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KRISHNA GOPESHVARA

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BOOK 1 OF THE LORD KRISHNA TRILOGY

THE TRUTH OF VRISHNIS

यत्रगोपेश्वरः कृष्णोयत्रराधायोगिनी तत्रमुक्तिरानंदम्धुवाप्रीतिर्मतिर्मम

Sanjay Dixit

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FOREWORD

Background of Krishna and the Mahabharata

The *Mahabharata*, for which Sri Krishna is the central figure, is the great national epic of India going back over three thousand years. It is one of the longest books in the world, with tremendous intricacy in its stories, and has seen several additions and adaptations over the long course of time. The *Mahabharata* is attributed to the sage and Vedic compiler Vyaasa and no doubt has a core of his writing, but has been amplified and commented upon by great thinkers and yogis not only in India but extending to Indonesia and all the areas that Hindu culture has influenced.

Sri Krishna is the dominant figure behind India's profound yogic civilization. He is the most famous of its many avatars and gurus, and the most common figure in its many stories, poems, music, dance and artistic depictions. Krishna is an iconic figure who has influenced the entire world as one of humanity's most important spiritual guides. His *Bhagavad Gita* is the most central scripture and teaching of the Hindu religion. Yet there is something profoundly human about Krishna as well. His character engages all aspects of life, all fields of activity, and has something for every type of individual. His solutions to life's difficulties are very practical on an outer level; yet direct us to our

own highest potentials, awakening our inner Self, not leaving us with any external dogma to blindly accept.

Krishna is a monumental figure with many sides to his character and a diverse life experience, far more so than any usual religious or spiritual personage. Krishna is a sublime guru, master yogi, noble king, skillful diplomat, determined warrior, and sensitive artist. His wisdom is profound beyond limits providing the essence of the *Vedas* and their Rishi vision. Yet his actions often present an enigma, paradox and mystery, working through the dilemmas of human life in a way that the human mind finds it difficult to comprehend.

Krishṇa's behavior does not conform to any regulations, stereotypes or dogmas, even what some may regard as the fixed rules of the *Vedas* or Hindu law codes. He acts out of a direct insight beyond the dichotomies of the human mind or any set code of conduct. He recommends what is best possible in a given circumstance, however difficult, rather than following a rigid ideal beyond the practicalities of its application. He does not uphold any mere abstract principles but draws from the very ground of existence within us like a force of nature. He knows that life is an inner battle between dharma and adharma and cannot be won by pity, compromise or fear. He is a spiritual warrior above all, which is the basis of his yoga, bhakti and Jnana, most eloquently taught on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

Krishna embodies the very abundance and mystery of life that cannot be reduced to any pattern and does not follow any expected or planned course. His way of action is dynamic, fluid and spontaneous, not a repetition of the past. He shows us our highest human potential with the skills and capacities that we can draw upon deep within us. He guides us how to deal with the most problematical situations in a transformative manner, pushing us beyond our ordinary human choices. His thinking is always out of the box as it were.

As such, encountering Krishna in his many facets is certainly daunting, particularly in this era of media stereotypes. It is easier to focus on one side of Krishna only or to make him into a hagiographic image in which we accept whatever he does as an article of faith, rather than searching out the deeper wisdom behind his actions. But to do so is to miss the real Krishna who is meant to challenge us to a

higher vision, not to make us feel safe in our mere human identity and conventional role in society.

Sanjay Dixit

Sanjay Dixit has authored a unique new trilogy on Lord Krishṇa that goes into the depths and embraces the paradoxes of Krishṇa's life in a way that is innovative and inspiring. He brings out the reality of Krishṇa, both human and cosmic, for a new global era beyond all dogmas of the past. It is a vast and daunting task that he has taken upon himself to bring Krishṇa back to life as the master of all sides of the human being and a guide for all aspects of society. He has the insight and breadth of vision to address his topic in a way that brings Krishṇa closer to us again today, not as some distant deity but as our highest potential, our inner wisdom and capacity for ever new growth and transformation.

Previous efforts to understand Krishna have often focused on one side of the great master, whether it is devotional Bhakti, Vedantic Jnana or integral Yoga, which certainly have their inestimable value. Yet Krishna contains all of this wisdom and more and embraces their application in a totally engaged human life, connecting with humanity as a whole, young and old.

Notably Sanjay presents Krishṇa as a rationalist who teaches people how to think and discern in order to uncover the right way of action that is hidden behind the veil of appearances and the illusions of the human mind. Yet his Krishṇa is no mere logician, much less an atheist or agnostic, but one who realizes that true insight is born of detached inquiry and sustained contemplation — which requires that all questions and all possibilities are examined and given their due before coming to a conclusion. The yogic vision is to integrate this comprehensive examination into a clear focus and sharp and decisive judgment, which is Krishṇa's art of karma yoga. This rational image of Krishṇa is particularly relevant today in our age of science when the yogic science of consciousness must be understood not just as a way of understanding the cosmos but also of dealing with our complex human problems in the context of global technology.

Sanjay Dixit introduces his new vast Trilogy on Lord Krishṇa, starting with the first volume of *Krishṇa Gopeshvara*, Krishṇa, the lord of the Gopis. As the title suggests, the book deals with the background and early life of Krishṇa. Yet it is much more than Krishṇa's interaction with the Gopis in the usual sense, or a recount of Puranic accounts or that of *Srimad Bhagavatam*. His Radha is an adept Yogini, not simply a devotional or romantic image, a character with as much depth, refinement and as many nuances as Sri Krishṇa himself. Her depiction reveals Yoga as an inner art and science of life and nature, much like Krishṇa's approach. Radha reflects Krishṇa's Shakti, exuberance, lila and ananda but as a power of awareness, not merely as an outer expression.

Dixit provides a new and profound depiction of Krishna and the very different times in which he lived. His is an action packed book that takes us back to the ancient drama of an earlier Vedic era of history that few today can understand or even recognize. His is a detailed account of a remote epochal era of warriors and yogis, yet complete with literary flourish, engaging dialogues, spiritual secrets and deeper philosophical teachings.

Like that of Vyāsa, his Krishṇa is a master of all aspects of life, action, thought and awareness. Like Vyāsa he portrays the princes of the *Mahabharata* era as great figures in certain ways but with notable, sometimes extreme flaws that can have devastating negative consequences. The whole of human psychology is laid bare, including the inherent limitations of the human creature and the need to transcend our human nature through developing a more focused insight within us.

Dixit portrays how Krishna revived the eternal Vedic Dharma at a period in which dogma was starting to enter into human society, and drag down our inner aspiration into politics and prejudice, when spiritual striving and world domination began to be confused in a dangerous manner. He shows how in India this movement of religious exclusivism in human thought and belief was turned away under the guidance and inspiration of Krishna, whose life and character represent an opposite pluralistic force of dialogue, debate, reason and diversity of expression. It is always easier to repeat, follow and propagate a belief than to deeply examine the ignorance and

contradictions within us and look for a real development of inner wisdom at an individual level. Krishna teaches us this way of Selfactualization and Self-realization by example and experience, not by asking us to merely imitate him or adulate his human personality.

Historical Fiction in India

Yet Dixit's marvelous book does not attempt a factual retelling of the *Mahabharata*, or try to be an historical account according to modern standards for which the outer physical person is the real concern. It is not a search for the historical Krishna but for the Krishna that is relevant to all of us as our inner guide. The idea of such historical fiction is not new in Indian thought and is common in all of world literature. In India we find many different versions of the *Ramayana* and many variations on the sacred stories of Hindu deities, such as abound in the *Puranas*. Even the life of the Buddha is not an example of historical precision but the portrayal of a great ideal. Indic thought does contain its long lists of kings and dynasties, longer than any other country's records, showing a historical continuity, but how great figures impact humanity is more important than the actual events of their outer lives, which are elusive to prove in any case.

The Indian mind has never been trapped in physical reality or bodily identity, looking for a mere literal time-space portrayal of life as the final truth of our existence or our characters. The Hindu mind sees the world as Maya, an appearance or veil, behind which obscure and transcendent forces are operating beyond the constraints of human logic or any mere creaturely concerns. Yet that Maya is also a Lila or Divine play devised to impel us into a deeper level of consciousness, which begins when we learn to question the reality of our world and ourselves.

We see the same factors of diversity in Indian art where each deity has innumerable names and a number of portrayals and depictions. There is no sword of dogma, on one hand, or need to conform to physical reality, on the other, which limits the Indian imagination. Nor is there any mere mundane sense of history that places economics and politics over human aspiration. Hindu thought knows that our human nature can only be transcended by great effort over

many lifetimes. Each life story is a lesson for all to learn from, and many of these lessons are poignant, if not painful.

The Hindu storyteller must bring the ancient story and its characters alive in a new and engaging manner, without losing the essence of truth and dharma behind the lives of its characters. Krishna as Yogeshwar, the Lord of Yoga, offers many options in this creative process. Sanjay explores these different aspects of Krishna in the different layers of the tapestry of his book.

Vyāsa in the *Mahabharata* was not concerned with mere hagiography but of showing all the sides of a person, including characters like Bhishma that had both monumental wisdom and great personal failings. Sanjay takes the same view of exposing and revealing our human nature, so that its potential for further growth and evolution can be uncovered and promoted. He begins not simply with the birth of Krishņa but first sets the stage with the fascinating variety of characters, situations and alliances that made up the world in which Krishņa had to act.

There is a richness and complexity to Dixit's thought and presentation. He makes both the background and circumstances of Krishṇa's life alive for us. He shows India in the ancient world according to its own vision, lifestyle and values. He is not using Krishṇa's story to promote one way of looking at life or to uphold one philosophy or another. He is not interpreting Krishṇa according to outside values or western intellectual concerns of our times. He shows the continuity of India's own tradition of story telling and historical depiction, compared to which the western historical accounts seem mundane, spiritually naïve and blind to the importance of karma, trapped in an outer vision of life.

To put it in modern terms, Krishna was concerned not with getting a Nobel Peace Prize for himself in his actions but with thoroughly eradicating as much as possible ignorance and evil from the minds and hearts of the people around him, with no sympathy or compromise with the forces of adharma. He was not afraid of death or even human suffering, but knew that falsehood, deception, dogma and egoism could not be tolerated and could not be removed by mere half-measures.

Dixit's interpretation of Krishna and his times reminds one of that of Mahayogi Sri Aurobindo, one of the few great teachers to understand Krishna in the light of the Kshatriya Dharma that motivated the princes of his era, with both the blessings and curses that a strong sense of duty creates. His story reflects extensive character building and brings to life the individuals in the story, with all their living complexity. He introduces a few new characters as well, which explain factors that otherwise might be hidden.

I have known Sanjay over several years and have become acquainted with his mind and personality. His dedication to the cause of dharma is firm and determined. His intelligence is skillful and profound, probing and detailed. His sense of humor shows his understanding of the paradoxes of life. His appreciation of India's past is unwavering but not uncritical or blind. His vision of the future is both focused and comprehensive. His innate buddhi is visible from the many layers of his storytelling ability.

Krishņa Gopeshvara

Yet regardless of any philosophical or literary depth, Dixit weaves an engaging story that causes us to think deeply, to look at human world and our own individual lives with a different view. It is heartening to see Indian writers returning to the inspiration of their own vast and unparalleled Indian literary tradition. Too much imitation of western thought, politics or even sexual obsessions has come out of India under the guise of modern literature, superficially lauded by a culturally alienated elite.

India's real literature is an examination or Vichara relative to Dharma, or values such as are expressed and embodied in human life and action. *Krishṇa Gopeshvara* reflects the modern renaissance of that great Bharatiya Sahitya or Indian literature, which parallels India's reawakening as a nation, culture and civilization.

This first volume of the Krishna Trilogy covers the period before Krishna's birth, starting with the social and cultural circumstances. It proceeds through Krishna's early life in Gokul and Vrindavan, where all the forces of his life were set in motion, extending to Krishna discovering his inner destiny. With it the characters and stages are set

for the core of the epic. We will let your reading of the book unfold these fascinating events. We look forward to the next volume of this great saga, for denouement of this provocative drama.

Sri Krishna is needed again today to help us deal with our complex and convoluted technological world, in which dharma is hard to understand, and decisive action allied with unwavering insight still necessary. Our Kurukshetra has entered the realm of the media and cultural wars that can unleash great aspirations or tremendous fears and addictions, which requires a new Krishna to master and control. The spiritual drama and battle of life goes on and we are all characters in the encounter, seeking to understand our true nature and unique role in the universal movement. May we once more discover the relevance of Sri Krishna both within and around us!

Dr. David Frawley (Vamadeva Shastri)



<u>INTRODUCTION</u>

The seed of this work was sown in two discrete events. The first one was an argument in the family over Rāsa Līla of Rādhā and Krishṇa. In any such argument, there is always a lingering doubt over the nature of the Rāsa. I put forward the view that Krishṇa, after all, has not been christened as Yogeshvara for nothing. One of the family members of my generation disputed my statement, saying she had not heard of any such description. Now, my family and the extended family of in-laws are reasonably rooted in the Indic values. The discussion was within the people of my generation, not even among the youngsters. Even to them, I had to show the last shloka of the Bhagvadgitā to prove my point. I was deeply surprised and even a bit troubled. If this was the state of affairs among people who recited some Sanskrit prayer every day, what should I expect from the next generation. Predictably, an investigation into the next generation yielded an even more dismal finding. Krishṇa, to them, was just a story - not very different from Harry Potter.

Jaipur sits on the edge of Brij Bhoomi. Greetings of Rādhe Rādhe, Girirāj Mahāraj ki Jai, and Jai Shri Krishṇa are fairly common here. The second event took place around these greetings during one of my morning walks. One of my walking partners travels to Govardhan every month. Govardhan yātrā is deeply ingrained in the culture of

Eastern Rājasthān and Brij. People go around the Govardhan Parvat in the hope of an easy passage through their lives, peace and prosperity, and also mukti. Mukti, or liberation is a recurring theme in the spiritual value of this land – the entire Bhāratvarsha. Mukti is a deeply individual aspiration, as also a deeply spiritual one. The beauty of this quest for Mukti is that each individual has his own definition of his path. In many parts near Jaipur, this is centred on Krishna Bhakti. One day, we got into a discussion on the lore surrounding Govardhan. The legend is well known – how Krishna defied Indra, how Indra got angry, brought torrents of rain to punish Nanda's people, and how the young Krishna, not more than nine or ten years of age at that time, lifted up the Govardhan Hill on his little finger to shelter his people for seven days and nights – all very improbable to the modern mind. As I tried digging deeper into the lore, I realised that our people had no idea of the Yogeshvara aspect of Krishna. I tried to reason with them to discover the rational aspects of the Govardhan story, and the seed grew.

These two events, and the fact that I was rather lightly occupied in my profession, led to a journey of discovery that finds its culmination in the present work. As I travelled through India, I saw Krishṇa's imprint on the land. From Vallabhāchārya in the deep south, to Gīta Govinda of Jayadev – virtually the song of Odisha, to Dwarka in the west, and the North East, where he is said to have rescued sixteen thousand girls from captivity and gave them his name as husband in order to salvage their honour, and to Maṇipur and Bengāl, it is the yogic quality of Krishṇa that throws his followers, devotees and yogis into raptures. A multi-dimensional personality of a million colours.

The Bhagwadgīta has always intrigued me. The sheer reach of its profundity – cosmic in its breadth, and atomic in its effect, has never ceased to amaze me. Gita as the milk of the cow of Upanishads, milked by the cowherd Krishṇa, is another abiding image that pervades India. The strands of thoughts woven within the Gitā are verily like the infinite cosmos. There is no end to the flight of thought that the lift provided by Gitā cannot travel to. It grows on you as you read it again and again. You can be an ordinary devotee, or a yogi, or a person like me looking for rational explanations – Gita has a solution for everyone. This is why Krishṇa tells Arjuna at the end of

Gita's narration – I have taught you all the paths to liberation, O Arjuna, now you do what you like: "yathechchhasi tathā kuru". This is the ultimate reality of India's philosophy. You have the freedom to take your decisions. You are not bound to any totalitarian philosophy. There are no punishments for breaching the contours pf a philosophy, reforming it, and reimagining it. After all, all paths lead to the same truth, and the Supreme is found equally in all beings, not just human beings. "samoham sarvabhūteshu" is the reigning philosophy of this land. Yet, our millennials are blissfully unaware of the great multi-dimensional personality of Krishna.

In the dashāvatara lore, or the ten reincarnations of Vishņu, Krishņa is the one that fascinates me the most. There is a saying in many parts of India – Follow Rama, but listen to Krishņa. The explanation of this simple wisdom is even more fascinating. Rama is the upholder of maryādā, the values. He does it by setting his own example before the public. He upholds the values most cherished by an ordinary person – the ideal son, ideal husband, and ideal king. He sacrifices his own happiness to dispel doubts among the public. Rama is a linear personality that is an easy ideal to follw, revere and worship. He embodies everything that an ordinary Indian, and a devotee would like to see in an icon: predictable, stable, sober, family man, noble king, and a hero among men, who achieves everything on the basis of his purushārtha. Born in a noble royal family, at the height of bright noon, educated under Rishi Vasiṣhṭha, married to the princess of Mithilā – everything going well till his fortune turns.

What about Krishņa?

Here is a personality that faces troubles right from the word go. Born in a prison, on a dark night of a storm. Separated from his parents right after his birth. Brought up as a cowherd, with limited facilities for local education, he had inherited the life of a village rustic. He had a struggle on his hand to overcome the circumstances of his birth. Murderers chasing him throughout his childhood, a cruel uncle that he must kill to survive, and he gives it all up to become a beacon of light. He was the Dwarkadheesh without ever becoming the king of Dwarka. He is the multi-dimensional personality, who is the fount of wisdom in action. His level of exaltation in his yogic accomplishments is of such a dimension that his Rāsa Līlā became

the ultimate example of bhakti. To an untrained foreign eye, it may even appear to be an orgy, but those who know Krishṇa as a yogi, which is almost the whole of India, know that detachment in Karma is his way. He is the Gopeshvara of Brij, who remains in a state of detachment even while tending to his cows, or playing his flute, or while dancing with Rādhā and the Gopis. Anyone who tries to follow Krishṇa's conduct is surely doomed as it is not possible for ordinary mortals to be in that state of yogic detachment. That is why there is a joke that forbids youngsters from becoming a Krishṇa to any Radha as that is surely going to lead to the guy getting beaten up. Similarly, we will see in the next parts of this trilogy how Krishṇa is able to perceive things that are not readily within the realm of an ordinary man's cognition. His teachings in Bhagvadgītā and Uddhavagīta are the highest spiritual teachings of the universe.

The book is crafted as a clash of narratives. Krishna is the ultimate teacher, who not only shows the path of action guided by the highest consciousness, but also actively educates the enlightened and the lay public to resist the evil narratives. The character of Kuṭil Muni may be a fictional character in the book, but he represents the evil narrative that Krishna had fought all his life, and had also exhorted the others to fight. He fights the forces of darkness, represented by the reverse Swastika, and vanquishes them through the deepest consciousness. That is how the cover page of this book is extremely significant in the overall scheme of the Krishna Trilogy. The left-handed Swastika seemed to generate a fair bit of controversy, indicating how far we have moved away from our traditions that we are not able to comprehend simple ancient symbolisms.

This is the first work of a series of three books. This part covers the period preceding the birth of Krishna to the period immediately post the slaying of Kamsa. The second part would begin with the visit of Uddhava to Brij, and the famous exchanges between Uddhavas and Gopis.

I must take this opportunity to note my gratitude to many people involved in the project. I must thank the Government of Rajasthan and the Chief Minister Smt. Vasundhara Raje who kept me on a light assignment, enabling me to have a lot of spare time to write this book. I have to thank Dr. David Frawley for providing me with the

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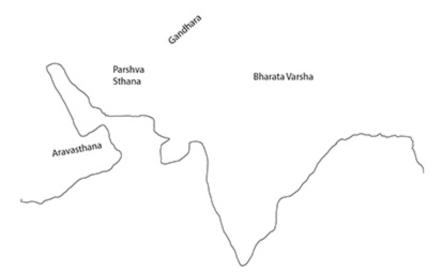
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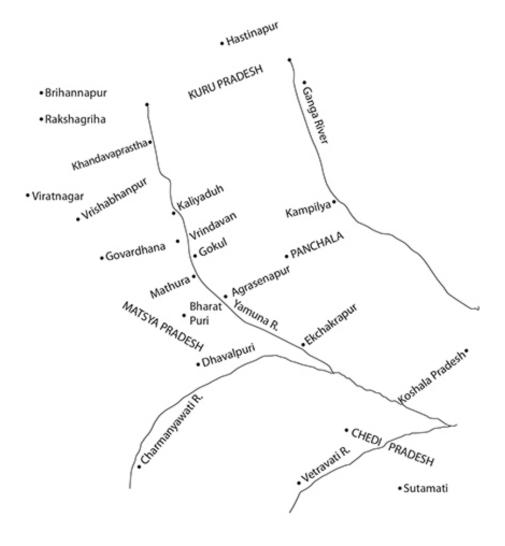
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RIVER MAP



BRIJ BHOOMI AND NEARBY



PART I





<u>- 1 -</u> ASTI AND PRĀPTI

The charioteer was furiously cracking his whip. The four-steed chariot was moving at a breakneck speed, giving big jolts to the two ladies sitting at the back of it.

