards their own nature, or towards their community, or towards their country. The unity of consciousness bit is nonsense. Unless we actuate the individual greed, there is no progress. We must immediately set about getting the elites in our favour by exciting their individual passions. Fire the spark of aspiration in them; ignite the fire of avarice in them. Make the State a collective of individuals, rather than have the State as a Dharmic institution having its own conscious property and suffusing the individuals with that conscious spirit and uniting them in deference to that opaque Dharma. We need not go to Maharaja and tell them that we are going against Sanatana Dharma. We will change the tactic. We will present the elements of Kutil Dharma as the new innovations in Sanatana Dharma, and Jhankal as the new God who is nothing but a reincarnation of Rāma.’

Shakuni liked the idea. ‘I think this is a very good idea to repackage Kutil Dharma as Sanatana, digest the elements of Jatil Muni’s version of Kutil Dharma into Sanatana and present it as the new invention of a great rishi, Rishi Kanika. I am only worried about Vidura. Dhritarashtra is very fond of Vidura.’

‘Don’t worry. I have a plan for Vidura as well. Ask for a time to meet from Maharaja.’

Next morning, the group of four was with Maharaja Dhritarashtra again. Karna was upset with the shenanigans of Kanika and went with

them reluctantly, only due to his fidelity towards Duryodhana. At the gate of the palace, Karna made an excuse and went back to his house.

Shakuni broke the bad news to Dhritarashtra. His blindness for Duryodhana was starker than his physical blindness.

Dhritarashtra went pale. His stolid appearance showed trepidation and confusion. He lost his composure, looked anxious and jittery. His alarm was not because of any remorse, but because he was scared of getting exposed. The secret wound that he nursed of having been deprived of what he considered his right to the throne always made him an object of easy intrigue. Bhishma had explained to him many a time that *'in a Dharmic tradition, rights are adjuncts of duties. Rights are given to a king so that he can perform his Rājya Dharma. The concept of Dharma envisages an organic existence of mankind as a whole, joined by consciousness as a wave in an ocean with many different waveforms as part of one whole.'*

Kanika had understood this. That is why he was insisting on the Kutil Dharma concept of divine rights of a king as the representative of the Almighty, whom he called Jhankal. Kanika's ideas appealed to Dhritarashtra but his weak non-assertive character was such that he was even afraid to think differently from the prevailing norm.

Kanika was able to influence Dhritarashtra yet again. He emphasised the importance of the role of the individual over the country. 'Maharaja, there is no way to justify the role of duties over rights. Duties can be given a greater role over rights only if the whole is greater than parts. Yet, that is not possible. Look at this orange. Please peel off the skin and try and eat it. You can see that orange is made up of its slices. Are the slices not orange? Is the orange not a collective of slices? The Vedānta would say that the whole is greater than its parts, but the sensory perception is everything. Can you deny what you see?'

Dhritarashtra mumbled what he had heard from Vidura quite often. 'Brahman is not what you see, but Brahman is what makes you see. If orange is a collective of slices, why can these slices not grow independently? Why are they found only within the orange?'

Kanika had sized up Dhritarashtra quite well by now. He knew that Maharaja does not counter a counter, so he nonchalantly uttered an inanity. 'Maharaja, if it is Brahman that makes you see, then I am the

one who can take you to that Brahman, and that Brahman is Jhankal. Word is God and God is reflected through Word. It is the Word of Jhankal that has ordained that you shall have only your descendants as the blessed sons of Jhankal. You should give up your little hesitation and bless them till they can get rid of this evil called the Pandavas.'

Dhritarashtra, as usual, kept quiet. Shakuni nodded to everyone to indicate that they had the assent of Maharaja for their next plot against the Pandavas.

Shakuni took over from this point onwards. He laid out a foolproof plan. 'Maharaja, Yudhishtira will never refuse your direction. His sense of Dharma is suffused with the idea of pitra-rna, deva-rna and rishi-rna<sup>1</sup>. He cannot even dream of not discharging his debts to the elders. He considers you to be his father. His sense of duty would never let him refuse a direction from you. Please direct him to go for a picnic to Varanavat<sup>2</sup>. We will direct Purochana, the great architect to build a house of lacquer. When the Pandavas are blissfully resting in that house, we will put that house on fire. All of them will perish.'

'But they will not go there without Kunti.'

'Too bad,' said Duryodhana, 'Mata Kunti will have to burn with them.'

Dhritarashtra shuddered but kept quiet, as usual.

There was a knock at the door and Vidura appeared in the doorway.

Duryodhana cursed under his breath. Shakuni uttered a swearword and Kanika made faces. Karna had not come with them; otherwise, he would have given away the plot with his reactions.

Dhritarashtra called Yudhishtira the next day and directed Yudhishtira to go to Varanavat to relax. Vidura was sitting with Dhritarashtra. He made a few strange remarks.

'Yudhishtira, you must follow the direction of elders. Do remember that nobody becomes an elder by virtue of only the age,' Vidura said.

Yudhishtira was intrigued, but he bowed before the Maharaja and left. He did, however, go to Vidura in the evening.

Yudhishtira touched Vidura's feet and both of them sat down on the ground on low wooden stools to continue their interactions.

‘Pitamaha, I know that you were giving me a message, but I am sorry that with my limited intellect, I was unable to grasp the message.’

Vidura spoke to him in riddles again.

‘Look, Yudhishtira, a weapon not made of steel or any other material element can be sharp enough to kill an enemy, and he who knows this can never be killed.

‘Fire cannot extinguish the soul but can annihilate the material body. But one who protects the soul lives.

‘The conflagration that devastates a forest cannot hurt a rat which shelters itself in a hole or a porcupine which burrows in the earth. The wise man knows his bearings by looking at the stars.’

Yudhishtira bowed before the wise man and asked him directly. ‘Why Varanavat?’

Vidura smiled again. ‘Ask Purochana.’

Yudhishtira persisted. ‘Purochana is a builder?’

Vidura laughed. ‘He can build and he can destroy.’

Yudhishtira was too sharp to not understand the hints being thrown at him. He also knew that Vidura’s code of duty prevented him from revealing the plot to its details, and also that his sense of Dhritarashtra’s adharma made it incumbent upon him to forewarn the Pandavas in an indirect manner.

The Pandavas dawdled and bought a lot of time. Yudhishtira himself demanded a palace be built, making Shakuni very happy. Yudhishtira also demanded that the new palace must be to their satisfaction. At the same time, Kunti sent a courier to Vasudeva, detailing the plot. Vasudeva consulted Krishna who was about to leave Mathura to escape Jarasandha. Krishna sent back a terse message to his cousins, ‘Get into the palace, build an escape route and disappear.’

The Pandavas left for Varanavat in a very happy mood.



- <sup>1</sup> The duty paradigm—discharge of debts to forefathers (pitra), deva (Nature) and rishi (teacher/mentor).
- <sup>2</sup> Modern-day Barnava in Baghpat district of Uttar Pradesh



**- 25 -**

## **Varanavat**

**V**aranavat was located on the banks of Yamuna. It involved a leisurely one-day journey to reach Varanavat from Hastinapura.

The Pandavas kept delaying the journey on some excuse or the other for months. They finally undertook the journey when winter was about to set in. They decided to celebrate Vijayādashami and Dipavali at Varanavat.

The day after Shrāddha Paksha<sup>1</sup> was over, on the auspicious first day of the waxing moon of the Ashvin month, the beginning of Navaratri, a royal entourage started for Varanavat from Hastinapura. The Pandavas were very popular in Hastinapura for their righteous conduct. Duryodhana and his brothers were the only ones who were unaware of this. When the whole of Hastinapura, including women and children, turned up to see their own princes off, Duryodhana was stunned. His face fell with the realisation that the cousins whom he considered to be unworthy of the throne enjoyed so much popularity.

Shakuni sensed Duryodhana's unease and complimented him for taking the step of eliminating the Pandavas in good time. *'Fire, enemies and debts pile up very quickly into threatening forms. Never let them gain strength.'*

Karna also complimented Duryodhana for the timely step. He had his reservations, but his sense of gratitude to Duryodhana would normally overwhelm his own sense of right conduct and Dharma.



Dhritarashtra's weakness was his wounded sense of having been deprived of the throne because Rājya Dharma would not allow the rule of primogeniture to be exercised to place someone on the throne who could not fulfil the duties of the king. Dhritarashtra outwardly displayed his utmost faith in the Dharmic traditions, but his sense of wrong was ever-present for others to exploit. Similarly, Karna's weakness also lay in his gratitude to Duryodhana for having restored his pride by giving him the status of a king when Dronacharya ridiculed him as a low-born.

Burning in the fire of his jealousy and ambition, Duryodhana was in a big hurry to finish off the Pandavas, but Shakuni advised restraint. 'Did you see their popularity? Do you want to go down in history as a murderer? Do remember that this land is deeply wedded to a sense of righteousness in the name of Dharma. It will take a lot of effort to convert it to a different creed. *A duty-addicted population does not take kindly to the assertion of rights.* Wait till we change the discourse by digestion and appropriation. Even Kutil Muni failed to change this population in spite of having the support of the mighty Kamsa and had to die at the hands of Krishna, the same Krishna who is the Pandava's cousin.'

It was settled among the conspirators that they would kill the Pandavas only after a month of their stay in Varanavat. The palace was fondly named by Purochana as Kashthagriha, meaning wood house, by cleverly disguising the basic material of lac under a paint resembling wood.

The Pandavas reached Varanavat before dawn. They chose a charioteer named Sulochana who was also an expert in digging mines and tunnels.

As the palace hove into view, they were impressed by its grandeur, architecture and the ambience that it was set in. The pillars on which the massive four-level entrance stood had fine carvings of deities of Aryavarta and motifs from the entire known world. As they entered into the foyer, massive structures of carnivorous animals adorned the area. The sitting room was full of singing statues with every conceivable musical instrument in their hands. The symbolism could not be missed. The existence was moving from the divine into pātāla<sup>2</sup> and back to the ether world. Six rooms led from the main hall, each

symbolising one of the Panch Mahabhootas<sup>3</sup> each for the five brothers and Shakti for mother Kunti.

Yudhishtira had already shared the message from Krishna and Vidura with all his brothers and mother Kunti. Bhima got to work as soon as they settled in their rooms. He scratched a pillar and behold! The lac started giving way under the superficial wood-colour paint. Bhima ran to Yudhishtira's room to share the news. Yudhishtira called all the brothers and mother Kunti. They discussed the implications. It was clear as daylight to them that this was a plan to incinerate them alive. They remembered the second advice given by Vidura, and they interpreted it as a message to dig deep escape burrows. The room nearest to the River Yamuna was chosen. Bhima was given the task of digging a tunnel with the help of Sulochana. They had to take extra care as Purochana had built a house for himself right outside the gate of the palace.

Next day, Bhima went on a playful expedition alone, with Sulochana driving the chariot. He collected digging implements on the excuse of having to dig a pit foundation to install the Hastinapura flag. He came back after dusk to avoid detection and successfully smuggled the equipment to Nakula's room. From that day onwards, Sulochana, Bhima and Nakula worked through the night and slept during the day. Yudhishtira, Arjuna and Sahadeva continued to go around the villages and meet people exactly as they would do in Hastinapura. They maintained a façade of studied normal behaviour. The guards watching over them on behalf of Duryodhana kept reporting everything as normal. The brothers celebrated Vijayādashami with great pomp and show. All the brothers and mother Kunti joined in the celebrations. Two days before Dipavali, the tunnel connecting the palace was ready. Bhima and Nakula dug it in a way that it opened in a desolate place on the Yamuna bank where a boat was placed for escape across the river.

The day of Dipavali dawned bright and sunny. Grihasthu, the commander in charge of the palace on behalf of Duryodhana, had planned this day as the day of reckoning. Unknown to him, the entire town of Varanavat and all the villages in a ten-kilometre radius were invited to take part in the festivities.

Right in the early morning, Bhima began a wrestling competition in the palace grounds. The winner was promised a bout with Bhimasena himself. Bhimasena would fight the winner with both his hands tied behind his back. In another corner, Arjuna ran a similar competition of archery; Nakula and Sahadeva ran a horse-riding competition. Yudhishtira had called a congregation of wise men. Kunti gathered the womenfolk and created the rangoli decorations all over the palace and prepared a thousand earthen lamps for lighting in the evening.

With so much activity around the palace, Grihasthu just could not find an opening to torch the palace. He hoped that one of the lamps would make the inflammable palace catch fire by itself. He had committed to Duryodhana that this would be the night. He decided to delay the task. He would inform Duryodhana tomorrow, he thought.

Bhimasena's contest had ended in a stalemate. The final two wrestlers could not beat each other, so Bhima decided to let both of them fight him together with his own hands tied behind his back. It was a hilarious scene. The mountain-like Bhimasena was too strong for both of them even without the use of his hands. The two of them moved around Bhima in circles, too scared to go near him, and ultimately gave up.

Arjuna gave a handicap of a quarter distance to the winner and kept himself blindfolded. Shooting at the sound created near the target, he hit every single one of them. The winner of his competition could not get even half the targets with his eyes open, and from a quarter distance.

The horse races were even more entertaining as many boys were riding horses for the first time. The whole day was full of falling riders, and horses refusing to let riders ride them. No conclusion could be reached. The whole scene was limited to mirth-making and stumbling bumbling riders.

Yudhishtira had a long discussion with sages and scholars. He discussed the various aspects of deception in statecraft. He had his own take on the issue of *sāma*, *dāma*, *danda* and *bheda*. The august gathering was virtually unanimous that no blame or bad Karma accrued by practising deception with the deceitful, but Yudhishtira continued to have his reservation. His sense of Dharma prohibited any form of lies and deception. The meet concluded with everyone

except Yudhishtira stressing '*shathe shāthyam samācharet*'<sup>4</sup> as the guiding principle.

As the evening dawned, the women lit up the whole palace with oil and ghee<sup>5</sup> filled earthen lamps. They made a lotus pattern in the campus, which looked sublime from the palace. They had also placed the lamps in the innards of the palace as well. A dinner was thrown, and the celebrations went on till well past midnight.

The Pandavas finally retired for the night.

Bhima called everyone to Nakula's room. All of them went into the tunnel. The boat was waiting at the Yamuna. After getting into the tunnel, Bhima suddenly turned, went back to the palace and threw some lamps onto the lac furniture. The lac palace was an inferno within minutes, even as the group of six trooped out quickly to the banks. They had to hurry up as the fire in the palace had started consuming oxygen from the tunnel as well. Before breathing could become really difficult, they had completed the three-hundred-metre distance to the river. They emerged into the night, got into the prepared boat and Bhima rowed the boat onto the other bank. Then they took off all the royal trappings, assumed the garb of sanyasis and disappeared into the dark night, guided by the star Abhijit<sup>6</sup> and headed due north towards the Himalayas.

Meanwhile, Sulochana woke up the entire town. The fire was so huge that its flames spread far and wide. Flying embers fell on Purochana's palace and even his house was engulfed by fire. The tunnel also collapsed, obliterating any trace. A family of five men and one woman had stayed on in the palace after the revelries had got over. They got burnt to death.

As the crowds gathered, they found this family and concluded that the Pandavas along with Devi Kunti had died in the fire. The news was relayed to Hastinapura, where Duryodhana and his confidantes conducted long mourning ceremonies, even as the public genuinely grieved over what they considered their personal loss. Dhritarashtra did a super show of fake grief even as his heart was full of joy at having achieved what he considered justice for his son.



- <sup>1</sup> The first day of the fifteen days of the waning moon in Ashvin month of Indian calendar during which oblations to the forefathers are done to discharge one's debts to them.
- <sup>2</sup> Nether world
- <sup>3</sup> Space, fire, air, water and earth—akasha, agni, vāyu, jala and prithvi
- <sup>4</sup> No harm being tough with a rascal.
- <sup>5</sup> Clarified butter
- <sup>6</sup> Vega



**- 26 -**

## **The Ten Commandments**

**D**hritarashtra had been continuing as the caretaker Maharaja ever since his brother Pandu went away to the forest to atone for his inability to give an heir to the throne of Hastinapura. Providing an heir to the throne was an important part of Rājya Dharma.

Shakuni and Duryodhana met at Kanika's place. Duryodhana wanted to call Karna as well, but Shakuni stopped him.

'I don't want a fracas on the definitions of Dharma and adharma. Karna is with you only because he thinks that he owes you a debt. That is a purely Sanatana position. He is also nursing a big grievance towards Arjuna because of Dronacharya. So do not involve him in some of the larger strategy sessions. He is fine to be involved in tactics. His devotion to you is exemplary. He may go against his better judgment to oblige you, but he will not oblige Kutil Dharma. For you and me, this dividing line between the staff of Dharma (Dharmadanda) and the staff of State (Rājyadanda) must be obliterated.'

Shakuni paused for a while thoughtfully and then continued. 'Even though we have removed the Pandavas physically, their shadow is still present in the minds of the public. You have already seen how hugely popular they were. Moreover, as long as Devavrata Bhishma and Dronacharya are in the mix, you cannot even have your own father side with you openly. He is a weak character and would be

swayed in their presence. We have to ensure that we somehow manage to make our philosophy mainstream.'

Kanika was listening to them intently. He stroked his beard thoughtfully. 'There are larger issues involved. We may have eliminated the enemy physically, but the narrative of the enemy lives on. This obsession with duty-based living in the name of Dharma is the real enemy of our larger intention to convert this land into the land of Jhankal. I am well aware of the route adopted by Kutil Muni. His methods were brutal and violent. The population in these fertile lands is simply too large to be converted by force. We have to change the narrative in a very subtle manner. I think we need to take Duryodhana to the master himself. Let us quietly go to Jatil Muni and prepare a long-term strategy so that when Duryodhana does take over the reins of power in Hastinapura, he is not hemmed in by the staff of Dharma that is wielded by some rishi or other assorted wise men. The king must be at the apex of both political and spiritual power. How to build that narrative is the question.'

The three of them set out for Rakshagriha the very next day. They were in an expansive mood. They had eliminated the impediment to the ascension of Duryodhana to the throne. Since Dhritarashtra was only a caretaker, that day could dawn early, but they still needed to firm up their plan for building a narrative platform on which the rule would become permanent and an empire of Jhankal could be created, with Jatil Muni as the prophet and Duryodhana as the agent. Shakuni nursed a deep desire in his evil heart that he would ultimately replace his nephew, either by himself or by his son Uluka.

Reaching Rakshagriha after two days of chariot ride, Kanika took Duryodhana and Shakuni to Jatil Muni's palatial house. It did not have the trapping of austerity that one would expect a Sanatana muni to have. Sanatana Dharma exacted a very heavy cost from its thought leaders in terms of personal sacrifices. Unless one could prove one's unconditional commitment to total self-abnegation and voluntary, deep commitment to the minimum requirement from nature and society, one could never be honoured as a muni. Here was a Kutil Dharma prophet living life king size.

Deep intonations to Jhankal having been made by all, including Duryodhana, they were admitted into Jatil Muni's presence. He sat on



a large golden throne, gifted to him by Shakuni, and behaved like a spoilt king.

Shakuni informed Jatil Muni, formerly Banakantaka, of his great achievement. He profusely thanked him for providing an invaluable resource like Kanika. 'If not for Kanika, we would never have been able to get the consent of Maharaja Dhritarashtra for such an action. He is a worthy disciple of a great guru indeed.'

Kanika bowed before his guru and submitted, 'I begin by salutations to Jhankal. With the grace of Jhankal, we have eliminated the main stumbling block. Yet, the public is very hostile to us. They are convinced that the Pandava's death is not a natural occurrence. Vidura is behind these whispers, and Bhishma is the main factor in whatever happens in Hastinapura. Even now, nothing would move without him. If he vetoes a proposal by Duryodhana, it will stay vetoed. We have to change the narrative as you had directed us initially. We need your guidance in the matter. We do not know how to go about this and not just secure the throne for Duryodhana, which is the easier task, but to also change the narrative in a manner that his throne is secure and he is able to serve the cause of Kutil Dharma.'

Jatil Muni was more patient than usual. It was after a long time that he had heard some good news. Ever since his flight from Mathura, it had been a long deep struggle. Manimālā had softened towards him considerably and his alliance with the Nagas was about to be strengthened with wedlock. With the news of this breakthrough in Hastinapura, Jatil imagined a situation of being able to have his rule over the entire Bharatavarsha through agents like Duryodhana and Shakuni. Just an association with Shakuni had given him immense leverage, including a palatial house in the Kuru country of Rakshagriha. Yet, he knew that if ever the Kauravas were to lose control, he would have to retreat to Khandavaprastha.

Jatil Muni reflected over the reports he was fed. He needed to ask a few searching questions.

'Are you sure that this public is not going to be with Duryodhana even if he wins the throne through the primogeniture rule?'

Shakuni was forthright even though Duryodhana was sitting next to him. 'No, the public does not like Duryodhana and I see no pathway

to making him popular through the conventional route. We have to invest in changing the Sanatana narrative.'

Jatil Muni sat pensively for some time and then slowly proceeded to let out his thoughts.

'First, the thing you should do is to study the methods adopted by Kamsa and Kutil Muni. Those methods must not be used. Any use of those methods would mean giving one more opening to Krishna. We have to be very careful of him. I had sent Chandrachuda to Ujjayini to change Krishna's mind. He has come back, but rather than changing Krishna, he himself has got changed. I have seen that brilliant mind at work, so the first point is to study Kutil Muni's methodology and avoid it. That does not change our commitment to Kutil Dharma and its essential philosophy.

'Second, we need to change the narrative through deception, lies and allurements. So, we may pretend to follow Sanatana Dharma outwardly, but we replace the deities with our symbols and create Kutil Muni as a deity. The word Kutil does not go well with the Sanatanis, so we may change the name to Saumya Dharma for the public. The term Kutil Dharma may be used only among ourselves. We will create Saumyeshvara as a new deity. There is no bar in Sanatana Dharma on having your own new deity. Remember, destroy the habitat and the species automatically gets destroyed. We need not brutalise the people directly. We will brutalise the habitat in which Sanatana Dharma thrives.

'Third, we create a cult around Saumyeshvara, using our essential symbol of reverse Swastika and a murti. We will not oppose idols. Instead, we will install idols of Kutil Muni as Saumyeshvara.

'Fourth, we will adopt all the symbolisms and outward features of Sanatana, we will also adopt their singing and dancing. We will just make subtle changes in the names of the practices. We will do Saumya Arati, we will perform Saumya Nāṭyam dance. We will create different manifestations of Saumyeshvara. So, we will have a Saumya Linga, a Chaturbhuja Saumya, a Saumya Rāma and a Devi Saumyā too. However, the concept of Time and Logic shall remain ours behind all the rituals that we perform to fool the people.

'Fifth, now that Duryodhana has his pathway cleared, he shall provide funds to Kutil Dharma's central Pralayaḥ here. Anyone

who comes to any of the Saumya temples must not go without having a sumptuous meal and without receiving a handsome stipend. We shall run free schools and free health clinics for everyone who accept the membership of a Saumya temple. Make it so alluring that the population drifts from their traditional temples to Saumya temples. Bribe and buy thought leaders with handsome gifts and permanent remuneration.

‘Sixth, create a miracle-making wing. Carry out miracles in the name of Saumyeshvara. Create a trope that Saumya does miracles. All the other Sanatana practices should be labelled as superstition and heavily condemned in seminars and gatherings of lay people.

‘Seventh, denounce and vilify the Brahmins and build a narrative that they have come from outside Bharatavarsha. This may be difficult, but I have experts here who can always supply justifications, and even produce false roots of Brahmins being from some other foreign land. Brahmin is the bulwark of the Sanatana system, and we have to do our utmost to weaken their hold on the population.

‘Eighth, sow the sin and salvation philosophy. Create fear of the eternal hellfire. Pronounce a curse on cyclical Time or Kāla Chakra. There can be no successful closed religions without the fear of the Master and his God. Be careful that you do this only with care. This is something that we need to convince our own intellectuals.

‘Ninth, target the Sanatana women. Every man who converts to Kutil Dharma with a proper baptism shall be permitted to marry at least three women. Then persuade, threaten or buy three women for each one of them. I need to increase the population of Kutil Dharmis.

‘Tenth, create a superiority complex around Kutil Dharma. Revile Sanatana Dharma in intellectual gatherings, especially among Brahmins. Declare their scriptures as inferior and arrange for a bonfire of their scriptural books. *Remember, killing the books means killing an entire culture.*

‘These are the ten commandments on which Kutil Dharma would have to be founded. I have personally seen how intractable Sanatana Dharma can be,’ Jatil Muni paused.

‘Make it look as if it is a religion of love, but once someone has accepted your kiss, he should not be allowed to go back to Sanatana,

by hook or by crook. Kill a man or woman who tries to go back after joining Kutil Dharma. Jai Jhankal.'

'Jai Jhankal,' all of them shouted in unison with the one finger salute of Kutil Dharma or Saumya Dharma, as it was supposed to be called from now on.

Jatil Muni then directed them to go back quickly to Hastinapura and convert at least one major elite to Kutil Dharma. 'Can you convert your sister secretly, Shakuni?' Jatil Muni asked.

Shakuni was shaken to the core. 'I will try, Master. She is too much under the influence of Vidura.'

Shakuni and Duryodhana left for Hastinapura, leaving Kanika with his guru.

Shakuni smiled absent-mindedly and muttered to Duryodhana, 'If your mother had got even a whiff of our plot, the Pandavas would still be alive.'





- 27 -

## Hidimb

The Pandavas and Kunti crossed the river and headed towards the north for some time, setting course by the star Abhijit, which was no longer one of the nakshatras. Abhijit, the twenty-eighth nakshatra used to be the pole star during the time of Ramayana. It no longer has the pride of its location among the stars due to the precession of equinoxes. The rishis were keen observers of natural phenomena. They had figured out the motions of earth, planets, stars and the Universe. Great treatises like Surya Siddhānta contained all the records of natural phenomena as they occurred. Continuous updating ensured that they remained up to date. If one followed the direction of Abhijit, one could still go in the direction of north, if not exactly north.

Yudhishthira was concerned that they were still within the territory of Hastinapura. He wanted to reach the Madra kingdom of the foothills as soon as possible, preferably before dawn. Kunti could not keep pace. Bhima lifted her like a toy and kept her on his right shoulder. They could walk quickly thereafter. As soon as a brother felt fatigued, Bhima would give him a little breather on his left shoulder. Bhimasena's massive frame belied his agility. When the first ray of dawn broke, they were standing on the banks of River Sarasvati, where the river just met the plains after descending the Shivalika foothills. A temple of Chandi<sup>1</sup> stood on the western bank of

the river. A ridge extended upwards from the base of the temple into the Shivalikas. The river skirted the eastern part of the ridge, even as the western part of the ridge rose north and then flared out into the west. A small lake lay on the base of the northwestern side of the ridge. A village by the name of Sukanyā lay at the base.

The Pandavas took a boat to the temple. After resting and refreshing at the temple, and worshipping Devi Chandikā, the manifestation of the destructive feminine power over the evil forces, the Pandavas moved away quickly. They had entered the Madra country by crossing the Sarasvati, but Madra was the kingdom of their maternal uncle, Shalya, and they were sure that sooner or later, someone would recognise them. Bhimasena, in particular, could not be hidden. The man-mountain attracted attention immediately and even as they spent a few hours at the Chandi temple, a huge crowd gathered to look at Bhimasena. Before long, they reached a thick forest on the northern bank of a large river, which Yudhishtira identified as Shutudri and built a temporary accommodation on its banks. They were surprised to find such a thick forest on the banks of the river. They did not realise that this was the famous Shālivāhana forest that was inhabited by the ferocious Hidimb tribe and regarded out of bounds for the plainsmen. They were equally surprised by not finding any trace of bird and animal life around. Little did they realise that they had set themselves in for a difficult trial by tribulation.

The Hidimb tribe was like the Nagas of Khandavaprastha, except that unlike the Nagas, they operated only in the night.

As night fell, the Pandavas got ready to brave the slight chill that was already in the air in the month of Kārtika. Nakula kept wondering aloud about the absence of any animal noise. Nakula had a special skill of being able to read the voices of animals. Sahadeva, the wise one, had the special skill of reading the chirping of birds. Even he did not hear any noise. He openly expressed his apprehension about the area being home to certain people who ate animals and birds.

Sahadeva was prophetic. Only a few minutes after he had expressed his apprehension, there was a loud noise in some distance. Nakula interpreted that as human noises, 'I understand the language of every animal on earth. This is not a noise made by an animal. We should be on our guard.'

They woke up Bhimasena who was already fast asleep, worn out by the exertions of the day. It took them half an hour to make the giant get back on his feet.

Just as Bhimasena rose from his deep slumber and was trying to understand the situation from Nakula and Sahadeva, a loud thud was heard near the hut and they heard a tree being uprooted. It was as if some elephants had started destroying the habitat near them.

Bhimasena came out of the hut to confront the challenge. The man-mountain was supremely confident of taking on any man or animal with his bare hands. All the other Pandavas were dependent on their weapons, which they could not bring with them from the burning palace of Varanavat. Sahadeva had managed to bring a small dagger that he hid in his clothes. He gave it to Bhimasena.

It was the first night after Dipavali, a dark night. They could not see anything. Kunti had gathered stones for making cooking fire from the Chandi temple. She hastened to create a fire outside the hut so that Bhimasena may at least see. Once the fire had been made, they realised that the danger was near as someone was shaking a tree nearby. The fire rose up and created a silhouette of the trees on the shaking tree. Yet, nothing could be seen.

Suddenly, a big figure charged at Bhimasena who was standing on the edge of the light, trying to figure out what that figure was.

The first blow was devastating. It shook even Bhimasena. He staggered and nearly fell.

Bracing himself up from the shock of the first thrust, Bhimasena stood fast and confronted the figure that had shaken him up. The fire leapt up in the dry leaves of the forest, and it was then that Bhimasena and all the other Pandavas had their first glimpse of the human-mountain they were up against. It was a woman-mountain, to be precise—a monster of a woman who was playing around with the trees as if they were toys.

The monster woman saw Bhimasena and the other Pandavas standing around. She charged at Bhimasena who deftly moved sideways. The woman carried on and fell on the hut. The hut that the Pandavas had built with their sweat was gone in a jiffy. Yet, it gave Bhimasena an advantage. He swivelled around, caught the woman in his pincer-like grip and tried to throttle her. She said something in her

language. Sahadeva deciphered the language, ‘She is saying that she would kill all of us.’