Under normal circumstances, this chariot would have been decorated, bedecked with the best flowers of Yamunā country, escorted on both sides by a bevy of female consorts in the inner ring and the best Magadha soldiers on the outer ring. But this was not a normal time.

Asti and Prāpti were the two principal queens of Mathurā, married to Kaṃsa, and daughters of the fearsome Magadha king Jarāsandha. They were being driven to safety by the charioteer with a small detachment of four trusted horsemen under the command of Prabala.

Prabala had just witnessed a terrible event. Just half an hour earlier, he had seen the lifeless form of the king of Mathurā, the formidable warrior Kaṃsa, lying in a pool of blood in the festive wrestling arena constructed in the Royal Palace Square. He had seen the people of Mathurā charge at the members of Magadha battalion protecting Kaṃsa. He had seen the trusted general of Kaṃsa, Pradyot, switch sides, and melt away into the crowds. Prabala had

just enough wits at his command to rush to the queens' quarters and rescue the two Magadha princesses before the crowds got to them.

Prabala was aware of the Dharmic code of the people of Mathurā. They would not touch women of the inner quarters or for that matter any woman. In Mathura's ancient Dharmic code, women had the highest place of honour in the society. Prabala was not sure of how the closest confidantes of Kamsa would behave. He knew that Kamsa had been protecting folks busy converting the royal courtiers to a new savage cult. The persons who had converted to this cult had strange customs, and would frown at women and anyone not following their cult. He had seen them put women behind veils and segregating them, and even whip them at the slightest provocation. He had seen them carrying out bizarre punishments on women and public. They were a hated lot. Some of them had been targeting the two queens as Asti and Prāpti had not acquiesced to Kamsa's requests of joining the cult. Kamsa was too heavily under Jarāsandha's obligation to ill-treat his daughters. Prabala was not sure of how things would pan out after Kamsa's death and when Mathurā was shouting revenge at Kamsa and his cult; and anyone connected with Magadha.

Prabala was a trusted general of Jarāsandha. He was deputed to Mathurā to take care of not only his son-in-law, but also to ensure that his daughters enjoyed the pride of place among the many future queens of Kaṃsa. He was equal to the task.

As soon as he saw Kaṃsa fall and Mathurā erupt in joy, he barged into the inner quarters to pull the queens out. He could not care less if the protocol was breached. He remembered muttering to himself 'Āpādkaale maryādā naasti'. 'No shame or protocol exists in an emergency'. He ran into the private areas of inner quarter setting off a startled reaction. He found the two sisters sitting together on a ledge near a window and yanked them out by hand. He yelled, 'Come with me, we are going to Girivraja'. Girivraja, the Magadha capital lay in a cluster of five hills at a distance of about five and a half yojanas² from Pāṭaliputra, the main Magadha river port.

The two ladies were startled. They never expected a male underling to barge into their private quarters and physically pull them out. Prabala was a father figure to them but the access to the inner

quarter was allowed only to the Mahārāj or female guards. This breach of protocol was unprecedented, but they hardly had time to think before they were forced into the royal chariot that always remained parked at the junction of the inner quarters and outer quarters. The chariot was not even ready to receive them, but after forcing them into the back seat reserved for the King, he shouted a command to the charioteer.

Prabala mounted a horse parked in that space, and got another four Magadha horsemen to follow him. They set off at a fast pace. Prabala knew all the labyrinthine lanes of the palace. He took a route from the back of the palace that took them straight to the banks of Yamunā. The path was not well paved or prepared for a chariot to move, but at that point the only thought in Prabala's mind was to leave the boundaries of Mathurā and reach the Chedi territory.

Asti and Prāpti were in a daze. Had it not been their trusted Chief of Guards Prabala, they would have thought they were being abducted. As the chariot hit the banks of Yamunā, they could hear a huge roar in the city quarters to the west. The banks of Yamunā would usually be throbbing with activity at this time, the second prahara³ of the day, but they were totally deserted. It appeared as if everyone had rushed to the city centre.

In about one ghați⁴, the chariot was outside the city limits. Asti and Prāpti were sitting dumbfounded. They did not know what had hit them. Prabala rode ahead of the chariot, cajoling the charioteer to move faster. The path was hard and uneven. The two women could hardly think. They had to use all their craft to just stay in one piece. They had never experienced such a hard ride in their lives. They had lived a privileged life as Magadha princesses. They were granddaughters of the pious Brihadratha, and daughters of the mighty Mahārathi⁵ Jarāsandha. In Mathurā, there was none in valour and wealth who was an equal to their father. Jarāsandha was a great Shiva devotee and many considered him to be at par with Rāvaṇa as a Shiva devotee. They were also granddaughters of the Kāshi naresha from the maternal side. The two women enjoyed impeccable pedigree, but not so grand a matrimonial house.

After travelling for nearly five ghatis, or two hours, the chariot stopped. The horses needed some rest.

Asti was nearly unconscious because of the jerks and jolts of the journey. She was the elder of the two, but the more delicate one. She was also the favourite of Jarāsandha. Prāpti was a little stronger. She had a taste for martial arts and had been trained in weapon craft as an adolescent. She had learnt hand-to-hand combat, sword combat, wielding the bow and arrow, and had also had elementary training in use of divyāstras.

She could not pursue her hobby after both the sisters got married to Kaṃsa. Jarāsandha had married them to Kaṃsa, as he had admired his strength as a wrestler and a warrior. Jarāsandha regarded Kaṃsa as one of the foremost Malla Yudha warriors of his time, in the same class as himself. Prāpti had nagged Kaṃsa quite often to allow her to continue practising her martial arts, but he had steadfastly refused.

Prāpti had coped quite well with the ordeal. She was hamstrung by her attire which was more a gown worn after nuptials. She ventured out and addressed Prabala with authority.

'Kākāshri', Prāpti said.

Prabala tried to avoid her gaze and started shouting at the charioteer. 'Come on, Pushtak, water the horses quickly. We still have eight yojanas to cover; another seven ghatis at least'. (A little less than three hours).

'Kākāshri, where are we going? What calamity can excuse this behaviour of yours?' asked Prāpti.

Prabala could not avoid this pointed question. He said, 'Maharāgni shreshtha, I am under an obligation to take you to Kāshi immediately...to your Mahāmāmāshri⁶. There is an emergency'.

'Where is the emergency; In Kāshi or in Mathurā? I have seen Mahārāj Kaṃsa very worried over the past few days. Even yesterday he had discussed it with us. Is it that same cowherd he was tormented with? We have never travelled to Kāshi in this manner. It appears as if you are spiriting us away from some calamity that has befallen Mathurā,' said Prāpti.

Prabala had no hesitation in telling the truth to the younger princess of Magadha. He had seen both the princesses growing, and even been involved in their education. He was aware that she could handle adversity, but the elder one? Asti was delicate as a flower, not only in physique, but also in psyche. He tried to prevaricate.

'Mahārāgni shreshtha, we had to rush as there was a boat leaving for Kāshi from Dhawalpuri in about three hours'.

Prāpti was at her coolest.

'When did we ever travel from Dhawalpuri to Kāshi, Kākāshri? Has the kingdom of Mathurā lost its fleet of royal boats that we have to travel to Chārmaṇyavati river on the boundaries of Chedi kingdom to take a boat,' Prāpti was relentless.

Prabala remained quiet.

Prāpti lowered her voice. 'Kākāshri, I am born and brought up in a royal palace. I can quite figure out when things are wrong. Let me be direct— what happened to Mahārāj Kaṃsa? Don't dodge the question.'

Prabala cleared his throat.

'Maharāgni shreshtha, I am worried about Maharagni jyeshthe⁷'.

'I promise I will not tell her anything. Anyway, she is only half conscious. She cannot handle this ride for long,' said Prāpti.

'We are safe now. We are in Matsya Pradesh. Somewhere near Bharatpuri. In another two and a half hours we should be at Chārmaṇyavati⁸ where a boat was scheduled to leave for Kāshi today,' dissembled Prabala.

'Prabala Kākā,' Prāpti gave him a blazing look.

Prabala lowered his eyes and said:

'Mahārāj Kamsa is no more. He was slain by a cowherd' Asti woke up with a start.





<u>- 2 -</u> <u>CHĀRMAŅYAVATI</u>

A sti shook her head to ward off the daze. She had obviously not heard the conversation between Prāpti and Prabala. She got up and started groaning.

'Where are we going? Why can't the chariot move slowly? I am nearly dead with jerks,' said Asti.

Prāpti took over the role of an elder. 'Don't worry jyeshtha bhagini⁹. We are just going to Kāshi. Grandma is very ill; she is at her father's home in Kāshi. The earliest boat was from Dhawalpuri¹⁰ ghāṭ. That is why Prabala kaka rushed us. Of course, his behaviour was a bit overbearing. We will settle that once we reach Kāshi'.

The chariot set off again. Prāpti was pensive. The role of women in the Kaṃsa household was markedly different from that in Magadha. In Magadha, they were treated as equal to any man. They had the same education as the princes, had absolute freedom to move about and pursue their calling, even lead armies in war. She did lead a small battalion once, while Asti was pursuing music and dance. In Mathurā, their ten years had been marked by vicissitudes. Initially, they enjoyed the same freedom as they had in Magadha. She herself

trained with the Mathurā forces. Then something came over Kaṃsa. He had some strange Muni take him under his influence.

There were rumours in the ladies' quarters that the king had given up Sanātana Dharma and converted to a bizarre new cult. He had once asked them to join in some rituals of that cult which they had refused. He had connived in demolition of a Shiva temple within Mathurā. As daughters of a Shiva Bhakta, they had taken offence and informed their father. Jarāsandha had sent an emissary to express his displeasure. Kaṃsa was sufficiently chastened to not touch another Shiva temple, but was complicit in continued demolition of many temples even after that. People in Mathurā had starting calling him a rākshasa¹¹.

Kaṃsa could not trust the Yādava Army, as it was a mix of many clans, the majority being Vrishṇi. As Vasudeva husband of his cousin Devaki was a Vrishṇi, it made Kaṃsa deeply insecure. He only used Magadha guards to protect him, had Magadha malla yoddhas¹² under his patronage, and used them to terrorise the population.

The Yādava Army of Mathurā was a decentralized force, a contributory force raised by the eighteen clans of Yādavas and maintained by them. There was no chance that he could protect his kingdom without the help of his father-in-law. How could a mere cowherd kill him when he had the mighty Magadha battalion and warriors to protect him? Kaṃsa was a Mahārathi who had impressed their father so much with his valour during an invasion of Mathurā by Magadha that he had decided to marry his two precious daughters to him. That Kaṃsa was no more alive would be a deeply disturbing thought for Jarāsandha.

Prāpti remembered the bad omens she had been noticing of late. She had gone to kulaguru Gargāchārya to share her fears. Gargāchārya was himself so furious with Kaṃsa for having neglected Sanātana Dharma and his open espousal of a strange cult, which enjoined killing those who did not accept conversion into the cult. He was so angry that he had left Mathurā for Pānchāla and returned only recently. The cult had attacked his Āshrama as well.

Gargāchārya had told her to meet her sister-in-law Devaki in the prison. Devaki had told her the story of her torture and how her

brother, Prāpti's husband, had killed six of her sons. They had discussed the role of women in Sanātana culture. 'Prāpti', Devaki had said, 'male and female form two sides of a whole. None can achieve liberation without being born as a female during the kārmic cycle. Shiva is not complete without Shakti'.

'I agree, jyeshthe, but your brother is under some evil spell. He is being tutored by Kuṭil Muni, and holds the view that men are created as privileged. He thinks that if he advances the cause of Kuṭil Muni's cult, his Creator will reward him. I really worry for him after knowing the brutalities he has inflicted upon you and bhai Vasudeva'.

'Mark my word, Prāpti,' Devaki had said, 'this torture is a fleeting interregnum in the cosmic scheme. Neither Kaṃsa, nor his tutor, nor his cult, can escape the causal forces let loose by his actions. This Kuṭil Muni's disciple who was his pet astrologer, had himself made the prophecy that my eighth son would kill him and re-establish Sanātana Dharma. He has discovered that my son is living in the house of Naṅda and Yashodā. I wonder whether the time has come.'

Prāpti came back tormented by the thought of fate visiting her husband. Asti, her elder sister and the Principal Queen, pooh-poohed her fears. Asti had blind faith in her husband's prowess. She even told Prāpti to consider converting to the Kuṭil Dharma, the cult Kaṃsa was propagating. Prāpti had rejected her idea and told her that she would send an emissary to their father, the greatest Shiva Bhakta of the era, Jarāsandha and ask him. Asti was never an intellectual match to Prāpti. She just backed out. They continued following all the Sanātana practices they had been taught by the Magadha kulaguru, Āchārya Chanḍakaushika.

It was Prāpti's turn today to take her elder sister under her care. She took Asti under her wings as if her elder sister was her young daughter. 'Let us not have any suspicions about Prabala kākā. Nobody has our interests more at heart than him. Let us get moving, Kākāshri.'

The horses had been watered and tended. The chariot moved again. As the chariot moved, there was a rustling noise in the woods to the left. Prabala and his four horsemen sprung to alert. The chariot stopped.

After suspense of a few seconds, which appeared like an eon to the two queens, they saw a sloth bear family moving away from them. They had probably been woken up from their diurnal slumber. The area had thick jungle of medium to short trees. Habitations were mostly in clearings, with large agricultural fields around. They took the jungle route to avoid any potential danger. As the chariot moved, Asti went to sleep again.

In about six ghațis, they approached a river in a rocky profile. It was Chārmaṇyavati.

Dhawalpuri ghāṭ served as a trade post for the kingdom of Matsya. It was here that the entourage boarded a boat to Kāshi.

The boat was not the kind of luxury boat the queens were used to. It was a freight carrier for carrying merchandise. A corner on the starboard side of the boat was used for erecting a makeshift shelter for the senior members of the crew. This space was vacated for the queens for four svarna mudrās 13.

The boat moved quickly. The head of the crew was crisp with his directions. Head out clear of this place and travel at least 3 *yojanas* before nightfall. The river was infested with crocodiles. They can damage the boat sometimes.

The boat was rigged with six sails. There was a light westerly wind. Assisted by the wind and current, the boat moved quickly.

The Captain of the boat was about thirty-five years of age. He came up to the queens from time to time to check if they were comfortable. Asti had recovered well about one hour into the boat journey. Sun was about to set behind the boat, which indicated that the boat was moving eastwards.

Next time the Captain came up to queens, Asti asked him, 'How long will it take to reach Kāshi?'

'Mahārāgni, we should reach Kāshi before nightfall tomorrow. Through the night, we will join Yamunā near Ekchakrapur¹⁴ after crossing the confluence of Sindhuvati¹⁵, and then the confluences of Vetravati¹⁶ and Kendravati¹⁷. We should be at Rajpuri¹⁸ by the morning where we will stop. We will have a long stop at Prayāg in Koshala at noon and Kāshi before nightfall. Of course, everything depends on the wind.'

Prāpti was absolutely quiet. She was reflecting on the events of the day. Asti had tried to sound her out but she was steadfast. She would not tell her anything till they had reached Kāshi. The night was upon them. Tired, she looked at Asti, who was already asleep in her makeshift bed. It did not take long for her also to fall asleep.

Prāpti woke up even as the first hint of the morning sandhyākāl was appearing directly ahead. The darkness had given way to trees flanking the river silhouettes.

The boat stopped at Rajpuri. Unlike the royal boats, there were arrangements on the riverbank for refreshing travellers. The queens had to disembark and perform their morning ablutions like commoners. They were looking at life from a new angle.

The boat moved after a brief stop. In another twelve ghațis, or a little less than five hours, they had reached Prayag. Prayag was situated in Koshala, at the beginning of Kāshi kingdom's boundary. The boat took anchor at the Royal Ghāt on the left bank of Gangā, just after the holy confluence of Ganga, Yamunā and Saraswati. Asti had been a devout worshipper of Saraswati, the deity of wisdom, music and fine arts. She had asked this question of many people as to how the river named after her favorite deity appeared at Prayag. Her father had told her once that the mighty Saraswati originated in the Himalayas near Shyāmal van overlooking the river Shutudri. Kamsa had once taken both the queens with him to Mādra capital Jalandhara. On the way, they had crossed Saraswati, then a winter river originating from lower Himalayas, and she remembered doing her special prayers with such an elaborate routine that both Kamsa and Prāpti had got thoroughly irritated. She had to be almost yanked out of her prayers to Mā Saraswati. Today, she had one more opportunity to pray to the invisible form of her favourite goddess.

Asti told Prāpti what she wanted to do. Prāpti, the ever-practical woman, could foresee that they would not reach Kāshi if they allowed Asti to go midstream where they could clearly see the white of Ganga meet the blue of Yamunā. She conjured up a trick.

'Didi, this is adhik māsa¹⁹. We cannot worship goddesses in this period because they are rajasvala²⁰ and they are meditating. We do not disturb them at this time,' said Prāpti.

Prabala was wonderstruck at the quick wit of Prāpti, and made sure that the boat departed within a few vighaṭis²¹. The river had become much wider, the current was stronger, and the wind had picked up from behind. The boat was racing towards Kāshi.

In less than three muhurtas²², the two queens of Mathurā were alighting at the Saimbeda ghāṭ of Kāshi near the mouth of Assi. A portion of the ghāṭ was reserved for the royal family of Kāshi. Their great grandfather was no more, but the relations between the kingdoms of Magadha and Kāshi remained as close as ever.

An Avadhoot²³ crossed the ladies as they alighted, crossed his temples, and shouted 'Krishnam Vande Jagadgurum.'

Prāpti froze. She felt faint.





<u>-3-</u> KĀSHI

There was no one to receive the Mathurā queens on the river wharf. Even Prāpti was quite bewildered. She knew why they had been brought to Kāshi, but she did not recheck the fact of her grandmother being in Kāshi with her brothers. Prabala had to arrange palanquins for them for money and it took them a full muhurta before they could reach the gates of the palace on the banks of Varuṇā. They were stopped at the gate.

It took another muhurta for Prabala to convince the gatekeepers to let them in. After they were brought in, they were not taken to the royal ladies' quarters, but were instead shown to the guesthouse for foreign envoys. They alighted there, and waited in a small room.

Nobody came to see them in the night. Instead, there were loud chants of 'Krishnam vande jagadgurum' all around. Asti was looking bewildered. The chants were coming from the direction of the royal quarters. She had heard of the charming cowherd from Vrindāvan who was reputed to cast a spell on gopis and even menfolk with his flute and smile. There were incredible tales of his playful exploits and even his supernatural powers. To hear it in the royal quarters of the maternal home of her grandmothers' was unexpected.

The Mathurā royal entourage spent the night like normal guests from another rajya of Āryāvarta.

Just as the sky was taking on a greyish hue, an elderly woman came to the guesthouse. Brahma Muhurta was the normal waking time in Kāshi. Not so in Mathurā. She was the widowed wife of her grandmother's brother, and the mother of the Kāshi Naresh²⁴, the Rājmātā.

Loud rattling of the chain fastener of the door woke Asti and Prāpti up.

Prāpti came out in her nightdress to find the Rājmātā outside their door. Rājmātā came in and closed the door behind her.

Both the queens touched the feet of Rājmātā. She had a calm bearing and serene look about her. She looked at the two princesses with a sweet smile and called them by their names. 'Asti, Prāpti – both of you here without any information; all is well in Mathurā?'

Prāpti broke down. All the torment of keeping the secret for last two days came out in a flood of tears. She hugged the Rājmātā and cried and cried. Asti was looking perplexed. She just could not fathom why her bold sister was crying. She had not seen her cry even in the worst of tragedies.

Rājmātā was also taken aback, but she kept caressing her hair and kept asking what happened.

Prāpti shrieked out, 'Mātā, Mathurā Naresh²⁵ has been slain by a gôpa²⁶.'

Asti fell unconscious after hearing this.

Rājmātā kept stroking Prāpti and started chanting, 'Krishnam vande jagadgurum'.

Prāpti separated herself and violently demanded to know why she was chanting praises to Krishṇa. 'Don't you know that this is the boy who has killed my husband?'

'Quieten down my child; these are the subtle movements of karma. We had a foreboding that all was not well in Mathurā'.

Prāpti was a little composed by this time. Rājmātā opened the door, looked out and called her lady attendants to look after Asti. They brought some water, sprinkled it on her, and massaged her head

gently. Meanwhile, Rājmātā asked Prāpti, 'Have you both converted to Kutil Dharma?'

Now it was the turn of Prāpti to be startled. 'No way, mātā, we are daughters of the most famous Shiva Bhakta of Bhāratavarsha. This quirk was limited to Mathurā Naresh. But how do you know all this. Why are you chanting praises of killer of my father?'

The old lady ignored her question. 'Oh, you are still Sanātanis²⁷. We had heard the whole of Mathurā rājavaṃsha had accepted Kuṭil Dharma and its violent ways. This is the reason we did not admit you to the inner quarters yesterday, my children. Let us go to the inner palace. You are our own.'

Prāpti was quiet. She whispered to the old lady, 'Mātā, Mahārāj Kaṃsa was a disciple of Kuṭil muni.'

Rājmātā heard her with interest and responded as if she was hearing something she already knew. 'We knew he would have to go this way. Aangiras²⁸ have kept us informed. They also told us about an exceptional young man from Vrindāvan. The Aangiras have been sending various teachers to teach him combat and martial skills. They have reported that the boy is exceptionally gifted. His companions, the cowherds, have initiated him into the highest spiritual calling. He is shaping up to be the leader of the earth.'

Asti had recovered and was quietly crying. Rājmātā consoled them and told the attendants to bring palanquins to take the queens to the inner quarters.

The two former queens of Mathurā were lodged in the inner chambers of the palace with the full dignity due to them as members of the royal family. Asti and Prāpti were still crying. A kind of release was occurring within Prāpti after two days of forbearance, and after two days of somnolence for Asti. A number of ladies came and consoled them. After a while, they took leave of the ladies to have proper ablutions for the first time in three days. After having their bath, they came out in widow's attire without shringār²⁹. They were met within their allotted chambers by the attendants, fed and brought to the centre of the chambers where a regular mourning session ensued.

After mourning for nearly a prahara³⁰, the assembly dissolved, leaving the two Magadha princesses with the Rājmātā.

Rājmātā was not saying much, but chanting her 'Krishnam vande jagadgurum' under her breath. She did not make the chant audible as she thought it would be offensive to the two princesses.

Prāpti was totally intrigued by this chant, which she had heard not only from the Rājmātā, but also on the streets of Kāshi, as well as from other women. Why was the killer of their husband being celebrated in their great maternal home as a world guru?

'Mātāshri, why are you all chanting praises of a mere cowherd? He killed our husband. There are all kinds of myths floating around about him. Is he a superhuman? Why is he being worshipped in Kāshi? We have just lost our husband to this dastardly killer, and we have to sit here and hear women swoon over him,' there was a decidedly peremptory tone to Prāpti's query.

Rājmātā smiled ever so graciously. Asti was quiet all the while as if she had lost her speech. Rājmātā kept her hands affectionately on Asti's shoulders and pulled her near. 'Child, Krishṇa is not the name of a mere cowherd. It is the name of an inspiration. I am surprised that he was living a few yojanas away from Mathurā and you could never learn about his great exploits. You must hear this story.

'Aangiras are a regular visitor to Kāshi. We also go to Prayāg at least twice a year at the time of Margashirsh snan, and and Chaitra Navratri. In Prayāg, we always visit the Aangiras Āshrama where they teach us the difference between kriyā and karma. For the last two—three years they have been giving us the example of Krishṇa and how he has grown up to be a true karmayogi. Aangiras have a teaching curriculum for him at Vrindāvan in which they teach him combat and fine arts, and learn from him his natural genius of detached action.

'The most surprising aspect of this story is that he has taken a girl as his guru, and the girl treats him as his companion. The Aangiras call their interaction with him not as training sessions, but as learning sessions. The present Head of the Āshrama, Āchārya Ghor-Aangiras has given him the title of Jagadguru, and taught us to chant this little shloka. He has also warned as that nobody should try to emulate Krishṇa. Krishṇa's words should be followed, not his actions. He

says that the level of detachment that he has achieved in his actions is not achievable by ordinary people. For this reason, ordinary people should not follow him in action, but as a Guru alone. He says that he would himself love to have him as a disciple. Āchārya Ghor-Aangiras was himself in the Yādava clan before he achieved his sadgati as a sanyasin,' the Rājmātā paused.

Prāpti was intrigued by this narration. 'Sadgati as a sanyasin; what's that?'

Rājmātā had a deep interest in spirituality. Even as a young queen, she had been fascinated by the serene beauty of Kāshi and the Gangā. She would often sit for long hours on the banks of Gangā and meditate on Shivalingam. Even as a young queen, she became known as Gauri Mā, after Mahāgauri. After the death of the King, she remained steadfast in her ways. She travelled often and spent a long time with the Rishis and sages. She was a seer in her own right.

Rājmātā was amused by Prāpti's query. She smiled indulgently. 'A sanyasin is considered to have a new birth, my child. When a person becomes a sanyasin, he has to perform his own last rites as a symbol of giving up all his past attachments of family, community, sect, and even memories. The sanyasin takes a vow of controlling the functions of his mind, in order to go beyond the mind. That is the kriyā yoga, which ultimately leads to karma yoga. You must know the difference between kriyā and karma.'

Prāpti was getting deeper into the discussion. 'Rājmātā, I don't think you can have karma independent of kriyā. Every action begets its karma.'

Rājmātā was patient. 'My child, this is where we make a mistake. A kriyā is merely the action of our body. You may touch my feet to show respect, but you may be cursing me mentally. Touching the feet is your kriyā, which appears to be a good gesture of a well brought up person. But your karma is the motivation behind that kriyā. Guru Ghor Aangiras tells us that this young boy Krishṇa has achieved the greatest degree of detachment in his actions, so that the karma he accumulates has absolutely no relation to the outward kriyā. According to him, such a person is born once in a Yuga³¹. We are waiting to learn from him. You say that he has killed your husband.

This is his action. We have to wait and learn what the motivation was behind that action'.

She paused briefly and then continued, 'we know that your husband had become a disciple of Kuṭil Muni, and was perpetrating untold misery over the population. He was demolishing temples and killing cows. He was keeping hundreds of concubines. He was also disregarding the sane counsel of Rishi Gargāchārya. Not merely that, he sidelined that fine and unique institution of Sudharmā Sabhā too.

'Till we learn from Krishṇa himself, we will keep chanting this mantra so that we are ready for the lesson with the right degree of respect when we get a chance. Āchārya Ghor Aangiras tells us that Krishṇa would definitely come to him because there are a few vidyās³², which he alone can impart. Usually, munis come to him for the highest learning. He has promised us that he would arrange for me to meet him. Shiva alone knows when that would be and whether I would live that long. Till then, I take him as Guru, and pay respects to him. I was one of the first ones to do that, but now half the Kāshi seems to be chanting this mantra. This is the most popular mantra in Kāshi these days after Har Har Mahādev and Rāma Rāmāyai Namah.'

Rājmātā got up to go. She told them that their journey to Magadha would begin the day after. An emissary had been sent to Magadha. After a confirmation is received from them, a royal boat would take them to Pāṭaliputra, from where they would make the five-yojana journey to Girivraja.





<u>- 4 -</u> <u>GIRIVRAJA³³</u>

The morning after, a royal boat was ready to sail from the palace ghāṭs on the Varuṇā. Royal family used this ghāṭ to travel eastwards, whereas the Saimbeda ghāṭ at the mouth of Assi river was used for travel westwards. As the Magadha princess came to the decorated approach to the boat, a Magadha detachment was there in full panoply to escort them. A horse relay usually took half a day to Girivraja. It was despatched early morning the previous day, and the Magadha escort was in Kāshi a little past midnight.

Asti got in first. Just as Prāpti was about to get in, an Avadhoot appeared next to the boat from nowhere. He was within an earshot of Prāpti, and loudly chanted – 'Krishnam vande jagadgurum'. Prāpti was not startled this time. She was becoming aware of the context.

By early afternoon, the boat had reached the ghāṭs of Pāṭaliputra. After a brief rest in the royal lounge, the royal entourage left for the five-yojana journey to Girivraja so as to make it to the capital city before dusk. The road was not brick paved but well maintained. The chariot carrying the royal princesses moved at a good pace, covering nearly two yojans in a muhurta.

Midway through the third prahara, the verdant agricultural fields started breaking up as thick forests arose in the near distance. There arose an impregnable wall in the far distance. The wall was made up of the five hills, which protected Girivraja from every direction. Chaityaka, Griddhakoot, Vaibhara, Swarṇa and Shaila hills encircled the city that was enclosed in a high wall in the valley below. The road wound up to a pass between Chaityaka and Swarṇa hills from where it led to the main gate of the Magadhaiya Fort. For two yojanas before the pass in the hills, there was a thick forest full of wild animals. That was the reason the escort party wanted the entourage to reach Girivraja before dusk.

The horses slowed down as they wound their way up the hill. Prāpti remembered the wonderful time she had hunting wild boar in the jungles. There were no tigers in these jungles as the annual hunting expeditions out of Girivraja had completely depleted the tiger population. Tigers could only be found south of Gayā along the Niranjanā³⁴river. Niranjanā was the cleanser, as the local wisdom said that it had the property of washing away all darkness of consciousness, or chitta. Though, as far as the Magadha royalty was concerned, Niranjanā served as the repository of excellent wild game and fish.

As the first lamp was lit, the two Magadha princesses made it to the main palace gate after negotiating the labyrinth built between the main wall and the gate of the palace. Entering the main gate from the western side, the royal quarters lay to the right, due south. To the right lay the Royal Court and staff quarters. Palace spaces were not exceptionally large, as the hills all around Girivraja had limited the space.

The chariot screeched to a halt in front of the smaller of the two gates of the Royal Quarters, the one meant for the ladies of the palace. Two tall guards opened the gate and the chariot was parked in the inner courtyard. Asti and Prāpti came out. Their mother, the Queen of Magadha, Saudamini stood at the top of the flight of stairs leading from the porch to the main lounge of the Raniwās.

Asti and Prāpti emerged slowly from the chariot, assisted by two maids. They came down in widow's attire. The Queen had not been told of the purpose of this sudden visit of the two sisters. She felt faint

with her heart in her mouth as she saw them in widows' attire. Her throat dried up as she saw her beautiful daughters ascend the steps of the porch. To her, they looked like two witches in the ethereal white they were wearing. She pinched herself to check whether what she was seeing was real. The lamps had just been lit. It was that period of sandhyākāl when the eyesight begins getting used to the faded light. There was no mistaking the fact. Her daughters had appeared before her as widows. She stood transfixed as the daughters ran up and hugged their mother, rising up a great howl. They were joined by other bewildered ladies of the Raniwās, drowning the place in shrieks, wails and howls of great pain and anguish.

The door connecting the Raniwās with the Men's quarter opened. It was an oversized door. In the doorframe stood a seven feet tall man. He wore only an angavastram at the top, revealing his full body musculature. His arms were the size of an elephant's trunk, his legs were as big as that of a smaller elephant, his midriff as slender as that of a tiger, and every muscle was well crafted as if in a mould, and every sinew rippled as if about to burst.

Jarāsandha had made a grand entry. His eyes were bloodshot, his nostrils quivered, he gnashed his teeth and spat into a spittoon as if he was spitting venom at an enemy. He moved in with a deliberate gait. Asti and Prāpti ran to their father and disappeared into his vast chest.

Jarāsandha was aware of the fact that his daughters had lost their husband. He was barely managing to suppress his fury. The message sent by Prabala from Kāshi was pretty elaborate. Besides, his horse relay communication from Mathurā had also corroborated the story of the murder of his son-in-law. The mighty man standing nearly seven feet high came and comforted his weeping daughters.

'Tell me what happened.'

Prāpti found some resolve to answer. 'I don't know. Prabala kākā rescued us just in time after the cowherd killed Mathurāpati. His name is Krishņa. He is very popular even in Kāshi. They ascribe supernatural powers to him.'

Jarāsandha stood tall.

He declared in a thunderous rage: 'I, king of Magadha do solemnly swear over Shiva that I shall not rest till I chase and kill the killer of my son-in-law.

'Call Prabala into my audience', Jarāsandha shouted to his guards standing guard outside the Raniwās.

Prabala was brought in.

'Tell me what happened,' said Jarāsandha.

Prabala cleared his throat, preparing to present a narrative that would keep his neck safe.

'Mahāraj, it was quite sudden. Mathurāpati had organised a wrestling match. I was on guard duty at the gate separating the Royal Quarters from the arena. The two cowherds forced their way in after killing the great beast Kuvalyapiḍa and challenged the wrestlers of the Royal Akhāḍā. Krishṇa killed Chāṇūra and those who followed him, and Balarāma killed the rest. After that, Krishṇa jumped at the royal throne with lightning speed. Before anyone could realize, he had brought Mathurāpati down into the arena and killed him with a direct blow to the weak spot in his neck. After that, there was complete bedlam in Mathurā. I feared for the life of princesses, so I immediately rushed them out of Mathurā.'

'That was a good thing you did, but how did a mere cowherd manage to kill the great Kaṃsa'.

'I heard a lot about him in Prayāg and Kāshi, Mahāraj'.

'Tell me something,' commanded Jarāsandha.

A nervous Prabala proceeded. 'Apparently, this person is known as Krishna and he possesses some divine powers. Every third person in Kāshi was chanting his name and calling him Jagadguru'.

'What, that slip of a child is known as Jagadguru? I have to get even with these Kāshi guys too. How easily they let my sister-in-law Ambā, Ambikā and Ambālikā be abducted by that celibate lackey from Hastināpur, Bhishma.'

'Apparently, this boy has some exceptional abilities. He has been given combat training by the Aangiras. He gets spiritual training from a girl. People say that he has performed many miracles. Mahārāj Kaṃsa is said to have tried to have him killed many times, but every hired killer was slain by Krishṇa,' said Prabala as if he knew very little.

Jarāsandha was beside himself with rage. He sent for his Senāpati Magadhamādan immediately.

Jarāsandha inquired from the Senāpati, 'How long do you require to prepare for an attack on Mathurā?'

'Depends on the kind of attack we are planning. A smaller attack involving only the cavalry can be organized in a week's time. A full-fledged attack involving boats and cavalry will have to wait for the right wind'.

Jarāsandha was not a very patient man.

'What if we use only the row boats?'

Magadhamādan was obviously familiar with the quick temper of his master.

'Rājan, row-boats will take thrice as long as sail-boats will take. Moreover, snows are melting and the current is building up in Ganga and Yamunā rivers. We have to wait for the rainy season to be over before we mount the offensive. The other option is to move our cavalry and take the assistance of Chedi. We could then move quickly and use the Vetravati flotilla of Chedi to attack Mathurā from all the flanks.'

Jarāsandha gave his nod to the proposal. He did not want to wait six months for the rainy season to be over. He had to avenge his son-in-law, the mighty Kaṃsa, now.

'Bring my horse Veeravāhan, amatya. I must see Kulaguru Chanḍakaushika. I think he is still in Griddhakoot hills. Get moving quickly'.

In the matter of less than half an hour, Jarāsandha was off to meet Chanḍakaushika. In about a muhurta, he was shown into Kulaguru Chanḍakaushika's hermitage.

'What brings you here, Rājan? I was anyway expected back in Girivraja in about a fortnight. Looks like the matter is urgent,' enquired Chandkausika.

Jarāsandha prostrated before the sage. He owed his birth to the sage. He never took any important decision without consulting him. On his part, Chanḍakaushika never gave him any advice. He only highlighted pros and cons of any action contemplated. He let the rest to Jarāsandha's buddhi³⁵ and viveka³⁶. That would explain the fact that in spite of having such quality counsel available to him, Jarāsandha still indulged in untold cruelties. In spite of being a Shiva

Bhakta, he never hesitated in using adharma to secure his victories and extract taxes.

Chandakaushika was all smiles. 'What happened? Has Kamsa been slain?'

Jarāsandha was shocked. "Are all these hermits conspiring against me and Kaṃsa? How do they know Kaṃsa was going to be slain", he thought.

'Yes mahātmā; I wish to attack Mathurā and kill Krishņa, the cowherd.'

'You have obviously not come to ask for my permission, Rajan.'

'Mahatman, I seek your blessings'.

'You know me well, Rājan. My blessings are always with Dharma. Your expeditions are usually in the quest of your ahaṅkāra³⁷, not for Dharma'.

'Mahātman, my son-in-law has been killed. Isn't it my svadharma to avenge the killing?'

'Yes, it is, but only if the killing itself was not to fulfill samāj dharma or Rāshṭra dharma. Your svadharma cannot take precedence over the higher calling'.

Jarāsandha was dumbfounded. Mahātmā Chanḍakaushika had never discouraged him in this manner. He needed to probe further.

'I am myself the supreme upholder of Dharma in Āryāvarta, mahātmā. You have yourself said that there is no greater Shiva Bhakta in Āryāvarta than me. Isn't it my kshātriya dharma to come to the assistance of the family of my slain son-in-law who was also a close associate?'

Rishi Chandakushika was still smiling. 'Rājan, if a Kuṭil Dharmi has been killed by a Sanātani, public has been relieved from his oppression, and justice has been restored in Mathurā, how is that adharma? This is not a killing actuated by ahaṅkāra, but by noble intentions of bringing succour to the public. Krishṇa has restored Dharma in Mathurā'.

Jarāsandha's eyes were in the state of going wider and wider while being shut out of any vision. He was not able to see. All he could see was a blur.

Rishi continued, 'It is not for me to advise you, Rājan. Since you have come to ask me, I can only bring the pros and cons of your

actions to your notice. Man will collect his karma. Kriyā is not always necessary for collecting the fruits of karma; nor does every kriyā result in karma. Krishṇa epitomizes unattached karma. His actions were to uphold Dharma. You can take your call'.

'Rishivar, my svadharma dictates that I must avenge my son-in-law'.

'Then you must do a pūrvapaksha of one you regard as enemy. Entire sant samāj of Āryāvarta is excited about this extraordinary boy named Krishṇa. All of us are waiting to have him in our Āshramas. There can be no greater karma phal³⁸ for a guru than to have such an extraordinary genius as a disciple'.

Rishi continued, 'I will be back in Girivraja by dashmi. You can come to me on ekadashi and learn about Krishna. He is a formidable adversary. Learn about his background before embarking on your expedition. That is my advice'.

Jarāsandha took a deep breath. He made his salutations to the rishi and left. He was in his Royal Court by the third prahara of the day.

He called Magadhamādan. 'We shall embark on our expedition to capture Krishņa and destroy Mathurā on purņa chandra. Get busy now'.





<u>- 5 -</u>

<u>PŪRVAPAKSHA³⁹</u>

xactly ten days after Jarāsandha's visit to Griddhakoot, Rishi Chanḍakaushika arrived in Girivraja at the break of dawn. He would stay with one of his disciples while in Girivraja. Jarāsandha sent his Mukhya Amātya, Kāntivardhan, to request the Rishi to accept the hospitality of the royalty. Chandakaushika was not very willing, but Kantivardhan reminded him that he had promised the King a complete pūrvapaksha on the cowherd, Krishna. That would take a long time to narrate, Kāntivardhan implored the sage. In the end, the sage relented and took quarter in the palace. The satsang⁴⁰ would begin at sandhyā kāl⁴¹. The King would have to be accompanied by the Queen as the sage considered it to be an anushth $\bar{a}n^{42}$. In Sanātana tradition, no ritual is complete without yajamana, the husband and his patni, the wife, both being part of it. Rta is the cosmic order in its highest form which, when manifested as Dharma, further manifests itself as both Shiva and Shakti. So a procedure to invoke the cosmic order must have both the man and the woman as the doers.

The sage was seated on a low couch made of flat wooden planks, atop a deerskin. His right hand was on his danda. The King and the

Queen were shown into the room at the beginning of the fourth prahara after dusk. The room had been lit by just one solitary lamp. The royal couple entered and did their obeisance to the sage and sat down on the floor on a sheet mattress. The sage sat in Padmāsana, the royal couple was told to be seated in sukhāsana.

'Call the wives of Kaṃsa, Rājan. They need to listen to this even more than you. It will take at least a fortnight to tell the whole story. You must remember that I revere Krishṇa as a gifted man having the capacity to rid this world of evil. So my condition is that you shall show no anger at any point of this tale. The moment I spot a sign of anger in your eyes, I will stop the narration. Your pūrvapaksha will remain incomplete'.

Asti and Prāpti came and sat down on the sheet mattress. The sage commenced a prayer to the infinite cosmos.

Om purṇamadah Om purṇamidam Purṇatpurnamudachyate Purṇasya purṇamādāy Purnamevāvashishyate⁴³

After this he started singing praises to Krishna, all the while intently looking at the King and the Queen.

Vasudeva sutam devam, Kaṃsa Chāṇūra mardanam; Devaki parmānandam, Krishṇam vande jagadgurum

Jarāsandha was beside himself with rage. Here was a chant that not only celebrated the murder of his son-in-law Kaṃsa, but also of one of his favourite yoddhās⁴⁴. Chāṇūra was like a son to him. He had brought him up as dearly as his son, Sahadeva. He was much older than Sahadeva, but was an exceptionally gifted warrior. Additionally, he was a malla yoddhā, a wrestler. Wrestling was the favourite sport of Jarāsandha. He had challenged and won against 5,000 yoddhās till now. It was one of his crafty techniques to win over a territory without striking a blow. His arrogance had multiplied as he stamped his imprimatur on countless kingdom and principalities. He had

perfected the chanting of Shiva Tānḍava Stotram, which he could recite a million times over. This had given him a formidable reputation as a Shiva Bhakta.