With superhuman effort, she threw Bhimasena off. She got up with tremendous alacrity and climbed up the nearby shāla tree. She disappeared into the thick foliage. She was obviously an expert in the ways of the jungle.

As the brothers stood blinking in the dimly lit dark night, the woman jumped from the tree onto Bhima with great force. It was like a gale of wind had hit Bhima. Bhima was brought down and the woman sat on top of him, throttling his neck.

The brothers rubbed their eyes in disbelief. They had never seen anyone bringing Bhimasena down, even by stealth. Even if an elephant fell on him, Bhimasena would probably not lose his footing. Here was a woman who had not only brought Bhimasena down but was on the verge of killing him by wringing his neck. Nakula and Sahadeva moved in to save him, but Yudhishtira put his hand up to stop them. In his exalted opinion, it was against the rules of combat. Arjuna whispered, ‘Brother, she did not exactly follow the rules by attacking Bhimasena in the dark, and from behind the cover of a tree.’

‘We will act if his life is under threat. I think Bhimasena is quite capable of warding off this little surprise. Have faith in his Shraddhā in Vāyu Devata.’ Yudhishtira said this with reference to the deep Shraddhā each brother had in a Sanatana deity—Yudhishtira in Dharmarāja, Arjuna in Indra, Bhimasena in Vāyu Devata, and Nakula and Sahadeva in Ashwini Kumara twins.

Just at that point, Bhima puffed up his chest with air and threw off the woman with tremendous force. In the next second, he had used a wrestling move to pin the woman down.

The seesaw battle raged all night. Both of them lost every bit of strength they had but neither of them could gain definite superiority over the other.

Darkness started dispelling with the dawn in sight. As soon as the darkness began diminishing on the eastern horizon, the woman became jittery and started losing strength. By the time, the first ray of sun came into sight, she seemed to lose all her ferocity and strength. The brothers whispered to each other—‘Is this what the Rākshasa



tribes are all about? They cannot fight during the day, but have immense strength at night.'

Kunti said that it had to do more with their upbringing than any special genetic make-up.

By the time the sun shed its reddish hue, the woman was totally exhausted. Kunti helped her get up. She was wildy dressed, with barks and leaves covering her inner parts. In the wild battle that she had raged with Bhimasena, all these had come off. She was totally naked except for a garland of some wild herbs that she wore around her neck and another girdle of a different variety of shrubbery around her waist. Kunti took her aside even as the brothers repaired the hut. She covered her up in some sheets she had carried and tended to her in a very caring way. After the brothers had repaired the hut, she took her inside and dressed her wounds. Nakula, with his special skill with animal languages, had no difficulty in deciphering a human language as well. Nakula said, 'She is telling us that they own this forest, that they are the Hidimbs. They eat animals and resting birds during the night. Their tribe numberes a few hundred. That nobody has ever survived a night in these forests and that she is greatly impressed with the way Bhimasena has fought.'

Kunti fondly named her Hidimbā after her tribe. She stayed with them through the day, slept like a log even as the brothers fortified their station. She thanked Kunti profusely when she left after dusk; she clasped Kunti and cried like a child. She came back with her tribal folks after a while. They struck up a conversation. Kunti gave her verdict. 'Bhimasena has had intense body contact with her. She is an unmarried girl. If the tribe agrees, Bhimasena should get married to her.'

A wild marriage party took place eleven days after the event. On Kārtika Ekadashi, Bhima and Hidimbā got married in a Gandharva Vivāha ceremony.



## <sup>1</sup> Modern Chandi mandir in Chandigarh



**- 28 -**

## **Ekachakra**

**B**hima stayed with the Hidimbs for a full week before the couple came back to the hut. Hidimbā turned out to be an exceptionally intelligent girl. She picked up the language of her husband and even tried to learn the manners of the Pandavas.

Yudhishtira was growing concerned that this matrimonial alliance, though greatly beneficial for the future, would reveal their location. Hidimbā guaranteed them safety, but Yudhishtira had his future plans in the Aryavarta mainland. He figured that the Pandavas had to reveal themselves at a proper time. They could not afford to give a free pass to the Kauravas, not because they coveted the throne but because their svadharma and Rājya Dharma mandated resistance to injustice.

At the end of the month of Mrigashirā, the Pandavas left Shālīvāhana forests. Before leaving, they also got the good news that Hidimbā was expecting a young Bhimasena. Hidimbā would stay back.

The Pandavas and Kunti traced their path back the same way. They went to Kurukshetra and did the customary worship. A piquant situation did face them when they were required to give out their names, gotras and kula at the time of the puja at the sarovara. They managed to circumvent the situation by using their alternate names. Yudhishtira used Dharmarāja, Bhimasena used Vāyuputra, Arjuna

used Savyasāchi, Nakula used Ashvasārathi and Sahadeva used Ashviniputra. Kunti gave her name as Prithā. Kurukshetra being in the Kuru country, they had to keep themselves disguised as ascetics to escape notice. Even then, they were not sure that people would not connect the presence of the man-mountain Bhimasena along with four brothers and their mother. The Varanavat incident had touched a raw nerve among every member of the Kuru public. The memory of that tragedy was so acute that the public was always on the lookout for some assurance that the princes and their mother were still living. Chastened by the close shave, they decided to eschew public worship till the time they could come out of their exile.

From Kurukshetra, they crossed the Yamuna and then took a route towards the eastern boundary of Kuru. They reached Ekachakrapura<sup>1</sup> and put up their camp a little outside the village. They were comfortable in the knowledge that they were in the Panchala country and they would not be exposed.

They mixed up very well among the villages. They were hosted by a very pious Brahmin family, which let out a part of their land to them to build their camp. The Pandavas nearly became a part of this family comprising of a middle-aged man, his wife and three young children—a son of about fifteen years of age, a daughter of about eleven years and the youngest son of about five years. The man earned his living by performing the worship rituals, marriage ceremonies, funerals and other activities broadly known as karmakānda.

The story of five brothers and their mother, including a man-mountain, performing worship at Kurukshetra sarovara spread in the hinterland quickly. Though the priest who performed the rituals for them had not recognised the aliases of the Pandavas and Kunti, when the rishis of Kurukshetra came to know of the event and they examined the record of worship customarily kept with the priest, they found the identity of the Pandavas and Kunti standing out in bold relief. Then who were the five men and one woman who had been found charred to death?

The news also reached Shakuni and Karna. Spies were sent out by Shakuni and Duryodhana to find out whether there was anyone else missing in the vicinity.

Duryodhana and Shakuni were sitting one evening in their river resort in Gangā, enjoying wine and songs. There was a huge commotion and much shouting that disturbed their merrymaking. Duryodhana shouted for the guilty man to be brought before him. 'I will skin this guy alive,' he muttered under his breath.

The chief of spies, Chudamani, stood trembling before Duryodhana. His mien caused sufficient alarm in Duryodhana to make him sit up.

'Tell me, Chudamani, what brings you here?' Duryodhana said, trying to hide his anxiety.

'Kumara, the five persons and the woman killed in the fire in Varanavat could be some other people. Five labourers and their eldest brother's wife are missing from Varanavat town since the day of the fire. They had gone to help the women with the lamp-lighting celebration organised by Devi Kunti and had decided to stay back in the campus. They had not gone back to their house, and their old father and mother have been looking for them everywhere. Their cries got suppressed in the larger grief around the disappearance of the Pandava princes with their mother.'

Duryodhana had a swooning attack. His head swam, and he felt faint. Shakuni quickly got up to support him as he started falling from his seat. He was nursed back to full consciousness by the available staff. The Rājavidya was summoned urgently.

Even though he became normal after a while, Duryodhana was completely distraught. Shakuni remained aloof and pensive. They were reflecting over their fate. Not only infamy stared them in their faces, but also the continued presence of their adversaries. Duryodhana started vomiting. He had to be moved from the palace to the infirmary.

Shakuni was also failing quite badly in implementing the ten commandments enunciated by Jatil Muni. The hostility of the public to Shakuni and Duryodhana had increased so much after the discovery that the Pandavas might still be alive; any little initiative they took to spread Kutil Dharma was simply brushed aside, if not downright attacked. The only person in their camp with any kind of credibility was Karna, but he was so deeply embedded in Sanatana

Dharma that they dared not discuss their plans and conspiracies with him.

After Duryodhana recovered from his shock and Shakuni from his disappointment, they activated the entire spy set up of Hastinapura to trace the Pandava princes. Spies fanned out all over Bharatavarsha to smell the slightest scent of their presence and to eliminate them.

The Pandavas spent their time in procuring their weapons back. Slowly, but surely, they got the elementary weaponry assembled so that they might be able to give some kind of a fight to any intruder coming for them from Duryodhana and his minions.

Nearly a year went by in this manner. A little before Dipavali, Kunti noticed that their hosts were in a state of depression. The husband was preparing a cart, but the wife was crying and not letting him go. The elder son was telling them that both father and mother had to take care of the younger ones and he may be allowed to go with the cart. Kunti felt intrigued and approached them.

‘Please do not mind. You have been a gracious host to us. We have been very comfortable here. You did not even ask us where we came from, did not ask for our kula and gotra, and accepted us wholeheartedly as members of your family. Won’t you share your difficulty with us? I have five grown-up sons and they are some of the most accomplished warriors in this land. Please share your difficulty with us. I may be of some use.’

The husband folded his hands before Kunti. ‘I am so thankful to you, graceful lady, but this is something that we have to face on our own. There is a cannibal tribe living on that hillock called the Baka tribe. Every month, the village has to send a man or a woman to those cannibals along with a cartload of rations so that they do not destroy the whole village, and do not indulge in pillage, plunder and rape. This month it is our family’s turn. We have to fulfil our duty towards our village. That is our Dharma, our code of discharge of our debt towards our village.’

Kunti felt a tinge of regret. She also had an intuition that probably the time for liberation from exile had arrived. After all, the divine sons that she had been blessed with loved exactly such a situation that gave them an opportunity to restore Dharma.

She remonstrated with them, ‘Am I not your family, bhadra? The shāstras say that anyone living amicably together in one campus is one family. Moreover, we are indebted to you. Let me send my son to these cannibals instead. Haven’t you seen that second son of mine, Bhimasena? He is so powerful that he can take on a few hundred oppressors all by himself. Let me send him.’

The family refused to accept this. Yudhishthira heard about this and all the five brothers implored the family to honour their mother’s wish.

Ultimately, the family relented but only after they became convinced that no harm would come to Bhimasena. Bhimasena went up the hillock with the cart.

As he reached the habitation of the cannibal tribe, he stopped the cart and started eating the rations himself. The tribe got incensed and attacked Bhimasena with swords and sharp objects. Bhimasena warded off the attacks without batting an eyelid. He marked out a person who looked like their leader. He got up, caught the leader by the neck and wrung out his neck in one motion. Then he picked up a plough, remembered his friend Balarama, and killed every person in the tribe using the plough.

After about three hours, the village saw Bhimasena walk down the hillock with the cart laden with the Baka corpses.

A huge celebration took place in Ekachakrapura that day. The acharya of the village came down from the nearby palace of the local chieftain. Hearing about the exploits of the divine looking brothers, he said that they looked to him fit candidates to wed the Panchala princess, Draupadi whose swayamvara was scheduled for the next month in Kampilya<sup>2</sup>, the new capital of the Panchala after they lost their original capital Ahichchhatrapura<sup>3</sup> to Dronacharya and his disciples, the Pandavas.

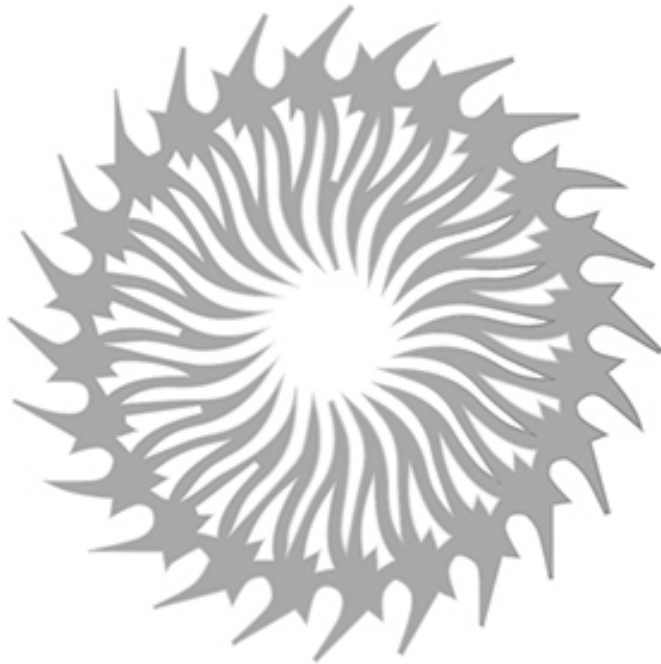
Kunti knew that time had come for them to come out of their exile.



- [1](#) Modern-day Etawah
- [2](#) Modern-day Kampil
- [3](#) Modern-day Bareilly



## PART V





- 29 -

## Revati

A new day had dawned at Prabhasa Tirtha. Rukmini was very excited. She could sense the story converging with her own story any time now.

Uddhava began the story after another round of incantations to the infinite Cosmos and worship of the Rtm.

‘We reached Ujjayini after about fifteen days. Damaghosha was with us right till the time we reached Sandipani Ashrama. Advance parties had gone out and informed Rishi Sandipani, who was waiting to welcome us. He did sound a note of caution as soon as the three of us had paid our respect to him, “Jarasandha is now a wounded snake. He will attack more ferociously. *Sanatana warriors have repeatedly made this mistake of wounding the lion and letting him go. If you wound a dangerous animal, it will kill you in its second strike. Don’t wound to chase away. Wound to kill.*”

‘The idea was to rest for a while and then move on to Mathura. Damaghosha left us after a day. Vinda and Anuvinda, our old friends, tried to make our stay comfortable. Yet, destiny had willed something else for us.

‘Dau Balarama chanced upon a young girl learning the skills of swordsmanship in the ashrama. He grew fond of the girl. Krishna sensed it and started teasing him about it.

‘Whenever we broached the subject of leaving for Mathura as winter was now in full bloom and it would be easy to take the boats through the Shiprā and Charmanyavati, Balarama Dau would come up with some excuse or the other.

‘Krishna told me that nothing was going to move till Balarama’s solution could be found.

‘One day Krishna went to the practice arena and accosted the girl. The girl was mad at Krishna. She complained to Acharya Sandipani but we at least got to know who she was.

‘Rishi Sandipani told us that the girl was bearing a misfortune. She was the daughter of King Revata of Kushasthali, which nestled at the foot of Mount Revataka, the same place where we had a stopover when we went to rescue Punardatta.

‘Rishi Sandipani told us that the same Punyajana bandits, who had captured Punardatta and taken him to Vaivasvatapura, were behind the difficulties of Princess Revati and King Revata. The bandits had attacked Kushasthali repeatedly. Though the king held off valiantly for many years, he was ultimately defeated and had to flee after losing all his brothers and sons, and most of his army. All he had with him was his daughter. He had requested the Acharya to help him train his daughter and help him gather up an army so that he could appoint her as the head of his army and reclaim his kingdom. King Revata was in a state of high meditation in a nearby cave.

‘Krishna confided in Acharya. “Dau Balarama seems to be very fond of the girl. I want him to marry the girl. The match would surely strengthen the king of Kushasthali.”

““You will have to meet the king and ask him personally.”

‘Krishna and I teased Balarama Dau who agreed to accompany us to King Revata.

‘We were guided to the cave by a disciple of Acharya Sandipani, but the king was in a state of samadhi. We waited for three days without food before the king came out of samadhi. He was not particularly pleased to see three strangers intruding his privacy. He frowned at us, but Krishna managed the situation with his inimitable charm and a captivating smile.

‘After introducing the three of us, Krishna came straight to the point. “We are here to help you win back your Rājya. We have also

fought against the Punyajana bandits. I killed their leader Panchajana with my bare hands. They still nurse an enmity with us. We know their ways better than anyone with you. Our eldest Balarama would accompany you to Kushasthali to win your territory back. Before that, we would like to cement the association in the Kshatriya tradition by having Balarama marry your daughter Revati.”

‘The king did not seem to like the proposal. He became furious. It appeared to him that his valour was being belittled. He snorted in the manner of an arrogant king, the usual failing of most kings who would treat Rājya as personal property rather than a trust on behalf of the people and Dharma.

‘He spoke with high dudgeon and hubris. “You people seem to think that we are helpless. You do not seem to know that my daughter is a better warrior than all of you. You Balarama,” he pointed his finger at Dau, “I will take you as the husband of my daughter if you can beat her in sword combat.”

‘That was a readily acceptable condition. We knew instantly that King Revata had no idea of the world beyond his own kingdom, otherwise how could the lore surrounding Krishna had escaped him.

‘An arena was prepared in the middle of the ashrama campus and the combat was set after a week. The combatants sharpened their skills with sparring partners in preparation for the event.

‘On the day of the combat, King Revata came down from his cave abode to witness the event. The whole ashrama turned up to watch the combat. Sparring between a man and a woman was not unusual, but full-fledged combat was definitely a first in the ashrama. Moreover, Balarama was massively built. There was only one man comparable to him in height, muscle and built in the entire Aryavarta, and his name was Bhimasena. Another person who came close to him was Jarasandha and then it was Duryodhana. These were the foremost experts in wrestling combat in the known universe. Some tribes and pirates like the Punyajana, the Hidimb and the Nagas also boasted fearsome warriors in sheer size, but their skills were not comparable to these four. Besides, they were experts in other forms of close combat as well such as swords, maces, spears and chains. The challenge combat was with swords.

‘Revati was a tall, svelte, graceful beauty, who had hardened herself with sheer practice. Yet, she had no experience of combat in a real-life situation. This would be a major handicap, Acharya thought, but Revata’s confidence in his daughter was sky-high.

‘Mallavikrama was appointed as the referee. The combat began at early dawn, as was the custom in ashrama living.

‘The referee gave the opening move to Revati. She was tall by feminine standards but was completely dwarfed by Balarama. Revati was not much perturbed, as she was quite sure of her speed. The referee had decreed that a touch would constitute a point and whoever scored twenty points first would be the winner. This was not a combat to finish.

‘Revati circled around and sized up the target. She looked for a feint that could allow her either a direct thrust at the chest armour of the target or would allow her to touch the leg. She feinted towards the right leg and thrust her sword towards the chest. The move was successful, but she could not reach the chest. She was short by nearly a foot. Her reach was not good enough. Dismayed, she tried to swivel around for a swooping attack on the legs. The monetary distraction was enough for Balarama to land a blow on the armour on her left arm even as she swivelled around and did a squat thrust.

‘Embarrassed by the loss of point, Revati did a fast whirl around—so fast that she nearly disappeared. Balarama just smiled and stayed put with his shield raised and his sword forward. Revati tried another feint on the left even as she whirled around and tried to touch Balarama on his right arm. It was useless. Balarama’s reach was much longer than her. Every time she tried to attack, she ended up exposing her flanks, which Balarama would just touch even while standing nearly upright. The contest was over in a matter of ten minutes.

‘What followed was sheer mayhem. Embarrassed by her defeat, Revati did not stay to exchange the customary bringing together of the two combatants by the referee, followed by the raising of the hand of the winner, further followed by the greetings offered to each other by the combatants. She ran off towards the Shiprā River. She felt that she had failed in her mission to accomplish sufficient expertise to be able to defeat the enemies of her father.

‘Krishna ran after her and caught up with her. She wrestled with him to get free, but he pulled her back to the arena. She sat in the middle of the arena and cried and cried. Sushushrā Devi had looked after her as her own child. She clasped her to her bosom and comforted her. King Revata sat ashen-faced.

‘Acharya Sandipani comforted King Revata, “*O King, a king’s only duty is to his people, not to his ego. It is your duty to do the best by your country by liberating them from the oppression of a monstrous tribe of pirates. Your girl is very brave, but bravery alone is not enough for a victory. A victory requires a combination of guts, blood, brains, tactics, strategy and uncommon common sense, not just valour.* I have no doubt that Revati has the first three qualities, but the other three qualities come only from experience. This experience too has to be the right experience of both wins and setbacks. Your experience will not be of much use. Here is your golden opportunity. You have a warrior of uncommon bravery, brilliance and right experience. He has himself offered to have your girl as his bride. By winning the combat he has fulfilled your condition as well. Have him as your son-in-law, cement the relationship and win your territory back.”

‘A few days later, a regular wedding took place in the ashrama, and Balarama and Revati were united in a Sanatana Dharma-Karma-Sambandha.’

A wry smile played on the lips of Uddhava. ‘Rukmini bhabhi, you will meet your senior very soon.’

Rukmini blushed.





**- 30 -**

## **Kushasthali**

**U**ddhava continued his narration after a pause. For the first time, Balarama also got involved in the narration. After all, his own story was being narrated.

‘A strategy for winning back Kushasthali was prepared in the ashrama. After the strategy was ready, Krishna left for Mathura, leaving me with Dau Balarama to execute the plan. We gathered an army of soldiers experienced in amphibious warfare. Local tribes in the Narmada Valley were very good, and with a short training under some troops supplied by Vinda and Anuvinda, and some expert commanders sent by Damaghosha, we were ready to march on Kushasthali in about two months’ time. Just as winter was receding, we marched over the Vindhya Mountains to Omkareshvara and took the same ferry that has brought us here this time.

‘We changed the ferries at Bhrgu Tirtha and set on a boat to Kushasthali. Skirting the Saurashtra coast, we sailed in a way that we reached Kushasthali a day before Amavasyā. We had picked the brains of King Revata. We had concluded that he lost mainly because he tried to counter the Punyajana on the sea, where they were invincible. Their flotilla was impregnable. To try and counter them there was sheer folly. Yet, the battle commander of Kushasthali tried to counter them at sea, thinking that if he could stop their ingress, they would back off. It was like battling a shark in the water. They

had no hope. The commander was a great naval warrior. That is where his ego and overconfidence overpowered his common sense. It was not the kingdom of Kushasthali fighting its battle, but it was more like the commander fighting his own battle. *When battles are fought not on current evidence of tactics and strategy but on historical dogma and authorities, defeat is guaranteed.*

‘Balarama made us land nearly twenty miles outside the city. His conclusion was simple. The pirates were not likely to be great land warriors. A fish out of water is not at its best.

‘We had a trained force of about two thousand land warriors and a thousand tribals who could wade through water like their second nature.

‘We sent a few tribals to look for the weak points in the fortifications. The information that they got back was startling. Exactly as Balarama had expected, they found that the fortifications on the land border were erected as if they were stopping the flow of water. Main routes were fortified, but the area in between was just shielded by earthen bunds, and was, thus, largely unprotected. The analogy to fighting ships was perfect, but unlike the sea where the line of sight is uninterrupted, they forgot that ingresses in landed borders are often like an underwater submarine. They also reported that most of the guards were asleep in the night. Dau Balarama justified a night attack against them because of their nature of unconventional fighting. *Fighting an unscrupulous enemy with high morals and ethics is sure suicide.*

‘On Amavasyā night, Balarama ordered a pincer movement to catch all the guards off guard. They left the entire coast open. The Punyajana had unwisely moved deep inland to build their palaces.

‘The night was carnage. Most of the guards were killed in their sleep. The new palaces did not have any fortification. They were not too well guarded either. For Punyajana, Kushasthali was their first-ever land base. All through their history, their ships had been their abodes. They had moved inland but did not know the ways of building well-guarded forts, palaces and cities. Their ships were anchored without any soldiers in them, and the city they built had soldiers who were unaccustomed to wielding weapons of close combat. They were used to using projectiles from their ships. A



terrible slaughter of combatants followed. Balarama kept wondering all the time as to how the Kunidmin King Revata could lose to such amateurs. The city was secured within twenty-four hours. The ships remained anchored at the harbour. Leaving aside the ones required for the defence of the city, Balarama ordered the rest of them to be destroyed. He wanted to ensure that there would be no recurrence of the Punyajana for a long time.

‘I directed the operations along with Revata, but Revati led one-half of the troops in actual operations. I led the other half.

‘The public celebrated like never before. For them, the Dipavali they had missed for many years had arrived. They lit up their homes like never before. I had only read a description of the intensity and joy of the public of Ayodhyā on the return of Rāma in Rishi Vālmiki’s Ramayana. The show in Kushasthali seemed to rival that description.

‘The coronation of the Kunidmin King was scheduled for the next week. Yet, the king did not seem reconciled to his coronation. Instead, he grew pensive and sought refuge in the same meditation that he had been doing in Avantika. The day before the coronation, he summoned a meeting at his court. Balarama, Revati and I were invited.

‘Revata sat motionless for a while, and then spoke, “Brothers, the purpose of my life has been achieved. I was burning with the fire of revenge. Till this fire burnt in me, I was unable to find a path to redeem my pledge of liberating my land. I had always thought of taking revenge. It was then that a young man came along and opened my eyes. He taught me that the thought of liberating the land for myself was the one that held my purpose back. He taught me that my rights and ambition as a king inhered in my duties towards my subjects. The day I gave up my attachment to my country as ‘my land’ and exalted my ambition as the liberation of ‘my people’, everything fell into place. My girl found a match, I found an able associate and my country has found its new rulers. I do hereby announce that I will not accept the coronation of Kunidmin country but would request my people to choose the great Yadavas as their next rulers. It is now for my daughter and son-in-law to decide who would be the king of this land. I am inclined to follow the Ashrama Dharma and go back to the cave where I did penance in the quest of a

worldly objective. *No worldly objective would be fulfilled without Shraddhā. Shraddhā is not blind faith. It is that state of conviction that gives you a glimpse of both true and false and gives you an anchor on which to base your journey towards truth.* Krishna is my anchor, my guru. I will follow his path with utmost Shraddhā. Concentrating your full focus on a great man and his example leads you to a sure footing in your journey. I hereby embark on that journey.”

‘Balarama was overcome with deep emotions. He was watching a human being turning divine with deep realisation. He had studied this. He had seen Krishna in this state almost all the time, but today he was himself feeling like a realised soul. Revati was overcome with a different emotion. She felt as if she was losing her father, the very essence of her life, forever. She cried.

‘The city of Kushasthali bid farewell to Revata the next day. Instead of coronation, he was taking sanyasa. He took the name Revatānanda Krishnānanda, taking Krishna as his guru.

‘I too left for Mathura the next day. I had to find my way around. I travelled to the edge of the desert, finding the Lavanyavati River skirting the southern edge of the desert and then travelled up the valley to reach Dwaita Vana on the northeastern boundary of the desert. From Dwaita Vana, I moved along the Banashayyā<sup>1</sup> River to reach Charmanyavati and from then on to Mathura.

‘Krishna had spent his time in Mathura well. He had been training the forces and giving leadership lessons to the leaders of the military. Sātyaki was his choicest commander. Krishna’s presence was greatly resented by Kansā who feared for the status of her unworthy son Brihadbala. Brihadbala was scheming every day with his cohorts to somehow prevent Krishna from finishing all his influence off. He was in bad luck.

‘The news came that a swayamvara had been announced for Bhishmaka’s daughter Rukmini, the princess of Vidarbha. In a calculated insult to the Yadavas of Mathura, no invitation was sent to them. The entire Yadava clan was seething with this insult. The elders gathered under King Ugrasena and Vasudeva. Sātyaka and Satrājit cleverly proposed that Brihadbala should lead the Yadavas to the swayamvara with an army to face the forces of Vidarbha and its

allies. It was clear to them that the Jarasandha-Shishupala axis was the root cause of this insult. Brihadbala had neither the capacity nor the inclination to take up the challenge. The Sudharma Sabha was convened, and like most of the times, they chose Krishna to lead the Yadava forces and stake his own claim in the swayamvara at Kundinapura. Thus, ended the Brihadbala chapter of Yadava ignominy permanently.

‘The swayamvara was set for Chaitra Navami. Krishna started out by the end of Magha Purnima at the head of a small but powerful contingent through the much-travelled route of Ujjayini-Omkareshvara-Kundinapura.’



## <sup>1</sup> River Banās



- 31 -

## Kundinapura

Uddhava and his audience paused for a while to refresh themselves. He continued thereafter.

‘Jarasandha had regrouped his forces after the rout in Gomantaka. For someone who wanted to conduct Naramedha Yagna<sup>1</sup> and was on his way to collect one hundred kings in his prison, it was important to have his alliances absolutely right. He had imprisoned fifty-five small chieftains who had styled themselves as kings in their petty potentates. He wanted to become the chakravartin<sup>2</sup> of the entire Bharatavarsha, from Sindhu to Samudra, and which the Vishnu Purāṇa had addressed as “*uttarm yat samudrasya, himādraishchaiva dakshinam*”<sup>3</sup>. The normal way of achieving the status of chakravartin was through a Rajasuya Yagna or an Ashvamedha Yagna. Jarasandha wanted to declare himself the chakravartin through a Naramedha Yagna, thus securing his position in the pantheon of emperors forever. No chakravartin had reigned the land of entire Bharatavarsha since the days of Ramayana and Jarasandha wanted to undo that little aberration.

‘The Naramedha Yagna idea was abhorrent to Acharya Chandakaushika<sup>4</sup>. Having failed to dissuade Jarasandha, he had permanently shifted to the ashrama of Acharya Ghora Āngirasa in

Prayāga, where he expected Krishna to come for his final induction in the quest of vidya<sup>5</sup>.

‘Exactly as Rishi Sandipani had told us, we had made a big mistake in not finishing Jarasandha off when we had him cornered. It was an invaluable lesson. Krishna learnt this the hard way. As we camped outside Kundinapura, Krishna told me with a fair degree of remorse, *“Judgment is the most difficult thing in taking a decision whether we need to follow svadharma, kuladharma or Rashtra Dharma in a given situation. Never, remember, never let a powerful enemy escape when you have him cornered. Either kill him or defang him. If you do not destroy his capacity to wage another war, there is nobody more foolish than you on this earth, as the Rashtra is going to suffer for this folly, even if you yourself are not killed or destroyed.”*

‘Krishna was correct. During the breather that Jarasandha had had, he had cemented his alliance with Shishupala, who was set to marry Rukmini, and her brother Rukmi would marry Jarasandha’s granddaughter. Jarasandha was trying to make up for the loss of Kamsa as his loss had deprived him of a formidable ally. Only two thorns lay between him and his dream of becoming a chakravartin—Krishna and Hastinapura. He would have encircled Hastinapura also but it was under the protection of the great Devavrata, Bhishma. He had also contacted Kalayavana of Amarkoshtaka. Even his response was positive. After having woven this web of alliances through treaties and matrimony, he intended to kill Krishna and then move towards capturing Hastinapura.