His devotion of Shiva was fully desire driven. He wanted to be the unquestioned king of Āryāvarta, the Samrāt or the emperor. His priests had told him that the way to unquestioned sovereignty was Naramedha Yajna, in which he had to first imprison and then sacrifice the heads of one hundred kings. Once he had done that successfully, he was promised immortality. It was a powerful stimulant to him, fed his mada⁴⁵ to a degree that he even became oblivious of the Mānava Dharma taught to him by Rishi Chandakaushika.

The sage went on with the chant for a whole ghati, or a little less than half an hour, seemingly going into a trance but all the while checking the reaction of his audience. His audience was sitting in front. Boiling within, but keeping a calm exterior. After finishing the chant, he teased the King some more.

'Jarāsandha, I do not see any good coming out of your war on Mathurā. Krishṇa should be made a Guru, not fought with. All Gurus long to have him as a disciple so that they can teach him what they know, and learn from him the mysteries of the cosmic order. In case you change your mind at any time, do tell me. I can always request the Aangiras to put in a good word for you'.

Jarāsandha put his hand together in namaskār mudrā, and requested the sage, 'Mahātmā, I beseech you to kindly let us have the benefit of your discourse.

'Fair enough, Jarāsandha', said the sage. 'I am happy with your equanimity. Unless you embark upon a project with complete composure and level mind, you cannot hope for a good result'.

Even as the sage was getting into a mood for beginning the discourse, there was a heavy commotion outside. Jarāsandha looked around and indicated to the prahari to see what was going on. There arose a great howl of the wind. A storm seemed to have hit Girivraja. Normally, storms would not affect Girivraja much, because it was shielded from all sides by hills, but if the winds did get in through the cracks in the hills, they could create an awful lot of mayhem. Cloudbursts did happen in Girivraja once in a while, and left a picture of devastation in their wake. Was it one such day? The King may

have to get into the rescue operations instead of putting his mind into the mundane preparation for another war. Kamsa was not only Jarāsandha's son-in-law, but was also his favourite ally. He was instrumental in aligning Chedi with him. He was an implacable foe of Hastināpur, thanks to the past humiliation that Bhishma had heaped upon him. Acording to Kshatriya custom, he was duty bound to avenge that insult, and Kamsa provided him just that perch. If he ever decided to take on Hastināpur, Mathurā would be a safe bet. Kamsa was quite fed up with the decentralized military structure of the Yādavas. Mathurā was more of a republic before Kamsa took over, but the federal structure of the military did not change even after he asserted himself as a powerful king. He still had to draw his military as contributions from the 18 clans. This prevented him from instilling a sense of purpose in his men. Jarāsandha had posted a battalion of troops with Mathura to not only look after the security of the king, but also to impart training to his troops. Jarāsandha had a well-oiled Army, stationed outside the Girivraja hills. It was a modern army for his times. It had a unitary structure, with well-defined hierarchy, and a chain of command going right up to the king as Supreme Commander.

Magadhamādan sought permission to be shown in. Jarāsandha looked at the sage Chanḍakaushika. He had an enigmatic smile about him. He nodded assent. Magadhaamādan came in and informed the king that they had just witnessed a most amazing phenomenon of a tornado in Girivraja. It lasted about half a ghaṭi, but had left large devastation in its wake. Jarāsandha was torn in doubt. His Rājdharma told him to rush to the side of the public and supervise rescue work, but the anushṭhāna had already started. The rishi had already uttered the cosmic mantra. He was to receive useful information that would lead to the conquest of a person he abhorred from the depth of his heart. He looked at the sage quizzically, but the Rishi just sat there smiling, as if to test him.

Jarāsandha looked at Saudamini for a cue. She was somewhere else. She seemed to be in a trance. Even the two princesses seemed enchanted by the presence of the sage. It was only the king who was going through the torment.

Āchārya Chanḍakaushika smiled again. 'Jarāsandha, you will be alive only till the time no one knows the secret of your childhood surgery. Even you do not know it. Today I have disclosed this in front of these three ladies. Now your life will depend on Saudamini, Asti and Prāpti. You are invincible in a wrestling bout unless someone rips you through the operated portion. Even you did not know it. Today I am telling you. It is important for you to know that before you know about someone you call your enemy. This enemy of yours has an incredible talent of charming ladies. So always make sure that none of these three ladies ever get under his spell'.

Jarāsandha felt a sense of dread. Ever since he came into the room, Rishi was full with praises of his enemy.

Jarāsandha looked at the smiling sage again. His decision had been made.

'Āchārya pravar, please start the pūrvapaksha'.





<u>- 6 -</u> VRISH<u>ŅI</u>

The sage Chandakaushika went into a meditative posture. He opened his eyes after what appeared to be an eternity and began his narration.

'Yādavas are a branch of Kshatriyas but the Suryavamshi Kshatriyas have never accepted them as such. They consider them as Shudras. However, great kingdoms like Shūrasena, Vidarbha, and Chedi have been created by them. Vrishni and Bhoja clans came together to form the confederacy of Mathurā in which all clans have participated. The confederacy elected Ugrasena of Kukura clan as its king and successor to the Vrishni Shūrasena, by a Sudharmā Sabhā that functioned as an assembly of elders to take all policy decisions and guide the King in the discharge of his duties. Since they have shown their proficiency in Kshātra conduct, Aangiras, Gargācharya, and I have conferred the title of Kshatriyas on them. Sanātana Dharma has never prescribed Varnas to be heritable, but there is a tendency among the privileged to appropriate positions in the Varna hierarchy on the basis of birth. Rishis have always decried this, but kings and their paid priesthood have often tried to fossilize the system. Fortunately, we have great men like Parashurāma, Rāma, and now Krishna; who appear once in an epoch and restore the Dharma.

'Vrishṇi kingdom was created as a partial democracy by Shūrasena, where the Sudharmā Sabhā was supreme and the King ruled on behalf of the Sudharmā Sabhā. Sabhā was also given the task of deciding upon succession of kings. The practice of the eldest son automatically becoming the successor was explicitly banned. Mahārāj Ugrasena was a benevolent king. Sudharmā Sabhā also mingled regularly with the public of Mathurā and the various clans settled in distant areas to get their feedback and advise King Ugrasena. Shūrasena's son Vasudeva willingly anointed Ugrasena, a Kukur, as the King, but the kingdom retained its name of a Vrishni kingdom.

'Your son-in-law Kamsa was the first born of Ugrasena. Right since his childhood, he displayed unruly behavioural traits. As an adolescent, he had grown big and strong. He was fond of wrestling and predatory sport. He loved cruel treatment of animals and birds during hunting and shooting expeditions.

'When he was around sixteen years old, Kaṃsa wrestled with an elephant and killed it. That added to his fame and his reputation. At eighteen, his prowess for combat had acquired phenomenal renown. With the help of Pradyot and Pralamba, he managed to secure the title of the crown prince. It was then that you; King Jarāsandha, married your daughters to Kaṃsa.

'A few days later, he killed a man on the street with his bare fists for not giving way to him while he was riding a horse in a street of Mathurā. The matter was referred to Sudharmā Sabhā, which punished him to ten years of hard labour for the crime. Since it was his first crime, he was let out on probation after serving three years in the prison on condition of good behaviour. While serving time in prison, he came across Bāṇakanṭaka.

'Kaṃsa was being made to run an oil mill that day. He was full of high dudgeon over the treatment meted out to him by his father and the Sudharmā Sabhā. He always thought that he was above the law as the son of the King and as the Crown Prince. A sentence of ten years was awarded to him only because he was young. No cognizance was taken of his status as the Crown Prince. There was a huge debate in the Sudharmā Sabhā on the quantum of punishment. Prime Minister Viprathu was insistent that he should be awarded death punishment. A murder was unheard of in Vrishni kingdom. It was Pralamba, the

Gaṇanāyaka, who came to his defence that day. He cited scriptures to impress upon the Sudharmā Sabhā that a young man could not be given the same quantum of punishment as a fully-grown adult. You did not punish a monkey for running riot in a locality, it was argued. Mathurā was notorious for its monkeys. There were instances that people had been severely injured in attacks by monkeys and had even died. Pralamba had argued that child of a human being could not be treated better than a monkey as his viveka had not fully developed at the age of eighteen. He had argued that full punishment should be awarded only to those who had developed this consciousness and viveka fully. Since Kaṃsa was only eighteen, he deserved leniency.

'A jury of eleven was formed by the Sudharmā Sabhā that day. They awarded him ten years of hard labour in the royal prison. His father did not intervene even once. He kept quiet like a log and let his eldest son go to prison. Kaṃsa nursed this grievance against him for not intervening.

'Bāṇakanṭaka made friends with Kaṃsa. He offered to do the work allotted to Kaṃsa from time to time. Bāṇakanṭaka was serving simple imprisonment of 1 year for cheating in a commercial transaction. He was not obliged to do hard labour.

'As Bāṇakanṭaka gained confidence of Kaṃsa, he began to indulge in small talk. He could sense the grievance Kaṃsa nursed towards the ruling dispensation of Mathurā.

'One day he gathered courage to broach the subject. "Kumār, Mathurā is a strange place. There is no respect for royalty here".

'Kaṃsa grunted loudly, almost as if he would demolish Mathurā with his grunt alone. "I have never heard of a prince being sent to jail by his own father. I feel ashamed that my father is the King of Mathurā".

'Bāṇakanṭaka could sense the opening. He probed on, "Kumar, Mathurā's Sudharmā Sabhā is like Adharma Sabhā. My guru has taught me that a king is not only the ruler of his kingdom, but he is also God's representative on this earth. Sudharmā Sabhā thinks that ruler is a representative of the Sabhā and not God".

"Who knows God anyway? I call him Ishwar. Ishwar is manifest in all of us". Said Kaṃsa.

"No, sir. My guru says that God is not Ishwar. God creates this world for human beings alone. All this bit about cosmic energy transforming itself into various forms of existence is all hogwash", said Bānakanṭaka.

'Kamsa nodded his head absent-mindedly. He was burning in a fire of vengeance. His mind was totally consumed by hate and humiliation.

'Kaṃsa had attended the Āshrama of Vrishṇi Kulaguru, Gargāchārya, but had not attained any great proficiency in any of his subjects except in combat and warfare. He was particularly good at hand-to-hand combat. He could inveigle many of his gurubhais⁴⁶ into having combat and would then relish defeating them and torturing them physically while beating them. Gargāchārya had received a number of complaints and he had even advised King Ugrasena that Kaṃsa did not possess the qualities of a King. According to the Yādava code, a king had to be proficient not only in warrior skills, but had to be well schooled in the 16 vidyās⁴⁷ and 64 kalās⁴⁸.

Besides, he had to have the viveka⁴⁹ to rule according to Dharma. Dharma was supposed be the ruler in the Vrishni kingdom, not the King. Sage Gargāchārya had found Kaṃsa wanting in 47 kalās. A prince had to be proficient in at least 52 kalās to deserve the throne. Gargāchārya had given Kaṃsa negative marks in his appreciation of scriptures, understanding of cosmic relativity, discrimination of right and wrong, and a general apathy towards Dharmic principles. Such a man, Gargāchārya felt, would become a cruel and oppressive King, given to pleasures and profligacy, and would lead the kingdom to ruin. This report had been shared with the jury before the conviction was awarded. A better report would probably have got him a lesser sentence, or even a benefit of doubt. Mathurā worked on a principle of 'noblesse oblige'⁵⁰, where a person in a higher calling or occupation had to have much greater sense of propriety and morality.

Kaṃsa found Bāṇakanṭaka quite likeable. He was saying things that Kaṃsa had himself felt at times. The prince had no patience for the niceties of Dharma that were taught to him at the Gurukul, but there was such a strong environment of correctness in Vrishṇi kingdom that Kaṃsa felt stifled. Bāṇakanṭaka, on the other hand, was

supplying him a set of justifications he had never heard from anyone in Mathurā.

One day he asked Bāṇakanṭaka whether he would let him meet his Guru. Bāṇakanṭaka was thrilled. His Guru had taught him the virtue of proselytization. In fact, his Guru had always debunked the Dharmic principles being taught in the Gurukuls across Āryāvarta. He ridiculed the thought that man and animal had their own rights to the environment. He ridiculed the idea of evolution of cosmic energy and inter-connectivity of energy fields that the gurus taught in Vedanta. He had his own theory of creation.

Bāṇakanṭaka quite loved the thought of earning piety through propagation of his cult. He was himself a hardy man who found the way of Vrishṇis quite feminine.

Within a gap of one month, Bāṇakanṭaka and Kaṃsa were freed. Bāṇakanṭaka had served out his sentence, and Kaṃsa was released on a special parole of six months available to young prisoners.

'Kamsa was now twenty and seething with rage.

'He called Bāṇakanṭaka as soon as he was released. "I want to meet your Guru."

'Bāṇakanṭaka was euphoric. He had the ear of the Prince of Mathurā.

"My Guru had gone to Aravasthan⁵¹ when I was incarcerated. He should be back soon. He usually goes to Kuru Pradesh where he is tutoring a prince. I will send a rider to find out whether he is in Hastināpur. If he is there, we will go there."

"Ok, send my rider. I will send my trusted men", said Kamsa.

'A rider was sent to Hastināpur with a message by Bāṇakanṭaka.

'Six days later, word came that they could go to Hastināpur as Guru was camping there on the banks of the Gangā.

'They decided to cross the Yamunā on boat with their horses one early morning, and were in Hastināpur before nightfall. They were put up in the Āshrama and were told to see the Guru at midnight.

'Exactly at midnight, they were ushered into a big sized hut. Bāṇakanṭaka's guru sat there on an opulent throne, with signs of resplendence all around.

'The Guru got up and welcomed both of them. "Kuṭil Muni welcomes you, Kaṃsa. You are now going to be under right guidance".

'Kaṃsa paid his respects to Kuṭil Muni, who bade him to sit down on a chair placed in front him. Bāṇakanṭaka kept standing.

'Muni did not indulge in any formalities. He was direct. "Prince, kingdom belongs to the man who has power of arms. Bāhubal⁵², astrabal⁵³ and shastrabal⁵⁴. You have all three, then why are you so despondent. Don't we say 'virabhogyā vasundharā⁵⁵"?

"Munivar⁵⁶, Mathurā follows a very open polity, with free participation. Anyone can become the King on his merits, even a commoner. Sudharmā Sabhā and Guru Gargāchārya have a huge role to play in the selection of the king".

"Oh, that's quite ridiculous. Nobody should follow that. Mathurā calls itself a republic. It is a silly notion. Every time they have a battle on hand, they keep sitting and discussing till the enemy knocks off a few forts and takes away a large booty. By the time the decision is taken by the so-called Sudharmā Sabhā, the battle is already lost. They have lost so much territory to Chedi and Magadha that way. Don't you think Mathurā should have a quicker system of taking decisions?"

'These words were like sonorous music to Kamsa.

"I agree with you, Munivar, but the principles of Dharma do not allow that".

"Who has seen Dharma, Kaṃsa? These people who try and locate the Supreme Being in every form of creation have no idea of this human life. According to me, we are created by Jhaṅkāl, the One creator, and we humans have the right to rule the earth, use its resources, and subjugate all other living or inanimate beings. Similarly, the King is the representative of Jhaṅkāl on earth. There cannot be any limits to his power."

'This line of reasoning was strange to Kaṃsa. He tried to argue, "Munivar, how can we say that. There is no pratyaksha⁵⁷ pramāṇa⁵⁸ of a theory of creation and one creator. On the other hand, we find the pramāṇa of existence in all living beings, even plants. They are clearly at a different level of evolution. Humans are at the highest

level of evolution. Anumāna⁵⁹ tells us that as human beings, we have the potential to evolve further."

'Kuṭil Muni was clearly showing signs of anger. "Look, Kaṃsa. Do you want to be the King of Mathurā or not"?

"Yes, I want to be King of Yādavas, Munivar".

"Then, go and seize the throne. Throw the challenge to Sudharmā Sabhā. By the time they come around to convene their meeting and come to a decision, you would have the throne of Mathurā. Follow the tenets of Kuṭil Dharma, Prince. We do not treat our captives as human beings. They are our properties. Their women and wealth are our properties. We will deal with that later. Capture the throne of Mathurā first. Are you up to it? I can get you the help of Magadha king Jarāsandha. He is a great friend, even though he is himself a great Shiva Bhakta⁶⁰. That is against my teachings, but deception is permissible in my catechism to achieve my goals. We get along superbly", Kuṭil Muni was scoring bragging points.

'Kuṭil Muni laid out a plan for Kaṃsa to follow. One hundred of the choicest Magadha troops would reach Mathurā via Dhawalpuri. By Kartik Pūrṇimā they would reach Mathurā dressed as sādhus. Kaṃsa would arrange to have them brought in to Mathurā. They would wait for orders of Kaṃsa. It was three months away. If the plan succeeds, Kaṃsa would not have to go back to prison'.

'Kaṃsa was back to Mathurā by the second prahara next day'.

Āchārya Chanḍakaushika called it a day. Asti and Prāpti were looking at their father with a quizzical look; a look that Jarāsandha was trying his hardest to avoid.





<u>- 7 -</u> THE COUP

n day two, Āchārya Chanḍakaushika began a little early, as the King wanted to have the pūrvapaksha completed by next Pūrṇimā. Asti and Prāpti, and Queen Saudamini were seated in a semi-circular arc around the sage. The proceedings began around noon, to be completed before nightfall. Persuasive skills of Prime Minister Magadhasharman were brought to bear upon the Kulaguru for this change of time.

Āchārya began the day with the same chants to the infinite cosmos and to Krishṇa. He narrated –

'As promised by Kuṭil Muni, your father sent his crack detachment under Prabala to Mathurā. They camped outside Mathurā for a few days and were taken into the city on Kartik Pūrnimā when the security was lax due to the heavy influx of pilgrims.

'That the King of Magadha had been friends with one of the biggest adharmic forces is not well known even today. This will happen if a king does his religious duty and penance out of ahaṅkāra and for worldly power and wealth. Our king was friendly with Kuṭil Muni despite knowing his dogged crusade against Sanātana Dharma. He was born in Arvasthan, and came to Āryāvarta through Pārshvabhumi and built an Āshrama in Pushkalavati in Gāndhara'.

Jarāsandha was shuffling uneasily as Āchārya Chanḍakaushika went through this narration. Āchārya continued.

'King of Magadha is renowned as a great Shiva Bhakta. Of that, there is no doubt. What is doubtful is the motivation behind this Bhakti. This Bhakti is not for discovering the unity of consciousness that Shiva represents in this cosmic scheme. Rather, it is an opportunistic and hubris driven kriyā. The King of Magadha has forgotten my lessons on kriyā and karma. He has also forgotten my lessons on Kshātra Dharma. Yādavas were Shūdras in the varnāshrma system. It was Gargāchārya who made them evolve into Kshatriyas in tune with the dynamic varnāshrama system when Shūrasena followed his teachings to establish a just Rājya. Jarāsandha, however, wishes to become the Lord of the Universe without knowing what he would do with that title. All position in this world is relative. Kriyā is not karma. Yet, the King is busy doing the kriyā of Shiva Bhakti with the motivation of achieving material power, and at the same time having the worst Shiva drohi⁶¹ as his friend. It is this ahankāra that made him tie up with Kamsa, as you would now hear. Jarāsandha, you are going down a dangerous path. Shiva resides in all of us. You have to find him within. The way you are planning to please him through Nara Medha Yajna⁶² will not make you invincible. In fact, it will be your undoing'.

Jarāsandha was taken aback at this sudden outburst in the middle of sage's narration. He had a look of great dismay over his face. His friendship with adharmic forces was being ripped open right in front of the ladies of his house. He bowed before the Āchārya and requested that the narration may continue. The ladies were mortified at the picture painted by the sage. They had always thought of their father as a very spiritual man. Here was the Kulaguru painting a different picture of him altogether.

Sage took a deep breath, closed his eyes for a brief vighați and resumed.

'After Kamsa received the forces of Magadha under Prabala, he started plotting. He had to somehow be at the Sudharmā Sabhā to be able to take it over.

'Kaṃsa suddenly remembered Viprathu, the Prime Minister of Mathurā. He was the one who wanted Kaṃsa given death sentence. Yet, after he had been sentenced only for 10 years with provision of six months' parole every three years and a good conduct remission at seven and a half years, Viprathu had come to Kaṃsa. He put his hand affectionately over the youngster's head and said, "child, we all err at times. One who makes the most of his errors and learns from them comes out as gold from fire —

valuable, flexible, glittering and gleaming. Meet me after your first parole. I will try and get the rest of your sentence waived off if you earn good credits from the prison administration".

'Kamsa went and met Viprathu. The kindhearted Viprathu was happy to see Kamsa. "Come, my child. I am happy to see you. I hope you did not earn a bad name in the prison."

"No, Amātya. 1 was not given a single punishment in the three years I was there".

'Viprathu was indulgent towards the Prince. He had lost the title of Crown Prince after being convicted. This was the code of Yādavas. A Sudharmā Sabhā meeting was due in fifteen days. Viprathu promised to have his case brought before the Sabhā.