‘We set up camp outside Kundinapura with our forces. Krishna sent an emissary to inform Bhishmaka that Yadavas from Mathura had come and he would be representing them in the swayamvara. He also informed them that this non-invitation to Mathura was treated as an insult and a violation of the principle of reciprocity among the kings.

‘Bhishmaka is a weak king. Kaishika, his father, is a great king who is wedded to Dharma in his conduct. Kaishika is now over ninety years old.’

Uddhava paused and looked at Rukmini, ‘I think Devi Rukmini would be better placed to narrate this bit of the story.

Rukmini blushed again, but she loved to add her bit to the story.

‘I do not know much of what went on in the house of kings as it was meeting in the camp of Jarasandha, but I do know that grandfather was overjoyed and thrilled like a teenager at this news. He was the one who had cared for me and supervised my education and grooming after my mother had died. He has nurtured me like a mother. He had been opposing the idea of having a swayamvara, which he thought to be rigged in favour of Shishupala. I was furious at having to choose from what I thought to be unworthy people,’ Rukmini said.

‘And who did you think were the worthy princes?’ Uddhava chimed in.

Rukmini blushed again, looked at Krishna and then looked away as her cheeks turned to a reddish hue.

Uddhava picked up the thread from where he had left off.

‘Jarasandha was flustered. He had just suffered a humiliating defeat when he thought he had the enemy outnumbered one hundred to one.

‘He was not sure about what to make of this latest foray of Krishna. He had seen Damaghosha, the father of Shishupala, defect to Krishna’s side. He had also seen his close friend Shrigālava Vāsudeva destroyed. He had seen his forces destroyed by subterfuge that he considered adharma. It was a different matter that he did not follow a single Dharmic conduct in the war. It was no surprise that other kings often referred to him as Jarā Rākshasa.

‘After a long deliberation with the other kings, all of them his acolytes, Jarasandha reached the conclusion that he could not afford another showdown with a wily enemy. Even a stalemate would further dent his already dented reputation. He decided that he would not hold the swayamvara until Krishna was totally out of the way. Discretion, he thought, was the better part of misplaced valour.

‘Rukmi was totally opposed to this proposal of Jarasandha. He argued with Jarasandha long and hard. Rukmi was vehement. “This swayamvara has been organised by Vidarbha and Bhishmaka. It was our decision not to invite cowherds masquerading as kings. Technically, Mathura is a vassal of Girivrija. We can invite Girivrija vassals only with the permission of the suzerain, Emperor Jarasandha.” (Jarasandha’s allies called him Emperor even though he

had not fulfilled the conditions of becoming an emperor. Claiming the title of an emperor was a trick to impress recalcitrant kingdoms.)

‘Jarasandha could not tell Rukmi the real reasons for his withdrawal. He tried to explain to Rukmi that it was inauspicious to have a swayamvara that had been dogged by controversy. Rukmi was not convinced. Yet, he had little choice in the matter except to defer to the word of his future grandfather-in-law.’

Rukmini added to the narration.

‘Once it was settled that the swayamvara had been postponed indefinitely, grandpa Kaishika danced with joy. He urged father Bhishmaka to invite Krishna to Kundinapura with all the honour that a prince deserves. Father Bhishmaka, as usual, hesitated. He did not dare displease even Rukmi, let alone Jarasandha.

‘As father Bhishmaka dawdled, grandpa Kaishika got on to his own chariot, went to the city gate, had it opened and rushed out to invite Krishna into the city. A throng of a few thousand people followed the much-liked king, who had followed the Ashrama Dharma and abdicated in favour of his son. They thought he was going to the forests to spend the rest of his life in meditation, but he had found a living form to meditate upon. He reached the place where they were camping.’

Uddhava picked up the narration.

‘I was outside the camp when I saw a chariot flying the Vidarbha flag approaching us, with multitudes following the chariot. For a minute, I thought the Vidarbha Army was coming for an attack, but then I noticed that the people following the chariot comprised women in greater numbers and the man in the chariot was not only unarmed, but was in a sanyasi’s dress. I went out to receive the great ex-king. Kaishika had been recognised all over the Aryavarta as a true karmayogi. Great kings from all over Bharata used to come and seek his counsel. His son and grandson were the only exceptions. So he taught all his wisdom to his granddaughter.

‘I received the great man with all the deference at my command. I washed his feet, honoured him with incense, sandal, akshata and flowers. Krishna had noticed the commotion. He also came out to honour the great Kaishika.



‘Kaishika, however, refused to accept the honours from Krishna and instead said that Krishna already possessed the spark of divinity that he had been striving to achieve. He insisted on honouring Krishna instead, “In the Bharatiya tradition, honour is bestowed not to one’s age but to the wisdom of the honoured. Age is honoured only when relative wisdom is not known. I know that Krishna is the wise one, hence it is my duty to honour him.”

‘Krishna was embarrassed and so was I, but we were caught in our own web. We respected Kaishika for his age and experience. If we did truly respect him, we had to bow to his judgement. So this was first of the many times I would witness Krishna, the wise one, being honoured.

‘Kaishika took both of us along to Kundinapura as his guests, where we stayed for a good fifteen days, before leaving for Kushasthali through the Tapasvini River route, taking the boat to Prabhasa Tirtha from Suryapura Tirtha<sup>6</sup>. While as the guests of Kaishika, the veteran ex-king arranged great sessions for picking the brains of Krishna by the princes and princesses of the Bhoja clan. One princess was always seated in the front row and would monopolise the conversation till Kaishika would intervene to let others also benefit from Krishna’s wisdom. Most of her questions would, however, concern Krishna’s exploits rather than any deep matters of Dharma or Karma.’

Uddhava looked at Rukmini as he narrated this part. Once again, Rukmini tried to hide behind Devi Sushushrā. Of course, everyone present in the audience knew that story by now.



- <sup>1</sup> Human sacrifice
- <sup>2</sup> Emperor, a chakravartin would have all the other kings of Bharata paying tributes to him.
- <sup>3</sup> That which lies to the north of the oceans and south of the snow-capped mountains.
- <sup>4</sup> Jarasandha's guru
- <sup>5</sup> Vidya in the Hindu philosophy is much more than knowledge. It is the ultimate wisdom of self-realisation.
- <sup>6</sup> Modern-day Surat



**- 32 -**

## **Dvaraka**

Uddhava paused to have a sip of water and continued. ‘Even as we left Kundinapura, we had built an excellent espionage system with the help of the great Kaishika. We avoided Damaghosha because his loyalties could change like the seasons. His mood swings were dependent on the prevailing power equations.

‘From Suryapura Tirtha, we reached the major port of Prabhasa Pattan and made our way to Kushasthali. We had learnt that Dau Balarama had defeated and destroyed the Punyajana bandits, and that the Kunidmin King Revata had taken sanyasa and gone back to Avantika. We gave no advance notice of our intention of reaching Kushasthali to Dau Balarama.

‘When we reached the city gates, we found it manned by the Ujjayini warriors. They recognised us instantly and started blowing their trumpets in a celebratory welcome. The trumpeting caused big alarms in the palace where Balarama and Revati were staying. The Yadavas had established a reasonably robust espionage system. Balarama was surprised at having been surprised. He ordered emergency mobilisation.

‘The gate superintendent, Dvarapala, came running to announce that Krishna was coming to see Balarama. Dau got up from his throne and came running to receive us at the gate. He clasped both of us in

his broad bosom at the same time. He was thrilled and it showed in his freely expressed joy. He shouted, “Come here, Revati, your young favourite has come. Come, come running...”

‘Revati bhabhi came running and was so overcome at the sight of us two that she started crying with joy. The happy reunion lasted nearly half an hour. A contingent of women gathered doing mangala<sup>1</sup> arati, sprinkling charanamrita, flower petals and natural colours over the two brothers.

‘Once the effects of the effusive welcome and joyous reunion had abated a bit, the brothers sat down for a meal, prepared and supervised by Revati bhabhi herself. They exchanged notes.

‘Balarama Dau told us of the abdication by King Revata. We admired his dedication to Dharma and his desire to unite with the unitary consciousness that pervades the Universe. Krishna suggested that Balarama should now assume the crown as the king of Kushasthali. He even suggested a new township to commemorate a new Yadava kingdom. Considering that it could be developed into an entrepot for trade and industry, Krishna sought to name it Dvārapuri. Balarama thought the name to be too short. He suggested Dvarakapuri. Revati was the first to accept it. Others followed suit.

‘Krishna arranged for the Ashvini Kumars of the yuga to be contacted to design the new city. Even as we were waiting for the two great architect and designers, named Ashvini Kumars, the spies brought some very disconcerting news.

“‘Jarasandha,” they said, “had abandoned the alliance-making with his traditional partners and had linked up with Kalayavana of Amarkoshthaka once again. The fierce and ferocious Kalayavana was planning a march to Mathura before the terrible summer of the Thārasthāna desert started. Jarasandha was marching through the land route, after having suffered as many as seventeen reverses. His army had already started out through the Chedi kingdom, avoiding the Yamuna and crossing the Charmanyavati at an undisclosed point in the Chedi kingdom, avoiding the usual crossing points near Ekachakra, Batukeshvara and Dhavalapuri.”

‘This was serious news. We left Dvarakapuri immediately. We did not use chariots. Rather, we left on a contingent of fifty horses, equipped with rations and water to last a tough journey. The journey

was made tougher because Krishna insisted that he wanted to survey the entire route that Kalayavana would take. I told him that I had surveyed a part of the route. I had gone to the north from Kushasthali and caught up with the Lavanyavati River near Vilvapatra<sup>2</sup> village where the river meandered out of the Āhāravalli<sup>3</sup> ranges.

‘That is not good enough. I am quite sure Kalayavana is not going to risk travelling through the Thārasthāna desert. He will come down from Amarkoshthaka and go up through the Lavanyavati Valley. The river will provide his forces with everything they need. The river is draining into the sea a little south of Baksheshvara<sup>4</sup>. The sea there is shallow. He could go down the Sindhu, and take the sea route to Baksheshvara or come straight down. Amarkoshthaka to Baksheshvara is only a three- or four-day march through a desert, so I don’t think he is going to have a three-day march to Sindhu River and then spend another week travelling through the river and the sea to catch Lavanyavati.’

‘Accordingly, we went straight up from Dvarakapuri to the point where a gulf wedged inland. Going around the gulf, we set course directly north with the help of some local guides. At the end of two days, we reached the point where Lavanyavati emptied into the sea. The river was at a very low flow, but it was still good enough to support a large army with water, food and rest. We rested in Baksheshvara for two days, looking for places where traps could be laid. A large swamp lay near the northern rim of the sea, which would be enough to swallow a large army. Krishna stayed for a few days in Baksheshvara and detected a great revulsion among the people towards Kalayavana. Digging deeper, we could find a group of dedicated youth whose families had been slaughtered by the monsters of Kalayavana. They volunteered to join our force. Krishna had a diversionary mud wall built in such a way that a marching army would be forced to divert west and reach the valley of Lavanyavati through the salt-infested land. The salty marsh has a quality that it is rock hard when dry but simply melts away even if there is a little bit of water, making it marshy and boggy. Having ensured that the four-foot-high mud wall would be enough of a nuisance to divert the Kalayavana army through the salty marsh, he supervised the amount of water that would go into the salt pans. He reckoned that a standing

water column of about half a centimetre would be enough to not deter them from getting into the shiny marsh that appears like land but is actually a bog.

‘We moved along the valley of Lavanyavati, traversing through Malanyikā<sup>5</sup>, Bālahotra<sup>6</sup>, Vilvapatra and to the origin of the river in Pushkara. From Pushkara, we crossed over to the eastern side of the Āhāravalli range to the large town of Ajayameru<sup>7</sup> and then moved on to the Dwaita Vana. The route from Dwaita Vana to Mathura lay through Viratanagara and Govardhana. Unlike me, Krishna did not move from Ajayameru to Charmanyavati Valley, but instead went through the eastern rim of Āhāravalli range.

‘We reached Mathura just before Jyeshtha Purnima. The heat was at its peak. Jarasandha had started his march from Girivrija. We were sure that Kalayavana too would have started. Their march had to be coordinated well to bear fruit.

‘Krishna had an emergency meeting with Maharaja Ugrasena, Vasudeva and the two senapatis—Veerabhadra and Pradyot. Pradyot was always dodgy, but tactically very sound. Veerabhadra was more loyal and braver.

‘Krishna and I explained the danger that was coming our way—a very well-prepared Jarasandha and an equally well-prepared Kalayavana were marching through the desert and plains to catch Mathura in a pincer movement.

‘We discussed the readiness of the Mathura forces. These were the forces that had successfully staved off Jarasandha seventeen times, defeating him decisively each time, but due to Krishna’s prolonged absence from Mathura, and my mother Kansā’s unwanted interference in the affairs of the State and her propping up of Brihadbala as the leader had demotivated the forces. Except for the little band of a few hundred soldiers, a dozen commanders that travelled with Krishna to Kundinapura and the forces that travelled with him from Gomantaka, the fighting forces of Mathura were in a disarray. A defeat looked certain and imminent.

‘Everyone became quiet in the room of Maharaja Ugrasena. Pradyot recounted the ways of war of Kalayavana, “They do not believe in fighting Kshatriya to Kshatriya. They do not spare non-combatants unlike us. They rape and defile women, kill the civilians,

plunder the homes, vandalise the temples and take the most beautiful women as sex slaves to sell them in the markets of Parshvasthāna and Shankha Dweepa.” The very thought of defilement of their loved and respected daughters, sisters and mothers, and the destruction of their worshipped temple deities was repugnant to everyone present.

‘After a good lull, Krishna made a suggestion, “Winning the war of righteousness, the Dharma Yuddha is the ultimate goal. Winning the war means that we should win the last decisive battle. In between, there will be many battles. If we look to win each one of them, we will lose the war. We must conserve our resources, our civilian public and our armies to win the war. I do not think that the occasion has come to us yet. We are not even prepared for it. *The retreat is as important part of war as fighting a battle. We should be able to choose our battle, and not give battle at the time and choosing of our enemies.* We already have an impregnable fort with a well-trained defending force at Dvaraka. I suggest we vacate Mathura and leave for Dvaraka. I have a plan of fighting a guerilla war against Kalayavana and Jarasandha. That can happen only if I do not have to run around protecting our population in Mathura, which does not even have prepared defences at this point of time.”

‘There was pin-drop silence, with some murmurs of protest. In the end, everyone acquiesced to the wisdom of Krishna, as they had always done in the past.

‘Kansā made a lot of noise, but the public shouted her down. That Krishna had made the suggestion was enough for a public that had implicit faith in his judgement.

‘Mathura started emptying quickly, with camps being strewn over a route that we did not expect Kalayavana to take.’



- [1](#) Auspicious
- [2](#) Modern-day Bilara in Jodhpur district
- [3](#) Arāvali ranges, from the Āhāra people of antiquity
- [4](#) Modern-day Bākhāsar in Barmer district
- [5](#) Modern-day Malāni
- [6](#) Modern-day Balotra
- [7](#) Modern-day Ajmer





**- 33 -**

## **Kalayavana**

Uddhava continued without a break.

‘Our spies from Baksheshvara had reported that Kalayavana took the route through Baksheshvara as we had anticipated. The high hubris of the marauders made them take the detour that we had created for them in the form of the low mud wall. They headed straight to the marshes and got bogged down. They lost a large number of their horses, chariots and men. Not only did they lose half their men, horses and chariots, they also lost a lot of time. Our men in Baksheshvara were experts in using homing pigeons. They sent us the message on a tree bark that the Kalayavana army had got stuck in the hurdles we had created and it would take them at least another fifteen days to regroup and move. Their intended route was exactly what we had anticipated.

‘Accordingly, Krishna drew a route that steered clear both from Jarasandha and Kalayavana. The route went from Mathura to Dhavalapuri and from there it went south along the River Banashayyā<sup>1</sup> to reach the eastern Āhāravalli, which is south of Ajayameru, and from there to Arbudā<sup>2</sup> Parvata, skirted the range and moved on to Dvaraka in a southwestern direction.

‘While in Dhavalapuri, we went to pray at the cave of Maharshi Muchkunda, who was there in samadhi. It was well known in the

areas around Muchkunda Parvata that if anybody dared to wake him up, he had the power to kill that person. Nobody used to go near him. People would seek his blessings from afar. While praying at Muchkunda Rishi's place, we did not realise that the fertile brain of Krishna was plotting something.

‘The massive contingent moved slowly towards Dvaraka. Even though the journey was arduous. We expected to take around a month and a half to complete the distance to Dvaraka. We anticipated that there might be a delay because we would run into the rainy season towards the halfway mark of our adventure.

‘After we had reached Pālikāpuri<sup>3</sup>, the Lavanyavati Valley was not very far away. The spies travelling with the Kalayavana army were feeding us all the time. Kalayavana was blissfully unaware of our move to Dvaraka. He was busy maintaining contact with Jarasandha who had reached Shivapura and was camping with his army on the right bank of Charmanyavati. Kalayavana was still more than fifteen days away. The link-up was planned on the bank of the River Bana Gangā<sup>4</sup> near Bharatapuri.

‘On a moonlit night, Krishna made me the logistics-in-charge and Sātyaki the army-in-charge of the Mathura contingent heading towards Dvaraka, took a band of about fifteen horse-mounted soldiers, riding one himself, and left the camp.

‘Rest of the account of how Krishna outwitted Kalayavana will sound the best if told by Krishna himself.’ Uddhava goaded Krishna to speak up and add his own authentic account of how he tackled Kalayavana.

Krishna was unprepared for this. He was under the impression that the narration was being done to humour Rukmini, but here he was himself in the thick of action and Sandipani Rishi nodded at Uddhava's proposal. Hence, the doors of escape were effectively shut.

Krishna cast a disapproving glance at Uddhava, but all he met was a smile playing on Uddhava's face. He had to join the narration.

Krishna drew a deep breath and started telling his part of the story.

‘After I left the Yadava camp, I travelled to the Āhāravalli ranges in the upper reaches of Lavanyavati River. I waited because I expected Kalayavana's army to reach there in the next three days. As expected, the army was moving slowly and ponderously.

‘I travelled in the upper reaches of the mountains, keeping a close eye on the Kalayavana army from a safe distance. The old mountains gave us not only excellent cover, but also food, shelter and water.

‘The Kalayavana army had been reduced by more than half by the trap that I had laid for them in the Baksheshvara marshes. The flip side was that a smaller army of about five thousand men could move much faster.

‘After stopping in Pushkara to refresh and rejuvenate themselves, Kalayavana crossed the Āhāravalli range to Ajayameru and then moved towards Banashayyā River to ultimately link up with Jarasandha on the bank of its tributary, Bana Gangā.

‘My objective was to distract Kalayavana and not let him get in touch with Jarasandha. So I sent my spies in the disguise of villagers to inform Kalayavana that a big contingent from Mathura numbering tens of thousands had just passed and was marching towards the south. Kalayavana detained the spies, tortured them, but could not break them as they were indeed telling the truth. They took a few commanders and soldiers from Kalayavana’s army to Rājasamudra<sup>5</sup> from where we had crossed the Āhāravalli range into the Pālikāpuri plains. The Mathura contingent had already crossed into Saurashtra through the Jāleshwara<sup>6</sup> route on the western side of Arbudā Parvata.

‘The Kalayavana commanders had to find evidence. A large number of people, most probably from an army, had camped at and headed southwest. The route gave a strong suggestion of an army headed towards Kalayavana territory.

‘Hearing this news, Kalayavana stopped at the Banashayyā banks near Vanasthali forests and discussed his next course of action. Faced with the prospect of a large army headed possibly towards his own territory, Kalayavana had to ask a good half of his remaining army to head back on their swiftest horses. He had strongly suspected a trap at Baksheshvara, laid by someone who knew the movement of his army. He retained only the slow-moving chariots and infantry with him. His entire cavalry headed back to Amarkoshthaka under the command of his feared brother, Trikalayavana. Meanwhile, he sent couriers to Jarasandha and asked him to wait at the Bana Gangā, as he had to take care of a deceptive attack on his own territory.

‘The stage was set. I sent another set of spies who informed Kalayavana that one set of Mathura army had gone off to attack Amarakoshthaka and Krishna was camping some distance away to attack him near the confluence of Banashayyā and Bana Gangā.

‘Kalayavana had developed a healthy trust in the local information by now. Yet, he again sent his own intelligence operatives to check on the information. The information was found to be correct. I was indeed camping near Guneshvara<sup>7</sup> in a deeply populated valley. When you looked at the valley from a distance, it gave the impression that a large army was camping there.

‘The information having been confirmed, Kalayavana changed the direction of his army towards Guneshvara. I was getting the news of this movement regularly. I intercepted this army in the night when it camped about twenty-five kilometres away from Guneshvara. I did something unusual. I just intruded into the camp on a fast steed, galloped to the tent of Kalayavana and blew my conch Pāñchajanya, sending shock waves and creating utter confusion. Before they realised what had happened, I was off and away from the camp, waiting at a safe distance out of range of arrow projectiles and deliberately giving my location away by blowing Pāñchajanya repeatedly.

‘Kalayavana was a tamasic. His anger at having been insulted right in his camp took his senses away. He just got onto his horse and galloped into the night after me with just a few of his bodyguards. I had Kalayavana on the mat exactly as I had wanted.

*‘Battles are won when tactics and action are in perfect unison. Wars are won when wisdom and action are in perfect unison.* This little battle was evidence of my tactics and actions winning the day.

‘I galloped through the night, crossing Bana Gangā and Gambhiri on my way to the Muchkund hills. At the base of the hills, I laid an ambush for them. As a contingency, I myself hid in the cave of Muchkund Rishi, covering him with my pitambara<sup>8</sup>.

‘The idiot Kalayavana simply walked into the ambush. All his bodyguards got killed—eleven of them, but he managed to escape the ambush and headed for me. I had left enough telltale signs for him to track me to the cave.

‘As he entered the cave, he saw the rishi, who was in deep meditation. My pitambara made Kalayavana think that I was sleeping there. He roared and shouted, “Bloody coward, your death is here. Get up. I don’t kill sleeping cowards.” Saying this, he kicked hard at Maharshi Muchkund.

‘Maharshi got up with a start. Seeing the rishi, Kalayavana became totally confused. Unknown to him, the Maharshi was an expert in using darts and even when he went into deep meditation, he used to keep them on the stone where he was meditating, just for emergencies.

‘The Maharshi took a dart with a sharp edge and threw it at Kalayavana’s temple with unerring accuracy. The dart pierced Kalayavana’s temple and lodged in his brain. Kalayavana fell with a big thud. He writhed and convulsed for a while and was dead in a few minutes.

‘I came out and prostrated at the feet of the Maharshi. I was scared that he would hold me responsible, but seer as he was, he was very happy to see me. “You had one of the worst demons among humans killed. Killing a monster that oppresses and kills innocent people is great punya<sup>9</sup>. I am thankful to you for having got this done from my hands. I have now achieved liberation. *Liberation happens here and now. You do not have to leave this mortal body to achieve liberation.* I am now beyond the affectations of happiness and sorrow, good and bad, right and wrong.”

‘Then he said something that I am yet to figure out. He said, “Madhusudana, you achieved liberation a long time ago. Yet, you continue to bring wisdom and knowledge to this world. You are the paramārthi<sup>10</sup>, you are the Avatāra.””



- [1](#) Modern-day Banās River
- [2](#) Modern-day Ābu
- [3](#) Modern-day Pāli near Jodhpur
- [4](#) Modern-day Banganga
- [5](#) Modern-day Rājasamand
- [6](#) Modern-day Jalore
- [7](#) Modern-day Goner in Jaipur area
- [8](#) Yellow cloth signifying purity
- [9](#) Good deed
- [10](#) One who does good for others

## PART VI





**- 34 -**

## **Rukmini's Wedding**

**K**rishna ended his narration. Uddhava looked at the audience. There were smiles all around. Everyone knew what happened next.

Mathura relocated to Dvaraka fully. Jarasandha kept waiting near Bana Gangā for many days. He grew apprehensive when he did not get any news or any communication from Kalayavana. There was a big flood in Bana Gangā, which bogged him down further. After waiting for over a month, he sent informers and spies all over. It was soon found out by him that Kalayavana had disappeared and his forces had fled back to Thārasthāna.

Jarasandha lost his composure and moved against Mathura. He had been beaten badly seventeen times by Mathura in the past, and the eighteenth time at Gomantaka. Surprisingly, he found no resistance. He paused outside Mathura, fearing a trap. He had not forgotten the last trap in Gomantaka.

He waited and waited, but nothing happened. He sent a few soldiers to snoop in quietly. They came back and reported that Mathura was empty.

Jarasandha did not know how to react. He wanted to laugh, but his heart was sinking. His mind was devastated. The Mathura he so wanted to defeat was lying before him in a state of surrender. The palaces were welcoming him with a taunt. The temple bells were



tolling as if to mock him. The Yamuna was flowing by in full swell of late monsoon; it was the eighth day of waning Bhadrapada. The coincidence was too stark to miss. All the temples were celebrating Janmashtami, the birthday of Krishna. Except the temple priests and their families, and a few cowherds to tend to the cows that had been left behind, there was not a sign of anyone, military or civilian, in Mathura. Jarasandha came and sat on the banks of the Yamuna near the gate from which Kamsa had mounted his coup, and from where his daughters had escaped after he was killed.

Jarasandha's churn was no less than the churn of the oceans in Samudra Manthana—the great Cosmos churning allegory that produced all the good and bad in the Universe. For the first time, he experienced a sense of complete defeat. His adversary had escaped, perhaps forever. *A powerful adversary away from your range of weapons is a deadly cause of stress by the sheer apprehension it produces.*

Jarasandha was totally frustrated at Krishna having escaped and leaving him with an empty, lifeless and moneyless city. He could not even extract any revenue from the small Republic of Mathura. Not even a hundredth of what Kamsa used to give him as tribute or gifts. Instead, he would have had to spread his military resources thin to defend this piece of empty land from Kuru and Panchala, both of whom were ill-disposed towards him and did not accept his suzerainty.

Dvaraka was developed as a big city and a port by the sheer hard work of the Yadavas. It was a little after this resettlement had taken place and Maharaja Ugrasena had abdicated in favour of Vasudeva after Krishna once again refused to be the king, that the city of Dvaraka anointed him as the Dwarakadhisha—the owner of Dvaraka. This was the only known instance of someone being given this kind of title without being the king himself.

Then, Shvetaketu had come with Rukmini's message.

Prabhasa Tirtha reverberated with more activity. Rishi Sandipani had fixed an auspicious time (muhurta) for the great wedding of Krishna with Rukmini.

On the twelfth day after Dipavali, a day after the rising of Vishnu in the Sanatana tradition, the wedding was set. A small village named

Madhavapura, located between Prabhasa Tirtha and Dvaraka, named by Acharya Sandipani to commemorate his gratitude to Krishna for having rescued his son Punardatta, was chosen as the venue of the wedding by the Acharya himself.

On the day of the wedding, Rukmini was taken in the care of Mishmika people from the far-off Idulikā near Lohit country. They dressed her up in their traditional costume. After a while, Rukmini was unrecognisable. She looked like a princess from China. An outsized nose ring covered half her face. She wore a long silk skirt with dragons painted on it in natural colours. Her blouse was made of bamboo fabric, with grey tones on yellow. It matched well with the saffron colour of the skirt. Her hair was pleated and tied up in a big tuft. A transparent silk veil of bamboo colour covered her from her tufts to her bosom, leaving the face open. She was brought to the wedding stage by a long retinue of the Mishmika women as if they had recreated Rukmini's mother Lavangikā and were marrying her off all over again. The tall, reed-like figure of Rukmini, with her yellowish fair complexion suited the wedding dress perfectly. On her forehead, a tiara was delicately balanced to signify her royal lineage.

Krishna wore a yellow traditional Sanatana dhoti, with a pitambara on top. He wore sandal paste on his forehead and also on the exposed part of his torso. Unlike Rukmini, Krishna did not wear an expansive dress, but the peacock feather in his locks and a golden diadem on his head provided him with the authentic look of Yadava royalty, which Rukmi had refused to acknowledge.

A traditional Sanatana wedding was performed between Krishna and Rukmini. Acharya Sandipani himself performed the kanyadana along with Rukmini's maternal grandfather. The scene of Lavangikā's father giving away his dearest granddaughter—the daughter of his most loved daughter who had left them because of untimely death—was the most poignant moment in the entire ceremony. There was not one eye that was not wet. Just as they were about to finish the ceremony, a long retinue of chariots screeched to a halt at Madhavapura, and out came Kaishika. He had nurtured, educated and nursed this granddaughter of his like a mother. He ran to the stage and hugged his granddaughter like a mother. Tears were streaming down his eyes. He then announced that he would also do the kanyadana.

Kaishika performed a tender kanyadana ceremony with the utmost affection. He then hugged Krishna. Krishna knew that this wedding had become possible only due to the punya of Kaishika, who had shielded not only Rukmini but also Krishna from numerous dangers.

Immediately after the ceremony, Acharya Sandipani announced that Krishna had joined his other half, the Shakti that would henceforth lighten up his path, bring him prosperity and victory in all his endeavours. Rukmini is the veritable Lakshmi and Krishna would always be addressed as Shri Krishna from now on. Lakshmi can stand on her own, but Vishnu is incomplete without Lakshmi.

When the ceremony got over, the Yadavas left for Dvaraka, where Ma Devaki and Vasudeva waited for their son and his bride. Acharya Sandipani went back to Prabhasa Tirtha from where he planned to go back to Ujjayini.