'The Sudharmā Sabhā convened on purṇa chandra⁶⁴ day. The agenda for waiver of Kaṃsa's punishment was brought before the Sabhā, but was not taken up. It was decided to take it up in the next meeting, after a month. Kaṃsa was directed to be present on that day. That would be only 3 days before his parole would end.

'Meanwhile, Kaṃsa was finding it difficult to keep the Magadha force hidden. These were the finest troops from Magadha. Whenever they moved in the city, they would be noticed on account of their superb physique alone. Magadha had a centrally raised force. They were well trained in combat and other war like pursuits. They were specially recruited on the basis of their physical attributes. Mathurā, on the other hand, kept a contributory force. One month was a long time. On the other hand, if they were taken out and hidden somewhere in the forests of Matsya or Pānchala, there was no guarantee they would be able to find their way in on the appointed day.

'Kaṃsa orgnaised an anushṭhāna with 108 priests. Half of the force was hidden among the priests, and the other half as parichārakas⁶⁵. It was common to have priests and parichārakas brought from outside for anushṭhānas. Kaṃsa managed to hide his secret.

'On the day of the Sudharmā Sabhā, Kaṃsa carried out the purṇahuti⁶⁶ and started from his abode in the north of Mathurā towards the south where the palace was located as also the main ghāṭ where members of the Yādava clan would perform ablutions after completion of an Anushṭhāna. His entire force was with him, dressed as priests and parichārakas, weapons hidden in their flowing robes and loose clothes. They were going towards the Yādava ghāṭ, from where they would move to Sudharmā Sabhā, which used to meet off the Eastern Gate, named as Yamunā Dwar. The procession proceeded as planned. Kaṃsa was allowed to go in alone. There was a detachment of six praharis⁶⁷ guarding the gate. Chāṇūra was allowed to go in after a body search. He positioned himself in a line of sight with both his troops and Sudharmā Sabhā.

'The Sabhā began with Amatya Viprathu standing up and bringing down his Dharmadanḍa⁶⁸ and calling the meeting to order.

"With the permission of Mahārāj Ugrasena, we may begin today's proceedings", announced Viprathu

'Pralamba stood up to propose waiver of Kamsa's sentence. Kamsa was ordered to come forward.

"Mahārāj, Amatya Viprathu has proposed a waiver of the rest of sentence for Kumar Kaṃsa. The report from prison keeper says that his conduct through the 3 years of incarceration was impeccable. The hard labour that he put in was ten times that of the average effort of all other prisoners sentenced to hard labour. He proposes that in view of such excellent reports, there is every ground to assume that the Kumar is not only penitent, but has sufficiently reformed himself to merit an entry into the sādhāraṇa prajā⁶⁹.

'Kaṃsa was struck by the words "sādhāraṇa prajā", but kept a poker face.

'Mahārāj Ugrasena was looking intently at Kamsa.

"Let Kamsa plead his own case", said Mahārāj Ugrasena

'Kamsa was made to stand in the dock area, to the right of the King. The throne was on a raised platform, about five feet high. There were no stairs in front. King's entry was from the back of the platform.

'Kamsa spoke with certain haughtiness and a demeanour of a royalty, "I was unjustly punished".

'Viprathu was taken aback. He expected Kaṃsa to apologise. With this kind of an open challenge, he would antagonize the entire Sabhā. He tried to look at Kaṃsa with the intention of conveying a subtle message. Kaṃsa was not looking at him. He was looking at Ugrasena with blood shot eyes. He was kept in a confined dock, which was surrounded on all sides with a 5 feet high wooden enclosing partition. Even the normally phlegmatic Ugrasena looked a bit flustered at this clear breach of protocol.

"It does not look as if the petitioner has any sense of contrition. He is blaming the Sudharmā Sabhā for his despicable action", said Ugrasena.

'Kamsa gave out a loud grunt, broke the wooden enclosure using his enormous strength, and scaled the platform on which Ugrasena was seated in his throne with the alacrity of a perfectly trained combatant. Before anyone could realize, Kamsa had Ugrasena's neck in the powerful grip of his right hand, ready to strangle him.

'The entire Sudharmā Sabhā was paralysed with fear. They knew Kaṃsa's prowess in combat. Not only the King was no match, he was equal to a hundred yoddhās⁷⁰ in battle. "Hold off, everyone, or I will strangle Mahārāj Ugrasena", screamed Kaṃsa.

'Kaṃsa scaling the platform was a signal to Chāṇūra. He signaled to his troops waiting outside Yamunā Dwar. Two of them took care of the guards on the gate; the rest of them had taken the Sabhā hostage in barely two vighaṭis. Chāṇūra snatched away the Dharmadanḍa from Viprathu. He announced loudly, "Long live Mahārāj Kaṃsa".

'There was stunned silence in the Sudharmā Sabhā. Representatives from all the eighteen clans, as well as the senior ministers were present there. Not one could muster up the courage to speak up. All of them were armed. There were about fifty odd

members of the Sudharmā Sabhā, all of them entitled to carry arms. Besides, there were the Palace guards numbering at least two hundred. One hundred Magadha troops had silenced them all. Ugrasena's brother Devaka, Dharmādhikāri Vasudeva, Senāpati Pradyot, Gaṇanāyaka Pralamba, cousin Akroor, renowned warriors Satyak, Prasenjit, Satrajit – all were there and all of them were speechless.

'Kamsa physically lifted Ugrasena and called one of the Magadha soldiers to pin him. At the same time, he took his sword and beheaded two bodyguards of King Ugrasena who had been trying to free their master without resorting to weapons, as they thought the King was in a hostage situation.

'The Sudharmā Sabhā was terrorized. All the great warriors and accomplished wise men were silenced in the face of a threat to their body and honour. Kaṃsa lifted the crown from Ugrasena's head, placed it on his own head and occupied the throne. A radicalised minority had no difficulty in subduing a peace-loving overwhelming majority.

'A wave of shock hit the Sudharmā Sabhā. They could portend great calamity for Mathurā. Never had a King occupied a throne by unseating another and that too without any customary rituals.

'Vasudeva, the Dharmādhikāri, got up and protested. "Kaṃsa, this is adharma. You are not only doing something unheard of in the Yādava confederation, but you are also ignoring the Dharma shāstras".

'Vasudeva was the son of Shūrasena Vrishṇi, a major clan of the Yādavas. His brother Naṅda was the chief of the clan. If the rule of primogeniture was to be applied, he was the rightful heir to the throne of Mathurā. Yādavas did not follow that rule. The wise Vasudeva himself proposed Ugrasena of the Kukur clan to succeed Shūrasena. He was a brave warrior, well-schooled in the nuances of Dharma, and very bold. He could clearly see the Sudharmā Sabhā taken hostage by Magadha troops, yet he spoke up. He was also a friend of Kaṃsa, though a few years older than him.

'Kaṃsa roared with a demonic laughter. "Vasudeva, my Dharma teaches me that the throne belongs to the powerful. So I have snatched it. Since you are the Dharmādhikāri and also my friend, I am

reappointing you on that post. You do whatever you need to do to formalize the arrangement. Where is Senāpati Pradyot and Gaṇanāyaka Pralamba?"

'These two persons were not happy with the daily meddling of Sudharmā Sabhā in their affairs. They were present but looked on at the happenings without making any attempt to resist this unfortunate turn of events.

"Senāpati, I order the imprisonment of my father Ugrasena with immediate effect. He shall be placed in the same cell as I was. Looking at his age, I exempt him from hard labour.

'Vasudeva got up again, "Kaṃsa, this is not the way to conduct affairs in Yādava Kul. Even Mahārāj has no power to sentence anyone. It is the job of the Sudharmā Sabhā. You cannot follow the path of adharma."

"Oh, I see", said Kaṃsa. "Ok. I do hereby order that all functions of the Sudharmā Sabhā shall forthwith reside with me, the King of Mathurā. As far as Dharma is concerned, I do hereby order Dharma, or whoever he is, suspended with immediate effect. Sanātana Dharma is no longer the official Dharma of Mathurā. Everyone is free to practise whichever brand of Dharma they wish to practise."

'The Sabhā was still. There had been whispers about Kaṃsa having met Kuṭil Muni. The Muni had a handful of followers in Mathurā, but he never made much headway. Here was the shadow of Kuṭil Muni and his intolerant Kuṭil Dharma seated right on the throne of Mathurā.

"The Sabhā is adjourned to meet again on next purṇa chandra. All officials shall retain their designations. Chāṇūra is appointed as head of my personal guards. Senāpati Pradyot is ordered to requisition another five thousand troops from Magadha, from my father-in-law Jarāsandha. In the Palace meeting halls, there shall be two thrones on each side of the main throne for my two wives, the Magadha Kanyās. Senāpati shall report to my Head of Personal Guards." The Sudharmā Sabhā was dismissed. Ugrasena was led away to the prison, as if it was just a roulette routine. Except Vasudeva, no one even uttered a word. Such was the pusillanimity of the great chieftains of the Yādava clans in front of a bigoted tyrant.





<u>- 8 -</u> THE PROPHECY

Mathurā had gone into a state of shock. Yādavas had a unique federal system of governance. King was only a representative of the Code of Yādavas and Dharma. It was a Gaṇatantra in the nearest possible sense. Before Kaṃsa, no son of a King was even named as a crown prince. The first one to be so named, even though briefly, had snatched away the throne from the king.

'Kaṃsa was beholden to his father-in-law and to Kuṭil Muni for the throne of Mathurā. He slowly replaced all the Army commanders with imports from Magadha.

Āchārya Chanḍakauśika was looking intently at Asti and Prāpti. It was clear that they had not the ghost of an idea about what Kaṃsa had been doing to Mathurā. They seemed to have been busy doing the duty of queens, which could not have been much in a kingdom based on power, not on Dharma. He continued.

'Kaṃsa was aware of the wave of revulsion among Yādavas towards him. He knew his folks. Yādavas were not the types who would give in to force. You could win them over by reason and affection, but anything done to them by force would generate a reaction, sooner or later. With this in mind, he carried out changes only in the Army and his Personal Guards. Pradyot remained the

Senāpati and Pralamba the Gaṇanāyak, but the real power had shifted to Chāṇūra, the Māgadh friend of Kaṃsa. He had been designated as the head of combat training, and had perfected the art of political killings by challenging potential troublemakers to a wrestling duel. He had acquired a fearsome reputation for being an indiscriminate, cruel murderer. With Chāṇūra as his sword arm, Kaṃsa hardly required any other enemies'.

Jarāsandha squirmed in his asana. This pūrvapaksha was becoming an exercise in him getting exposed in front of his wife Saudamini and daughters Asti and Prāpti. He could do nothing as he had himself requested for it. He was being made to realize that he shouldered a bit of responsibility for his son-in-law getting killed in the prime of his kingship.

'Bāṇakanṭaka had also grown very close to him. He had also introduced a Magadha tāntric to Kaṃsa. This tāntric went by the title of Karmādhikari and was trained by Kuṭil Muni in the art of deception, espionage and subversion. His name was Kroorasena, and he usually lived up to his name.

'An occasion for reconciliation with the people of Mathurā presented itself to Kaṃsa when his cousin sister Devaki, daughter of his uncle Devaka, was to choose her spouse. In Yādava tradition, just as in most of Aryāvarta, women chose their husbands. They could do it either by swayamvara, or by making their choice known to their parents. Parents could also propose names of suitable suitors to enhance their connections and relationships, but the final choice always rested with the women. Women often rebelled if they were forced to marry against their wish, and in such cases as well, their wishes were honoured by the society. Parents of such girls received much social opprobrium.

'Yādavas followed the samājdharma prevalent in Āryāvarta. It is only in those places where personalities had clouded time honoured Dharmic practices out of sheer arrogance that girls were married off without their consent. Magadha is a good example. Āsuri tendencies sneak into a kingdom in the form of oppression of women'.

Jarāsandha squirmed some more.

'Devaki chose Vasudeva. Vasudeva was already much married. Devaka's six elder daughters had all chosen Vasudeva. This was in addition to Pauravi and Rohiṇi, who were already wedded to him. Dhritadevā, Shāntidevā, Upādevā, Shridevā, Devrakshitā, and Sahdevā were already married to him. With his family background as a Shūrasena, erudition, warrior skills, reputation for fairness, and position among the elites of Mathurā, youthful Vasudeva was a favourite among Yādava girls. Even Mahārāj Ugrasen had himself wanted to marry his own daughters to Vasudeva, but since his younger brother Devaka's daughters had already married him, he did not want to create any misgivings. Devaki also happened to be a favourite of Kaṃsa. Other than his own sister Kaṅsā, he had great affection for Devaki. He was very happy when Devaki chose Vasudeva as it gave him an opportunity to show Mathurā his kind side. Many purohits did cite the example of Lord Rama to decry this practice of polygamy; but both polygamy and polyandry flourished in the name of free choice.

'Kaṅsā did go to Devaki and sounded her about Vasudeva's eight previous marriages. "Devaki, why do you want to marry someone who already has his attention divided among eight wives. How will he do justice to you", Kaṅsā had asked her favourite sakhi⁷² and sister

"Look, sister, a woman longs to see those qualities in a husband which Vasudeva possesses in plenty. I would rather marry a great man like Vasudeva and share him with eight other women, six of whom are my own sisters. What is the value in being a single wife of a nondescript man?", Devaki said with not a little arrogance. Kańsā was discovering a bit of jealousy coursing through her veins. Vasudeva was indeed one of the finest specimens of manhood in all the eighteen Yādava clans. Vasudeva had also readily agreed to the proposal after consultation with all his wives. This was also a necessary part of joining relationship with another woman. No man could marry a second time without the explicit consent of his first wife. As if that was not enough, women could also keep more than one husband if all the parties agreed. Consensus was the key operating principle in matters of betrothal and weddings.

'The marriage was duly solemnized. Kamsa was the master of ceremonies from Devaki's side. He made sure that the wedding was performed in a manner befitting the monarch of Mathurā. Even

though Mathurā always frowned on the King using State resources on his personal affairs, their fondness for Vasudeva was such that they were ready to ignore even the foibles of Kamsa.

'With the kind of festivities none in Mathurā had seen or heard of, the wedding of Vasudeva and Devaki was formalized. Rishi Gargāchārya himself came and blessed the couple at the time of saptapadi. The time had now arrived for ceremonial send-off of the bride to the house of the groom. Kaṃsa was genuinely fond of Devaki. He chose to drive the chariot of Devaki and Vasudeva himself. Mathurā was getting somewhat overwhelmed with the devotion Kaṃsa was showing to Devaki.

'Vid $\bar{a}i^{73}$ was at the end. With tears in their eyes, the elders, the friends, the attendants had all bid Devaki good-bye and blessed her auspicious future with the deepest recesses of their manas $\frac{74}{100}$.

'Women of the house brought Devaki to the chariot. Kaṃsa was waiting to drive the chariot, reins of the six horses in his hand. Vasudeva was already seated in the chariot, waiting to receive the bride.

'Kansā and Devaki's mother, Rupasi, brought her to the chariot where Vasudeva extended his hand to take Devaki into the chariot.

'There was a commotion and Karmādhikari Kroorasena came rushing to the chariot. He had been disturbed at this further fortification of relationship between two major clans of Yādavas and had been doing tāntric rituals to somehow forestall the union of Devaki and Vasudeva. He had failed, as Kaṃsa was too fond of Devaki. He had discovered something, which he was sure the king could not ignore.

'Devaki had just been taken into the chariot by Vasudeva. Kaṃsa was about to mount the chariot.

"Mahārāj", screamed Kroorasena at the top of his voice".

'Kaṃsa paused and looked at him quizzically. "Mahārāj, great misfortune has befallen Mathurā and Yādavas. This is an inauspicious union".

'Kamsa was furious. "Stupid tāntric. You are again here to bring bad omen. I am going to behead you with one swing of my sword. It was a bad day when I brought you into my court in spite of the advice of Rishi Gargāchārya".

"No, Mahārāj. I am beholden to the salt that nurtured me with your grace and blessings. I am here to make a prophecy".

'A prophecy of a tantric was greatly valued in Mathura.

"Blurt it out, Kroorasena. If it had not been an auspicious occasion, I would myself have taken your head off. Now rush".

"Mahārāj, Devaki's eighth child will be the cause of your death. He will be your Kaal⁷⁵. He will kill you exactly twenty-one years hence," Kroorasena was breathless. This is a message from Kuṭil Muni himself.

'Something clicked within Kaṃsa at the name of Kuṭil Muni. He was beholden to him for the throne of Mathurā. He considered Kuṭil Muni as his benefactor. This man was deputed with him at the instance of Kuṭil Muni. He had to take this message seriously.

'Kaṃsa considered the message. Something snapped within him and the carefully cultivated exterior disappeared. He became the original Kaṃsa, born as a union between his mother and Dramila the gandharva. The gandharva had deceived his mother into thinking he was Ugrasena. His mother had herself been very cross with the child Kaṃsa. His psyche bore all those injuries even today. He lost his cultivated exterior, roared like a mighty lion that he fancied himself as, and drew out his sword.

'Next moment, Kaṃsa was on the chariot. With the sword drawn, he held Devaki by her flowing hair in one hand, preparing to behead her. He had forgotten that this was the sister he loved the most. He had forgotten that he had himself made all the preparations for her marriage, going into the minutest detail. At this point, all he could remember was the message conveyed by the tāntric, "Devaki's eighth child will be your kaal". Kaṃsa had made his decision; strike at the root. Kill Devaki herself. There will be no Devaki, and no eighth child.

'Vasudeva was taken aback. He had made his peace with this usurper as he had thought it wise to bide his time. Even he had heard this rumour floating around as it were, from Nārada Muni. He did not think very highly of Nārada Muni, as he was given to many exaggerations and hyperbole. Nārada Muni never managed to attain

the status of a rishi. Even his status in the hierarchy of achievements of gyāna⁷⁶ and viveka⁷⁷ was not very highly regarded among the knowledgeable. Even then, the present situation was totally unexpected.





<u>- 9 -</u> THE CONFINEMENT

← T asudeva was thinking quickly on his feet.

Y "Mahārāj, this ill behoves the king of the Yādavas. We revere women. You are indulging in the worst form of adharma by torturing a woman", said Vasudeva.

'This intervention by Vasudeva made Kaṃsa pause for a vighaṭi. He held his sword and looked at Vasudeva.

"Mahārāj, Devaki is not only a woman; she is also your sister. What you are doing right now is not the code of Yādavas. This is done by Rākshasas. We have never had an instance of anyone, especially one in a position of authority, trying to kill a woman. Even women convicted of crimes are given mitigated sentences if they are of a childbearing age. Your sister Devaki is an accomplished woman, well versed in fine arts and dharmashāstras. She will be a blessing to many generations. Please refrain".

'Kaṃsa was breathing fire. He looked at Vasudeva with bloodshot eyes, "To hell with your Dharma. I am concerned only with saving my life. I don't recognize any relationship when it comes to my own life. What use is Dharma if prāṇa is detached from the body"?

'Vasudeva was relieved as he had managed to engage Kamsa in a conversation. "Kamsa, you are not only the official leader of the

Yādavas, but also my friend. Let me remind you that a Yādava king holds his position as a representative of the Yādava Code and Sudharmā Sabhā. Let me also remind you that king has no power to punish anyone. That job is given to the Dharmādhikāri⁷⁸ and the Danḍādhikāri⁷⁹. Please let go of Devaki", said Vasudeva.

'Kaṃsa was unfazed. "I do not let go of my enemies. When there is war, it is the king who marshals his troops, not any Dharmādhikāri or Danḍādhikāri. Moreover, I have already announced that there is no compulsion in religion. One is free to follow any doctrine one wishes to. If I don't kill Devaki, she will bear your children, the eighth of which will then kill me".

"Listen to me, Kaṃsa. Whatever you may do, no doctrine permits killing of unborn adversary. How do you know that this Karmādhikāri of yours, who is nothing but a small time tāntric, understands the subtle movement of stars in the universe? For all you know, he may be lying in order to create strife, or may genuinely be an ignoramus. Even then, here I am, Vasudeva, known for my resolute word, taking a vow in front of this entire assembly of friends, relatives and elites that I will myself bring Devaki's eighth child to you. You may then do whatever you wish. After all, it is the eighth child of Devaki who is your concern. You need not incarcerate everyone for this reason. I, Vasudeva, son of Shūrasena, do hereby undertake to bring my eighth child to you as soon as he is born. May Shiva be my witness".

'Devaki was crestfallen. She could see Vasudeva trying all the diplomatic skill at his command to wriggle out of a difficult situation. Yet the thought of a son being made over to Kaṃsa was unbearable to her.

'Kaṃsa let go of Devaki. "Ok, Vasudeva. Entire Vrishṇi kingdom knows you as the truthful one. I am letting go of her. I will ensure that you carry out your vow. You have to also promise me that you will not leave the confines of Mathurā".