A massive welcome awaited Shri Krishna and Rukmini in Dvaraka. Revati had made grand preparations. The bride was made to walk on flower petals as she got off from the chariot. Her lucky feet were imprinted on a mould, after which she walked over vermilion and the impression of her feet covered every inch of the way. ‘Women,’ Acharya Sandipani would often say, ‘are the ones who carry Dharma on their shoulders. When men go astray, it is the women who bring them back on the path of Dharma. This is why *women occupy the central place in a Dharmic society. It is also the reason that women and Brahmins are the first ones to be targeted by marauders who wish to destroy Sanatana Dharma.*’

The next few days went by in a blur. Rukmini assumed the mantle of a wise pattarāni to Shri Krishna, the Dwarakadhisha. Revati did not like the importance being given to Rukmini as she could not get over the thought that she was the elder daughter-in-law in the family. Balarama was busy teaching wrestling techniques to his pupils. He was the quintessential unattached being. Usually, nothing fazed him. It never crossed his mind that his younger brother had been given the title of Dwarakadhisha even though he was the elder one. His long sessions with Sandipani Rishi had made him internalise the notion that primogeniture was not the right principle in the matters of the State. He loved his brilliant younger brother Krishna. He had seen him perform the greatest feats of intellect and warfare. He considered

Krishna to be his guru in matters of yoga and spirituality. He knew that Krishna was already a realised being. He was never able to place his finger on the exact day Krishna realised his Self, but he had been watching the evidence and expression of this fact for a very long time. Krishna achieved even the impossible feats of killing Kamsa and Chanura without showing the least bit of agitation and anxiety. The way he was building rings around Jarasandha was a generalship of the highest quality. Now nearly all the rishis were testifying to the fact of his genius and of his having reached a state of self-realisation.

Hence, even Revati's nagging produced no effect on Balarama, but to avoid all the heckling, he found an escape and embarked on a journey to Hastinapura. He wished to meet his two favourite wrestler friends, Bhima and Duryodhana.





**- 35 -**

## **Syamantaka Mani**

**T**he fledgeling new city of Dvaraka needed lots and lots of funds to build a new mammoth city, and a new port to ensure that the riches kept flowing in continuously through trade. A strong army and navy had to be raised to ward off the marauding pirates and savages, such as Kalayavana, from across Thārasthāna. Krishna and Uddhava busied themselves with the important tasks of security and commerce.

Satrājīit was the royal treasurer of the Yadavas. He lent money to the State. The impression was that he was the keeper of all the riches Kamsa had accumulated. He was a gentle businessman, who dealt in trade with Aravasthana, Parshvasthāna and Shankha Dweepa. Not only the Yadava rulers of Mathura, but also every other Yadava ruler, including Chedi, Bhoja and Vidarbha, tapped his trading connections. He financed the building of the new city of Dvarakapuri as well.

Satrājīit was a worshipper of Surya. He came into the possession of a rare diamond, which he named Syamantaka Mani. The possession of a rare jewel got to his head. His arrogance increased so much that he started a big charity in the name of the Mani. He would put the Mani on display for a fixed time every Surya Vāra (Ravi Vāra or Sunday) and anyone who came would be gifted a mound of grains and gold coins. Slowly a legend grew around the jewel that it gave out kilograms of gold every time it was invoked.

Satrājīṭ's contribution to the finances of Dvaraka decreased in direct proportion to his obsession with Syamantaka Mani. Lack of financing from Satrājīṭ started hampering the work of building the city, the army and the navy. When Krishna learnt of this unexpected drop, he went to Satrājīṭ's house one day.

Unlike the protocol followed for the guests, and more so for special guests like the Dwarakadhisha Shri Krishna, Satrājīṭ did not seat him in the special room, but in the anteroom. Krishna noticed this and a person of his intellect and elevated consciousness immediately sensed that Satrājīṭ's ego had overtaken his intellect. Intellect is the vehicle to subdue ahankara or identity centrisms and move the intellect to the level of chitta or consciousness. The process involves removing all duality produced by rationality, verbal delusions, binaries, dreams and even memories.<sup>1</sup>

Satrājīṭ's intellect had been clouded by his ego completely. When Satrājīṭ did come into the anteroom after making Krishna wait for a long time, he did not offer him due regard and just kept standing. Krishna smiled at his ignorance and said, 'Ārya Satrājīṭ, I have information that your life could be in danger because of this great jewel you have in your possession, the indescribable refulgent Syamantaka Mani. I have come here to suggest to you that you deposit this Mani in the royal treasury so that you remain safe. Dvaraka will remain safe only if you remain safe.'

Satrājīṭ laughed loudly. 'Krishna, looks like you are afraid not of my safety, but my power. You very well know that this new Dvaraka is based on my money. If I demand my money back, you will have to sell yourself. That day is not very far when you will have to do that. Otherwise, you can let me become the king of Dvaraka. I will let you keep the title of Dwarakadhisha.'

Krishna kept quiet and walked out. He could see that Satrājīṭ had been totally overtaken by the arrogance produced out of his attachment to his jewel. Krishna knew the route. 'Pleasure-attachment-enjoyment-arrogance-anger-delusion-loss of reason-loss of intellect-destruction' was a well-traversed path of many otherwise noble souls. Krishna knew it well. He had a sense of the ruin that awaited Satrājīṭ, who had otherwise been a bulwark of strength for the Yadavas. *Hubris destroys the best of minds.*

Even though Satrājīṭ had given the big rebuff to Krishna, Krishna smiled. The moment he left Satrājīṭ's house, he took away the peace of his mind. Once the swell of arrogance had subsided, apprehension gripped Satrājīṭ. He had seen Krishna destroying both the arrogant and also arrogance. Those who had their arrogance destroyed became ever indebted to Krishna. Those who did not let their arrogance be destroyed got destroyed themselves.

Restlessness took over Satrājīṭ. He could not sleep through the night. He feared a knock at his door any moment by Pradyot or Veerabhadra with soldiers who would take away the Syamantaka Mani. His own identity had become totally subsumed in the Mani.

Satrājīṭ spent the whole night twisting and turning. In the morning, he called his brother Prasenajit and handed over the Mani to him for safekeeping. He also instructed him to keep it in his house and not let anyone know about it, not even his own wife Pragati and daughters Satyabhama, Vratini and Prasvapini.

Prasenajit was thrilled to feel the jewel in his hand. He kept it with him for a day, but not being able to bear the thrill of having the most precious jewel in the world in his grasp, Prasenajit decided to go hunting early the next morning. He did not tell anyone, not even his family, that he was going hunting. He proudly wore the Mani in his diadem and left for hunting before dawn, hoping to get some good game at the time of sunrise. Yet, the brightness of the jewel he wore gave him away to the early risers who spotted him leaving Dvaraka that early. The soldiers at the northern gate of Dvaraka also saw him. He left towards Nāgeshvara<sup>2</sup> forests. He did not come back.

When the family found Prasenajit missing in the morning, they tried to locate him for a few hours and then informed Satrājīṭ who panicked. He checked with the guard at the three gates in the east, west and north. The northern guards informed him that they had indeed seen Satrājīṭ proceeding towards Nāgeshvara forest. They also told him that they had seen him wearing a bright jewel that shone like the sun. Satrājīṭ nearly had a heart attack. He rushed on the trail of Prasenajit, only to find him lying dead in the forest, with the jewel gone.

Satrājīṭ looked around for the jewel for many hours but could not find it. He had to bring Prasenajit's body back to Dvaraka in time for

cremation before nightfall.

Prasenajit was cremated but Satrājīit was not comforted till he could get his jewel back. All his life had now been subordinated to a mere jewel.

The next day, Satrājīit called for an assembly of the Yadava nobles. Usually, weighty issues were discussed in the Yadava Sudharma Sabha. Satrājīit knew it too well that he did not stand a chance in Sudharma Sabha by accusing Shri Krishna. He, therefore, called for a meeting in his own house and vented his spleen. What shocked entire Dvaraka was that Satrājīit accused Krishna of murdering Prasenajit and stealing the Syamantaka Mani. The Mani was bringing grief to everyone who possessed it.

The allegations were passed on to Shri Krishna, who smiled at this turn of events. He had foreseen this. With the entry of this element of greed and arrogance into the Yadava affairs, he foresaw more and more trouble for the Yadavas as their power and money grew. *Dharma is scared to stay in a house where greed and arrogance are co-residents.*

Krishna decided to clear his name. He knew that the Yadavas were going in a direction of ruin and perdition after they had become secure. *There is great merit in insecurity. It usually keeps men on the straight and narrow. A secure man rarely feels compelled to do his duties. That is why gurus have recommended continuous churning of consciousness through various rituals and examinations of character. A satisfied king soon comes to grief, so does an unsatisfied Brahmin<sup>3</sup>. It is the duty of the Brahmin to goad the kings to greater glory in pursuit of Dharma, and duty of the king to meet the meagre wants of the Brahmins.*

Krishna needed to satisfy the population in general as the rumours grew. He was well aware of the power of rumours. He remembered the rumours that had destroyed the kingdom of Rāma by forcing him to abandon Sitā to satisfy public opinion. Krishna did not want to just follow the public opinion. He knew that *those who do not have the capacity to mould the public opinion are condemned to follow it in a way that may not always be in the interest of the Rājya, Dharma or Rta.*



Krishna went looking for the killer of Prasenajit with a select band of warriors headed by the loyal Veerabhadra. He did a forensic survey of the place where Prasenajit had been found. He then proceeded to follow the blood trail. Very soon he came across a lion, which seemed to have killed Prasenajit, eaten some flesh out of him and then dragged the diadem with him to a place where the animal itself had been killed. The diadem lay next to the lion but the jewel was missing.

A further search ensued, tracking the footprints of a man. The marks led to a cave. They had to stop and consider their next step. Veerabhadra wanted to go in himself leaving Krishna outside, but Krishna was firm. 'It is my name that needs to be cleared, Veerabhadra, not yours. I will go in, as there is hardly space enough in this cave for more than one man to pass. You stay here till you hear the Pāñchajanya, or if you do not hear the Pāñchajanya for more than a prahara<sup>4</sup>.

Krishna went in. The cave was narrow, but it opened up into a huge cavern, where he saw a tribal girl wearing the Syamantaka jewel and dancing away. He interrupted the dance and asked the girl from where she had got the jewel. The girl shouted for help and out emerged her father from the deeper recesses of the cavern.

The man was massive. He towered over Krishna. His hairy body, protruding visage and dark colour made him appear like a bear. He attacked Krishna. Krishna, however, was nimble and swift. He used his well-tryed manoeuvre of tiring the giant out. Once he was totally overcome by fatigue, he pinned him down and sounded the Pāñchajanya.

The jewel was recovered. The great tribal chief Jāmbavana accepted the suzerainty of the Yadavas and asked for a condition in return. Krishna granted the condition provided it was reasonable. Jāmbavana asked Krishna to marry his daughter to cement the relationship. Krishna was caught in a bind. He could not marry without the permission of his present wife and Jāmbavana insisted that he would not let him go till Krishna acquiesced. He held Krishna's feet in reverence and refused to let go. In Sanatana tradition, one can attack a person if he is attacked, but one cannot kick a person at one's feet in supplication.

Krishna sent Veerabhadra to fetch Rukmini. Rukmini came to the spot, assessed the situation and granted permission to Krishna to marry Jāmbavati, the daughter of Jāmbavana in the interest of Rājya Dharma. She knew Krishna's philosophy—Rājya Dharma is greater than svadharma, Rashtra Dharma is greater than Rājya Dharma. She knew the story of Rāma and Sitā. She let Rājya Dharma triumph over svadharma. The rites happened throughout the night and Krishna returned to Dvaraka in full glory the next day with a new bride.



- [1](#) Pramana, viparyaya, vikalpa, nidrā and smṛiti (Patanjali Sutra 1:3)
- [2](#) Modern-day Nāgēshvara Jyotirlinga in Saurashtra
- [3](#) The virtuous, not the priestly class alone.
- [4](#) Three hours



**- 36 -**

## **Satyabhama**

**K**rishna requested Ārya Vasudeva, the Dharmadhikari of Yadava Republic, to convene the Sudharma Sabha. He wanted to clear his name.

The Sabha was called even as the celebrations of Krishna's second marriage with Jāmbavati were going on. Ārya Viprathu, who had taken retirement in Mathura, was requested to assume the responsibility of conducting the proceedings one more time, as it also happened to be the first Sudharma Sabha in the newly built Sabha Bhavan in Dvaraka.

The Sabha commenced to discuss an agenda that was to be proposed by Krishna on the floor of the house.

Shri Krishna got up and spoke in a very sombre tone, 'Maharaja Ugrasena, Dharmadhikari Vasudeva, Ārya Viprathu and the members of the Sabha, we have chosen this form of governance over the other preferred forms of governance prevalent in Aryavarta. We had hoped that democracy is the best form of governance. Yet, when the crunch came and Kamsa took over the throne from Maharaja Ugrasena in this very Sudharma Sabha, not one person except Ārya Vasudeva spoke up. Great maharathis and atirathis kept sitting quietly even though any one of them could have defeated Kamsa then and there. The problem of democracy is that it engenders hope in every person that he too can wield power, not just an enabler of performing duties,

but as an end in itself. *The democratic form of government places more stress on counting the men, rather than weighing the men. When the count becomes more important than weight, extraordinary situations like the one we have here today arise.*'

Shri Krishna then recounted the events leading to his marriage with Jāmbavati. He then dramatically produced the Syamantaka Mani and held it aloft. 'This jewel is accursed. *Jewels produce an unimaginable degree of vanity, greed and arrogance. I have never had any use for them. For the longest part of my life, I have worn peacock feather in my diadem and Pārijāta garland around my neck. The shine must come from the persona of a human being and not from the jewels he wears.*'

Krishna requested the Dharmadhikari to hand over the Syamantaka jewel to Satrājī in front of the whole Sabha. Vasudeva called a visibly embarrassed Satrājī to the throne of the king and handed Syamantaka Mani to him. The hall rent with the familiar cry of 'Jai Shri Krishna'.

The Sabha dispersed.

By the time Satrājī reached his house, the news had already reached his family. Pragati and her daughters were waiting for him at the doorstep of his palace. When Satrājī reached his house, the wife and daughters took him to task, 'Shame on you, how could you ever doubt Shri Krishna? Does anyone doubt one's own deity? Whatever we have today is all because of him. He saved us from Kamsa, but you have earned filthy money from Kamsa and you are sitting on top of that money. That seems to have completely sullied your mind. Bad money brings bad influence. We will not allow you to enter the palace. You have to go back and offer this jewel to Shri Krishna.'

Satrājī was in a state of turmoil. His vanity had been stripped bare before the whole Yadava Sabha. *Infamy is a punishment worse than death.* How would he redeem his reputation? Reputation is a higher possession than all the riches of the world.

Satrājī stood transfixed. He could not bring himself up to the task. Pragati and his daughters helped him by offering to go with him. 'That would be good,' thought Satrājī, because if he went to call on Shri Krishna with his wife, he cannot refuse audience to him. Moreover, the presence of women would definitely soften the attitude

of Krishna towards him. He readily agreed and took Pragati and his three daughters to the palace of the Dwarakadhisha.

Satrājī, Pragati and the three girls presented themselves before Krishna and Rukmini. Satrājī just stood there. Pragati spoke this time, ‘Madhava, we have committed a big mistake and earned huge negative Karma for ourselves by doubting your intention in keeping this jewel away. Greed, vanity and arrogance have been our undoing. Please accept this jewel back on behalf of our whole family.’

Krishna did not answer. He was caught in a quandary. His better sense told him that accepting a jewel, which he himself had called accursed, would be a disaster both for him and for the State. Yet, the courtesy of tradition demanded that he could not refuse it. He just stood there, looking helplessly at Rukmini.

Rukmini understood his predicament. She said, ‘Shri Madhava would not like to refuse a gift from you, but you may offer something more valuable than this. This, after all, is just a piece of stone.’

Pragati was sharp. She also understood the predicament of Shri Krishna. She grabbed the opportunity, ‘Madhava, I offer you three jewels in lieu of one. Please accept my three daughters Satyabhama, Vratini and Prasvapini as your wives.’ Krishna stood there without a response. Rukmini understood the implication of another decline of this request and she said yes. The three daughters were taken aback at the sudden development, but quickly realised the great fortune that they had come into. Rukmini embraced all of them. A quick wedding ceremony followed and Satyabhama became the third queen of Krishna. Vratini and Prasvapini took their place in the pantheon of Krishna’s queens after her.

‘How will you manage so many queens,’ asked Uddhava during a moment of quiet privacy to Krishna.

‘Uddhava, it does not matter to someone who is unattached to the fruits of one’s kriya. I think I have explained the difference between kriya and Karma on many occasions. This trial by many queens is similar to the trial by many gopis that you have yourself seen. When the man has ascended to his level of highest consciousness and has learnt to stay there in Turiya, does he get affected? It is not difficult to stay true to all of them. Rukmini is verily the Lakshmi who will take care of the house of the Dwarakadhisha and Satyabhama will be the

warrior queen. Jāmbavati will have her own place. The two sisters of Satyabhama have their own priorities. It is my Dharma to be even to them. You know that samatva<sup>1</sup> is not difficult for me at all.'

Just as the Syamantaka Mani affair was coming to a close, a message from Balarama came to Krishna. It was a worrying message in the normal course. Balarama had sent him the message that the Pandavas had been missing for a long time after they went to Varanavat.

Krishna shared this with Maharaja Ugrasena, Vasudeva and Rukmini, the principal queen. Krishna knew that time for the Pandavas to reappear was coming near. He had to go to Hastinapura to find out when and how they would reappear. It was also essential for him to go to Hastinapura in response to Balarama's message so that nobody should get suspicious that he knew what was happening.

While Krishna was away, Shatadhanvā became jealous and greedy. He did something, which Krishna had feared that the Yadavas could degenerate to. One night, he entered Satrājīt's house, killed him and decamped with the jewel.

Satyabhama's father had been killed and her mother had been widowed for the same jewel, which Krishna had called accursed. Satyabhama rode out in a chariot and reached Hastinapura to inform Krishna and Balarama of the ghastly crime. Krishna and Balarama immediately rushed back to Dvaraka only to find that Shatadhanvā had fled. They chased Shatadhanvā right up to Mithilā and killed him. Before he was killed, he revealed that he did not have the jewel and had kept it at Dvaraka with Akrura. The brothers rushed back to Dvaraka only to find Akrura gone.

Akrura was successfully summoned back from Kāshi. Syamantaka Mani was taken from him and finally kept in the Dvaraka treasury. Krishna was still of the opinion that the Mani should be exchanged for money with some other State that had greater greed than Satrājīt for the jewel.

Satyabhama was given the task of handling this delicate task by the Sudharma Sabha. She would have become the inheritor of this unlucky jewel, if she had had any intention of keeping it. She had willingly contributed the jewel to the Yadava treasury. She contacted her mother Pragati's sister Aditi, who suggested that it could be given

to her and she would buy it in instalments. Little did Aditi realise how this step of having this accursed gem would get her embroiled in a crisis. Satyabhama informed her father-in-law, the Dharmadhikari of the Rājya, and delivered the gem to Aditi. Aditi's husband's kingdom was named Indraloka<sup>2</sup> and was located between Vanga<sup>3</sup> and Pragajyotisha.

As if their peripatetic travels were not bad enough, Krishna came to know that the time had come for the Pandavas to come out in the open. Swayamvara at Kampilya by Drupada was being organised. Information had come to Dvaraka as well. Krishna confided in Rukmini. While people thought that Shri Krishna had left for Kampilya to take part in another swayamvara, Rukmini knew that something else, something momentous was about to happen. On the other hand, even before Krishna could return from Kampilya, another crisis on account of Syamantaka Mani would be on hand.





- <sup>1</sup> Equal treatment/equanimity, generally used in reference to mental responses to various circumstances.
- <sup>2</sup> Modern-day Coochbehar
- <sup>3</sup> Bengal



**- 37 -**

## **The Eye of the Fish**

**T**he Pandavas reached Kampilya after a two-day journey and camped on the banks of the Gangā in a temple. They introduced themselves as Brahmins.

Krishna reached Kampilya directly, after leaving Balarama behind at Dvaraka, as Balarama was quite exhausted in chasing and killing Shatadhanvā. Drupada himself received him. Krishna made it clear that he would be a part of the jury, not the competition.

The Pandavas remembered Drupada well. Their guru Dronacharya and Drupada had been classmates in the gurukula of Rishi Bharadwaja. Drupada had a much larger territory earlier, covering both sides of the Gangā. His capital used to be Ahichchhatrapura.<sup>1</sup> Drupada had promised his friend that he could bank on him whenever he needed help. In times of dire need, Dronacharya had gone to Ahichchhatrapura to seek his help and get employment. Dronacharya was well known as a military trainer, one of the best experts in the art of warfare, specialised in archery.

When Dronacharya reached Drupada's palace and gave his introduction to the gatekeeper, the gatekeeper returned to tell him that he would have to wait as the king was busy. Apparently, Drupada had become so arrogant that he refused to recognise him. He sent a message that he was welcome to receive alms as an ordinary Brahmin, but not as a friend. Dronacharya returned humiliated, but

not before swearing that he would avenge this humiliation inflicted on him by Drupada. It was then that he started his own military academy.

In due time, Dronacharya found employment in Hastinapura, where he taught and trained the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Arjuna was his favourite disciple. After their military education had been completed, Dronacharya asked for his Guru Dakshina from his disciples, the princes. He asked them to defeat Drupada and bring him to his feet tied in ropes.

The Kauravas tried but were beaten badly by Drupada. The Pandavas led by Arjuna went in next and defeated Drupada. They brought Drupada tied in ropes in disgrace before Dronacharya, who disgraced him further by arrogantly throwing a part of his territory back to him as alms. Drupada was allowed to retain his territory south of River Gangā. That is how Drupada had to shift his capital to Kampilya. Ever since that day, Drupada vowed revenge on Dronacharya and trained his daughter Draupadi as well as all his eleven sons with the single-minded objective of avenging his humiliation.

On the day of swayamvara, the five brothers also reached the place of the great event.

A unique condition had to be fulfilled by the potential suitor to be able to claim the hand of Draupadi in this swayamvara. A rotating fish target was hung at a height of fifteen feet from the ground. To be able to stake one's claim, one had to first hit the eye of the rotating fish target by looking at it in a pot of oil kept on the ground. All those who could perform this act would be shortlisted and then the girl had the freedom to choose from among them. The girl always had the absolute freedom to deny her affections to anyone. Normally, background checks of most of the suitors would be done. Krishna had a hand in suggesting this test to Drupada. Drupada readily agreed because he knew well that only Arjuna had the capacity to perform this impossible task. The whole of Aryavarta already knew that the Pandavas were alive and Drupada thought this to be an excellent idea to bring them out from hiding. Karna too had an outside chance, but then the choice rested with Draupadi.

The jury headed by Krishna read out the rules. Shishupala objected to the presence of Krishna in the jury, but Drupada overruled him. Krishna said, ‘Vidarbha Kumara, unlike some other swyamvaras, we do not intend to rig the swayamvara.’

Shishupala took the oblique reference badly and walked out in a huff with the Magadha prince Sahadeva. Some other princes allied to Jarasandha also protested at the presence of Krishna as the chief of the jury and staged a walkout.

The swayamvara began with Duryodhana trying his hand at the target. He could not hit the target because he was not able to see the target. One by one, many princes tried the feat, but all of them came a cropper.

It was then that Karna got up from the invited princes’ gallery and walked up to the platform.

Suddenly, Draupadi got up and objected, ‘This is not a contest for a low-born,’ and humiliated Karna in public.

Krishna as the chief of the Jury interjected, ‘Krishnā<sup>2</sup>, the shāstras do not confer the status of a Brahmin or a Kshatriya by birth. It is the quality that a man acquires that gives him his distinction. Karna is one of the finest archers not just in Bharatavarsha but also in the whole of Jambudwipa<sup>3</sup>. He has acquired his kshatriyahood by being an able disciple of Guru Parashurama and by virtue of being the king of Anga. He has every right to participate in this competition. However, the girl is supreme in a swayamvara. I would urge you to apply your mind rationally and logically and not be carried away by your prejudices.’

Draupadi snarled like a wounded tigress. She had inherited a streak of arrogance from her father. ‘I will not allow the son of a sūta to even participate.’

Krishna overruled Draupadi. ‘As her elder brother and the chief of the jury, I would like to overrule her objections. Though she has the final choice to accept or reject any suitor, there is absolutely no occasion for her to deny the chance of participation to anyone.’

Draupadi kept quiet. Here was the man against whose counsel, she would never go.

It was now Karna’s turn to indulge in histrionics. ‘You think I really care for an ill-bred woman like this girl. I won’t have her for

my sandal. She is not fit for me.’ Karna threw a fit and walked out leaving the other Kauravas behind.

One by one the princes came. Before taking the shot at the target, Krishna asked every prince the same question, ‘What do you see?’

Every prince would come up with an ever more expansive answer. Someone would say that he saw the whole universe. Someone would be a little less ambitious and would see only the faces in the swayamvara sabha. Only Vikarna, the youngest Kaurava, said that he saw only the fish. Krishna was doing this test on purpose.

Not one prince succeeded in hitting the target. It was then that Drupada started a soliloquy, ‘Is there not one brave archer in this wide world who can take up this challenge. Is this earth now free of real warriors? Is there none in the world who can accomplish this simple task of hitting a moving target? My daughter and I will have no recourse left except to sing the praises of Aryavarta’s cowardice and go and do a river burial for my daughter and myself. O Shiva! Is there none in the three realms who would absolve me of this infamy.’ Having said this, Drupada got up from his throne and proceeded to take off his royal clothes, preparing to lead the life of an ascetic. Draupadi joined him.

It was then that a young man wearing the dress of a Brahmin got up and asked for permission to string the bow and take a shot at the rotating fish. Duryodhana laughed aloud and said, ‘Hey Brahmin, this is the sport of Kshatriyas. You better stay out of it.’

Drupada was intrigued. Though the young man wore the garb of a Brahmin, his physical features gave him away as a warrior. He had the tall, lean and muscular mien of someone who had spent hundreds of hours outdoors, certainly not the job of a Brahmin. Moreover, there was a man-mountain sitting among the five Brahmins.

The young man quietly asked, ‘Kumara, who is a Brahmin and who is a Kshatriya? How does one distinguish a Kshatriya from a Brahmin? If a sheep wears the skin of a lion, does it become a lion? Or if a lion dons the skin of a sheep, does it become a sheep?’

At that point, it was confirmed to Krishna that the man was indeed Arjuna. He asked the name of the young man and his kula.

‘My name, Achyuta, is Savyasāchi and my kula will be known by my actions. Suffice it to say that my kula is one that strives to protect

Rashtra Dharma from dushtas<sup>4</sup>.’

While Duryodhana was trying to recall where he had heard that name, Drupada remembered immediately that an inquiry had come from the Kauravas to look for a person with that name, as they suspected the Pandavas to be alive and hiding in Panchala. It dawned on him that this man could be Arjuna. He was thrilled. After all, the test he had designed was such that only one person could surely pass that test along with, perhaps, a few others. Draupadi, of course, had already given in to Krishna Vāsudeva’s logic. The young man, Savyasāchi, was given the chance to try his luck.

Savyasāchi climbed up the platform and strung the bow in one motion with the practised ease of a great warrior. He then looked at the shadow of the rotating fish and seemed to meditate on it forever. Krishna asked him, ‘What do you see?’

He did not seem to hear him at first, being so absorbed looking at the shadow of his target. Krishna asked him again, this time quite loudly. With the eyes focused on his target as if in deep meditation, he replied, ‘O Madhava, O Achyuta, O Gopāla, I see nothing right now, except the eye of the fish.’

Krishna knew at that moment that the target was going to be hit.

After going into deep meditation on the target for an eternity, the young man released the arrow. The arrow pierced the eye of the fish.

Krishna announced, ‘Please welcome Arjuna and the Pandavas, O King of Panchala.’

The Kauravas were livid at this. They considered this to be a deceit played by Krishna. Duryodhana got up from his seat and chided Krishna. The ever-smiling Krishna replied, ‘Duryodhana, let me not reveal more. All I need to tell you is that I know everything. Everything from the day the Pandavas left for Varanavat to this day. Do you want me to reveal more? You better go back to Hastinapura and prepare to receive the bride. I am bringing the Pandavas back to Hastinapura after the wedding.’

Duryodhana piped down and instead of staying for the wedding, he left in a huff.

Drupada started the wedding preparations of Arjuna with Draupadi. However, the Pandavas asked for permission to go back to their

mother Kunti with the bride-to-be to take her blessing and bring Mata Kunti back to the Panchala Palace.

The brothers, along with Draupadi, reached the temple where they had been staying incognito. Arjuna wanted to give a surprise to his mother. He made others wait outside Kunti's room and went in. He announced loftily to his mother, 'Mata, I have brought a great gift for you.'

Kunti, as was usual for her, said, 'Very good, Arjuna. All five brothers divide the gift equally among yourselves.'

When she learnt that the gift was a bride won by Arjuna, she repented having asked them to share the gift equally and released the brothers from the order. Yet, the brothers conferred among themselves and Yudhishtira, the wise one, the paragon of Dharma, opined that betraying their mother's word was an adharma, even if she had herself recanted. Draupadi was brought into the discussion. Given the sanctity attached to the position of women in the family, Draupadi had full liberty to say no to this proposal. She had chosen Arjuna, not his brothers, but as often happens in the affairs of men, she chose to keep quiet and go along with Yudhishtira's advice. When the decision was conveyed to Drupada, there was great dismay all around. Krishna disapproved of the decision not because of anything else, but on the simple principle that Arjuna won Draupadi and she had garlanded Arjuna. It would be an impossible mental feat for her to treat all the five husbands equally. That would be a test of a lifetime.

Yet, Yudhishtira's interpretation of Dharma prevailed, much like Bhishma's interpretation when he refused to take over the reins of Hastinapura in spite of the inability of the elders to find a worthy successor to Maharaja Shāntanu. The wisest of men have failed to balance the different demands of different Dharmas in times of trial.



- <sup>1</sup> Modern-day Bareilly
- <sup>2</sup> Draupadi's other name, as she was a sister of Krishna
- <sup>3</sup> Asian continent
- <sup>4</sup> Knaves





**- 38 -**

## **Indraprastha**

**D**uryodhana rushed to the house of Shakuni. He was flustered. His face was flushed, his breathing heavy and his head hot. Shakuni looked at Duryodhana in that state and realised that something was amiss. Even though Duryodhana was a highly strung man at the best of times, this behaviour was unusual, even for Duryodhana, in the sharp eye of Shakuni.

‘Something terribly wrong, Suyodhana?’ asked Shakuni.

‘Our worst fears have come true, Matula. Those five brothers and their mother reported from Kurukshetra, whom we suspected to be the Pandavas and Mata Kunti, have indeed turned out to be exactly them. They turned up at Kampilya and won Draupadi. Draupadi humiliated Karna and all of us were humiliated by the lowly eye-of-the-fish trick by Krishna. We were set up, Matula. Jatil Muni was right. As long as Krishna is aiding the Pandavas, we will have no respite.’