"Granted, Kaṃsa. In any case, the Dharmādhikāri of Mathurā is supposed to be available at all time to its citizens, to the king and to the Sudharmā Sabhā. You will have the custody of the eighth born of Devaki. That is the vow of a Shūrasena", said Vasudeva. Devaki was looking at him quizzically. Let go by Kaṃsa, a thought went up in

Devaki's bosom. "Why am I not being consulted, Vasudeva? I chose you for your sterling qualities, not for you to act as my keeper. Is this the Dharma that you talk of? Wife of a Sanātani is a sahchari⁸⁰, not a property of her husband. How can you make a promise that only both of us can make", she was thinking. Yet, she could see that these bonds of Dharma meant nothing to her own brother, who had almost killed her on a mere suspicion.

'Vasudeva took the reins of the chariot from Kaṃsa as he seemed to relent and drove the chariot home. The word had already spread in the city of Mathurā. When Vasudeva arrived home with Devaki by his side, it was a sea of anxious Shūrasenas waiting for him. All the revelry had subsided. Devaki's sisters, with elder wives Pauravi and Rohiṇi, had planned an elaborate welcome; all that was forgotten. There was now a quiet sigh of relief at their arrival. Muted celebrations took the place of unbounded revelry.

'On her wedding night, Devaki appeared cross with Vasudeva. Vasudeva could immediately sense it. He took her in his arms and asked her, "Priye⁸¹, I know you are not happy but that was the only way at that time to save your life. *Apādkāle maryādā nāsti* – there is no limitation of Dharma in an emergency. Your brother would have beheaded you if I had not made that promise to him. I had no intention of losing you. Whether you will have one child or eight is all hidden in the chrysalis of time. It was important to break his delusion at that time," Vasudeva remonstrated.

'Devaki gave him the look of a khanditā nāyikā⁸², slid out of his grasp and went to sit near the other corner of the bridal bed. "You are the Dharmādhikāri of this land, Ārya. Don't you know the bond of Dharma that operates between a mother and her child? Does your Dharma teach you to treat your wife as your property, or her child as one"?, asked Devaki.

"Relax, Devaki, I have already told you that no such thoughts crossed my mind except how to save you from that rākshasa. I have information that he is under the influence of adharmi Bāṇakanṭaka. That man was well caught by the police. They had reported his links with a strange cult. He has also got Kaṃsa under his influence ever since they met in their prison tryst. In that cult, both women and

children are treated as property of the man. I could sense Kamsa acting under the influence of that cult even on the day he deposed your uncle Ugrasena. I remember him saying even on that day that there is no compulsion in religion. The hollow brain in his head does not understand the difference between Dharma and religion. *Cultures follow Dharma, cults follow religions*".

'Devaki was melting up a bit. She knew that entire Mathurā considered it a miracle that Vasudeva could rescue Devaki from the iron grip of Kaṃsa. He was not known to think twice before murdering anyone. He was fully under the evil influence of Bāṇakanṭaka and Kroorasena, who were also tutoring his brothers.

'Devaki was quite perturbed by Kamsa's change of attitude towards her. Vasudeva could sense that uneasiness. Devaki asked Vasudeva, "What is it that leads a man such as Kamsa to a path of adharma?" Vasudeva was quiet and pensive. He had been trained in the nuances of Dharma. Even he was bound by Dharma as the Dharmādhikāri of Mathurā. He tried to rationalize the situation. "Devaki, there is no one definition of Dharma. It is a code of honour, which operates differently in different situations, as also with different people. For instance, Kshātra Dharma⁸³ is very different from Vanik Dharma⁸⁴. The principal tenet of Kshātra Dharma is to protect the people and the country, to ensure justice for the populace, and rule as a guardian of Dharma on its behalf. Kamsa does not follow any of these. He was always a malefic influence in the family of Ugrasena. He got into bad company. Sudharmā Sabhā even put him in prison. He should not have been given generous parole terms. He does only lip service to Dharma; to the extent it enables him to keep the public happy. I am aware that he is hobnobbing with the adharmi forces of rākshasas, led by their mentor Kutil Muni and his strange cult".

'Devaki was mollified. The couple consummated their marriage, but not without trepidation at the prospect of having to surrender their eighth child. They also considered the possibility of not having more than two children.

'This option was, however, nipped in the bud by Kroorasena's subterfuge. The tantric waited on Kamsa the very next day. He was

ushered into the audience of Kaṃsa. He was very loud. "Mahārāj, you have committed a serious mistake by letting Devaki off". Kaṃsa was rather amused. "Tāntric, you are worried about the eighth child from Devaki. That is a long way. So have some opium and get lost".

"This is no joking matter, Mahārāj. I studied the astrological treatises of Nārada Muni after you gave me that public dressing down. In similar situations, he asked another king, "In the cosmic scheme, who is the first and who is the eighth"?

'Kaṃsa continued to smirk, "What does a Kuṭil Muni follower have to do with cosmic cycles and cosmic order. You should be fine with your separate apartments for hell and heaven. Logic of creationism does not apply to cosmic evolution; or does it"?

"Mahārāj", Kroorasena brought his mouth close to Kaṃsa as if he wanted to whisper. "I do know a fair bit about Sanātana Dharma as well. Let me draw the cosmic circle for you, and mark out the eight children on it. Please tell me who is the 1st and who is the 8th. *Time and space do not always move in a linear path, nor does the cosmic cycle.*"

'Kaṃsa began to listen. These henchmen knew Kaṃsa's vulnerabilities. He was very touchy about his place in the pantheon of Yādava warriors. He was also aware of the whispers about his mother Padmāvati and the impostor Dramila gandharva. Āchārya Gargāchārya had refused to formalize his anointment as a king on the ground of being an unworthy warrior. "Mahārāj, here is the cosmic circle and the eight children. Tell me which one is the first and which one eighth. Roots of Dharma that you allude to are rather subtle. Now tell me".

'Kamsa was thrown into a vortex of confusion. He had relied on his linear concept of numbers and their sequence. This was another view.

'Kroorasena was insistent. Kaṃsa had to give in. He shouted instructions to Gaṇanāyaka Pralamba. "I want Dharmādhikāri Vasudeva brought in immediately".

'It was the second prahara of the night. A rajpurush⁸⁵ could be disturbed at this hour only in times of emergency. What could be greater emergency than the orders of the King?

'Pralamba hurried to Vasudeva's palace. He informed the guards outside that it was an emergency. He was ushered in after a brief wait.

'Vasudeva came out in the waiting room. "Yes, Ārya Pralamba, what is the emergency? Is anyone attacking Mathurā? I thought Mathurā has already pledged itself to the security grid of Magadha. We are now a vassal of Magadha, isn't it?"

"Rājputra, Mahārāj Kaṃsa wants you with him immediately".

"I hope you know the protocol for calling the Dharmādhikāri. Even Mahārāj has to send his mudrikā⁸⁶ for an emergency summon".

'Pralamba was fidgety in front of the radiant personality of Vasudeva. "Rājputra, I am merely carrying out the duty assigned to me", said Pralamba. "Mahārāj is sitting with Kroorasena. He is again misguiding him", added Pralamba helpfully.

'Vasudeva became thoughtful. He could understand from the way he was being summoned that the emergency did not relate to Mathurā. It was clearly related to insecurities of Kaṃsa the individual, rather than Kaṃsa the king. A king was the upholder of Rājdharma. His relationships with the ministers and other functionaries were not of a personal character under the charter of the Vrishṇis. But Kaṃsa hardly cared about any Dharma. Rishi Gargāchārya had stopped visiting Mathurā as he found that the King was drifting away from the path of dharma.

'Vasudeva bade Pralamba to wait, and went inside to confer with Devaki. He told Devaki that he suspected the worst from Kaṃsa. It seemed he would not wait till the eighth born, and may go back to killing Devaki. Devaki was mortified. She urged Vasudeva to resist Kaṃsa in the name of Dharma.

"Devaki, my svadharma tells me that I must fight this tyrant to protect my family. My Rājdharma tells me that I must obey the king, but my Rāshṭradharma tells me that I must do what is best for the Vrishṇi country. When the various strands of Dharma are in conflict with each other, the one with the larger purpose must prevail. My Rāshṭradharma tells me that for the welfare of the Vrishṇi, the Yādavas and Āryāvarta, we must bring this eighth child to the earth. Our earlier intention of limiting our children to one or two would have to be changed in the larger interest of Āryāvarta. This would

entail great sacrifices on our part, but Rāshṭradharma demands sacrifice. If I were killed fighting Kaṃsa and his Magadha Army today, nature would never forgive me. *Dharma is not bondage, Devaki. Dharma is liberation. Even if you undergo suffering for the sake of Dharma, it can bring liberation.* I am going to Kaṃsa, with your permission". Devaki swallowed her tears, and took a solemn oath, "Āryaputra, even though Kaṃsa is my brother but he is on the wrong path. I promise to you that I shall do everything to liberate this land of the Vrishṇis and Yādavas".

'Vasudeva came out, and left for Kamsa's palace with Pralamba.

'He was greeted by Kamsa with a frown and a grunt. There were no customary pleasantries. Kamsa was direct, "I need all your children, Vasudeva. Just the eighth child will not do".

"I thought my word had a certain weight, Kamsa. These are unlawful directions of Kamsa the person, not that of the King of Vrishnis that call for compliance. I am not honour bound to comply with such adharmic pronouncements from you".

'Kaṃsa was livid. He started frothing in his mouth. "Ok, this is Kaṃsa the monster. He will do anything to protect himself. I have no faith in your promise and oath. Now both of you will remain in prison till the eighth delivery has taken place; enough is enough".

'In about two muhurtas⁸⁷, both Vasudeva and Devaki found themselves in Mathurā's prison – in a cell next to Mahārāj Ugrasena'.

Āchārya Chanḍakaushika called it a day. Next Anuṣḥṭhāna would be two days later.



PART II





<u>- 10 -</u> <u>KUŢIL MUNI</u>

K uṭil Muni was inspecting his flotilla on the river Suvastu⁸⁸ next to his Āshrama. He remembered the day when he was thrown out of Takshshilā Gurukul. He had defied many of the disciplines imposed by the Gurukul. Expulsion happened after Āchāryas had given him many opportunities to reform. They considered him to be a bright student. It was his deviant behaviour that was a problem.

He was aware of his high intellect even then, but his ego would not permit him to accept the viewpoint of others, not even of his gurus. With his fellow students, shāstrārth⁸⁹ would often end up in violence. Shāntibhūt, as he was then known, was the one who always initiated the violence. He was in the habit of answering an unassailable argument by the other debater with his fist.

He was the son of a shepherd, but was picked by the local Brahmins when they saw the spark of intelligence in him. After initial education in the Vedas, Āchārya Mahabhuti took him to Takshshilā. Takshshilā was a University, a massive compound Gurukul where many Āchāryas lived. He was trained in the higher yogic practices there. He often got delusional during meditation and was unable to

distinguish between meditative focus and illusory feelings. Āchāryas considered it to be a function of a bloated ego. Accordingly, he was prescribed many methods of controlling his ahaṅkāra⁹⁰. He never considered ego to be an obstacle. That made his samāshreyaṇa⁹¹ difficult. After many attempts at reforming him, Āchāryas finally asked him to leave when they found him fomenting a rebellion against the Gurukul aimed at its takeover by violence.

Today he had his own Āshrama, an army of disciples, a well-drilled formation of combatants and war materials. He had propounded a new philosophy, which rebelled against Sanātana Dharma and its catena of philosophies. He called himself Jhaṅkālputra, the son of Jhaṅkāl the God. His devious means made his name popular as Kuṭil Muni.

In fact, he rejected the concept of Dharma altogether. He rejected the Vedas and all its derived philosophies like Vedanta, Sankhya and Yoga. He called his meditation experience as Anubhuti, and rejected any experience other than his own. He rejected every prevailing method and principles to examine the working of the cosmic order. He did not honour the concept of karma and rebirth. He honoured a militant and exclusivist ideology, and advocated spreading it by force of arms.

Kuṭil Muni was of a medium build with a medium height. He was extremely ugly with a deformed nose and broken upper front teeth. He limped as he walked. His first appearance often caused revulsion, but he had the gift of speech. He could hold a person spellbound with his powerful oratory delivered in a deep bass voice. His command to his flotilla carried authority.

The flotilla was assembled over many years. It had seventeen ships of all sizes, with about five thousand soldiers. All ships had double rowing propulsion, a bottom deck with rowing men, and an upper deck with sails. Some ships even had a third deck, like his own ship. Kuṭil Muni had found a lot of allies in Āryāvarta. He wanted to conquer a territory in the main population areas in the Saraswati region. He had a base in Hastināpur, where Shakuni of Gāndhāra often brought some princes to him to teach, but he could make little headway due to Bhishma. He had found the Nāga tribe very receptive

to his ideas. They were forest people, not given to settled life of the agricultural areas. Violence was their natural habit. Incitement to their virility and appeals of revenge made a lot of sense to them. They had always suffered defeats at the hands of the people of plains and their well-organized war machine. They were greatly enthused by the ideological heft that Kuṭil Muni brought to buttress their natural martial skills. They needed a brain to supplement their brawn.

Kuṭil Muni inspected his flotilla. The time had arrived. Rainy season had gone. Gāndhāras would attack him again in Pushkalavati⁹², from Kubhā⁹³ region. He wanted to leave now; through Suvastu River to Kubhā River, then on to Sindhu River and to Saptanada with the current. From there, he would have to go up the Shutudri⁹⁴ and Saraswati⁹⁵. It was a difficult sail; full of hazards. At the end of it lay great rewards, perhaps.

Kuṭil Muni had developed a philosophy, which involved active conversion of the entire humanity, through all means – *reconciliation*, *allurements*, *intimidation and subversion* ⁹⁶. Expansion was the only motive of his philosophy. He had a deep sense of anguish at his banishment from Takshshilā, and learnt at the feet of Pārshva Muni, the Kulaguru of the Dasyus. He learnt the methodology of the Dasyus, and found out the reasons why they had to migrate east after being defeated in debates and battles to the Sanātanis in the times of Sudāsa.

He bade his Commander of the flotilla a signal.

'Marshal your crew, Griddhadrishti. We heave up anchor at first light. Have to get past Varanas⁹⁷ by nightfall. The whole area up to Varanas is infested with pirates. We will take guides from Varanas and move on with the current and wind. It should take another two days to Saptanad. After that, the real difficult part will start.'

Commander made a smart namaskār, and got busy with the task assigned to him. The ships were being loaded from the left bank of river Suvastu.

At the first light, a gong went off from the lead ship, in which Griddhadrishti was aboard with a small but very sharp force of two hundred ace astradhāri, and one hundred shastradhāri. Two ships of the same size flanked the lead ship. Behind them sailed slightly

bigger ships of five hundred capacity, two abreast. After three rows of the medium ships came a large ship housing Kuṭil Muni, his family, female slaves and one thousand soldiers. They were then trailed by three rows of smaller ships.

As soon as the first gong struck and the lead ships and its flanking ships began to heave up anchor, suddenly a band of horsemen swooped in from the right bank of the river. Led by a swarthy tall man on a Pārshva steed,they got into a swift formation, single file, spread over nearly one km, numbering about two hundred, they covered the entire flotilla from the starboard side. All the horsemen were equipped with a long bow, arrows wrapped with oil dipped cotton, and a small battle lantern to enable lighting of the fire arrows.

The big swarthy man stood in the middle of his Army and gave out a clarion call - Har Har Mahādev.

The entire riverbank reverberated with the follow up call – Har Har Mahādev.

Kuṭil Muni sensed trouble. He could see from his perch in third deck of his massive vessel that these horsemen were equipped with fire arrows, typical of the Suvastu tribesmen. They had been under the influence of a Rishi from Takshshilā, who was busy compiling the laws of Sanskrit language. Kuṭil Muni had been trying to undermine his influence by preaching his own doctrine to nearby tribals. This seems to have provoked the tribals in upper Suvastu near Mrigashira 188. The cry of Har Har Mahādev, however, was a surprise, because Kuṭil Muni had mostly found Vishnu temples around Pushkalāvati. Mrigashira was not on his usual route to Pārshva country, where he travelled on horseback through Gāndhāra.

Kuṭil Muni had to take urgent measures. His Army was confined on the boats, with little room for movement. They were sitting ducks. He had to engage in urgent talks. He asked for a white flag of reconciliation to be raised and rushed to the top of the deck bridge. It was a tranquil day. He had his shouters with him. Kuṭil Muni relayed his message.

'Who are you and what do you want'?

'You rākshasas, you destroyed our temple last week. Now I will not allow a single one of you out alive. Prepare for an Agni Sańskār⁹⁹,' replied the leader of the band.

Kuṭil Muni was quick in response. 'Look, we do not believe in temples and Murtis. We know only the One Jhaṅkāl. I am sorry for any damage. I am ready for reparations'.

Reparations were a standard form of revenge money. The leader stood considering the offer, but the deputy leader was adamant. 'This is not a war for territory, Kumara Chittasena. Our Dharma has been violated by these rākshasas. We have to kill them so that they do not spread their foul creed in the rest of Āryāvarta'.

'Rules of war do not allow us to indulge in aggression if the enemy surrenders and is ready to pay reparations', said Chittasena.

'Kumar, you do not know these people. They are not simple marauders. They are intent on spreading a vile creed, which does not respect our darshan and Bhakti 101. Nor do they respect our tradition of multiple visions of the Supreme. He has a monochrome vision that he is ready to force on others by violence. This is nothing but rākshasa karma. Dharma mandates that rākshasas and dushtas must be exterminated without mercy. That is the larger vision of Rāshṭra Dharma, Kumar'.

Kuṭil Muni was not wasting any time. He put a sackful of gold coins in a little dinghy and the sack was being emptied in front of Chittasena along with the Mudrikā of Kuṭil Muni even as his deputy harangued him for action. Mudrikā was a symbol of surrender and a request to be forgiven. Kumar Chittasena looked at the reparations, which were far in excess of what he could ever imagine. He bade his little band to turn away. His deputy remonstrated one more time. 'Kumar, we have them at our mercy. We should not give them any quarter. When the implacable enemy is at your feet, wisdom is to destroy the enemy and uproot it. It is wise to finish an ideology if it is contrary to dharma. You never know when you would get such an opportunity again. I can promise you that if this Kuṭil Muni were to find you in such a situation, he would be ruthless and would do exactly what I am telling you to do.'

Kumar Chittasena was only half listening. He had been sent to the gurukul of Pāṇini rishi from Gomāntaka. His royal blood was boiling at this little intervention.

'I have heard you, Gulmi, and appreciate your thoughts. We will debate it again in front of Āchārya Pāṇini. Collect the reparations and turn back.'

The band of Āchārya Pāṇini turned back.

Kuțil heaved a sigh of relief and marveled at the naïveté of this young band.

He shouted at the top his voice, his shouters repeated. 'Anchors out. Full Away.'

In no time, the sails had been put out on all the ships, harnessing what little wind there was, and the rowers had been put on the highest speed, meaning everyone of them was being made to row, without any reserve rower. They had to get out of Suvastu fast.

By nightfall, they had anchored at Varanas. Varanas was a big trading town. They did not care about your colour, creed or ideology as long as you paid them for wharfage.

The scare left behind, Kuțil Muni slept well.





<u>- 11 -</u> RAKSHĀGRIHA¹⁰²

From Varanas, they picked up rations for the rest of the journey. It was another 10 days with 2 stopovers. The rowing men were put on rest, as the ships would move with tail wind for the next two days to Saptanad. After Saptanad, they would be required to put in their hard labour up the river Shutudri and Saraswati. Saraswati was once a mighty river, but had become difficult to navigate in some parts due to excessive siltation. The kings of those areas were not paying attention. The flow had been reduced with weakening rain systems over Mādra and Kuru hills. On the first light of day two, they would set sail.

The next two days were not very eventful. The countryside was well settled and happy. There were bountiful crops and just kings in the area. Farmers could be seen carrying their produce up and down the river in small boats and dinghys. Every now and then a great temple on riverside would break the monotony with the music of temple bells, and devotional songs. The river was wide – nearly 2 kosh. The flotilla did not need to stop for the next two days. They hit Saptanad around the second prahara of day three and weighed anchor.

The flotilla left on day four first light. They had to go up the river system of Saptanad for about ten yojanas in the same formation, and then go into Shutudri-Saraswati system. As they got into Saraswati River, the formation had to be changed to a single file. Saraswati was a once mighty river that used to flow from the middle Himalayan glaciers, collect Yamunā waters at Kālibanga and then flowed parallel to the Sindhu into the ocean. After Yamunā changed its course to become a tributary of Gangā, Saraswati also changed course to become a tributary of the Shutudri. A small river Drishādvati now made confluence at Kālibanga. Drishādvati was not navigable, so the flotilla had to take the Saraswati route to Brihannapur 103, and then travel overland to Rakshāgriha on the banks of Drishādvati.

The entire journey from Saptanad to Rakshāgriha took a week, as the flow of Saraswati was a problem. Two ships ran aground when they missed the central current of the river. Closer to Brihannapur, the volume of the flow was just too low. They had to anchor nearly twenty yojanas short of Brihannapur. They stopped and secured their ships in a wide part of the river where they would be safe for their return journey. Near Rakshāgriha, on the left bank of Drishadvati, they had built a large Āshrama campus. They had bribed the Kuru Gaṇanāyaka of the area to secure a place in thick forests. Locals had been employed to make a clearing in the middle of the forest, about five yojanas from the town of Rakshāgriha. Saraswati formed the boundary between Kuru and Mādra territories.