Shakuni comforted Duryodhana and promised him that he would soon go to Rakshagriha to confer with Jatil Muni and work out the next scheme.

The events, however, overtook Hastinapura rather quickly. Krishna had accompanied the Pandavas to Hastinapura. He confronted Dhritarashtra and made the entire episode of Lākshāgriha public. The entire public of the Kuru Rājya rose as one in favour of the Pandavas.

Krishna shamed the Hastinapura elites into coming together to shame Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana. Dhritarashtra feigned ignorance. Vidura exposed his brother in front of Bhishma and Krishna. The situation so developed that Dhritarashtra had to agree to immediately give the Pandavas their share of the Rājya. Even though Bhishma and Vidura insisted that Yudhishtira was not just the most suitable but also the rightful successor to the throne of Hastinapura by virtue of being the son of the previous king, Krishna worked out a truce and agreed to have only the part of Kuru kingdom to the west of the Yamuna as the Pandava's share.

Shakuni tried to stall, prevaricate and confuse. Dhritarashtra, however, was too weak to do anything. The only thing that Shakuni succeeded in achieving was that the state was bifurcated and the Pandavas got Khandavaprastha as the place to build their capital. Rakshagriha also passed to the hands of the Pandavas. Duryodhana thought that he had managed a great coup by palming Khandavaprastha off to the Pandavas without realising that the entire stretch beyond the Yamuna was under the operational area of Jatil Muni. If the Pandavas were to take Khandavaprastha, what will happen to the Nagas who had been living there for centuries and were never tamed by the Kuru scions? What will Jatil Muni do if his beloved Manimālā along with all her family members had to flee the area and go to a place farther away?

Khandavaprastha proved to be a difficult take for the Pandavas. The Nagas could not be evicted that easily and the Pandavas needed to clear the forest to build their capital. They had a message announced in the Khandavaprastha forests that all inhabitants should clear the area. The Nagas started making guerilla attacks on the escort parties accompanying the forest-clearing parties.

After consultations, Bhima put the forests of Khandavaprastha on fire. The carnage that followed the fire took its toll on the flora and fauna, but also had the effect of making the Nagas leave their age-old homeland. Takshaka, Vasuki and Manimālā went away swearing revenge. Takshaka quickly married off Manimālā with Banakantaka and all of them relocated to Uttara Kuru<sup>1</sup>, far beyond the reach of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Thus, started a feud that would have an epoch-changing impact in the future.

Krishna did not approve of the wanton destruction. Yet, he advised that the Pandavas should quickly build their capital and settle down. The delimitation and demarcation of the Pandava territory were important. Yudhishtira, Nakula and Sahadeva got down to the painstaking job of building up the structure of the empire as Arjuna secured the borders and Bhima terrorised the enemies of the State.

The Pandava territory was extended from just north of Mathura, which was under Jarasandha now, to cover the entire area between the Yamuna and Sarasvati right up to the northern reaches of Thārasthāna and extending to the southern edge of Kamyaka Vana. The border with the Virāta kingdom was formed by the boundary between Kamyaka Vana and Dwaita Vana.

Krishna came to visit them after a few months. Yudhishtira was thinking of performing the Rajasuya Yagna. As he was elder to Duryodhana, Duryodhana could not object to Yudhishtira seeking to establish his suzerainty over entire Bharatavarsha as a chakravartin. The concept of chakravartin had united the contours of Bharatavarsha for centuries. Krishna lauded the idea. But he had his own doubts.

‘I have no doubt that the majority of the kings would accept Yudhishtira’s lordship, not just because his army under Arjuna is invincible but also because everyone is convinced of the just nature of this kingdom. As a Dharmic Rājya, the Pandava kingdom has no parallels. It conforms to every deep tenet of Rashtra Dharma and Rājya Dharma, but you cannot have any success in this venture as long as Jarasandha is alive. He has deep influence on nearly half of Bharatavarsha. From Pragajyotisha in the east to Magadha, Koshala, Chedi and Vidarbha, his lordship is supreme. Unless we kill him first, there is no escape. You cannot be a chakravartin as long as he is alive.’

‘What should we do, Keshava? We want to live in peace, but Duryodhana’s evil nature just does not let him treat us fairly. He feels the Rājya is his right. In spite of being told innumerable times by Mahatma Vidura and Pitamaha Bhishma that Rājya is a duty and not a right, and that duty is to be performed by the most capable, he does not listen. He is now totally under the spell of Shakuni, who seems to be in the grip of some evil force,’ said Yudhishtira.

Krishna had learnt about the evil cult that Shakuni was a member of. Having dealt with Kutil Muni in the past, Krishna was fully aware of Kutil Dharma. He had battled Banakantaka in the past and was much amused to learn that he had inherited the mantle of Kutil Muni and had styled himself as Jatil Muni. Krishna remembered Chandrachuda and sent for him. It was a good time to give a little bit of deception back to the conspirators.

Chandrachuda turned up within a day at Indraprastha. He paid obeisance to Krishna when he came.

‘Hello, Chandrachuda. How is your desire to pursue vidya now?’ Krishna’s question was interspersed with many suggestions.

‘I am so happy today, Krishna. It is my great fortune that you still remember me. I have meditated on you every day since you left Sandipani Ashrama.’

‘How is your guru, Jatil Muni?’ asked Krishna.

‘Jatil Muni has relocated to the Sindhu kingdom of Jayadratha, the husband of Dushālā, the only sister of the Kauravas. He is now being hosted in the capital Mulasthāna<sup>2</sup> in a big palace. His palace in Rakshagriha has been taken over by the local Pandava administration. Kanika has now taken permanent residence in Hastinapura and lives in Shakuni’s palace. The Nagas have relocated to Uttara Kuru, beyond Madra and Kashyap<sup>3</sup> Pradesh. The alliance between the Kuru, the Sindhu, the Gandhara and the Nagas has been greatly strengthened by Dushālā’s husband Jayadratha marrying Shakuni’s sister and Jatil Muni marrying Takshaka’s daughter Manimālā. This is the same Manimālā who would not let a Kutil Dharmi come anywhere near her. The destruction of Khandavaprastha is not going to do good for the Pandavas. They fell into the trap of Shakuni. Shakuni has managed to make the Nagas a permanent enemy of the Pandavas and has also forced them to ally with Kutil Dharma’s prophet. Jatil Muni is now very powerful as the Nagas have become very soft towards Kutil Dharma in spite of their fierce commitment to Sanatana Dharma. Kanika now runs a very big temple dedicated to Jhankal, masquerading as a new Sanatana deity, but actually penetrating the psyche of the people slowly and insidiously. How did you let it happen, Krishna? Did you not realise the consequences of the bad Karma that would accrue through wanton destruction of the

plant, animal and bird kingdoms residing in Khandavaprastha?’ Chandrachuda was asking some very mature questions.

Krishna admitted that even he was outwitted by the turn of events. He also admitted that he should have asked for Chandrachuda much earlier. It was a rare lapse for Krishna, but it would have long-term consequences. The wheel of Karma grinds on remorselessly and ceaselessly in an endless cycle of Time.

Having known the extent of damage Shakuni and Kanika had wrought and having learnt the extent of infiltration Kanika was making for Kutil Dharma in Hastinapura, Krishna was forced to rethink his strategy.

Krishna called upon King Yudhishtira, ‘I will go along with your strategy of holding a Rajasuya Yagna. However, I have to get Jarasandha killed. My spies have told me that he has scheduled his human sacrifice ritual, the Narmedha Yagna, in a month from now. He has to be stopped; otherwise, he will start his own Rajasuya Yagna. We will then have a war between the Pandavas and Jarasandha, with the Kauravas helping Jarasandha. He will have Kāshi and Pragajyotisha on his side from the east, Chedi and Vidarbha from the south, Sindhu and Gandhara from the west, and the Nagas from the north. You would lose the battle even before it starts. Your only option would be to accept the lordship of Jarasandha. Not a happy situation at all. Bhima and I will leave for Girivrija tomorrow. Arrange for a few horses and back-up logistics till Kāshi. We leave at the crack of dawn tomorrow.’



- [1](#) Modern-day Xinjiang and Kazakhstan
- [2](#) Modern-day Multān
- [3](#) Modern-day Kashmir



**- 39 -**

## **The Two Wrestlers**

**D**raupadi, who was like a sister to Krishna, had a major grievance. When the Pandavas had married Draupadi, Nārada had advised them to be very clear about how they were going to cohabit with Draupadi. He narrated the story of two brothers, Sunda and Upasunda, who had married a very beautiful girl together and ultimately died fighting over her. So, a rule was made that Draupadi would spend a full year with each of the brothers, and any of the other brother intruding over their privacy would be exiled for a period of a year. Accordingly, Draupadi had started her first period of cohabitation with Yudhishtira. Draupadi had summoned the highest powers of her own consciousness to be at a level where she would be even to all of them. Without the highest degree of equanimity, Draupadi herself would become a cause for quarrel amongst the brothers. Arjuna had to intrude into the privacy of Yudhishtira and Draupadi once in order to fetch his bow to rescue the cows of a Brahmin and in spite of Yudhishtira and Draupadi forgiving him, he chose to voluntarily go into exile. During his exile, he travelled all over Bharatavarsha and married Chitrāngada, the daughter of King Chitrasena of Manipura, and Subhadrā, the sister of Krishna. It was now known that Krishna himself wanted Arjuna to marry his beautiful sister, Subhadrā, but he was not sure how the Yadava clan would react to his proposal. He had developed a fair amount of

scepticism over the working of the Sudharma Sabha and the system of democratic functioning. He was quite sure that Dau Balarama would have his own ideas. Playfully, he facilitated the abduction of Subhadrā by Arjuna. In spite of the stand taken by the Yadavas, Krishna played upon the usual confusion in the Sudharma Sabha and no decision could be reached on how to rescue Subhadrā. Ultimately, Krishna praised the qualities of Arjuna and carried the day in convincing the Sabha to accept Arjuna as their in-law because they had different gotras in spite of the fact that the two were distant cousins. Krishna had accompanied Arjuna back and Draupadi had come to ask him how he could betray her like this. Draupadi told them that she was very cross with both Krishna and Arjuna and that she did not want to see their faces.

Krishna seized the opportunity and got Arjuna to accompany him to Girivrija along with Bhima. From Kāshi, they took the garb of mendicant Brahmins, took an iktārā in their hands and went wandering and seeking alms, to Girivrija. From Kāshi, they took the usual route through Pataliputra.

From Pataliputra, they walked slowly singing beautiful songs. Krishna and Arjuna were both masterful musicians and singers. Along the way, they built up quite a reputation and picked up a lot of followers. By the time they reached the forest outside Girivrija Mountains, they had a crowd of nearly one hundred young men with them. They put up at a camp outside the forests leading to Girivrija hills. The impregnable walls of Girivrija Fort were made up of five hills surrounding Girivrija from all the directions—Chaityaka, Griddhakoot, Vaibhara, Swarna and Shaila hills. The road to Girivrija went through a pass leading to the main gate between Chaityaka and Swarna hills.

Even before the break of twilight, the three mendicants had got up and had gone up the Griddhakoot hill, the highest of the five. From the hill, they wound their way down to the fort wall, scaled it and got down into the main market. Krishna did not want to go through the main gate, as they would then have been treated as normal mendicants coming into Girivrija to seek alms. Scaling the wall would give them a different aura, more so when they intended to let it be known.



Crowds had started gathering as the twilight had given way to the tender sun. The markets were alive because a major celebration was going to take place, leading to the Naramedha Yagna on Ashvin Purnima that was less than fifteen days away. The great Jarasandha had captured ninety-eight petty princes, and his vow would be complete with another two, after which the human sacrifice rituals could begin. This was also the pitra paksha<sup>1</sup>. People were busy attending to their pitaras during this time.

The mendicants roamed around freely, arousing the curiosity of the people. The spies soon got wind of these strangers. A spy went up to them and asked them who they were. Bhima, the man-mountain, laughed out aloud, ‘We are your king’s nemesis. We are the two remaining princes that he needs to complete the count for his yagna. Tell him that we are ready for his sacrifice.’

Jarasandha was reported this strange conversation. He summoned the three in his presence. Three handsome men stood before him. One towered over even Jarasandha, while the other two looked distinguished. Even though they were wearing the garb of Brahmins, Jarasandha was able to quickly notice that they had a muscular build and even had the marks of bowstring on their palms and bows on their shoulders.

‘Brahmins, you should not lie to me. You are definitely not Brahmins. You are Kshatriyas,’ said Jarasandha.

Krishna gave his bewitching smile.

Jarasandha looked intently at Krishna. He had heard so much about Krishna and heard people describe him and his smile so many times. He had practically been thinking of him so many times for so many years that he could easily be taken to be a Krishna-bhakta as his entire being was suffused with Krishna.

Jarasandha thought he had heard the description of that smile before.

‘Are you that deceitful cowherd that goes by the name of Krishna?’ asked Jarasandha, totally infuriated.

‘I am the same cowherd who has defeated you eighteen times, Jarasandha. I am here to challenge you one last time.’

‘Oh. You are the same person who ran away from the battlefield on the nineteenth occasion!’ Jarasandha taunted Krishna.

‘The nineteenth battle is not yet over,’ countered Krishna.

‘You are in my hands now and my Naramedha vow will easily be fulfilled. That’s what it looks like. I have to thank Mahādeva for fulfilling my vow.’

‘You are right, Jarasandha. We are Mahādeva’s gift to you. But your vow is that you can sacrifice only those princes whom you have defeated. You have not defeated any of us till now. We have come here ourselves to give you the opportunity. You can pick any one of us. If you are able to defeat that one person, all three of us would consider ourselves defeated. Your count of ninety-eight would go up to one hundred and one and you would then be able to perform your human-sacrifice yagna. Such a wonderful opportunity for you.’

Jarasandha considered the offer for a while. He was deeply apprehensive of Krishna but this seemed to be like suicide. ‘*There comes a day in the affairs of all men when they bring their ruin by sheer overconfidence*’, thought Jarasandha. He agreed to the proposal and acting exactly with the overconfidence and sense of chivalry that he thought should be his hallmark, he chose Bhima as the person to fight. Of the three, he was the only one who matched him in height, muscles and power.

Jarasandha treated the three very well. A combat bout began twelve days before the next Purnima. The whole of Girivrija and many people from across Magadha came to witness the great bout every day. The bout would begin in the afternoon and last for three hours. The two were well matched in every form of bout. They would fight with maces and then fight with bare hands once they had destroyed each other’s maces. A battle of the kind that had never been heard of ensued. It went on and on. Neither of the combatants could establish superiority over the other. The seesaw battle went on for twenty-five days, so much so that all the neighbouring kings travelled to Girivrija to watch the most famous malla-yudha<sup>2</sup> ever fought in the annals of Aryavarta.

One day before Kārtika Amavasyā, on the day of Dipavali, Krishna told Bhima that it was the twenty-sixth day of the combat. ‘Jarasandha,’ he said, ‘is especially powerful on the day of Amavasyā because of the tāmasic element in him. Bhima, if you are not able to kill him today, he will kill you tomorrow for sure. Just three hours

stand between the great destiny of Bharatavarsha and its destruction. You have to summon all your reserves into the fight today. Remember, you are the son of the indefatigable and invincible Vāyu God. Bring on all your fury today and blow him over. All you need to do is to somehow topple him and then I will tell you what to do. Just keep looking at me.'

Krishna, of course, knew the secret of childhood abdominal surgery of Jarasandha and he knew that he had a weak joint right in the middle of his mulādhāra<sup>3</sup>. He had got this information from Acharya Chandakaushika.

As the bout began on the Kārtika Chaturdashi of the waning moon, on the day that is called the Naraka Chaturdashi and celebrated in Magadha as a token of friendship between Jarasandha and Narakasura, Bhima managed to briefly pin down Jarasandha. It was not the first time that one had been able to pin the other down, but such moments never lasted long. As soon as Bhima managed to pin down Jarasandha, Krishna took a grass blade and tore it apart from the middle and then threw the parts in the opposite sides. Bhima immediately understood and swiftly turned Jarasandha around, placed his one foot on one leg of Jarasandha and yanked the other part apart with all his might. To everybody's surprise, Jarasandha's torso split at the base. Bhima managed to yank the split further till Jarasandha was leaking blood from all over. It did not take long for him to die.

Krishna, Bhima and Arjuna then visited Queen Saudamini, who had taken the killing of her husband with remarkable stoicism. Asti and Prāpti, the two daughters of Jarasandha and widows of Kamsa, were beside themselves with grief. Krishna consoled them and stayed on to crown Sahadeva, the son of Jarasandha, as the king of Magadha and also gave him the kingdom of Mathura as an official gift. He offered to take Asti and Prāpti back to Mathura, which they accepted after initial reluctance. They would be happier in a place they had once ruled as queens.





- [1](#) The fortnight dedicated to propitiating family ancestors.
- [2](#) Wrestling combat with mace
- [3](#) Coccyx



**- 40 -**

## **Yogeshvara Krishna**

**D**ecks were cleared for the Pandava's Rajasuya Yagna. As soon as the kings in Bharatavarsha learnt about the killing of Jarasandha by Bhima, the message of invincibility of the Pandavas spread far and wide.

Now Karna alone was the great warrior who remained fully committed to the Kauravas. With everyone knowing that Bhishma and Drona were likely to remain neutral in a conflict situation, Jarasandha's death was a significant strategic shift in the favour of the Pandavas. Chedi, Vidarbha, Sindhu, Kāshi and even Pragajyotisha acquiesced to the suzerainty of the Pandavas almost immediately. Yudhishtira performed a great Rajasuya Yagna and messengers were sent to every nook and corner of Bharatavarsha—from Gandhara to Kalinga, from Vanga to Pragajyotisha, and from Kashyap to Kishkindhā, Kanyākumari and Rameswarama. An overwhelming majority of kings were simply happy to pay tribute to the Pandavas. A few recalcitrant ones fell into line as soon as the news of Jarasandha's killing spread in the hinterland. The ninety-eight small kings who were going to be slaughtered as a sacrifice by Jarasandha did the greatest word-of-mouth publicity for the Pandavas. They became the goodwill ambassadors of Yudhishtira and his brothers.

Once the armies of Yudhishtira had traversed the length and breadth of Bharatavarsha and obtained tributes from everyone except

Dvaraka and Hastinapura, whom the Pandavas considered sacred spaces, the final yagna was to be performed in the presence of all the kings and their representatives. Dhritarashtra, the Kauravas, Bhishma, Vidura and all the other elders were invited from Hastinapura. There was a debate about inviting Karna, who had not paid tribute, but was not pursued as he was considered to be a vassal of Hastinapura. Yudhishtira did invite him, overruling Draupadi and Bhima, but Karna himself did not come. His jealousy and hurt were too overwhelming; so overwhelming that it triumphed over all the spiritual gains he had made through his devotion and Karma-kānda over the years.

As the proceedings began in a huge Sabha-griha built by Mayāpati, an interesting incident took place.

Bhima invited Duryodhana to take a round of the Sabha-griha. The Sabha-griha was divided into various sections. The biggest one was for the assembly and there were parts that reflected different aspects of special skills of Mayāpati. Bhima deliberately took Duryodhana around the ‘Lost-in-the-Maze’ portion first. Duryodhana got lost in the maze and had to shout for help to extricate himself. Bhima commented to Duryodhana, ‘See, Duryodhana, this maze is an accurate reflection of your own situation. You are lost in your mental maze. Better come out.’

Duryodhana was already burning with hurt at this ill-concealed insult when Bhima took him to ‘Maya Griha’ part of the Sabha-griha. It was built in a manner that it produced an illusion in the mind of the visitor. The protocol was to explain to the visitor that things would appear exactly the opposite of what they actually are. Thus, water would appear to be a solid floor beneath your feet and the floor would appear to be water. Duryodhana was deliberately not told this by Bhima. Duryodhana went in and kept stumbling until he tried to walk on a solid floor and fell headlong into the water.

Queen Draupadi and her consorts were watching this from a balcony. Peals of laughter went up when Duryodhana fell. To add insult to injury, Draupadi said something that would alter the course of her relationship with Duryodhana forever. It was never too great anyway, but a quasi-Kutil Dharmi like Duryodhana had begun to consider women as an inferior creation of Jhankal.

Draupadi uttered quite loudly for Duryodhana to hear, ‘Here is the blind son of a blind father.’

Draupadi violated some of the basic limits of Sanatana Dharma. It is not appropriate for a Sanatani to mock someone’s misfortune. The motion of Karma is very subtle. Men and women normally do not have the capacity to recognise this movement. If they could, they would never commit a mistake. The subtleties of Karma and Dharma are often not understood even by great and noble personalities like Bhishma and Drona. How could Draupadi have understood it? She mocked both Dhritarashtra and Duryodhana in one sentence. The Karma behind this kriya would come back to haunt her later.

Duryodhana came away smarting. He was already jealous of the Rajasuya Yagna being performed by Yudhishtira. On top of that, he had been humiliated by Draupadi in front of Bhima and other women. He had not been able to digest the killing of Jarasandha by Bhima. Shakuni had Jarasandha in his long-term plans. He walked into the assembly with a drawn face and sat next to Shakuni. Shakuni immediately sensed that Duryodhana was sulking and felt very happy.

Before beginning the yagna, Bhishma gave a nice little speech extolling the achievement of the Pandavas. He said that it had always been his dream to unite Bharatavarsha under a chakravartin, but he could not do it as he was himself not the king of Hastinapura. What he left unsaid was that never had a king of Hastinapura possessed the capability to achieve this kind of a feat. He ended his speech by telling Yudhishtira that in a Rajasuya Yagna, one had to begin by paying respect to the elders, the kings, rishis, friends and the exalted. ‘The arghya<sup>1</sup> needs to be given to all such people. Moreover, the youngest among you shall give the arghya, so Sahadeva would perform this task. You also have to choose the person to whom it may be given first.’

Yudhishtira requested Bhishma to also enlighten the person to whom the first arghya may be given, as agrapooja. Bhishma said unhesitatingly, ‘There are rishis present here, there are great kings present here but there is only one person here who combines the qualities of Brāhma and Kshātra, of a rishi, a yogi and a king. We have an Avatāra among our midst.



‘Yudhishthira, who else except Yogeshvara Krishna deserves this honour.’

Yudhishthira heard his own thought in Bhishma’s words. He immediately signalled to Sahadeva to begin the proceedings by washing the feet of Krishna as the first recipient of the sacred arghya, in form of the water of the Sarasvati.

Sahadeva was only too happy to perform the task. He went to Shri Krishna, placed his feet lovingly in a flat vessel and poured the holy water of the Sarasvati mixed with five sacred herbs on Krishna’s feet. He then touched his wet feet to his forehead and proceeded to dry them with a towel. After drying his feet, Sahadeva began to apply sandal paste to them and to venerate them with a form of worship offered to the first among equals in a yagna.

Even as Sahadeva had started applying the paste, there were deep murmurs in the quarter where Rukmi and Shishupala were sitting. Duryodhana was also seen contributing to the ruckus.

Shishupala’s face contorted in jealousy-filled disgust. He was a direct cousin of Krishna, but all his ambitions had rested on marrying Rukmini and he could see Rukmini sitting in the ladies’ corner watching the proceedings as Krishna’s principal queen. If Krishna had not abducted and married Rukmini, maybe Shishupala himself would have been conducting a Rajasuya Yagna, or so he thought.

A surge of mixed emotions went through Shishupala’s mind—frustration, hate, anger, envy and hurt pride—and a full spectrum of the dashāri, the ten enemies of men, rustled through his frame. He stood up and started laughing derisively.

‘Just see what has become of this great line of Maharaja Shāntanu. They have lost all sense of pride and dignity. In front of this august gathering of great kings and rishis, they have found a cowherd to be the front man in their Rajasuya Yagna. Is this a Rajasuya Yagna or a cow milk distribution?’

The Sabha was stunned into silence, but Krishna remained smiling. He knew his cousin well. He was a hot head and it was for this reason that his aunt, Vasudeva’s sister Shrutashravā, had taken a vow from Krishna that he would ignore one hundred offences by his cousin.

Shishupala started a whole litany of insults to Krishna. He started out by calling him an illegitimate child of Vasudeva and then called

him a low-born. He further said that even if Krishna was a Yadava, it was his Karma of a cowherd that should decide his station and not his birth. Shishupala implied that he was a noble Yadava by being born in a king's house, whereas Krishna was an inferior cowherd because he actually tended cows. Shishupala went on and on.

After a while, Krishna started counting the insults. 'Fifty,' he said.

This infuriated Shishupala even more. He reeled off the insults with greater ferocity.

'Ninety,' warned Krishna.

'As if a damned cowherd has any power to do anything! He managed to slay Jarasandha through deceit only because he was generous to him. I am not going to be generous. I am going to cut his head off,' roared Shishupala.

'One hundred,' Krishna said smilingly.

Shishupala then called him a despicable worm of the earth—a snake.

In a flash of lightning, Krishna took out the Sudarshana Chakra from its holder near his waist and threw it at Shishupala. The Chakra took his head off and with the boomerang action, returned back to Krishna. Krishna nonchalantly wiped the Sudarshan Chakra and kept it back in the holder.

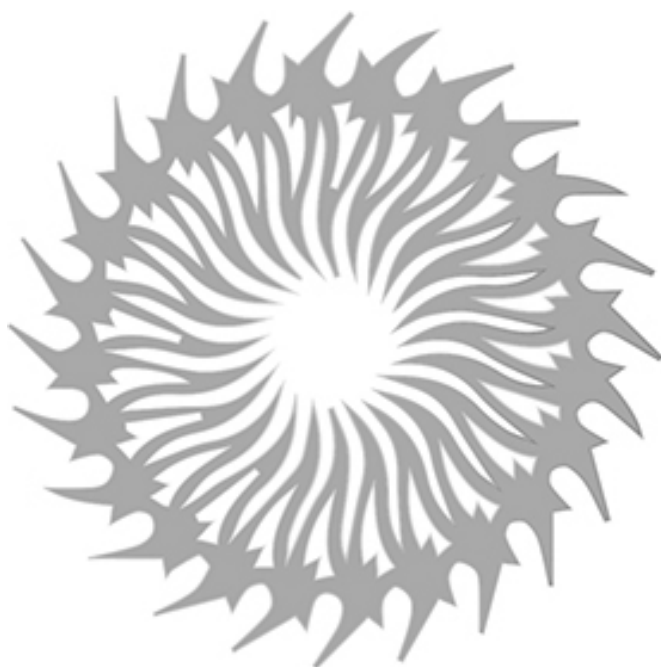
The Sabha fell silent.

Not one person spoke a word till the yagna was completed. Only the chanting of mantras could be heard.



<sup>1</sup> First offering

## **PART VII**





**- 41 -**

## **Narakasura**

**A**fter settling the Pandavas in their new-found glory as chakravartins, Krishna and Balarama returned to Dvaraka only to run into a new and major crisis.

Satyabhama had donned the battle gear and was ready to proceed to Vanga to rescue sixteen thousand women abducted by Narakasura from Indraloka, the state of her uncle Ghanendra and aunt Aditi. What was worse, Narakasura had humiliated Aditi, taken the Syamantaka Mani, imprisoned Ghanendra and taken him along with the sixteen thousand women to Pragajyotisha.

Narakasura was a great friend of Jarasandha. Unknown to either Jarasandha or Hastinapura, he had established contact with Jatil Muni and declared his kingdom as the true abode of Jhankal after Jarasandha had died. The great Shiva-bhakta that Jarasandha was, Narakasura had the same reasons as Kamsa for not espousing Kutil Dharma. With Jarasandha gone, Narakasura played the deception game. On the one hand, he paid tribute to the Pandava army, lulling them into a false sense of comfort and, on the other hand, he started working towards the ultimate goal of Kutil Dharma, the conquest of the whole world by subverting the roots of Dharma.

When Narakasura came to know of the great Syamantaka Mani making its way to his neighbourhood, he knew that it was time to come out of the closet and establish his own faith in the entire eastern

part of Bharatavarsha, his tribute to Yudhishtira notwithstanding. He could always recant.

Narakasura had obtained the ten commandments of Kutil Dharma from Banakantaka and had started following them faithfully. As a start, he established Pralayalayas in Pragajyotisha, abducted sixteen thousand women from Indraloka and put them into sex slavery.

Satyabhama had decided to march to Pragajyotisha all alone, link-up with her uncle in Indraloka on the Uttatrāpatha<sup>1</sup> and then march on to Pragajyotisha. Narakasura was famous for the use of missile projectile arrows from long distances, with different properties. Satyabhama had also specialised in projectile warfare, so she felt she was quite competent to take on the monstrous Narakasura all by herself. She had taken Veerabhadra along, with a few thousand soldiers.

Krishna met her right at the gate. He joined Satyabhama in the venture without even going inside the gates of Dvaraka. The great Yadava army headed towards the northeastern direction and crossed the Gangā at Pataliputra with the help of boats. It was already the month of Ashvin and they marched without much rest for another month to reach Indraloka and then entered the boundaries of Pragajyotisha. At the end of Ashvin month, they camped on the banks of the Brahmaputra outside the great city of Kāmarupa in Pragajyotisha.

The Brahmaputra is one of the only two rivers that are considered male in form because of its sheer size. The Brahmaputra is referred to as a nada and not as a nadi in the historical records of Bharatavarsha.

As the rainy season was just about ending, the river was flowing deep and fierce at its narrowest part at Shara Ghata, the crossing point for Kāmarupa. Krishna surveyed the area and told Satyabhama, 'Kāmarupa is invincible unless we are able to conquer this great river. Narakasura has to do absolutely nothing to thwart us. We can keep camping here and he can keep smiling. We do not have the boats, we do not have the rafts and even if we try to cross the river, his bowmen sitting securely in their towers on the bank of the Brahmaputra will simply mow us down.'

Aditi came up with a plan. She made the Yadavas feign a retreat and go away to a point about fifty kilometres to the west. The army

made a great show of dismantling their tents and then going west along the river through the day. The Kāmarupa spies followed them on the left bank of the river to the point where the river takes a sharp southward turn. The Yadavas left a few watch posts on the river and then camped in the forests near Tapeshvara on the Manasvini<sup>2</sup> River, which marked the boundary between Indraloka and Pragajyotisha. They had crossed this river earlier with the help of a large fleet of boats made available to them by the Tapeshvara trading and fishing community. They sought their help again, but this time with a different intent. They sought guides from the Tapeshvara town, who advised the Yadavas to take the riverine route from Manasvini to the Brahmaputra and then do a landfall on that side sometime during the night.

Accordingly, a large flotilla set sail on the night of Ashvin Navami. They had timed their sailing in a manner that they would be able to cross the Brahmaputra the night after. They sailed with the current and having reached the Brahmaputra, crossed the river during the night. The landfall began with the beginning of the night and was completed before the night was over. They marched away from the river and along the mountains that stood about twenty kilometres to the south of the river. By the time the next night arrived, they had successfully camped atop the mountains that skirted Kāmarupa on the south and the east.

The Yadava army fell on an unsuspecting enemy the next morning. By noon, the army of Narakasura had been mowed down. Shri Krishna pierced his senapati, Mura, with a hundred arrows. ‘Krishna has become Murāri<sup>3</sup>,’ shouted the Yadava soldiers at Mura being slain by Shri Krishna. Continuing the action, Satyabhama and Krishna kept raining great projectiles on Narakasura from their safe perches.

His army having been destroyed, Narakasura counted on the vanity of the enemy and had a challenge sent to Krishna to meet him one-on-one like a true Kshatriya. Krishna accepted this challenge with alacrity. Asking Satyabhama to guard his rear, he engaged in an archery bout with Narakasura.

It was a battle to behold. The two great archers were cutting each other’s arrows down as they flew towards them. Krishna used some rare projectiles, but Narakasura was equal to them. Yet, Narakasura

could not keep pace with the speed of Krishna and started getting tired. Krishna realised this and quickened his pace even more. Eventually, Narakasura was not able to keep pace. As he took a split second longer to lift another arrow to his bow, Krishna used the Sudarshana Chakra and decapitated Narakasura a day before Kārtika Amavasyā, that is Dipavali. In acknowledgement of the valour of a great warrior, Krishna lit a diya lamp in the evening to honour Narakasura and announced somberly, ‘Henceforth, we will celebrate the day before Dipavali as Naraka Chaturdashi all over Bharatavarsha instead of just Magadha.’

Rescue operations were launched to free the detained princes, princesses and the women that Narakasura had abducted. The Yadavas sought out Kutil Dharmis from every corner of the city, and depending upon whether they were ready to repent and mend or whether they had carried out any atrocities upon the population, the Yadavas decided to either restore them to Sanatana Dharma or kill them.

The prisoners had been freed. There was much joy among the princes and princesses, but a wail went up in the quarters of the sixteen thousand women at the time of their departure from Pragajyotisha.

Taken aback by the wailing and mourning, Krishna sent Satyabhama to the women to check what the matter was.

Satyabhama was met by Tarangini and Vrindini, who had been chosen as the leaders of the group. The groups had been further subdivided into one hundred sixty other sub-groups of one hundred women each. Narakasura had subjected them to the utmost cruelty and they were treated as third-rate human beings who had to submit to the carnal demands of the elites of Narakasura. Sex slavery, as taught in the doctrines of Kutil Dharma, was being practised on them.

Satyabhama approached the group leaders very sympathetically, ‘Why are you people not ready? Don’t you want to escape the prison and come with us? We will restore you to your families and you will live happily ever after.’

Tarangini confronted Satyabhama, ‘O Queen, you are the third wife of Krishna, isn’t it?’

Satyabhama was taken aback. ‘Why do you say that?’ she asked.



‘Why did you choose to share a husband with four others? How many more is Krishna going to marry? Is there any limit on the numbers that he can marry? If he is going to have twenty wives, how are they different from the women who serve at the pleasure of many men?’

‘What do you want me to do?’ asked Satyabhama. ‘You come with us to Indraloka, or even to Dvaraka, and we will settle you there.’

‘As ganikas<sup>4</sup>?’ asked Vrindini testily.

‘We are not going anywhere with the reputation we have acquired,’ said Vrindini.

Satyabhama was badly offended at this. She turned back and left and narrated the foul mood of the women to Krishna.

Krishna was full of empathy. ‘Do you realise what kind of reputation awaits them back home?’

Satyabhama pondered the question, and then understood what Tarangini had been saying. ‘I think we will have to find matches for these women; otherwise we cannot really salvage their reputation. For an Aryavarta woman, reputation is very important, just as it is for men. We will have to find a solution for them.’

Krishna tried to find out whether his soldiers would like to take at least one woman as a wife. He met with a firm no from almost everyone. Their reputation having been compromised as comfort women; nobody was ready to touch them. All the talk of kriya and Karma, of women not having done anything out of their volition, of them being non-attached in a work of low calling did not seem to work with men.

As Krishna stood pondering the question, a soldier shouted, ‘Why don’t you marry them, Krishna? You talk so loftily of the girls not being attached to the dirty work they were made to do. You have the means to look after them. Marry them.’

Satyabhama stood transfixed. She exchanged glances with Krishna. It was one of understanding and acquiescence. Krishna announced then and there, ‘Fine, I will marry them and give them my name as their husband. I am sure nobody would taunt Krishna’s wives.’

*The greatest display of empathy in human affairs took place in Kāmarupa with Krishna formally marrying sixteen thousand women, giving them his name, giving them back their dignity and then*

*restoring them to their families.* They retained their right to come to Dvaraka.



- <sup>1</sup> The Great Northern Road, linking Purushapura to Lohit through North India
- <sup>2</sup> Modern Manas
- <sup>3</sup> Mura's enemy
- <sup>4</sup> Prostitutes



- 42 -

## The Conspiracy

While Krishna and Satyabhama were battling Narakasura, the far eastern ally of Jatil Muni, Jatil Muni himself was hosting Shakuni in Mulasthāna, arranged by Jayadratha. They were very uncomfortable with the turn of events in Indraprastha. Yudhishtira had a practically trouble-free run after all the kings had paid tributes to him and Jarasandha had been slain by Bhima with the subterfuge taught to him by Krishna. Shri Krishna was turning out to be even more implacable a foe than Jatil Muni had warned. Not only was he able to thwart every move that the Kutil Dharmis planned, but he was also able to anticipate their moves and checkmate them in advance. They had come to know that Krishna was now engaged in Pragajyotisha. ‘This,’ asserted Jatil Muni, ‘is the time to play deceit with the Pandavas.’ The righteous nature of Yudhishtira is perfectly susceptible to subversion. He remembered an old skill of Shakuni that he had been witness to.

‘Shakuni, I think the time has come to play on the weakness of Yudhishtira. Like Bhishma, he is also vulnerable to calls on his personal conscience. Even though he has a very fine appreciation of Dharma, he is always susceptible to calls made on his svadharma, his personal conscience and a little bit of vanity. Without Krishna around, we can get the better of them. The time has now come since Kutil Dharma has hit a wall. Krishna has gone to fight Narakasura, who

was foolish enough to disturb Krishna's relative. He was very enthusiastic in spreading Kutil Dharma, but I doubt if he will survive Krishna. Except for a few Pralayalayas and the image of Viloma Swastikas in a few temples, we have simply not been able to put the message into the head of the people. The Pandavas are so popular that there are no takers for the narrative of the ten commandments that we needed to spread. Kanika is ineffective beyond the large Pralaya Temple that he presides.'

Banakantaka paused and looked intensely at Shakuni. 'I have heard that Yudhishtira is also fond of a game of dice?'

Shakuni brightened up, 'Yes, he is. But I don't think he will play with any kind of bets. He just plays it as recreation.'

'What if Dhritarashtra orders him to play with bets?' Jatil Muni asked.

Shakuni mused for a while, 'Dhritarashtra would be a bit difficult to tackle, but Kanika has a great hold on him. We will play on his secret ambitions. Though he has got half the kingdom for his son, yet he is intensely jealous of Yudhishtira becoming a chakravartin. But I am sure that Yudhishtira will not disobey Dhritarashtra except on the goading of Krishna.'

'Are you sure you will win if Yudhishtira agrees to let you play on behalf of Duryodhana?'

'Not a doubt, Jatil Muni. There is only one person in this world who can beat me in the play of dice,' said Shakuni.

'Who?' Jatil Muni was curious.

'Krishna, who else!'

'Oh! This bloody Krishna is everywhere. What on the flat earth does he eat that we do not!' Jatil Muni exclaimed exasperatingly.

Shakuni brightened up at the very thought of playing dice to defeat Yudhishtira, 'I have learnt the game of dice by using the mathematical concept of sankhyāna or probability, taught by King Rituparna to Nala when Nala was serving as a charioteer by the name of Vāhuka with King Rituparna.'<sup>1</sup>

Jatil Muni became curious about this. 'How?' he asked.

Shakuni narrated the story of Nala losing his kingdom and wife to his brother in a game of dice. 'These Aryavarta kings have a long

history of losing their kingdom through gambling. They treat it as a thing of valour. That is where my advantage is.'

'When Nala lost his kingdom and his wife Damayanti to his brother, Nala had to bear exile and was a charioteer with King Rituparna. Damayanti feigned to conduct another swayamvara and Rituparna wanted to reach Vidarbha quickly. Nala promised to take him there, but he wanted the king to teach him the theory of sankhyāna. Rituparna pointed to a tree and told him that he would be able to count the number of leaves and the fruit on that tree accurately. He counted the leaves as panchakoti<sup>2</sup> and the number of fruits as two thousand and ninety-five.'

Shakuni paused to survey the effect. Finding everyone suitably impressed, he emphasised, 'My knowledge of gambling is rooted in the knowledge of chance theory and not in blind chance. Yudhishtira's skill is based on chance alone.'

The plot was set. Shakuni rushed back to Hastinapura. Dipavali was always a great occasion for wagers and gamble.

It took Krishna about two months to get back from Pragajyotisha.

He got back and had rested for a day when Sudāmā paid him a visit.

Dhritarashtra invited Yudhishtira and the Pandavas along with Draupadi to Hastinapura. Kunti had continued living in Hastinapura, so it was also a good occasion for the Pandavas to unite with their mother. The winter was just setting in the northern parts and Yudhishtira was happy to indulge in his pastime of playing the dice. He was lured into it by younger Kauravas playing with him at first and losing to him easily. His confidence was getting boosted immeasurably.

Krishna got busy with Sudāmā. He lived in Saurashtra and his life had been a struggle. It was at the insistence of his wife that he had finally come to Dvaraka. Krishna was so happy to see him that he feted him for many days, even as he deputed his best architects to build a suitable house and a gurukula for him at his village. Being busy with Sudāmā, Krishna delayed his visit to Indraprastha, which was overdue.

As Sudāmā left Dvaraka, fully gratified, the spies informed Krishna that Yudhishtira and the Pandavas had gone to Hastinapura and had

been staying there for over two months. Yudhishtira was neglecting his duties at Indraprastha and had got addicted to playing the game of dice. Krishna sensed trouble and immediately started for Hastinapura.

On Makara Sankranti, a big event was organised in Dhritarashtra's palace. Kanika had already set the stage. Dhritarashtra invited Yudhishtira to play a game of dice with Duryodhana. Yudhishtira readily acquiesced.

A platform was set and the game began. As Yudhishtira and Duryodhana sat down for the game, Duryodhana sought leave to let Shakuni deal the dice on his behalf. Yudhishtira hesitated as he knew Shakuni's prowess.

Duryodhana taunted him, 'Dharmarāja is only a name. You do not even honour the simple rules of a game. Don't you know that it is admissible for another man to deal the dice?'

'That is not the question, Duryodhana. The question is whether a man as devious and as deceitful as Shakuni should even be part of a game of dice, which is to be played only as a game,' said Yudhishtira.

'When there is no great purpose in an action, the means become important. I am sure the game of dice is just for entertainment and I would not like entertainment to be sullied by an evil man like Shakuni, who is well known as a conspirator against Dharma. The game of dice is to be played in consonance with the rules of Dharma. How can I have an adharmi like Shakuni allowed to play the game on your behalf.' Yudhishtira was quite firm.

Duryodhana took umbrage at what he perceived to be an insult of his maternal uncle. Vidura got up and intervened, 'A game of dice is not the way to entertain. A game of dice is akin to war if this is played with bets. I would request Maharaja Dhritarashtra to abort this game right here. I would not recommend this to go ahead.'

Dhritarashtra, as usual, waffled and said nothing. Karna got up and addressed the house, 'Maharaja, the mere fact that a game of dice is being compared to war is an admission of defeat on the part of the Pandavas to leave the palace without playing what is a mere game. It is no longer the simple matter of a game. The very rules of the game of dice are being flouted.'

Shakuni acted being insulted. He pretended to leave the arena.

Duryodhana also got up, acting hurt and demanded from Maharaja Dhritarashtra to give his verdict. The sabha adjourned for the day, with a direction by Dhritarashtra to reassemble the next morning.

Krishna had started for Hastinapura in the meantime. He did not feel it was right for Yudhishtira to even accept the hospitality of Dhritarashtra when they had faced betrayal so many times. How could the Pandavas forget the poisoning of Bhima and the Varanavat perfidy? Game of dice was a weakness of Yudhishtira.

‘The ways of Dharma are so subtle that even a Dharmarāja can get deluded,’ sighed Krishna as he sped towards Hastinapura, urging Daruka to go faster and faster.





<sup>1</sup> Nalopākhyāna in Mahabharata

<sup>2</sup> Five crores or fifty million



**- 43 -**

## **The Dice of Kutil Dharma**

**J**ayadratha rode fast in a large chariot with Dushālā, rushing to witness an event that would change the course of history in Aryavarta. A large entourage followed him.

In the chariot, next to him, sat the imposing figure of Banakantaka. He smelled a great chance for the spread of Kutil Dharma. Kanika had informed that Yudhishtira had reached Hastinapura. Jatil Muni wanted to be in the place of action. Jhankal willing, he may even be able to announce the conversion of Hastinapura to Kutil Dharma. The great turnaround in the fortune of the new religion would come only if a major king became a follower of Jhankal. He was drooling with expectation and anticipation.

Krishna urged Daruka to move faster. Daruka told him that even at his fastest, he would not be able to touch Hastinapura for the next thirty-six hours.

Vidura visited the Pandava camp in the evening. He sat with Kunti and narrated the story of Nala-Damayanti, and how a great king like Nala, who was unimpeachable in every sense, the most accomplished warrior in the entire Jambudwipa, came to grief because of that one weakness he had for gambling. Yudhishtira, he told Kunti, should not continue with this fatal addiction, as he considers it to be his Dharma to follow Dhritarashtra's direction. 'It is adharma to even honour one's father if he is leading one to a path that is manifestly

leading to adharma. Dhritarashtra is besotted with his evil son, Duryodhana. Outwardly, he honours Dharma, but inwardly, he honours only what Duryodhana advises and what his new advisor Kanika advises. Kanika is a seed planted by Shakuni. These people have started investing in a new philosophy to change the Dharmic orientation of the public at large. If Yudhishtira does not resist this obvious adharma, there is no point in his being Dharmarāja. The bets will be large, even to the point of betting the territories. Shakuni has got a loaded dice prepared. If it does come to pass that Yudhishtira has to play the game, the least he should do is to either refuse to allow Shakuni play with his loaded dice or ask for Shri Krishna to play on the Pandava's behalf. The moment Krishna appears in the Sabha, half of the Kauravas will faint and the other half will have no courage to do anything that is not strictly in accordance with Dharma.'

By the time Vidura left, the brothers had already gone to sleep. Draupadi was in a separate room, as she was having her periods. She was awake. Kunti went to Draupadi and explained to her what she had been told by Vidura. The two ladies remained closeted till late in the night. Draupadi was badly concerned, as she could not bear the thought of the Pandavas losing their territory to the cunning of the despicable Duryodhana.

It was twilight of the dawn. 'How much more time do we need, Daruka?' asked Krishna. 'Do you realise that something earth-shattering will happen if I do not reach in time.'

The Sabha reassembled the next morning.

Kanika, who had become the trusted advisor of Dhritarashtra by playing upon his fears and insecurities, had tutored Dhritarashtra through the night. Dhritarashtra came to the house properly coached.

As the Sabha began, Vidura got up to once again urge Dhritarashtra to call off the event, 'There is nothing Dharmic about a gambling event. We must call this off because Duryodhana insists on using an evil proxy to represent him. This shows that this is not just a game of dice anymore, but a game of deceit. Elder brother, please call this off, otherwise, I see only destruction.'

Duryodhana got up to counter Vidura, 'Mahatma is doubting the wisdom of the king. One who doubts the wisdom of a king without any supporting evidence is not the benefactor of that kingdom. We do

not even know what the king is going to say. The king is not just the king of Hastinapura, but is also the elder brother of Pandu ji, the father of the Pandavas. We should have the fullest faith in the judgements of our elders.'

Vidura looked at Bhishma and Drona for help. Both of them averted his glance. '*Too much of blind faith to the throne is a weakness,*' thought Vidura.

Dhritarashtra announced his verdict. It was as if he was simply reading out from a script prepared by Duryodhana. He announced, 'It would be wrong for a high-class Kshatriya like Yudhishtira to go back on a gambling challenge. A gambling challenge is like a challenge to a personal duel. Just as it would bring dishonour to a Kshatriya if he refuses a challenge to a duel, similar would be the case in a gambling challenge. As for the fairness of the contest, I have appointed Rishi Kanika, a high-born Brahmin, as the referee.'

Bhishma, Drona and Vidura were all taken aback at the announcement of the referee. All of them knew that he was an impostor and a Kutil Dharmi. Yudhishtira did not know about this new entrant into the equation.

Krishna, however, knew that the plot to ensnare the Pandavas had been originally scripted in Rakshagriha, and the Nagas, the Kauravas and the Kutil Dharmis had all joined the plot.

Dhritarashtra continued, 'I have consulted the experts. It is perfectly fair for the combatants to depute someone else to throw the dice. If the Pandavas want, they can also depute someone else from among those present in the Sabha.'

Arjuna whispered into the ears of Yudhishtira, 'Let us appoint Shri Krishna to deal the dice on our behalf.'

Yudhishtira considered the proposal. He could do that even if Krishna was not present in the Sabha. Yet, the ego of Yudhishtira told him that he was himself a great gambler. Yudhishtira kept considering the proposal until the time to appoint a proxy was over. His ahankara did not permit him to appoint Krishna as his proxy.

Kanika, the referee, called for the combatants to join. He pronounced the rules, 'Bets can be placed only by the combatants. The proxy can only throw the dice and call out the numbers. The proxy can also advise the principal combatant. Other than the proxy,

nobody else can advise the combatant. Since Yudhishtira does not have a proxy, he will be on his own.'

Thus, the ruinous gambling bout started. Vidura lamented over it, 'Alas! Even the noblest Yudhishtira has fallen prey to the common human frailty of ahankara. How the posterity will pay for it remains in the chrysalis of the future!'

Krishna was still a few hours away from the Dyuta Bhavan, the great hall of gambling, that had been created especially for this purpose.

The bout started. The referee gave the first throw to Shakuni. His guru Jatil Muni sat among the elites, watching the fun and the inexorable march of Kutil Dharma.

Shakuni asked Duryodhana to place a bet. Duryodhana placed a precious diamond as the bet. Yudhishtira was honour bound to reciprocate.

The referee announced once again, 'The person dealing the dice shall throw the dice after a number is called by the other party and followed up by his own party. I shall provide the dice. Throw the dice now.' Kanika brought out Shakuni's loaded dice.

Yudhishtira called the number six, Duryodhana called twelve. The dice was actually a pair with each six-faced dice carrying numbers from one to six.

Shakuni dramatised the throw. He cupped the dice in his palms, took them close to his ears and threw them with a flourish. Both the dice came up with six. 'Twelve,' announced Kanika, 'Duryodhana wins this round.'

Yudhishtira lost the precious diamond he had put as the bet.

Krishna was rushing towards Hastinapura.

'Fast Daruka, fast. It seems Yudhishtira has forgotten that Rājya is his duty, not his right. It is his Karma, not his property. I hope he has not made the cardinal mistake of treating the State treasury as his personal effect.'

Yudhishtira picked up the dice, hoping to throw them in a way that would help him square the contest.

The referee came up with another rule. The dice shall change hands only if the thrower loses in a particular throw. Probability is that over

a few throws, it will even out, knowing full well that the dice were rigged.

Bets were placed again. Duryodhana upped the ante and placed a big diamond necklace on the bet. Yudhishtira murmured something to the effect that this treasure was not his personal effect. Referee announced once again that all the wealth of a State was the personal wealth of the king. This was a typically Kutil Dharma concept, but the referee had been called a rishi by Dhritarashtra and appointed to oversee the gambling bout. As long as the bout lasted, there was nothing they could do.

The second round went the way of the first. Yudhishtira chose eight, Duryodhana, having been tipped off, once again called twelve. The theatrical throw of the pair of dice once again totaled to twelve. Duryodhana had won again.





**- 44 -**

## **The Disrobement**

**K**rishna urged Daruka again, ‘Daruka, I see the end of Dwāpara Yuga approaching if you are not able to take me to Hastinapura in time.’

‘Just three hours more, Achyuta,’ said Daruka. Both he and his horses were sweating profusely. He did not want the horses to collapse. They had hardly had any rest, except for watering and some food.

In the Dyuta Bhavan, Shakuni dealt his third throw and Duryodhana won again; this time a village of the Pandava territory had been placed as a bet.

After winning a few more villages, Duryodhana bet the whole kingdom of Hastinapura, forcing Yudhishtira to bet his own kingdom of Indraprastha.

A gasp went up in the hall as Yudhishtira lost his entire kingdom.

With his eyes downcast and head held low, Yudhishtira got up to leave. The referee interjected, ‘You can reclaim your kingdom if you put your brothers on the bet.’

Yudhishtira demurred, ‘I have no authority over my brothers.’

Referee Kanika once again rationalised the property doctrine taught to him by Kutil Dharma, ‘All your brothers are your property, Yudhishtira.’

Yudhishtira thought again. His mind was completely clouded and he did not remember anything. The classic ‘loss of intellect’ had taken place.

Yudhishtira placed Sahadeva on the bet, while Duryodhana tempted him with the return of all his gains. Sahadeva was lost to the Kauravas. He became their slave. Even this was unnatural because there was no concept of slavery in that society, but the referee allowed it because his own Kutil Dharma allowed slaves.

Yudhishtira lost Nakula, Arjuna and Bhima in the same way.

When Arjuna was lost as a slave to the Kauravas, Karna roared with laughter. ‘Give this slave to me,’ guffawed Karna. Duryodhana shouted, ‘Given. Get him to massage you every day.’

When Bhima was lost, Duryodhana went mad. He started dancing and held Bhima by his locks, ‘My dear slave, you will gratify me every day.’ Bhima snorted and wanted to take Duryodhana’s head off, but Yudhishtira gave him a forbidding look and stopped the carnage.

All this while, Bhishma and Dronacharya kept quiet. Vidura kept looking at his own feet, as all his wise counsels had found no takers. Dhritarashtra was enquiring from his youngest son, Vikarna, as to what was going on. Vikarna kept murmuring his disapproval of the reprobate actions of Duryodhana, Shakuni and Kanika, but met with no response at all. Dhritarashtra kept nodding his head in disapproval from time to time, but every time Kanika sought his authority to proceed with the filth he was throwing over all the Kuru traditions, Dhritarashtra just nodded. It was a huge conspiracy of silence.

Meanwhile, Yudhishtira placed himself on the bet against all the losses he had made till now. Shakuni made a big show of throwing the dice, Duryodhana called twelve and the dice dutifully turned to twelve. A huge cheer went up from the Kaurava brothers and their core supporters. The public of Hastinapura and all the right-minded elites were choking with emotions as they watched the murder of Sanatana Dharma taking place. *Once again, an obstreperous minority had triumphed against a peaceful majority.*

‘You have won everything, Duryodhana. My addiction and my ego have reduced me to penury. Now I have nothing to place a bet upon. I am your slave. Do as you please now.’



Duryodhana was not done yet. He could never forget the humiliation that he was subjected to in the Sabha Bhavan at Indraprastha. He laughed sardonically, 'Yudhishtira, you still have the most precious jewel left. You can still bet Draupadi against everything you have lost. Maybe her luck will bring everything back to you.'

A collective sigh went up in the assembled crowd. Jatil Muni was smiling. His best prescriptions of Kutil Dharma were coming true. He was going to be the person who would convert this whole land into his beloved Kutil Dharma.

Vidura protested again, but Duryodhana shouted at him and Dhritarashtra did not intervene.

Yudhishtira, devoid of all Dharma by now, sheepishly placed Draupadi on the bet. All the other Pandavas kept looking down.

Shakuni stood up, brought the dice up to his ears with a flourish, threw the dice down and won the bet for Duryodhana.

'Bring Panchali here,' shouted Duryodhana. Nobody reacted.

Duryodhana looked at Dushasana and shouted again, 'Dushasana, do the pious deed. Bring that woman here. She is now our slave.'

Dushasana dutifully departed. He went to the palace of Kunti where the Pandavas were staying. Kunti was away to Vidura's palace. Draupadi was alone. Dushasana went in the shameless manner that the Kauravas had been learning from Kanika and his followers over the past few years.

'Come, Draupadi, you are now our slave.'

Draupadi was resting and was in a single piece of cloth that women would wear during their periods. Dushasana barged into the room and asked Draupadi to accompany him to the Dyuta Bhavan as Yudhishtira had lost her to Duryodhana now. 'Come, you five-husband woman, enjoy one hundred of us now.'

Draupadi, the haughty princess of Panchala, got up from the bed where she had been resting and faced Dushasana full in the eye, 'You earthworm, you know what will happen to you if the Pandavas learn about your behaviour?'

'Ha ha ha,' Dushasana laughed deliriously. 'They are already our slaves.'

Draupadi was astounded, but she tried to enquire about what was going on by trying to intimidate Dushasana, but Dushasana was in a state of frenzied mind where he did not brook any resistance, so he caught Draupadi by her long hair and dragged her to the Dyuta Bhavan.

The scene in the Dyuta Bhavan was traumatic. The public stood crying and cursing. The Pandavas stood in a corner with their heads bowed down and in the garb of slaves, their royal attire having been taken away from them, and a proud Draupadi, her dignity intact, being dragged onto the central platform. Draupadi broke herself free from the grasp of Dushasana and asked Dhritarashtra point-blank, 'Pitashri, is this how the daughters and daughters-in-law of the Kuru dynasty treated these days?'

Dhritarashtra did what he always did best. He kept quiet.

Draupadi turned to Bhishma, 'Was Yudhishtira a free man when he placed me on the bet? By what rule of Dharma does a wife become his property? I am living with Nakula for this year. I am not even Yudhishtira's consort right now. By what authority has he traded me?'

Bhishma looked at Draupadi and mumbled, 'The ways of Karma are very subtle and inscrutable, my child!'

Dronacharya simply averted her eyes. His selfish character could never allow him to think beyond serving the man-in-charge, which in today's situation was Duryodhana.

Vikarna got up and protested, 'This is pure adharma, Pitashri. I request my elders to intervene. This will spell the end of the Kuru dynasty. Where women are humiliated, that Rājya cannot last long. I appeal to everyone present to come to their senses.'

Vidura got up again and told Dhritarashtra, 'Maharaja, I once advised against your coronation because you were physically blind but it appears to me that you have turned completely blind in every sense.'

Duryodhana shouted at Vikarna and Vidura to shut them up. Karna jeered at Draupadi, 'A woman with five husbands is nothing but a prostitute'

Duryodhana shouted at Dushasana, 'What the hell are you waiting for? Disrobe the slut now. I will have her sit on my thighs.' He

slapped his thighs.

Bhima roared from the corner, 'I will break that thigh of yours and kill you Duryodhana, and I will drink the blood of Dushasana after killing him.'

Duryodhana shouted a hundred insults at Bhima and the other Pandavas, called Draupadi every dirty epithet he could throw at her and then shouted at Dushasana, 'You coward, what are you scared of? Strip that slut and bring her to my thigh.'

Dushasana started pulling Draupadi's robe. Draupadi started chanting the name of Gopāla loudly. Dushasana hesitated at the name of Shri Krishna. He suddenly remembered that she was the sister of Krishna.

Draupadi noticed the hesitation and shouted at the top of her voice, '*Krishnam vande jagadgurum.*'

Exactly at that point, Daruka brought the chariot to a halt outside the Dyuta Bhavan and Krishna entered the hall with a flourish, Sudarshana Chakra in hand.

Everyone stood still. Dushasana let go of Draupadi's robe. The eloquent silence could be heard from hundreds of miles.

Even Draupadi was stunned for a minute. Then, she ran and hid behind her brother. Krishna and Draupadi made a wonderful sight in the magnificent hall of gambling, the Dyuta Bhavan.

Dhritarashtra's heart skipped a beat as he realised that the hall had fallen silent. He felt for Vikarna to ask him what had happened.

'Madhusudana, Pitashri,' whispered Vikarna.

Dhritarashtra did not understand, 'What about Madhusudana?'

'Keshava is here, Maharaja. He has the Sudarshana Chakra in his hand.'

Dhritarashtra felt like collapsing from the throne. Was fate going to cheat him again of his great prize!

'Who wants to test me,' asked Krishna in an imposing voice.

All present in the royal court had already witnessed Shishupala Vadha. They knew the potency and power of the Sudarshana Chakra. Except for two persons—Kanika and his guru, Jatil Muni.

Kanika had heard a lot of descriptions of Krishna, but it was for the first time that he was watching him. He felt overawed.

Krishna thundered, ‘Is this the Sabha of a Rājya based on Dharma or is it a conglomeration of demons?’

Duryodhana wanted to speak, but he was not sure how Krishna would react. If there was one person that he feared was this man Krishna whom everyone else loved.

Yet he made bold to speak, ‘Manmohan, we are not doing anything without the consent of the Pandavas. You can ask them.’

Krishna bellowed at Duryodhana in a rather uncharacteristic manner, ‘Do you know what Dharma is?’

Duryodhana folded his hands in supplication to Shri Krishna, ‘I know Dharma, but it is not in my nature to follow it, I also know adharma, but it is not in my nature to abstain from it. O Hrishikesha, you are the one who lives in my heart and I only follow the impulses of my heart, so you are the one responsible.’<sup>1</sup>

‘What deceit have you played with these unsuspecting Pandavas?’ Krishna was unrelenting.

‘Why don’t you ask the Pandavas themselves,’ countered Duryodhana.

Vikarna informed Gandhari of the terrible fate that had befallen the kulavadhu of the Kuru dynasty. She came into the hall in all her royal regalia, took Draupadi under her wings, admonished everybody including her husband for making a spectacle of themselves, gave a dress to Draupadi to wear and took her away to her own quarters. Dhritarashtra declared the event closed without any clarity as to what would be the status of the bets won and lost in the great gamble.