Three weeks had passed since the flotilla had left Pushkalāvati. A habitation was developed about five yojanas from Rakshāgriha. There was an outer circle of nearly five hundred soldiers guarding the habitation of Kuṭil Muni. It was named Pralayankāla. Two barracks on the opposite ends of the habitation housed the guard duty soldiers. Approximately eleven hundred soldiers did the guard duty in rotations. The other four thousand were housed in an inner ring. At the centre of the inner ring were the thatched quarters of Kuṭil Muni, in some degree of opulence. Kuṭil Muni's quarters, suitably named Kuṭilkuti also had a female quarter, which also housed his three wives and a hundred female slaves.

A few bow-wielding tribals appeared at the gate of the outer circle, wanting to meet Kutil Muni.

'Where are you from?', asked the guard in Sanskrit.

The tribals did not understand the guard sentry. They simply handed him a letter. Vāsuki, the chief of the Nāgas, had signed the letter.

The letter was carried to Kuṭil Muni. They were called to the camp. The Chief of Guards sent a detachment with the tribals. After two ghaṭis, a beautiful young girl, no more than twenty years, appeared at the gate and was taken to Kuṭil Muni.

Kuṭil Muni received Maṇimālā in his visitors' chamber. Maṇimālā, who was seated in the chamber, got up as Kuṭil Muni came in. She was wearing a dress commonly worn by Nāga elites – a tight and colourful top enhancing her curvatures, with a long skirt ending just below the knee. She was very attractive. Kuṭil Muni could not take his eyes off her protuberances. He stood transfixed for several minutes. A smiling Maṇimālā could clearly see her effect on this Muni, something she had not seen in the other sages and saints she had met. She broke his trance with a deliberately loud namaskār. This was clearly a worldly saint who had been bewitched.

Maṇimālā's namaskār brought Kuṭil Muni to his senses. He put on an air of injured arrogance. 'What is this? Takshak has sent a woman to represent him!'

Maṇimālā laughed. An innocent peal of laughter filled up the room. 'Munivar, you were clearly floored by this woman. By the way, I am the most educated person among the Nāgas, men included, and I am the daughter of King Takshak. I am the first heiress of Nāgas. I spent twelve years in a Gurukul, but I had not seen a Muni who would object to a woman as an envoy. This is Saraswati Khand of Āryāvarta, Munivar. Women are more than equal of men in this land; even more so among the Nāgas.'

Kuṭil Muni was clearly offended. He made an angry response, 'your father wanted my help in defeating the Ārya kingdoms. You cannot defeat an enemy without defeating his narrative. If you want my help, you have to follow my narrative, the teachings of my cult. Only then I can offer my trained combatants to you. I already wield influence on Mathurā's Kaṃsa and Kuru Duryodhana of Hastināpur. Both of them can finish you off whenever they want. How long can you keep hiding in Khāndavprastha?'

Manimālā was deferential, but firm. 'Munivar, I have studied your methods. They are different from the code of honour followed in Saraswati Khand and Gangā Khand. In fact, nobody in the entire Bhāratvarsha would find your methods honourable. However, we Nāgas are practical people. In spite of our valour, we have lost to Āryan princes because of their education and the guidance provided by their Kulagurus. I was the first Naga to be formally educated in a Gurukul. I faced no difficulty in spite of being a woman. But I find that you have great difficulty honouring the presence of a woman. In fact, you are a lecherous, lustful woman-oppressing worm. You could not control your erection the moment you saw me. I have moved around in my Gurukul with much less clothes, without any Guru or gurubhai so much as giving a glance. So you are not really a Muni. Drop that pretense and do a deal as an equal. As for your narrative, I do not think Nāgas will have much use for it after looking at your lack of control over your senses.'

Kuṭil Muni was absolutely livid. He was even more incensed because the girl had brutally dissected the state of his mind. He shouted, 'Enough, you filthy slut. Nobody talks to Kuṭil in this manner.'

Maṇimālā smiled, a bewitching little curve on her lips played so lusciously that it would straighten most men in a wink of time. 'I knew you would not stand my logic. Guru Kāshyap told me that Kuṭil followers had only carnal sense organs, nothing much between their two ears. I can see that right now. Don't shout, Munivar. I am here to make a deal. Tell me what you want. I am authorized to make any deal. We want to carve out Saraswati Khand from Rakshāgriha to Kampilya for ourselves and we want to spread Nāga Dharma.'

Kuṭil was still very angry, 'woman, we Kuṭil Dharmis do not talk to women. Place of women is in our harem. Women are to be enjoyed; we do not hold discussions with them.'

Maṇimālā laughed, 'Munivar, enjoy me if you like. We Nāgas have quite an open culture. But why do you have these strange ideas about women. Some of the wisest and staunchest persons in Bhāratvarsha have been women. We Nāgas have descended from Nāga Devi and in our eclectic culture, we worship goddesses first. Entire Bhāratvarsha worships linga¹⁰⁴ with yoni¹⁰⁵. There cannot be

any creation without both linga and yoni. Shiva, the supreme consciousness, teaches us just that.'

Kuṭil Muni was totally captivated by the offer. He could feel a sensation of lust and passion coursing through his veins. The girl had cast a spell on him. He was sure he wanted time with her. He softened considerably, but he could not let his guard down. He had five hundred disciples and another five thousand soldiers rigorously schooled in his cult. Any weakness on his part could spoil his aura and authority.

Kuṭil Muni brought his hands to his ears, cupped the palms around the ears, looked up and shouted at the top of his voice, 'Jai Jhaṅkāl'. Right on cue, the entire camp took up the call and within a few seconds, everyone in the camp was shouting Jai Jhaṅkāl, making for an awful din. Some wild animals and a whole lot of birds were startled and took off, adding to the din. After the call, everyone from a lay worker to soldiers left everything they were doing and sat down in vajrasana, to offer a short prayer lasting about ten minutes. After the prayer was over, Kuṭil Muni began to entertain Maṇimālā again, much more softly.

Maṇimālā too was startled by this sudden show of coordinated and synchronized piety. 'Who is this Jhaṅkāl', she enquired from her new paramour, Kuṭil Muni. Kuṭil Muni once again put his palms on his ears and said, 'Take that name respectfully, Mani. He is the One and only Supreme Being. He is the One who created this earth, laid it out for us to enjoy. We are here as his soldiers. He wants us to subdue the world for him and convert it to Kuṭil Dharma. If you do not submit to Jhaṅkāl, you will go to hell, no matter how good you are, or how much good you do to others. You go to heaven only if you do well in the way of Jhaṅkāl. It is my mission to convert the world to Kuṭil Dharma. In my philosophy, there is no room for debate or disagreement. I am the apostle of Jhaṅkāl. Everyone has to follow my command as Jhaṅkāl speaks only to me.'

Maṇimālā was enjoying this talk of a besotted man. She said, 'Looks like women are only objects of pleasure in your scheme of things. You do not consider them worthy of brains. I don't think you will cut much ice with this kind of strange philosophy in Ārya

country. Here, you have to convince people with logic, demonstrable proof, and by showing them the experiential path.'

'Oh, Maṇimālā, you are such a sweet thing. I am sorry I cannot have you as my consort or a wife right now. I have put a limit of three wives in Kuṭil Dharma, but I can always divorce one of my three wives and have you as a wife. Though, it is permitted to enjoy bodily pleasures even without marriage. I have so many slaves with me who work as concubines. But you are different. Come let us go to inner quarters. I really want to have some good time with you.'

Manimālā laughed out aloud, 'Kutil dear, you seem to be under some delusions. You will not be able to convince even a single Nāga without beating the Ārya sages in a debate. As for having me, Nāga ladies decide who they want to be entertained with, and I am not in a mood. We respect brains, not brawn. You will be welcomed in Khāndavprastha only after you have proved your strange theories in a shāstrārtha¹⁰⁶. Nobody cares if you have an army unless you can back that army with a narrative. Show us that, we will honour you and may even follow you. Otherwise you have to be content with having a treaty with us. That's all. Do remember that we Nagas never forgive treachery.' Manimālā was sounding quite stern now. Kuţil Muni was becoming uncomfortable at the sheer magnetism of the girl. He was feeling intellectually overpowered. Usually, he would use force to get out of this predicament. To this girl, however, he was not sure. In his cult, women were to be made sex slaves, but this was no ordinary woman either. She was radiating with confidence, intelligence, and he could now even sense that she had enough weaponry on her person along with combat skills to harm him. He let her go.

'O Maṇimālā, how I admire you; I have never seen a woman like you. What about a few hours in the inner chamber.'

'You have three wives and a hundred concubines, Ghanṭāl. Try your virility with them first. Among Nāgas, you can have a woman only if you can beat her in combat. There are rules of combat. Are you challenging me? If you do, both of us will get 30 days to prepare and the combat will take place in front of our people. A jury will be nominated, five each, and the jury will choose a referee. Jury will choose a winner if there is no clear winner. Ready?'

Kuṭil Muni was deeply disturbed by being called Ghanṭāl. It was a pejorative often used to describe the followers of Jhaṅkāl.

Maṇimālā got up. 'I am going now. Send someone to Khānḍavprastha with your offer. Have a debate if you are so scared, or have a single combat. Whatever you want.'

Kuṭil Muni was stunned. He had never expected this. The emissaries of Nāgas who worked out this deal of bringing them to Rakshāgriha were a lot easier to deal with. This girl was something else. He remembered the Durgā Saptashati taught to him in Takshashilā, but he forced that thought out of his mind. In his cult, it was blasphemy to honour any other god, goddess or Murti.

Kuṭil Muni had an uneasy sleep. He did not even go to the female quarters. His mental space was completely occupied by Maṇimālā.





<u>- 12 -</u> THE DEBATE

K uțil Muni reconciled himself to a debate, as he was not sure of winning against even Maṇimālā in a single combat. Nāgas arranged a debate between Raghavāchārya, a disciple of Gargāchārya, with Kutil Muni. A Kāshyap, a member in Rishi Kashyap's lineage, had always led Nāgas in their debates. It was an extraordinary concession on part of Takshak to stand behind someone dubbed a vidharmi by the rest of Bhāratvarsha. Takshak, however, wanted to create a distinct identity. That is the reason he had invited Kutil Muni and his entourage to Saraswati Khand. His own vanity was very important for him. He found all the talk of Dharma useless if it did not bestow him the strength to have his kingdom and sphere of influence. Nagas by themselves had been struggling for centuries to carve out a sphere of influence but their relative lack of education and training made them lose out. Their tribal living was a big handicap in their quest to establish a full-fledged territorial kingdom. So they mostly managed by foraging around in forests, killing through poisons, looting and brigandry. Takshak was the first one in yugas to try and bring respectability to the tribe. He sent his only daughter to a gurukul. Manimālā emerged as one of the ablest all

round personality with tremendous leadership quality, supplementing the combat skills and generalship of Takshak.

On the appointed day, a big assembly was convened on the edge of Rakshāgriha forest. The event was dubbed as 'dharmic challenge of the Nāgas to Sanātanis'. Such debates were fairly common in Āryāvarta. The debates could be endless and usually ended with one side conceding the debate. A jury of independent scholars nominated with mutual consent would supervise such events. Its job was to prevent irrelevant and paralogical arguments. Their job was to keep the debates on defined tracks, and to determine when a side had failed to counter an argument from the other side. The defeated scholar had to accept the tutelage of the victorious scholar. In many cases, scholar committed suicide by immolation if they were unable to bear the humiliation of having to become a disciple of their challenger. This practice was widely decried by scholars of all description, but would manifest itself from time to time. There was never an example of a fight between two sides at the conclusion of a debate, so well established was the custom.

The jury had been nominated. The two sides came to the assembly site with their groups. Groups usually included disciples and students. Tension had been brewing in the area with the rumours that Kuṭil Muni's soldiers had been stealing cows and slaughtering them, and also that they had molested some women. They had been found frequenting the brothels of Rakshāgriha, which had a thriving sex industry. There were too many complaints from these sex houses. There was a general aversion developing in the area against Kuṭil Muni. Complaints had been made to Hastināpur. Bhishma, the Commander of Kurus at Hastināpur, had appointed an investigator to come to Rakshāgriha and find out what was going on. Occupation of a territory by strange people with an Army in tow was not allowed within the Kuru territory. It was obvious that the Kuṭil Muni camp was unauthorized, but Hastināpur was quite a distance.

Assembly ground had been prepared with meticulous care. Maṇimālā was in-charge of the arrangements from the Nāga side, and Gargāchārya gurukul from the Sanātani side. On the full moon of Shrawan, Guru Pūrṇimā, the debate started with the customary prayer to goddess Saraswati. The head of jury, Āchārya Purṇanaṅda Giri, led

the prayers. As the jury and both sides were called to the platform on which the Murti of goddess Saraswati was kept, the hall was stunned to see that Kuṭil Muni and his disciples kept sitting in their seats. Only Maṇimālā and her Nāga warriors stepped forward to take part in the prayers. Āchārya Purṇanaṅda Giri was intrigued, but not surprised. He had heard about the strange cult practices of Kuṭil Dharmis. His first surprise lay in the fact that Kuṭil Muni had accepted the challenge of a debate.

He did not make an issue of the defiance displayed by the Kuṭil Dharmis. After completing the prayers, Āchārya and the jury sat down on a platform just below the Murti of Ma Saraswati, but higher than the ground on which the two adversaries were seated; Raghavāchārya with his five disciples, and Kuṭil Muni with his five. Kuṭil Muni and his disciples were wearing overalls worn in winters in the Suvastu area, distinctly odd in the humidity and heat of a shrawani Pūrṇimā.

Purṇānaṅda sat down on the floor in Padmāsana, recited the gayatri mantra — Om bhurbhvah svah, tatsa viturvarenyam, bhargo devasya dhee mahi, dhiyo yo nah prachodyāt.

After finishing the incantations, he made a few announcements, making the rules clear to both the debating sides. 'We will decide who gets to open the debate by spinning a coin. Whoever opens the debate first has to state the vishaya, vismaya and pūrvapaksha, meaning the subject, the doubts and what he understands of the others' position. Then he has to advance the points of siddhānta and saṅgati, meaning a statement of arguments and pramāṇas (proofs) of his claim on the points he has chosen to advance. The other side will then get their chance. They will similarly state the vishaya and vismaya and will then have to do a clear pūrvapaksha of the other side, as to what they have understood of the other side's claim, and then rebut it. Afterwards they will get a chance to advance points of their own. Finally a saṅgati or synthesis has to be advanced.

The cycle will go on till any side fails to counter the other.

A coin was spun and the Nāga side led by Kuṭil Muni got the opportunity to open the debate.

Kuṭil Muni made a short introduction of his position and what he understood of the Sanātani position. It was more of a diatribe.

'The philosophy of Sanātana Dharma is bizarre. It is a welter of taboos and divisions. They say that man is born equal. This is stupid. How can man and woman be treated equal? All of us know that man is physically stronger and woman weaker. Even emotionally, man is stronger and woman is weaker, so the Sanātana position on equality is wrong. Second, you have divided people in varnas, which is against your own precept of equality among men. You worship stones and Murtis. What is the value of a stone Murti? I can break it with a strike of my foot. Then are those who do yoga and meditation. That is nothing but hoax, because nobody can verify his or her experiences. Vedas are an illiterate paean to things that a man is born to enjoy. Vedanta is abstractionism of the worst kind. Sankhya is silly, nyāya is anyāya, and vaisheshika is empty rhetoric. There is nothing in Sanātana Dharma that stands scrutiny to a rational test. In practice, all these lofty ideas are just reduced to blind devotion to a million deities that cannot even protect themselves. What will they do to the devotees? There is no salvation in Sanātana Dharma. It is just idle talk that that the ātmā collects karma and then keeps moving in a cycle of karma.

'I am the embodiment of divine inspiration. Jhaṅkāl, the god of the universe, spoke to me personally and told me to bring a oneness of faith. Jhaṅkāl is the only God. I am his son, Jhaṅkālputra. He is the Creator. He is outside your universe. He made this creation consciously. Can you tell me from your ordinary wisdom whether anything can be created by itself? I do hereby declare that Jhaṅkāl is the only God and I am His son and apostle and representative on earth. I have compiled my conversations with Jhaṅkāl in Pralaya Shāstra. Jhaṅkāl made this earth flat, then pinned mountains and oceans on it for the enjoyment of men who adopted Kuṭil Dharma. If we adopt Kuṭil Dharma and do right by Jhaṅkāl, He will receive us on the day of Pralaya¹⁰⁷, deliver His Last Judgment and assign us to perpetual heaven or eternal hell. There is no nonsense like a karmic cycle for the followers of Jhaṅkāl. When they die, they rest in sleep till the day of Last Judgment when all the dead shall rise up and be

given their judgment. The only right moral in this world is to follow Pralaya Shāstra in my spirit and advance the Kutil Dharma. All of you have to either accept my claim and become Kutil dharmi, or fight me. Kutil Dharma does not believe in Murtis, gods or false prophets. The only verification of its truth is by a reference to my conversations with Jhankal. A Kutil Dharmi has to treat himself as the most superior person. Women are born unequal. Their job is to submit to the pleasures of men and bear children. All those who do not accept Kutil Dharma when offered are subject to our command. We will follow Jhankāl's command and treat them as criminals. After joining Kutil Dharma, nobody is allowed to leave it, or we will kill him. Nobody is allowed to criticize Jhankal's command. That would be blasphemy punishable by death. Everyone has to pray to Jhankal three times a day. No mundane work is more important than prayer to Jhankāl. Vilom Swastika is the symbol of Jhankāl, and we pray to Swastika. All are born in sin and you can attain salvation by joining a struggle to establish Jhankāl's word as laws of this universe. I am the Jhankāl's representative on this earth, and I will convert this whole earth to Kutil Dharma, after which there will be pralaya.' Kutil Muni was shouting at the top of his voice by the time he finished. In the end he shouted 'Jai Jhankal' and gave a one-finger salute. All his disciples and followers joined in. Even their sponsors, the Nagas were nonplussed. Even some of their own long held principles were being called out as false. In these august assemblies, this kind of behaviour was usually a sure sign that the person was losing the argument.

Maṇimālā muttered under her breath, 'this guy is a real Ghantāl. Idiot.'

For the Assembly, it was rather a short and plain opening. Used to ponderous and deep philosophical debates, this sounded like a school debate.

Purṇānanda confirmed from Kuṭil Muni that he had used up his chance. He turned to Raghavāchārya for his say.

Raghavāchārya began by chanting the favourite Āngiras chant, 'Om namah Shivāya'. Kuṭil Muni loudly interjected him.'"You cannot pay respect to anyone in a place that has been sanctified by Jhaṅkāl's name. That place becomes a Pralayālaya. This is our law.'

Purṇānaṅda was very severe with him. 'Kuṭil, next time you interject when it is the chance of other side to speak, I will declare you defeated. So shut up and maintain some decorum. This is not your beast assembly. This is heart of Āryāvarta.'

Kuṭil Muni became uneasy. His eyes became bloodshot. He was barely able to suppress his anger. One of his disciples pressed his hand. 'Munivar, they take krodh¹⁰⁸ as an evidence of a losing argument. Please gather yourself.'

Raghavāchārya continued after this unexpected interruption. 'My learned friend has put a viewpoint which does not conform to any accepted principle in this land. When we have a debate, we do not put my experience versus your experience. Debates are on the basis of logic. This is the first debate I have participated in where the statement by a rishi or an Āchārya does not tell me the pramāna 109 base of that statement. I have even debated Chārvāka and his followers. They are very narrowly constructed but even they state their pramāṇa position very clearly. They said that they honour only the pratyaksha pramāna¹¹⁰ – the evidence of sensory perceptions, which can be verified, universalized and repeated. That is also the way of Vaisheshika with the addition of anumāna 111. Yoga Āchāryas honour shabd pramāna¹¹² as well. There is no system, which does not honour the epistemological value of direct evidence of pratyaksha. What I can understand from the peroration of Kutil Muni is that he is preaching a philosophy, which is based totally on his word – a vikruta shabd pramāna¹¹³. Shabd pramāna by itself is not acceptable unless it is accompanied by pratyaksha pramāṇa. Word proof by itself is worthless. We ourselves do not honour any shabd pramāṇa unless it can be corroborated by pratyaksha¹¹⁴. So the entire edifice of Kutil Muni's argument does not stand the basic test of logic and is liable to be rejected.'

Suddenly Kuṭil Muni got up, took out a sword from his loose overall and shouted, 'Jai Jhaṅkāl'.

All his disciples and five hundred followers all got up and brought out swords from their loose fitting overalls and shouted 'Jai Jhankāl'. The fifty or so Nāgas were nonplussed. They did not appreciate a

forced disruption of this kind, but kept quiet as they sensed an advantageous situation for themselves. Maṇimālā motioned to them to stay back and watch the situation.

'Jai Jhankāl', the cry made deafening noise.