<sup>1</sup> jānami dharmam na cha me pravrittih janāmyadharmam na cha me  
nivrittih |tvayā hrishikesha hridishthitena yatha niyuktosmi tathā  
karomi ||



**- 45 -**

## **The Exile**

According to the rules set out by Rishi Parashurama, once the Sudarshana Chakra had been brought out, it could not be retracted without taking off a head. Krishna went into a bit of discussion. He was already aware of the conspiracy cooking in Kutil Dharma circles. The spectators had emptied out, but the main actors were all there seated on the main platform. There was only one person that Krishna did not know up there. He enquired about Kanika.

‘He is Rishi Kanika, He is Maharaja’s advisor,’ said Duryodhana.

‘Rishi,’ sneered Krishna.

The Sudarshan Chakra moved and went back to Krishna after taking Kanika’s head off.

Duryodhana protested loudly. Krishna asked him, ‘Do you want me to tell you what he was doing and what Shakuni was doing? I call upon Maharaja Dhritarashtra to declare whatever has happened here as null and void; otherwise, I may have to bring out my Sudarshana Chakra again.

Yudhishtira admitted that he had agreed to the terms dictated by Maharaja Dhritarashtra.

‘Let this be clear,’ said Krishna. ‘Even if they had agreed to be enslaved voluntarily, there is no Dharmic precepts that allow it. This was a device used by Kanika, who fooled our Maharaja as a rishi,

whereas he was a regular member of an adharmic cult and was deliberately made to infiltrate by Shakuni and Duryodhana.’

Discussions went on and a trade-off was agreed by Yudhishtira because he felt very embarrassed about the fact that he had gone under the spell of adharma under the mistaken notion that order of the elders formed the highest Dhrama. Krishna mocked him, ‘Dharmarāja, we have been guided by you in all matters regarding Dharma. How could you fall into the same error as Bhishma and Drona? Safety of your kula is not the ultimate in Dharma. Your Rājya and your Rashtra come far higher in the pecking order. How could you be so naïve?’

Even Krishna had to agree that although Duryodhana was vile, Yudhishtira also made a grievous error of judgment, and another terrible error of vanity, in agreeing to bets that were not his own. As a person of the highest character, his punishment would have to be higher than the lesser people. A trade-off was established. The terrible bets were withdrawn. They were made free men, but they would have to suffer twelve years of exile in forests<sup>1</sup> and would have to spend another one year incognito<sup>2</sup>. During the incognito period, if the Kauravas discover them, the cycle would repeat. This time, Yudhishtira agreed to these terms only after consulting Krishna. Krishna did admonish him, though, ‘If only you had appointed me as your proxy, brother Yudhishtira...’

The Pandavas left for their Vanavāsa a few days after Makarasankranti<sup>3</sup>. Kunti stayed back in Vidura’s house with his wife Sulabhā. All the wives of the Pandavas stayed back. Some like Subhadra went back to their maternal home in Dvaraka. Others stayed back in the care of Vidura and Bhishma. Nearly every learned man, rishi and muni, Brahmin and sanyasi, practically the entire public of both Indraprastha and Hastinapura accompanied them to the forests of Dwaita Vana. It lay northwest of Mathura and southwest of Indraprastha, at a trijunction formed by the Virātanagara kingdom, Kāmyaka Vana and Mathura kingdom, now ruled by Jarasandha’s son Sahadeva.

The Pandava’s settled down to a long period of self-study, interactions with wise people and deep introspection. However, they could not escape the evil eyes of Shakuni and Duryodhana. Jatil Muni

ran away to Mulasthāna after learning about the decapitation of his able disciple Kanika. From Mulasthāna, he established a courier communication with Shakuni to give him ideas. The unpopularity of Kanika, Shakuni and Duryodhana had reached such a stage that people started pulling down the Vilom Swastikas wherever they saw them. Bhishma, Vidura and Kripacharya heavily opposed Shakuni and his schemes, so the Kutil Dharma project started languishing after the dice game. The highest success of Kutil Dharma also became its nemesis.

Bhishma and Drona were full of contrition at not having spoken up. Yet, they remained confused between their svadharma, Rājya Dharma and Rashtra Dharma. Instead of following Vidura and Krishna and putting Rashtra Dharma first, Rājya Dharma next and svadharma last, they did exactly the opposite. *Great men make terrible mistakes when they think they are genuinely doing good, while aiding the evil.*

Drona had a deep discussion with Arjuna and imparted him every bit of knowledge that he had not yet done, and then pronounced him as the best archer of the world. Exactly a day later, he came across Ekalavya, son of Magadhamādana, also known as Hiranyadhanu, the commander of Jarasandha. His prowess in archery was even better than Arjuna. Arjuna was happy to find someone with whom he could duel and improve his skill, but the greedy Drona took a short cut and got Ekalavya's thumb as Guru Dakshina. That became a permanent infamy for Drona.

Krishna now knew that his quest to spread the deeper meanings of Dharma and produce a yogic civilisation was inevitably tied to the Pandavas. After the Syamantaka affair and the way the younger Yadavas were faring, he regretted taking them to the safety of Dvaraka. The young children were not getting the attention of sages and gurukulas that they were getting in Mathura. Krishna himself had to remain away for long periods. Rukmini and Satyabhama were both proud ladies and engaged in a permanent cold war. Jāmbavati was a schemer par excellence and loved the petty squabbles. The entire tenor of the Yadavas was getting spoilt by too much comfort, too much lucre and too much contact with the trading people from Shankha Dweepa and Aravasthana. Even Balarama was drifting apart. The only person who kept faithfully with Krishna through thick



and thin was Uddhava. His interest was in the realm of self-actualisation and he rightly recognised Krishna as the giver of the highest knowledge and wisdom.

So, Krishna kept visiting the Pandavas and engaged with them on deeper questions of Dharma, Yoga, Samkhya and the nature of human life.

The first trick played on the Pandavas by Duryodhana and Shakuni was to send a very irascible rishi by the name of Durvāsā with thousands of disciples. They knew that the Pandavas did not have the means to feed so many people in the forest. Krishna came to know about the plot from the excellent spy system he had put up. He needed to spy on every move of the Duryodhana-Shakuni cabal. Krishna thwarted the infamy that would accrue to the Pandavas by not being able to feed their guests by diverting them and filling them with so much of milk and buttermilk that they missed their appointed hour with the Pandavas and the rishis left without troubling the Pandavas. It was a narrow escape for Draupadi.

Krishna and the Pandavas could see the clouds of war at the end of the thirteen years. Krishna arranged for Arjuna to go to the Indrakeela Mountain and learn higher skills in archery including wielding of divyāstras of the highest power. The mountains lay between the Kashyap Kshetra and the Uttara Kuru.

The Pandavas went to get Arjuna back and wandered on a Tirtha Yatra all over Bharatavarsha and then on to the Himalayas. On the way, they rested at the Hidimb area, linking up with Bhima's wife Hidimbā, and son Ghatotkacha. Ghatotkacha went with them to Gandhamadana, helping carry the Pandavas who got tired. On the insistence of Draupadi, Bhima fought a war with the Gandharvas to fetch the Saugandhika flowers for her. Bhima also ran into a descendant of Hanumana who demolished his arrogance and gave him the gift of equanimity. Once Arjuna was back from Indrakeela Parvata to the Gandhamadana Parvata, they welcomed him and came back to Kāmyaka Vana.

Draupadi was particularly concerned about the presence of apsarās<sup>4</sup> in the abode of Indra, lying to the north of Kashyap Kshetra.

‘Why are you so concerned?’ asked Arjuna.

Bhima chirped in, ‘Can’t you see that she is jealous?’

Draupadi said, ‘So what? Why can’t I even ask a question of general interest?’

All the Pandavas burst out laughing. Draupadi made faces. ‘Looks like there is something fishy.’

Arjuna smiled and narrated the incidents in the abode of Indra. ‘I requested Indra to give me divyāstras. He agreed on the condition that I should first obtain Pāshupata Astra from Shiva’s tribe in Kailash. I wandered to Kailash where a hunter in the garb of a Kirāṭa<sup>5</sup> challenged me. I fought with him for many days till I realised that he was the man I had come to pray for the Pāshupata Astra. He was pleased with me and gifted me the knowledge of using Pāshupata Astra.

‘The condition having been fulfilled, I went back to Indra’s abode who initiated the knowledge of these astras. I had to achieve the state of Nirvikalpa Samadhi. Even as I was attempting to meditate, the foremost apsara in Indra’s court, called Urvashi, came and disturbed me and asked for cohabitation. When I refused and explained the larger purpose of my visit to Indra’s abode, she got angry and cursed me with impotency. It was only with the intervention of Indra that she diluted it to one year of impotence on the condition that I should also learn the fine arts of singing and dancing. I did that too and Indra initiated me into learning of all the divyāstras he had under his possession. It was an important lesson for me. Indra possessed all the weapons, yet he had to frequently take the help of others because he had not achieved the sense of non-duality that alone makes these divyāstras effective.’

Jayadratha came to Kāmyaka Vana and abducted Draupadi. He was chased down and captured, yet Yudhishtira spared his life because he was the husband of Dushālā, the only sister of all the Kauravas and the Pandavas. Krishna did not appreciate this unnecessary munificence to an implacable enemy. He reminded them of his dictum that *an implacable enemy should never be shown any mercy*.

Years passed by and the twelve years were coming to a close.



- [1](#) Vanavāsa
- [2](#) Agnātavāsa
- [3](#) Sun's transit of Capricorn or the winter solstice
- [4](#) Beautiful women
- [5](#) A Himalayan tribe



**- 46 -**

## **Yaksha Prashna**

**T**he spying activities were increasing in Kāmyaka Vana, so the Pandavas once again shifted to Dwaita Vana. Duryodhana went to harass the Pandavas in the Dwaita Vana, ran into the king of Gandharvas, Chitrasena, who took offence to the Kauravas infringing on the privacy of Gandharva women, and fought with them. Karna led the fight on behalf of the Kauravas. But they were defeated and tied up by Chitrasena. He started to cart them away. When Yudhishtira came to know of this, he pondered over the situation with the other brothers.

Bhima was quite forthright, ‘It serves them right. Let them be taken prisoners by the Gandharvas. Our task of reclaiming our land would become easier.’

Nakula and Sahadeva also favoured Bhima.

Arjuna remained non-committal. His experience of Nirvikalpa Samadhi had lifted him up much beyond the normal human frailties of jealousy and envy. ‘They are our brothers, after all, even if much depraved,’ said Arjuna.

Bhima laughed, ‘They had not come here for charity. They deliberately made a pompous show to needle us. What are we going to achieve by saving them?’

Yudhishtira agreed with Arjuna. ‘If a Gandharva is able to defeat one set of progenies of Maharaja Shāntanu, the other set of progenies

also suffers from infamy. They may bear ill-will against us, that is between them and us. We will fight them for our rights, and we will not let someone from outside spoil the fair name of the line of Maharaja Shāntanu.'

Yudhishtira directed Arjuna to use his divyāstras to get the Kauravas released. Arjuna gave chase to the Gandharvas. Chitrasena appealed to Arjuna to not fight him as he was only incarcerating the enemies of the Pandavas. Arjuna challenged him. A big fight ensued the kind of which had not been witnessed in Aryavarta for a long time.

Arjuna rained his arrows on the Gandharvas and defeated them in a fierce battle. The released Kauravas, along with Karna, were a bunch of demoralised warriors, especially Karna. The very Gandharvas whom they could not take on had been defeated with ease by Arjuna. Karna became a butt of joke in Hastinapura and his earlier feat of a fake Digvijaya on behalf of Duryodhana was all but wiped out. Elders like Bhishma, Drona and Kripacharya sang praises of Arjuna through the alleys and lanes of Hastinapura, while Karna cowered and glowered in the indignity of humiliation. The humiliation of having secured their release with the good offices of Arjuna gnawed at Karna every living moment, but there was nothing he could do except to depend on the deceit of Shakuni and Duryodhana.

As the time for the Pandavas going incognito drew near, the Pandavas started going deeper into the forest, leaving all their companions behind. One day, the Pandavas were thirsty and the youngest one, Sahadeva, went looking for water. He chanced upon a pond. As he lowered his pitcher into the water, a Yaksha<sup>1</sup> challenged him.

The Yaksha said, 'Young man, this is my water body. I will allow you to take water from this water body only if you answer my questions.' Sahadeva thought that the Yaksha was talking through his hat. He just ignored him and went ahead with taking water from the pond. The Yaksha shot a dart at him and made him unconscious. When Sahadeva did not return for a long time, Yudhishtira sent Nakula to look for him. Nakula also reached the same water body and was intrigued to find Sahadeva lying unconscious, but he himself was

so thirsty that he thought of quenching his thirst first before investigating further.

He was similarly warned by the Yaksha but chose to ignore him and was knocked unconscious by the Yaksha by firing another dart.

Arjuna and Bhima followed and met the same fate.

At last, Yudhishtira had to go himself to investigate the matter. He was concerned that something terrible had happened. He was apprehensive of the low tactics of Duryodhana, Shakuni and the Kutil Dharmis.

When he came upon the scene of his four brothers lying unconscious near a water body, he decided to pause. He called out to the invisible person who had caused these great warriors to be in this state of unconsciousness. 'Do please reveal yourself, O great man. Anyone who can knock these great warriors unconscious cannot be an ordinary person.'

The Yaksha called out to Yudhishtira and threw the same challenge at him.

Yudhishtira readily agreed to answer the questions. Yaksha fired the questions one after the other.

The Yaksha asked Yudhishtira, 'Who makes the sun rise and ascend in the skies? Who moves the Sun around? Who is responsible for the sunset in the horizons? What is the true nature of the Sun and where is the Sun established?'

Yudhishtira answered, 'Brāhma makes the sun rise and ascend. The goddess of earth perambulates about the Sun. The Dharma sets the Sun. Truth is the actual Sun and the Sun is established in Truth only.'

Yaksha enquired, 'What instils "divinity" in Brahmins? What is the quality of virtuosity in a Brahmin? What is the human-like quality of a Brahmin? What is the conduct akin to a non-virtuous person in a Brahmin?'

Yudhishtira replied, 'The self-study (Swadhyaya) of the Vedas is divinity in a Brahmin. Penance is the quality like a virtuous person in a Brahmin. Death is human-like quality in a Brahmin. Criticising others is a conduct like a non-virtuous person. Nobody is born a Brahmin. Unless he has these qualities, he cannot be termed as a Brahmin.'

The Yaksha asked his third set of questions, ‘What instils divinity in Kshatriyas? What is the quality of virtuosity in a Kshatriya? What is the humanity of a Kshatriya? What is the conduct akin to a non-virtuous person in a Kshatriya?’

Yudhishtira replied, ‘The art of archery instils divinity in a Kshatriya. Oblation is the quality of virtuosity in a Kshatriya. Fear is his humanity. Abandoning people who are under the protection of a Kshatriya is conduct akin to a non-virtuous person in the Kshatriya.’

The Yaksha asked for the fourth time, ‘What is that thing which is like mantra in the performance of oblations (yajna)? Who is the performer of rites and ceremonies during yajna? Who accepts the offerings and oblations of a yajna? What is that which even a yajna cannot transgress?’

Yudhishtira replied, ‘Breath is like a mantra in the performance of rites. The mind is the performer of all rites in the course of yajna. Only shlokas of the Vedas, termed richa, accept oblation. The yajna cannot surpass nor transgress the riches.’

The Yaksha sounded impressed but continued to fire on, ‘What is heavier than earth, higher than heavens, faster than the wind and more numerous than straws?’

Yudhishtira answered, ‘One’s mother is heavier than the earth, one’s father is higher than the heavens, the mind is faster than the wind and our worries are more numerous than straws.’

The Yaksha applauded and asked the sixth set of questions, ‘Who is the friend of a traveller? Who is the friend of one who is ill and one who is dying?’

Yudhishtira answered, ‘The friend of a traveller is his companion. The physician is the friend of one who is sick and a dying man’s friend is charity.’

The Yaksha asked, ‘What is that which when renounced makes one lovable? What is that which when renounced makes one happy and wealthy?’

Yudhishtira replied, ‘Pride, if renounced, makes one lovable, renouncing desire makes one wealthy and to renounce avarice is to obtain happiness.’

The Yaksha asked, ‘What enemy is invincible? What constitutes an incurable disease? What sort of man is noble and what sort is



ignoble?’

Yudhishtira responded, ‘Anger is the invincible enemy. Covetousness constitutes a disease that is incurable. He is noble who desires the well-being of all creatures and he is ignoble who is without mercy.’

The Yaksha asked his final set of questions, ‘Who is truly happy? What is the greatest wonder? What is the path? And what is the news?’

Yudhishtira replied, ‘He who has no debts is truly happy. Countless people die every day, yet the living wishes to live forever. O Lord, what can be a greater wonder? Argument leads to no certain conclusion, the Srutis are different from one another; there is not even one rishi whose opinion can be accepted by all. The truth about Dharma and duty is hidden in the cave of our hearts, therefore, that alone is the path along which the great have trod. This world full of ignorance is like a pan. The sun is fire; the days and nights are fuel. The months and the seasons constitute the wooden ladle. Time is the cook that is cooking all creatures in that pan with such aids. This is the news.’

‘What is the essence of Dharma, Yudhishtira?’ asked the Yaksha.

‘śrūyatām dharmasarvasvam shrutvā chaivavadhārytām,  
ātmanah pratikūlani pareśām na samācharet.

*Listen to the essence of Dharma and absorb it; do not do unto others  
what you do not like done to you.’*

Even though Yudhishtira had answered all the questions in a satisfactory manner, the Yaksha only allowed him to choose one of his brothers to live. Yudhishtira chose Nakula. When the Yaksha asked him why he chose Nakula when he could have chosen sharp Arjuna or brave Bhima, Yudhishtira replied, ‘I love Kunti, my mother and Madri, my stepmother equally, If I choose my blood brothers, it will be an injustice to Madri, hence I choose Nakula.’

The Yaksha became so happy that he used a salve on all the brothers and made them fully conscious. He gave them a map of all the water bodies and blessed them that with this knowledge of all the water bodies in Aryavarta, may they never go thirsty.

They returned to their place of temporary stay. Krishna came and met them and advised them to go to Virātanagara, the capital of Matsya Pradesh. He chose Matsya because he felt that the Kauravas would never expect them to hide so close to the Kuru kingdom. They would look for them in far-off places. Also, their friend Kichaka, the Senapati of Matsya and the brother-in-law of King Virāta, virtually rules Virātanagara. If their masks are good enough, Virātanagara would be the last place that the Kauravas would look for them.

They bid goodbye to Krishna and moved towards Virātanagara.



<sup>1</sup> A tribe



- 47 -

## Incognito

**O**n the way to Virātanagara, the Pandavas faced yet another trial by a Naga who had not shifted to Uttara Kuru along with Takshaka, Vāsuki, and Manimālā because he opposed the Naga alliance with the Kutil Dharmis. He regarded Kutil Dharmis as fundamentally opposed to the spirit of the original Naga animism. He considered it to be safe only within the confines of the Sanatana country. He had relocated to a deep forest near Upaplavya<sup>1</sup>, where he spotted Bhima alone while he was on the lookout for some food for the group. The hotheaded Bhima got into an altercation with the Nagas.

The Nagas surrounded Bhima, roped him and tied him to a large tree. Yudhishtira came looking for him and he was intercepted as well. As a consummate diplomat and communicator, Yudhishtira engaged the Nagas in a dialogue.

The Naga leader, Nahusha, was impressed with Yudhishtira. He proposed a simple ransom, ‘I will ask you two questions, if you answer them, I will let both of you go and will also join you whenever you want me to.’

Yudhishtira readily agreed.

Nahusha asked, ‘Who is a Brahmin and why he should be known? By your speech, I think you are highly intelligent.’

Yudhishtira said, ‘O foremost of the Nagas, *one who possesses truth, charity, forgiveness, good conduct, benevolence, observance of the rites of his order and mercy is a Brahmin. One who pursues the attainment of Brahman is a Brahmin.* What do you think?’

The Naga said, ‘O Yudhishtira, truth, charity, forgiveness, benevolence, benignity, kindness and the Vedas work even for a Shudra. As regards the object to be known and which you allege is without both happiness and misery, I do not see any such that is devoid of these.’

Yudhishtira said, ‘Those characteristics that are present in a Shudra do not exist in a Brahmin and vice versa. Neither a Shudra is a Shudra by birth nor a Brahmin is a Brahmin by birth. One who possesses these virtues is a Brahmin.’

The Naga was very happy. He untied Bhimasena. Yudhishtira now pleaded with the wise Naga to clarify a few of his doubts too.

Nahusha happily agreed.

Yudhishtira said, ‘In this world, you are so learned in the Vedas and Vedangas; tell me, what is the way to attain liberation?’

The Naga replied, ‘Yudhishtira, my experience is that the man who bestows alms on the deserving, speaks kind words, tells the truth and abstains from doing injury to any creature attains moksha.’

Yudhishtira enquired, ‘Which is the higher of the two, truth or giving alms? Between kind behaviour and not harming any creature, which is superior?’

The Naga replied, ‘There can be no omnibus prescription for these. A fine sense of judgment in accordance with the context is the proper Dharma for that occasion. In certain situations, speaking the truth may harm a person, and in other situations, not harming a harmful creature may cause harm to the entire world. Hence, you have to fine-tune your sense of relative merit of Dharma.’

Yudhishtira said, ‘Tell me, Nahusha, how does one differentiate between kriya and Karma, and how does one ascend to the higher realms of existence?’

The Naga replied, ‘By his own acts, man may move in the Karmic cycle to human existence, or heavenly life, or birth in the lower animal kingdom.’

‘O my son, the sentient being, who follows the tenets of virtue and righteousness will be born as a human being; if he attains to the highest consciousness, he may be liberated; and if he indulges in base and foul actions, he may be born in the next cycle in the lower animal kingdom.’

Yudhishthira asked, ‘How does the Ātmā perceive sound, taste, smell, taste and touch through the gross senses?’

The Naga replied, ‘Yudhishthira, the effects that you refer to are called *Kāraṇas*. The Atman is beyond all this and the beauty is in discovering it through the intellect, by going beyond the intellect and into the realm of the highest consciousness.’

Yudhishthira said, ‘Tell me the distinguishing characteristics of the mind and the intellect. The knowledge of it is ordained as the chief duty of persons meditating on the Supreme Spirit.’

The Naga replied, ‘Through illusion, the Ātmā becomes subservient to the intellect. The intellect, though known to be subservient to the Ātmā, becomes the director of the latter. The intellect is brought into play by acts of perception; the mind is self-existent. The intellect does not cause the sensation, but the mind does it through sensory perception. This, my son, is the difference between the mind and the intellect.’

Yudhishthira and Nahusha felt instant admiration for each other. Yudhishthira paid his obeisance to Nahusha and received his benediction for the successful completion of his agnātavāsa.

The Pandavas had vanished without a trace and this worried the Kauravas infinitely. All through the twelve years, they had laboured under the illusion that the condition of thirteenth years of incognito living was a masterstroke that would ensure them an unlimited run of absolute mastery of the entire kingdom of Hastinapura.

The Pandavas took off their attire and their weapons on the edge of the forest near Virātanagara and hid them under a very large shami<sup>2</sup> tree. Arjuna was worried about his divyāstras, but the tree was so large that it concealed everything successfully.

All of them went to the king’s court and asked for employment at different intervals rather than asking for employment at the same time, which would have aroused suspicion.

Yudhishtira took the name of Kaṅka and took up the job of the king's partner in playing dice and also advised on statecraft.

Bhima took the name of Vallabha and found employment as a cook and wrestler.

Arjuna found it a good time to indulge in the pastime of singing and dancing, and also to oblige the wish of Urvashi, and took the garb of a neuter, Brihannalā, and became the teacher of Uttarā, the daughter of King Virāta.

Nakula tended horses as Granthika and Sahadeva looked after the king's bovine wealth as Tantipāla. Draupadi became a maid to Queen Sudeshnā, taking the name Sairandhri.

They would have easily passed their time incognito, but fate willed otherwise. Kichaka became infatuated with Sairandhri and molested her openly. The king was not able to do anything on the complaint made by Sairandhri, because Kichaka, physically a monster of a man, wielded the real power.

Draupadi complained to Bhima, who used Draupadi and tricked Kichaka to meet him at a secluded place. Kichaka went there thinking that Sairandhri was ready to surrender to him. Instead, he found Bhima and in a great wrestling bout, Bhima killed Kichaka.

The killing of Kichaka sent shockwaves throughout the kingdom of Virāta, and soon, it became the talk of the entire Aryavarta as well.

The thirteenth year was about to end. Killing of Kichaka was the first real hint Hastinapura had got. Consultations were done and a plan to smoke out the Pandavas was prepared. Bhishma and Drona argued for peace with the Pandavas, but Kripacharya was fully on board with Duryodhana. Shakuni, in the meantime, had sent his son Uluka to Mulasthāna for training with Jatil Muni.

A plot was hatched. The Kauravas sent professional thieves to steal the cow wealth of Virātanagara, wagering on the possibility that by their very nature, the Pandavas would come out to fight to save the cows on behalf of King Virāta.

The plot went exactly as planned. Two weeks remained before the thirteenth year was to get over.

The Pandavas waited for the two weeks even as Virātanagar reeled. Kichaka had been killed. Virāta was too old. He sent his son Uttara who could not muster enough courage to face the attackers. It was

then that Sairandhri suggested to Queen Sudeshnā that the neuter who was teaching Uttarā was an expert charioteer and also a lucky one.

Prince Uttara went with Brihannalā to fight the cattle herders. He was extremely nervous. The Pandavas followed him. Arjuna stopped near the shami tree where he had hidden his weapons and led the prince into the battle. Using his divyāstras, he routed the Kauravas. Only Karna offered brief resistance, before being defeated and put to flight. Bhishma was the only one who could fight on, but he voluntarily chose to accept defeat because Duryodhana and Karna had fled.

Arjuna came back, but the king thought that it was his son who had won the battle. Prince Uttara revealed the identity of the Pandavas. There was great thrill and excitement and a match between Princess Uttarā and Arjuna's son Abhimanyu was fixed. The marriage was solemnised in the presence of Krishna and Subhadrā, the mother of Abhimanyu.

Duryodhana and Shakuni tried to prove that the Pandavas had been exposed before the thirteenth year was over, but Vidura used his skill in astronomy and calendar-making to prove conclusively that Arjuna revealed himself only one day after the thirteen-year period had ended.

The Pandavas moved towards Indraprastha and set up their camp in Upaplavya, with Krishna taking the negotiations in his own hands.

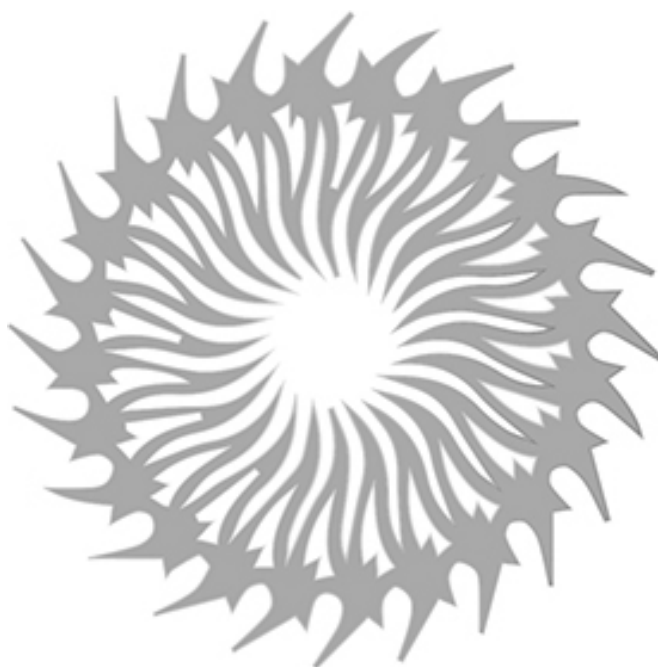




<sup>1</sup> Modern-day Alwar

<sup>2</sup> Khejri tree of the desert

## **PART VIII**





**- 48 -**

## **The Unarmed Mentor**

**T**he future course of action was discussed in the presence of Shri Krishna by the Pandava partisans. Drupada and Virāta were then allied to the Pandavas as they were relatives.

Sātyaki was emphatic that Duryodhana and Shakuni would not give up Indraprastha even though the Pandavas had dutifully completed the conditions of restoration of their kingdom. Drupada was also apprehensive about the plans of the Kauravas. From the news filtering through, Duryodhana was now fully in the grip of Shakuni and his mentor and would never agree to hand over the kingdom of the Pandavas back to them. Jatil Muni was now having wet dreams of ruling the whole of Bharatavarsha after creating a war, causing large-scale destruction and wiping out large populations as the privation and penury grew as an after-effect of war. He saw the kingdom of Jhankal spread all over Bharatavarsha after the war. Only one person stood between him and his dream—Shri Krishna.

After the marriage of Abhimanyu, Krishna went back alone to Dvaraka. In the thirteen years that the Pandavas were holed up in the forests, Dvaraka and the Yadavas were going downhill continuously. The situation had come to such a pass that Krishna had come to the conclusion that his path was going to seriously diverge from the arrogance, chicanery and profligate ways of the Yadavas. All his sons were turning out this way, particularly the evil Sāmba, who had gone

to abduct Duryodhana's daughter Lakshmanā, but had been caught and detained. A showdown was averted only because Duryodhana did not want to annoy Balarama, who had gone and camped outside Hastinapura to rescue Sāmba.

Drupada sent his purohita on behalf of the Pandavas to ask for restoration of Pandava's kingdom. Dhritarashtra himself received the purohita. All the stalwarts of Hastinapura were present in the court when the purohita relayed his message.

All the elders, including Bhishma, Vidura, Kripacharya and Dronacharya strongly supported the restoration of Indraprastha to the Pandavas immediately and without any condition.

Bhishma said emphatically, 'A king that does not rule with Dharma on his side is bound to come to grief. He not only brings himself to ruin, but also brings the Rājya to ruin, affecting the subjects as well.'

Karna opposed the proposal totally and absolutely. 'A State is won and maintained by the force of arms and not by any abstruse notions of Dharma. Dharma is with the one who can defend it. The Pandavas have nothing with them. A poverty-stricken man has no right to keep a Rājya with him. We will defeat them in no time.'

'Like you defeated them in Dwaita Vana and in Matsya Desha?' Bhishma remarked sarcastically.

Karna was livid with rage. Dhritarashtra broke up the meeting to avoid further unpleasantness.

The purohita came back and reported the exchange to the Pandavas who were now camping in Upaplavya.

Arjuna immediately set off to Dvaraka to formally request Krishna to join the Pandavas in case of a conflict. Duryodhana's spies informed him that Arjuna was headed to Dvaraka. Duryodhana also set off to Dvaraka.

Duryodhana managed to reach Dvaraka just a little before Arjuna did. He immediately headed towards the palace of the Dwarakadhisha. He was informed that Krishna was sleeping. Rukmini told him that he could either wait and accept her hospitality or if he was in too much of a hurry, he could just wait in the room where Krishna was sleeping. Duryodhana was not a patient man. He asked to be taken to Krishna's room. He was prepared to wait in the room.

Duryodhana was taken to the room. He sat on the only chair available in the room, placed towards the head of the bed where Krishna pretended to be asleep.

Arjuna also landed up a little later. He was also taken to the room where Krishna slept. Arjuna entered the room and stood near the feet of the bed, with his hands folded. They were great friends, but Arjuna's respect for the Yogeshvara form of Krishna was such that he always treated him as a guru.

Krishna seemed to wake up. He saw Arjuna standing near his feet, and asked, 'Hello, Arjuna, what brings you here?'

Duryodhana chimed in, 'Govinda, I have come here before Arjuna. War may begin soon. I have come here to seek your help. Niti demands that I should be given my choice first. I want you to be on our side.'

Arjuna just stood there with his hands folded.

Krishna smiled in his own inimitable way. 'Duryodhana. I am really happy today. For the first time ever, I have heard the word "Niti" from your mouth. Now let me lay out the conditions. I am mandated by the Yadava Sudharma Sabha to not fight on any one side, as both the Kaurava and the Pandavas are related to the Yadavas by various bonds. Already, a lot of bloodshed has occurred among the Andhakas, Vrishnis and Bhojakas. I have, therefore, decided, that I will be on one side, fully unarmed, and will not lift any astra or shastra. The entire Yadava army will be on the other side, led by Kritavarma. Both of you may choose. Since I have seen Arjuna first, he will get the first choice.'

Duryodhana protested loudly, claiming that he had arrived first. Krishna taunted him, 'If you are so righteous, why don't you just keep your word and honour the rights of the Pandavas to Indraprastha?'

Duryodhana kept on protesting. He was scared that if Arjuna chose the powerful Yadava army, his calculations of war would come to nought.

Arjuna made the choice, 'Keshava, I just need you on my side. *No body can work without a brain and no Arjuna can succeed without Krishna.*'

Duryodhana was thrilled. The idiotic Arjuna had given him what he wanted. He could not believe that there were such people in the world. He muttered under his breath, ‘This is the reason that Duryodhana is the lord of the world and the Pandavas are grovelling and begging.’

Duryodhana took the army and went to meet all the Yadava generals. Balarama rebuked him and declared his intention to remain neutral, ‘If the war is inevitable, I would rather go on a tirthayātra than even witness the destruction of the human race.’ Duryodhana extracted the commitment of the Akshuhini army of the Yadavas, met Kritavarma and happily left for Hastinapura.

Arjuna stayed back in Dvaraka. He was lounging around in the evening with Krishna, Rukmini and Satyabhama. He asked Krishna softly, ‘Achyuta, you knew that if Duryodhana did not get the Yadava army, he might not have gone for a war. Why have you thrown us all into this war?’

Krishna smiled. ‘Pārtha, do you know that Duryodhana is not the only one on the path of adharma. The Yadavas are also on that path.’

He kept quiet after that. Rukmini was taken aback and so was Arjuna. It was now that Arjuna realised that adharma in any form was an anathema to his childhood friend and his guru. *Krishna truly was the Jagadguru—Niranjana, Nirguṇa, Nirākāra, Nirvikalpa, Nija and Niriha.*<sup>1</sup>

Krishna and Arjuna left for Upaplavya together. The preparations had been going on well. Duryodhana had got the powerful Yadava army and he had banished all thoughts of rapprochement. Shakuni and his Kutil Dharma was there to provide all the mental and moral support system to him.

Krishna and the Pandavas sat down in Upaplavya to take stock of the situation. There was not much that was happening on the Kaurava side that would give any hope of avoiding the war. Yet, Dhritarashtra had become mortally scared of war and the possibility of losing all his sons and the Rājya because Vidura was emphatic that this is what the result was going to be.

Dhritarashtra sent Sanjaya to Upaplavya to understand the point of view of the Pandavas.

Sanjaya returned to Hastinapura to repeat exactly the same things that Vidura, Bhishma and Dronacharya had been saying. Karna and Duryodhana flared the situation again and refused to consider any other course of action except war.



- <sup>1</sup> Spotless, without attributes, without form, without duality, Inner focused and without ego.





**- 49 -**

## **The Negotiator**

Krishna advised the Pandavas to be ready for war. They discussed their preparations. The whole of Bharatavarsha had been divided up into two camps. The two sides summoned vast armies to help them at Kurukshetra for the war. The kingdoms of Panchala, Dvaraka, Kāshi, Kekaya, Magadha, Matsya, Chedi, Pandyas, Kalinga, the Yadus of Mathura and some other clans like the Parama Kambojas supported the Pandavas. The allies of the Kauravas included the kings of Pragajyotisha, Anga, Kekaya, Sindhudesa (including Sindhus, Sauvira and Sivi), Mahishmati, Avanti in Madhyadesa, Madra, Gandhara, Bahlika, Kambojas and many others.

Sanjaya's confabulation with Dhritarashtra yielded no results. It was clear that Bhishma would have to lead the Kaurava army if the war would take place, and the war seemed to be inevitable due to the intransigence of Duryodhana, his mentor Shakuni and by extension, Jatil Muni, who was salivating at the prospect of being able to launch his political religion. Jatil Muni was dreaming to become the first religious leader who is also an emperor. He planned to kill Shakuni and Duryodhana after the war had been won. He was now quite sure that the methods by which the Kauravas would win the war would be his methods, and a glorification of those methods after the war had been won would automatically pitchfork Kutil Dharma as the Dharma of choice.

Dhritarashtra called for an interaction. Bhishma castigated Karna and Shakuni so badly that Karna refused to fight as long as Bhishma was in command. Vidura dwelt long and ponderously on the duties of a king.

Vidura expounded his Vidura Niti for a few hours and summarised it in the end—

- A king should wish for the prosperity of all and should never set heart on inflicting misery on any group.
- He should pay attention to those who have fallen in distress and adversity. He should not ignore persistent sufferings of those who depend on him, even if the suffering is small.
- He should show compassion to all creatures, do what is good for all creatures rather than a select few.
- He should never impede the development and growth of agriculture and economic activity by anyone.
- He should always be prepared to protect those that depend on him for their safety and security.
- He should be fair and accessible to his people. By means of virtue should he attain success, by means of virtue should he sustain it.
- He should consider the welfare of his people as his personal responsibility.
- He should encourage learning and transmission of knowledge.
- He should encourage profit and virtue. Prosperity depends on good deeds. Good deeds depend on prosperity.
- He should avoid friendship with the sinful.
- He should never misuse wealth, use harsh speech nor inflict extreme or cruel punishments.
- He should only appoint those as ministers (senior positions in his staff) whom he has examined well for their history of virtue, dispositions, activity and whether they give others their due.

After listening to the advice of Vidura about the duties of a king, Duryodhana laughed derisively.

‘Mahatma Vidura, you are living in a world of dreams. The Dharma that you preach is now obsolete. Any Dharma that clings to a trope that is many thousands years old is useless. We need a Dharma that is dynamic and changes with the times.’

Vidura taunted Duryodhana, ‘Are you talking of Shakuni’s Kutil Dharma? The very name suggests that the two terms are paradoxical. What is Kutil cannot be Dharma and what is Dharma cannot be Kutil. Your cabal is going delusional. Under the effect of delusion, your ability to think clearly has taken a hit.’

In Upaplavya, Krishna suggested that he wanted to have one more attempt at reconciliation.

When Draupadi learnt of this, she went on a hunger strike. Krishna went to assuage her.

Draupadi threw a fit, ‘Do you remember, Keshava, what you had promised me at the time of my humiliation at the hands of Dushasana?’

Krishna kept smiling, ‘Of course, I do. How can you even think that I would forget my promise to you?’

‘And yet you are going to Hastinapura as an envoy to talk peace with those brutes. Have they repented even once on the excesses that they have committed against us? Yet, you have given your army to them, strengthened them and discounted all the possibility of an easy victory. I do not understand your ways, Achyuta. Are you a friend, or a foe?’

Krishna patted Draupadi softly on her head. ‘I solemnly swear on your head, Prithā, that I will avenge your humiliation. Yet, it has to be avenged in a way that it sets an example. *As far as possible, our processes should be commensurate with the nobility of the objectives they set to achieve. Objectives, however, are greater than the process.* I will do right by you but let me at least make an attempt to try a great process to achieve a great objective. The objective will always be uppermost in my vision. Be absolutely sure and be absolutely assured.’

Draupadi allowed Krishna to go to Hastinapura only after she had fully satisfied herself that there would not be a compromise on the target that she had given to Krishna. She had no faith left in her

husbands after the disrobement event. She believed and had faith only in Krishna Yogeshvara.

Krishna reached Hastinapura and was offered a palace by Duryodhana and Karna. They met him and invited him for a meal. Krishna snubbed them and went to Vidura's house. He met his aunt Kunti, Vidura's wife Sulabhā and conferred with Vidura. Vidura told him that not only there was going to be no breakthrough, but he had to be careful that the Kutil Dharmis that had gathered in Hastinapura under the care of Shakuni would not harm him. Krishna was prepared for this eventuality. Sātyaki had accompanied him with some of the finest Yadava and Panchala warriors.

The Sabha assembled next morning with Dhritarashtra, Bhishma, Vidura, Kripacharya and Dronacharya present. Duryodhana and Karna were also present in strength with Shakuni. Shakuni had been given the task of rounding up Krishna. Shakuni believed, as Jatil Muni had been telling him for decades, that Krishna was the key. By now, Shakuni was absolutely sure that Duryodhana had made a mistake in letting Krishna go on the side of the Pandavas. 'Duryodhana,' he thought, 'was a fool to let a brilliant strategist and tactician like Krishna walk over to the Pandavas. An army is as good as its commander. An army of lions led by a sheep is no match to an army led by a lion.'

Shakuni tried to impress upon Duryodhana and Karna to round up Krishna in the Sabha itself. Karna was hesitant, being the Dharmic that he was.

The discussions began, but soon foundered on the intransigence of the Duryodhana-Shakuni duo. Bhishma, Vidura and Dronacharya were overruled by the duo and Dhritarashtra kept requesting Krishna to somehow avoid a catastrophic war.

Suddenly, Sātyaki swept into the Sabha and decapitated fifty waiters who were actually soldiers tasked to surround and arrest Krishna.

Karna drew his bow and arrow. Duryodhana drew his sword, but Sātyaki was too swift. And then the unthinkable happened.

Krishna moved to take out his Sudarshana Chakra. Seeing this, Bhishma jumped from his seat and grabbed Krishna's feet. Bhishma

knew that by the instruction of Guru Parashurama, the Chakra could not go back without taking someone's head.

Bhishma prayed to Krishna with trembling hands, 'No Govinda, no. As the senapati of the Kaurava army, I assure you that nothing adharmic shall be allowed to take place as long as I am in charge. Karna and Shakuni will have no role in Hastinapura army as long as I am the senapati. Since you know that I cannot be defeated, you will have to find a way of getting rid of me, but even the Kaurava side will have to find a way of getting rid of me if they want to use their Kutil Dharma warriors. Karna has already refused to fight under me. Please do not get the Sudarshana Chakra out. You have taken a vow not to use any astra.'

Dhritarashtra was quaking. He was mumbling incoherently. He had to be helped by Vidura before he came into his senses again.

Krishna stood tall and stately.

'Looks like I have to reveal the full extent of my powers to these idiots who are under the illusion that they are very powerful.'





**- 50 -**

## **The Inverted Tree**

Krishna stood tall and stately. He motioned as if he had the Sudarshana Chakra in his hands, without actually taking it in his hands. Bhishma knelt at his feet with the greatest reverence.

‘O Keshava, the battles and wars will be fought as long as this earth remains. The five elements that make up this universe come together and move apart in a rhythmic, harmonic motion. Forget about these low-level creatures that cannot look beyond their identity and hubris. Enlighten me about the secrets of this universe.’

Krishna picked up Bhishma and bowed to him, ‘O Pitamaha, it doesn’t behove you to kneel in front of me. I have only recently been to the ashrama of Guru Ghora Āngirasa, my final guru, after Acharya Sandipani and Acharya Parashurama. He was able to put all my learning in perspective.

*‘The Universe is like an inverted banyan tree. The roots going upwards link to the Brahman. With roots upward and branches downwards this primaeval tree is everlasting. With roots upwards refer to our Brahmā with four faces, the secondary creator who is situated above the seven worlds of Bhur, Bhuvah, Svah, Mahah, etc. The branches downwards refer to all the denizens of creation in the form of humans, animals, birds, fish, plants, insects, etc. The indestructible nature of this tree is due to its being avyayan or*

everlasting like a river with no end; a tree it is impossible to uproot until one is weaned from sense gratification and material desires by the mercy of the Supreme and *ātmā tattva* is achieved by His grace. The word *chhandamasi* refers to the injunctions and prohibitions of the Vedic scriptures, which are symbolised by the leaves that flourish or dwindle in proportion to the Karma or reactions to the actions one accrues by adhering to or ignoring such provisions. Leaves are very instrumental in preserving the longevity of trees. Whoever has knowledge of this tree, as just explained, comprehends the Vedic scriptures as the knowledge of non-attachment and knows ways and means of uprooting this tree and allows one to achieve *ātmā tattva*.

‘If anyone in this universe thinks that his sensory perceptions that are like a few leaves in this endless maze of trunks, leaves and roots is all that there is to this tree, he is totally under delusion. *The journey from asatya to satya is a very exciting journey if only you realise that there is a journey. Otherwise, you come with your eyes closed and you will go away with your eyes closed.* The sum of total energy in the Universe will always be constant. What we perceive through our ordinary senses is just the form that can be sensed, the sound, the form, the smell, the taste and the touch corresponding to the various elements in the universe. This knowledge is but gross knowledge. The real knowledge or *satya* is like going up this tree into the single root that is connecting you to the top—to the Brahman.’

Both Bhishma and Vidura were overwhelmed by the deep wisdom they were receiving from the Yogeshvara, Shri Krishna. Karna, Shakuni and Duryodhana were following what was being said, but they deliberately ignored what was being discussed.

‘*I must say this very clearly,*’ said Krishna, ‘*those whom the Ishvara wants destroyed; the first thing that he does is to deprive them of discrimination and discretion.* Look at the faces of these greedy people sitting here. They think that they are above Dharma, that they will uproot Dharma and establish a new one. Let me tell these idiots that Rta and Dharma are intertwined. You cannot destroy Dharma without upsetting the forces of Rta, and that will destroy not just your body, but the quintessence of collective consciousness as well. The gift of identity, and intellect is given to us so that we can use them to go beyond the intellect and into the *nirākāra*, *nirguṇa*,

nirvikalpa state of Chit. However, that is the state of niranjana, and it is not possible to reach that state with the attachments and greedy affiliations that these people have.’

Krishna got up to leave. Duryodhana and Karna did not even get up to give him the bare courtesy of a farewell. Dhritarashtra was quaking with fear. The extraordinary genius of Krishna could be ignored only at one’s peril.

Krishna went back to Upaplavya and the armies started marching towards Kurukshetra. The king of Madra, Shalya, the maternal grandfather of Nakula and Sahadeva, was marching to meet the Pandava army. Duryodhana played another low trick. He sent his own commanders to welcome him and serve him well. Being happy with the welcome he received, he asked Duryodhana for a boon. Duryodhana grabbed the opportunity to ask him to join the Kaurava side. Shalya could not say no, but even though his army joined the Kaurava side, he made it clear that his commitments could not be bought or sold.

The final nail was prepared to be struck by provoking the Pandavas. Duryodhana was scared that Bhishma and Krishna may still be able to get Yudhishtira to agree to a rapprochement. Fully imbued with the spirit of a political religion by now, he feared the very presence of a noble man like Yudhishtira and his brothers. Shakuni gave him a perfect solution.

Duryodhana sent the son of Shakuni, Uluka, well trained under Jatil Muni for years, to the Pandavas for communicating a very insulting message. The idea was to provoke the Pandavas to such an extent that any truce may become impossible. So he gave detailed instructions to Uluka.

Duryodhana instructed Uluka to tell Yudhishtira these exact words, ‘You are like the cat Kilika that acts pious in the company of mice even as she keeps eating the mice. You had desired just five villages, but I refused even that. Now using your low cunning, you have got Vāsudeva Krishna’s support and now you want the whole of Kuru Empire. Verily, there is no bigger hypocrite than you.’

Duryodhana then told Uluka what he should say to Vāsudeva Krishna, ‘You are nothing but a deceitful man without any sense of dignity. Despite saying that you will not fight on behalf of the



Pandavas, you have become their principal advisor in matters of war. You are nothing but a conjurer of tricks.'

Duryodhana further sent a message to Bhimasena, through Uluka, stating, 'You gluttonous fool, you have sworn to drink the blood of Dushasana and break my thighs for that five-husband prostitute Draupadi who enjoyed with Kichaka when you were just a cook. You are fit to just remain a cook rather than have delusions of being a prince.'

Duryodhana further instructed Uluka to tell Nakula that he is not a man, he is just a craven man who is nothing but a slave of his step-brother Yudhishtira.

Duryodhana continued, 'Next, you must tell Sahadeva in the presence of the assembled monarchs that the battle is on him now!'

'Say next, from me,' continued Duryodhana, 'to both Virāta and Drupada that they are both no better than slaves of the Pandavas in spite of all their great pretensions.'

'Tell Dhrishtadyumna, the prince of Panchala, that the hour has now come for him and he has also come for his own hour! After facing Drona in battle, he will get to know what is best for him!'

'Tell Shikhandin that he is but a female in the body of a man and he is not going to bring any honour to those with whom he is associated with.'

Having said this, King Duryodhana laughed like a man possessed. He patted Uluka on the back and said, 'Tell Dhananjaya, so that Vāsudeva can hear you, "O hero, you either kill us or be killed! Remember how we sent all of you to exile. Time has come for us to send you now on a permanent exile from this world to the world beyond. Your character is no better than that of the neuter that you were during your agnātavāsa. Now behave like a real neuter and run away.'

Uluka loved the task. He went and regurgitated everything that was told to him by Duryodhana. The Pandavas wanted to slay him for these insults. Krishna prevented that and sent a message back to Duryodhana that the war would start the next day.





**- 51 -**

## **The Song Celestial**

The stage was set. The war would begin the next day. Dhritarashtra was concerned. He had requested Sanjaya to narrate to him the full account of ‘the great war’. Sanjaya had set up his communication channels and was able to bring a half-a-day delayed account to him.

Shakuni received news early morning, just before the forces were to be arrayed in the Kurukshetra battlefield, that Manimālā had killed her husband and had assumed the mantle of Kutil Dharma. It was ironical as the fundamental tenets of Kutil Dharma mandated only a subservient position to women.

After a brief ceremony, which was completed with Pralaya Mantra of ‘Jai Jhankalam’, Shakuni assumed the title of Saumya Muni. Unknown to him, Manimālā had already assumed the title of ‘Kapat Mata’ and carried out some fundamental changes in the principles of Kutil Dharma by holding a council and recognising the role of Jhankal’s daughter. She also incorporated the features of Naga animism in the revised version of Kutil Dharma.

Rukmi had arrived with his army. In the night, he went to the Kauravas and boasted that the victory would come to the party that would have him on his side. The arrogant Duryodhana shooed him away. He landed early morning in the camp of the Pandavas, and made the boast to them in a similar fashion. Yudhishtira consulted

Shri Krishna who advised them against accepting such an arrogant help. So Rukmi had to go away and became the only major maharathi not to take part in the Mahabharata war. Balarama being the other.

The Pandavas had appointed Drupada's elder son, Dhrishtadyumna, as their senapati. Though the brothers wanted Drupada as the senapati, Drupada was himself reluctant, so the mantle fell on Dhrishtadyumna in the end. The choice was made easier because of Shalya, who had been trapped by Duryodhana by deceit.

Sanjaya narrated the events of the battlefield to Dhritarashtra, 'Maharaja, two great armies—one led by Bhishma, having all your sons and the great states of Gandhara, Madra and Sindhu, buttressed by the great Yadavas led by Kritavarma; the other, led by Dhrishtadyumna but actually having Arjuna in the middle with Krishna as Arjuna's charioteer having a Sanatana three-cornered flag adorned by the figure of the great Hanumana—have arrayed themselves against each other.'

Dhritarashtra's anxiety knew no bound. He nervously asked, 'What did my sons and the Pandavas do?'

Sanjaya commenced the story of the Mahabharata, 'the great war', with the description of the great warriors. 'O King Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana described the various great warriors of the Pandava army to Guru Dronacharya. He pointed out the great maharathis on the Pandavas' side—Bhima, Arjuna, Drupada, Virāta, Dhrishtaketu, the king of Kāshi, Purujit, Kuntibhoja, Yudhamnyu, Chekitāna, Shaibya, Uttamauja, Abhimanyu and the five sons of Draupadi.

'Duryodhana then pointed out the great maharathis of his own army—Bhishma, Karna, Kripacharya, Ashwatthāma and Somadatta.

'Duryodhana boasted that his eleven-division, or akshauhini, army was quite adequate to win the war, whereas the seven divisions of the army of the Pandavas were simply not sufficient.

'As a token of starting the war, Bhishma Pitamaha blew his conch, but the collective noise made by the great conches of the Pandavas had completely outdone the sound of the Kaurava conches. In particular, the Pāñchajanya of Shri Krishna has the greatest sound than any other conch. Then there were many conches—Devdutta of Arjuna, Paundra of Bhima, Anantavijaya of Yudhishtira, Sughosh of

Nakula and Manipushpak of Sahadeva. The Pandavas clearly won the battle of conches.’

Dhritarashtra did not like this premature conclusion by Sanjaya. Even though he was primarily responsible for this war due to his inaction at crucial moments, he still preferred to credit fate with the turn of events.

Sanjaya could sense the unease on Dhritarashtra’s face.

Sanjaya next described Shri Krishna. ‘Shri Krishna was looking like a picture of great Yogeshvara, smiling and relaxed in the midst of the tension of the war. He was wearing his pitambara, and his favourite mayurapankha adorned his diadem. He was holding the reins of the four horses, as if a great Yogi is holding the reins of his senses. He is verily the realised soul, who has ascended the roots of the “Inverted Tree” and is feeding the trunks and leaves of his disciples the Pandavas. The Kauravas were looking like the rootless creepers who simply cling to any support they get. Shakuni has deprived the creepers of all other support and unmindful of the roots they could have grown among the nectars of great men like Bhishma, they have chosen to be with the deserted desiccated dried-up bed of a stream like Shakuni.’

Dhritarashtra admonished Sanjaya lightly, ‘Please stick to the actual description without adding your own figures of speech.’

Sanjaya smiled. He knew what was biting the pitiful Dhritarashtra.

Sanjaya continued, ‘Arjuna requested Shri Krishna to take his chariot in the middle of the two armies arrayed against each other.

‘Arjuna surveyed the great army of the Kauravas arrayed in front of him. The great Arjuna, who had already achieved the state of non-duality or nirvikalpa, has developed confusion in his mind. His mind is no longer in the state of non-duality that has distinguished him from all the other warriors. It looked as if he was no longer in a position to wield his divyāstras, because divyāstras can be wielded only when one has risen to a state of non-attachment.’

Sanjaya suddenly went quiet. Dhritarashtra grew anxious and asked him, ‘What happened? Why have you stopped your commentary.’

Sanjaya whispered, ‘Arjuna had an attack of moha and Maya, and was refusing to fight.’

Dhritarashtra’s heart started leaping with delight.

Dhritarashtra pretended surprise. 'What happened? It is not Kshatriya Dharma to run away from a battle.'

Sanjaya said, 'Arjuna was saying that human life is all about relationships and if one is going to enjoy a kingdom by having to kill all those whom he holds dear, there is no merit in such a victory.'

'He was saying that human life is ephemeral, and the enjoyment of this life is only in the emotional interaction with the near and dear ones. What is the use of a victory that eliminates these very people?'

'Arjuna was saying that his throat was becoming parched and his limbs were giving way.' Sanjaya paused.

Dhritarashtra's heart was leaping with joy, though he was trying to keep a glum face.

'Didn't Krishna say anything?' Dhritarashtra asked gingerly. He was secretly hoping that Krishna would accept Arjuna's pleadings and the war would be called off.

Sanjaya remained quiet for a long time. Dhritarashtra started getting very impatient.

'Tell me Sanjaya, what happened?'

Sanjaya started praising Arjuna. 'Arjuna is a rare breed among human beings. His expertise as a warrior comes from yoga. He is the only one, other than Krishna, among the warriors on both sides, who has achieved "Nirvikalpa Samadhi".'

Dhritarashtra was getting impatient.

'Come on, Sanjaya. Tell me what happened then?'

'Mahārāja...' Sanjaya paused again.

'Yes, yes...' Dhritarashtra goaded Sanjaya to go on speaking.

'Maharaja, Arjuna took off his bow and quiver and put them down. He was then sitting.'

Dhritarashtra felt like jumping up and down with joy. He knew that if Arjuna refuses to fight, there would be no war and it would mean surrender from the Pandavas.

'What was Krishna doing, Sanjaya?' asked Dhritarashtra.

Sanjaya paused again and then said solemnly.

'Krishna was laughing, Maharaja.'





## Notes

Transliteration of Indic proper nouns and shlokas

1. Acharya: Āchārya
2. Akasha: Ākāsha
3. Aravasthana: Aravasthāna
4. Arya: Ārya
5. Aryavarta: Āryāvarta
6. Ashrama: Āshrama
7. Atma: Ātmā
8. Avantika: Avantikā
9. Balarama: Balarāma
10. Banashayya: Bāṇashayyā
11. Bana Ganga: Bāṇa Gangā
12. Banakantaka: Bāṇakaṇṭaka
13. Bharata: Bhārata
14. Bharatavarsha: Bhāratavarsha
15. Bhava: Bhāva
16. Brahma: Brāhma
17. Chandrachuda: Chandrachūḍa
18. Charmanyavati: Chārmaṇyavati
19. Daruka: Dāruka
20. Dhritarashtra: Dhritarāśṭra
21. Dipavali: Dipāvali
22. Dvaraka: Dvārakā



23. Gananayaka: Gaṇanāyaka
24. Gandhara: Gāndhāra
25. Ganika: Gaṇikā
26. Ganita: Gaṇita
27. Guneshvara: Guṇeshvara
28. Idulika: Idulikā
29. Indrani: Indrāṇi
30. Jarasandha: Jarāsaṇḍha
31. Jatil: Jaṭil
32. Jhankal: Bāṇakaṇṭaka
33. Kanha: Kānhā
34. Krishna: Kṛṣṇa
35. Kamsa: Kaṃsa
36. Kanada: Kaṇāda
37. Kanika: Kaṇika
38. Kansaa: Kaṇsā
39. Karna: Karṇa
40. Kashthagriha: Kāṣṭhagriha
41. Konkana: Koṅkaṇa
42. Kshatra: Kshātra
43. Kundinapura: Kuṇḍinapura
44. Lavangika: Lavaṅgikā
45. Lavanyavati: Lāvaṇyavati
46. Madra: Mādra
47. Magadhamadana: Magadhamādana
48. Mani: Maṇi
49. Mansukha: Mansukhā
50. Mathura: Mathurā
51. Matsarya: Mātsarya
52. Matula: Mātula
53. Mishmika: Miṣmikā
54. Naga: Nāga
55. Narmada: Narmadā
56. Narakasura: Narakāśura
57. Nirguna: Nirguṇa
58. Om: Oṃ
59. Omkara: Oṃkāra

60. Omkareshvara: Oṃkāreśvara
61. Panchajanya: Pāñchajanya
62. Panchala: Pāñchāla
63. Panchali: Pāñchālī
64. Pandava: Pāṇḍava
65. Parashurama: Paraśurāma
66. Prabhasa: Prabhāsa
67. Pragajyotisha: Prāgajyotiśa
68. Pranama: Praṇāma
69. Purusha: Puruṣa
70. Radha: Rādhā
71. Rashtra: Rāṣṭra
72. Rukmini: Rukmiṇī
73. Samadhi: Samādhi
74. Samkhya: Sāṃkhya
75. Samskara: Saṃskāra
76. Sandipani: Sāndipani
77. Satyabhama: Satyabhāmā
78. Shankhabhara: Śaṅkhabhāra
79. Shraddha: Śraddhā
80. Shrigalava: Śrigālava
81. Somanatha: Somanātha
82. Sudharma Sabha: Sudharmā Sabhā
83. Syamantaka: Syāmantaka
84. Tunga: Tungā
85. Varna: Varṇa
86. Vijayadashami: Vijayādashami
87. Yadava: Yādava
88. Yashoda: Yashodā
89. Yudhishthira: Yudhiṣṭhira



## About the Author



Sanjay Dixit, additional chief secretary to the Government of Rajasthan, has many feathers in his cap. He graduated as a marine engineer and sailed the high seas for a few years before changing course to civil services. He is also well-recognised as a cricket administrator who once defeated Lalit Modi in a famous election for the post of the president of the Rajasthan Cricket Association. He considers Rajasthan's first Ranji Trophy title triumph as his crowning achievement. He is also credited with bringing a revolutionary new

technology for production of date palms on a large scale in western Rajasthan, transforming livelihoods.

Dixit is a prolific columnist on contemporary topics. He has a deep interest in Indian languages, culture, economics, history, philosophy and spirituality. His six-part series—‘All Religions Are Not the Same’—has won critical acclaim. He also heads The Jaipur Dialogues as its chairman, creating an India-centric think tank in the process, and hosts the YouTube series ‘Weekly Dialogues’.

*Krishna Yogeshvara* is the sequel to the bestselling *Krishna Gopeshvara*, also published by Bloomsbury.