<u>- 13 -</u>

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In a swift operation, Kuṭil Dharmis killed all the males of opposite side, made all women captive, and impaled the head of Raghavāchārya on a bayonet and carried it like a trophy through Rakshāgriha. Plunder, loot and rape followed. All this while, Nāgas kept quiet.

Maṇimālā's commander, Katibaddha, requested the Nāga princess to intervene. He was concerned that what was happening was not in accordance with Dharma. Maṇimālā told him to remain quiet. 'Dharma is not always what we see. This is our retribution for many yugas of defeats at the hands of Bharatvanshis.'

Katibaddha interjected forcefully, 'these fellows are killing, looting and raping non-combatants. This is not our way. We never harm civilians.'

Maṇimālā was steadfast, 'everything is fair in love and war. We have to use these bloodthirsty hounds to secure Khānḍavaprastha for ourselves as an independent State. Are we not tired of running from place to place?'

'Princess, what they are doing to Rakshāgriha, they could do to us tomorrow. What is the guarantee, Kuṭil will not set an evil eye on you yourself. He needs to be curbed. I feel like killing some of these more dastardly fellows', said Katibaddha.

Just at that point, there was a huge commotion. A band of priests was coming running towards them. 'Princess, what have you done? They are destroying Nāgeshvara temple.'

Maṇimālā was jolted from her indifference. She recalled the statement about temples and Murtis Kuṭil Muni had made. Katibaddha had drawn his sword. He shouted, 'Rajkumari, I am not going to wait for your instructions now. Either you come with me for your own security, or I go alone to stop these beasts.' Maṇimālā started galloping her horse out towards the temple without a demur.

The Nāga band was small, about fifty of them, but they were the choicest soldiers of the Nāgas. In less than ten minutes, they were at the temple complex, which had been surrounded by about five hundred Suvastu Kuṭil Dharmis. The plan to take Rakshāgriha had the consent of Maṇimālā, but not the loot, rape and plunder. She had let that pass as an essential part of expression of a victorious army. However, destruction of Nāgeshvara Temple, held in the highest reverence by the Nāgas was a quite different matter. As she made her way towards the temple from the main gate of the temple complex, she was accosted by a section of soldiers led by a high commander. 'Hello, darling, where are you going? This is our property now.'

Maṇimālā shouted at the top of her voice, 'you are my employees, vidharmis. Get out of my way.'

The commander laughed derisively, 'Come, be my sleeping partner, princess. Deception in the way of expanding Kuṭil Dharma is perfectly fine. Let us now destroy the symbols of your Sanātana Dharma so that people know that this is Nāga land.'

Maṇimālā flashed her already drawn sword and the head of the commander was taken off. His section melted away. Other soldiers saw what had happened, and froze. She got down at the steps to the temple, entered through the mandapam and ran towards the garbha griha with her soldiers giving cover. From a distance, at the garbha griha door, she saw the head priest standing. He was blocking Kuṭil Muni's way to the sanctum sanctorum. She ran at a full sprint but the temple was very large. She was at least fifty steps away when she saw

Kuṭil Muni beheading the head priest. She was in the garbha griha in less than another minute, killing four soldiers on the way. Kuṭil Muni's soldiers were surprisingly poor skilled. She entered the Garbha Griha.

Kuṭil Muni was standing over the Shiva Lingam, obviously contemplating how to destroy it. Maṇimālā challenged him.

'Kutil, stop. Stop right there.'

Kuṭil Muni was taken by complete surprise. This was not a part of script. Maṇimālā had given them the task of taking over the administration of Rakshāgriha, which would then serve as the outer boundary of their Nāga kingdom on the Drishādvati. Kuṭil Muni had the hidden agenda of forcefully converting a section of population to Kuṭil Dharma. He was not a mercenary without an agenda. He remonstrated.

'Princess, what are you doing here? You were supposed to wait at the Assembly Hall till we brought you the keys of the administrative building along with the arrested officers of the Kuru outpost.'

Maṇimālā touched her sword to the throat of Kuṭil Muni, 'you dreg of the world, how do you think you would touch a Shiva Temple of the Nāgas and Maṇimālā would keep quiet? Come fight me.'

Kuṭil Muni did some quick thinking. He could see that the little band of Maṇimālā with her. If they had breached a 500 strong force to get here, he was quite sure that these Nāga warriors had great skills.

Maṇimālā took the gown off Kuṭil Muni with her sword and slashed his forearm. There was a gush of blood and his sword dropped. He stood there cowering in front of her. 'I will kill you here and now. It's this useless army you have brought that will help us reclaim this land from Rakshāgriha to Khānḍavaprastha. Rascal!'

Kuṭil Muni made a few reconciliatory noises, but was totally overpowered by Maṇimālā. He was brought out in disgrace, and his band of five thousand warriors surrendered to fifty Nāgas in a matter of less than an hour. The Nāga princess was parading their Chief through the streets of Rakshāgriha. The town rallied behind her in no time. She won the town through her defence of its values, whereas the savage band of Suvastu was not able to do through its atrocities,

murders, plunder and rape. Soldiers involved in these activities were brought to the central quadrangle of Rakshāgriha and slain without mercy. By the evening, the Kuṭil Dharmis had been reduced to less than three thousand. About five hundred had been slain, and another few thousand had fled. Maṇimālā organized the town support, arrested all the remaining Kuṭil Dharmis, roped them in a group, and set off for Khānḍavaprastha. Rakshāgriha was now Nāga territory. She appointed some locals to look after its administration.

The prisoners were taken to Khānḍavaprastha and produced in the makeshift court of Nāgaraj Takshak. Kuṭil Muni was produced at the head of the troupè.

Nāga courts were devoid of the pomp and show one would expect in most other kingdoms. Takshak just walked in and sat on a couch on the ground. No raised platform for the Nāga King. Kuṭil Muni was produced before him bound in ropes. They were seeing each other for the first time, even though they had been having many exchanges through emissaries. Charge was read out.

A minister read out the charge: 'Kuṭil Muni, you and your soldiers, and followers, tried to destroy Nāgeshvara Temple in Rakshāgriha. For this, all of you are liable to be killed by being thrown into the Yamunā Dah¹¹⁷ where the great snakes live. Nobody has ever come out alive from the Dah. '

Kuṭil Muni lay prostrate at the feet of Takshak. 'Nāgaraj, I have made a terrible mistake. I thought you were against Āryas and would be against their religious practices too. I did not think Nāgas would be so attached to temples. It is mandated in our cult that no symbols of any God should be allowed to exist. Even our Jhaṅkāl cannot be represented by any symbol or icon, except Vilom Swastika. It is my mistake.'

Takshak was soft, measured and clear. He spoke in a staccato manner. 'Kuṭil, you have broken our pact. You were called here to assist us, in lieu of which you had asked for a mound of gold. How did you start looting, plundering and raping? Desecrating a temple and raping a woman, both carry death penalties in our kingdom. These Murtis are not just stone idols. They are the ones that aid us in focusing our minds on our true nature. That is why we consecrate

them as living beings. We may have differences over form, but the substance of all communities and kingdoms in Āryāvarta is the same. We honour cosmic energy in our own way. Besides, I have been told that you even cast your evil eye on my daughter. That carries a sentence of death with torture. So tell me what your alibi is.'

Kuṭil Muni was trembling with fear. He was invoking Jhaṅkāl. He begged for mercy. 'Takshak, I have won Rakshāgriha for you with deceit and deception. These qualities are lacking in Āryāvarta. Moreover, I am your guest. You should not break the code of honour of Bhāratavarsha.'

'Āryāvarta code of honour does not apply to Nāgas. But there is something that I can learn from you – art of deception. So I will use you, but after defanging you. All your soldiers and followers will be executed but you will remain alive to teach us your tricks of war. Vāsuki will oversee that. Also, if you are caught defiling any woman without her consent, you will be castrated', Takshak clapped his hand.

Maṇimālā was standing by the side of her father and displaying her bewitching smile all through.

Nāgas killed around three thousand Kuṭil Dharmis that night. Khānḍavaprastha was already under their loose control. News of killing vidharmi who dared to defile a Shiva Temple spread like wildfire, aided by the Nāga propaganda. Nāgas had suddenly acquired legitimacy in a deeply spiritual forest dwelling. Nāgas had a territory from Khānḍavaprastha to Rakshāgriha, and Kuṭil Muni as advisor.





<u>- 14 -</u> PRALAYA SHĀSTRA

Baṇakanṭaka came to know of the travails of Kuṭil Muni. He was a little surprised, even more amused. After Kaṃsa had taken over the kingdom of Mathurā and he had arranged a meeting of Kuṭil Muni with Kaṃsa, he had not been in touch with him. Kroorasena got some messages to the effect that Kuṭil Muni was planning a big expedition to Bhāratavarsha and Nāgas were going to facilitate. He had left Hastināpur for Suvastu Pradesh after meeting them in a secret place across the Yamunā near Mathurā. It was a good ten years since they had last exchanged a message. Bāṇakanṭaka brought the entire situation to Kaṃsa's notice. Kaṃsa had not been at peace ever since he had imprisoned Vasudeva. He did not trust the rishis and Āchāryas, as they were all under the influence of Gargāchārya.

The city of Mathurā had been restless. Kaṃsa had allowed Magadha influence to claim every sphere of activity in Mathurā. The great Yādava warriors, Pradyot, Prasenjit and Satyak had been sidelined. Jarāsandha's aide Chāṇūra had taken over command of all army units. This was causing great strife in the federated army of the Yādavas. Clans of Kukur and Shūrasena in particular were very restive. Even Vidarbha and Chedi had started asking questions.

Kamsa had agreed to become a part of Jarāsandha's empire. Jarāsandha had mentioned Mathurā as one of his Manḍala¹¹⁸ in his palace records. This news had reached Mathurā and had made people turn totally against Kamsa. Kamsa had turned Mathurā into a police state with Magadha spies at every corner. Bānakantaka had been made the Chief of Security, and Chānūra the Head of Regimented Troops. With such cruel persons at the helm of the security apparatus, Mathurā was on the edge, ready to explode. Kamsa had tasked Bānakantaka with reduction of influence of the rishis, and Āchāryas. Priests were largely wage earners. Kamsa had bought the priests off by providing them generous employment under the royal house. The result was exactly the opposite. Priests lost respect in the Mathurā society. Gargāchārya's word was still respected. All attempts by Kamsa to win Gargāchārya over to his side had failed. Rishis seem to be made of some other stuff. Worldly blandishments held no allure for them. Each time Kamsa went to Gargāchārya, he had to brave lengthy sermons on Rājdharma. In Mathurā, the legend of eighth son of Vasudeva had been growing. Devaki was carrying her eighth child. Mathurā was excited and rebellious. Kamsa and Bānakantaka needed Bāṇakantaka narrative. decided Khāndavaprastha after a lengthy consultation with Kamsa.

Bāṇakanṭaka travelled up the Yamunā and parked his Royal Boat on the left bank of Yamunā opposite Khānḍavaprastha. He sent a Prophet to Kuṭil Muni, as it was not possible for him to travel through thick forests on the opposite bank to Khānḍavaprastha's Takshak Kunj. He would need a guide. The forests were infested with snakes. Nāgas had great love for snakes. They had developed a degree of familiarity and immunity against snakebites over yugas of close interaction with the slithering forms. Snakes formed their protective shield in the forests where they lurked, laying ambush at unsuspecting caravans and armies travelling to Saraswati ports, and taking the Yamunā and Chārmaṇyavati route to Ujjayini and further south. After the capture of Rakshāgriha, Nāgas had been become like a bee in the bonnet of Kuru kingdom. Bhishma had himself led the Kuru expedition to throw out the Nāgas from Rakshāgriha and stationed a large garrison to protect their riverine trade. Kuṭil Muni's flotilla at

Brihannapur¹¹⁹ was taken over by the Kuru army and employed for trade to river and ocean ports.

Kuṭil Muni came across the river himself and was hosted on Bāṇakanṭaka's royal boat. After a luncheon, Bāṇakanṭaka and Kuṭil Muni met alone in the special chambers of Bāṇakanṭaka.

Bāṇakanṭaka was curious as to how Kuṭil Muni landed in the captivity of the Nāgas. Kuṭil Muni disabused him of the notion. 'I am here as an advisor, Bāṇakanṭaka. I was originally invited as commander of an army to aid the effort of Nāgas to carve up an independent state, but a misunderstanding resulted in my losing the army and staying back only as an advisor. My life mission of converting Nāgas to Kuṭil Dharma also came unstuck.' Kuṭil Muni described the events, which brought him to this diminished role. He was totally forbidden from teaching his cult to the Nāgas. His probation was still effective, so he could not even go near any Nāga woman. What was worse, Maṇimālā would humiliate him daily by sending her servant girls to him in provocative dresses for service. He did not dare to even look at them as he was mortally scared of being castrated.

'Tell me, Kuṭil Muni, you have always preached of One God and projected yourself as his Regent, then how you were so badly defeated by Nāgas. They are not even Sanātanis. They only follow some animistic and Nature practices; and they venerate the Shiva-Parvati duo. They do not do any yajnas, nor do they follow any rituals. Why did you fail with them?'

'I think the mistake was mine', said Kuṭil Muni. 'I did not realize that their need for political power was not greater than their way of life. Now I know that their way of life is more precious to them than a need for political power. My methods work best only when you can conquer people's mind in order to consolidate your political power.'

Something rang a bell in Bāṇakanṭaka's mind. 'Guruvar, we are facing great problems in Mathurā. The public has turned totally against Mahārāj Kaṃsa. Due to the heightened sense of requirement of Dharma in the polity and in administration, public regards him as a tyrant unworthy of the throne. He is holding on only with the help of his father-in-law, Jarāsandha, who is the King of Magadha. The

Mathurā army is a hodge podge of people drawn from various Yādava clans. Even the Vrishņis are against him because of Ugrasena's imprisonment and the powerful Shūrasenas are also against him. Moreover, there is a big rumour that the next son from his cousin Devaki will be the cause of his death. He cannot even sleep without a generous dose of liquor.'

Kuṭil Muni brightened up. 'That is exactly the kind of situation in which Kuṭil Dharma works best. You must use your power to bring in political religion in place of the spiritual systems that drive Āryāvarta. One God, One Book, One Prophet, One-finger salute and One Symbol goes very well with political power. This abstruse concept of the King ruling for Dharma and obscure rishis becoming the arbiter on behalf of Dharma needs to be replaced with my cult. Once that happens, then the King rules as an agent of Jhaṅkāl and nobody has the philosophical basis of challenging his imprimatur.'

Bāṇakanṭaka was very interested. Kaṃsa was facing his challenges from the Dharmic concept that pervaded the whole of Āryāvarta. Even someone as cruel as his father-in-law was able to keep his empire and army mainly because of his reputation as the greatest Shiva Bhakta in the whole of Bhāratavarsha. Besides, he also took care to support rishis and learned people in their quest of the spiritual. Even then, Āchārya Chanḍakaushik never felt shy of berating him publicly for his cruel methods. Jarāsandha would comply with the advice of his Kulaguru every time, albeit for a brief periods, before lapsing back to his normal oppressive style. He could manage that with the help of his massive army and his personal valour. Kaṃsa had co-opted himself into Jarāsandha's system, but he simply did not have the charisma of Jarāsandha.

'Please do tell me, how do we go about it?' said Bāṇakanṭaka.

'First, you must become my disciple. You should be the first person to become a Kuṭil Dharmi in the Saraswati-Ganga region. Till now, you have been an aide, but not an initiated disciple.'

'I am ready', said Bāṇakanṭaka.

'Okay. Come to me and kneel down.'

Kuṭil Muni took out a sharp knife and branded Bāṇakanṭaka's left forearm by making a figure of three points within a circle, and then shaved off Bāṇakanṭaka's head with a razor. 'You must look very

distinct from everyone else. Now sit in a vajrāsana and recite after me.'

'Jai Jhankālam, Jai Jhankālam, Jai Jhankālam namo namah.' Bāṇakanṭaka did that.

'Now your initiation is complete. I will give you basic instructions so that you may start converting people to our cult. Tell Kaṃsa to support the effort. He need not convert now, but after more than fifty percent of Mathurā rajya has converted, he can also convert and then continue to rule without the shackles of Dharma. In Pralaya Shāstra, it is enjoined that King is the agent of Jhaṅkāl and he has every right over the public, whereas the public has none. This bullshit of plural life must end and you must establish a unified religion on my behalf. I will then tell you the way to conquer the whole of Bhāratavarsha. These Nāgas are fools. They only want to learn the deception and deceit part of my cult, and do not want the entire package. Now I will teach you the essentials of Kuṭil Dharma, and give you my bhojpatra 120. Get it copied and read it. Return the original to me with five copies. It is not very large, just 50 pages and 500 shlokas.'

Bāṇakanṭaka saw Kuṭil Muni off after learning the essentials of Kuṭil Dharma and an instruction on carrying out the expansion of Kuṭil cult in Mathurā. After coming back, Bāṇakanṭaka briefed Kaṃsa, who was very happy to learn about the new counter narrative that he could use to establish his hold on the Mathurā public. He gave a go ahead to Bāṇakanṭaka.

Bāṇakanṭaka gathered some of his trusted aides and converted them to Kuṭil Dharma by using the initiation technique taught to him by Kuṭil Muni. Residents of Mathurā found a new breed of warriors with shaven heads roaming the streets of Mathurā with a menacing demeanour. They would sometimes block a street to hold a prayer meeting with loud cries of Jai Jhaṅkāl. At other times, they would beat up people without any provocation and ask them to shout Jai Jhaṅkāl slogan. One fine day, Bāṇakanṭaka held a congregation in the Main Square of Mathurā.

'Residents of Mathurā', shouted Bāṇakanṭaka. 'Wake up to the new reality. It is time you realized that your Vedas and Vedanta are all false. This world is not created out of nothing. There is nothing that

we can call cosmos or cosmic reality. There is no Supreme Being or Brahman living within you. Gargāchārya is a fool. How can there be creation out of a void. All creation requires a creator. There is nothing beyond what your sensory organs can decipher for you. There are no circles. This earth is made flat for you to enjoy. Jhankal creates the world for mankind to enjoy. All Nature and animal world is a slave of the humans. Jhankal creates these women for men to keep and produce children from. There can be no equality between man and woman. All morality is in submitting to Jhankal and acting in accordance with Pralaya Shāstra. Anything against the wishes of Jhankāl is sin, and all that is according to his wish is piety. There is no rebirth or reincarnation in this world. All of you will die and go to either heaven or hell on the day of Pralaya. Jhankal does not permit rule by Dharma. You must worship him and his symbol Vilom Swastika daily. Jhankal will decide where you go on the day of Pralaya. Jai Jhankāl.'

A crowd of skinheads numbering about one hundred went wild. Jai Jhankāl started reverberating everywhere. The mob attacked the Shiva Temple in the main square and pulled it down.

As the word went around that the main Shiva Temple had been pulled down by a strange new cult, crowds started gathering. They were set upon by the armed mob. A gruesome carnage followed in which at least hundred innocent Maathurs 121 were slain.

The madness was brought under control when the two queens, princesses of Magadha learnt about the destruction of Shiva Temple. They were the daughters of the greatest Shiva Bhakta in Bhāratavarsha. They remonstrated with Kaṃsa and reminded him of his Father-in-law's devotion to Lord Shiva. Kaṃsa then sent Chāṇūra to stop the state engineered mayhem.

It was a dark day of Bhādrapada ashṭami of the dark cycle. It was raining heavily since the second prahara. As the night advanced, rain became so heavy that half of Mathurā was inundated. The time had arrived.



PART III





<u>- 15 -</u> BIRTH

In Girivraja, Āchārya Chanḍakaushika resumed his pūrvapaksha after a gap of two days. Queen Saudamini was absent. Āchārya put off the discourse. King Jarāsandha went himself to request the Queen. She had not particularly enjoyed the incineration of people she had held in high esteem. On the other hand, the entire pūrvapaksha was being done as an Anushṭhāna, which could not be done without the grihaswāmini¹²². She was brought back to the Anushṭhāna after some cajoling and coaxing. Āchārya started the discourse after a delay of two hours.

'Devaki and Vasudeva were kept in a solitary cell. Kaṃsa even wanted to keep both of them in separate cells, but he did not want to risk a full-scale rebellion from the Vrishṇi clan. At least this way he was able to keep up pretense of keeping them under security due to some unexplained life threat. Devaki's fortitude and Vasudeva's patience was exemplary. They had decided that they would bring to the world their eighth child. They wanted to end the injustice, and they could foresee that Kaṃsa was so much under the influence of astrologers, tantriks and sorcerer that if they could somehow bring

that child into the world and save him, Kamsa would die from anxiety and dread.

'Kaṃsa killed six children the very day they were born. Poor Devaki was so overcome with grief every time she bore a child that she even refused to look at the newborns lest she should waver in her determination. Even the Prison Superintendent and all the guards had become totally enamoured of the couple who were the rightful heirs to the throne of Mathurā. All of them remembered the incident when Vasudeva of Vrishṇi Shūrasena clan gave up his claim to the throne of Mathurā and himself requested Ugrasena, an uncle from the Kukur clan to take up the throne. Vasudeva had reckoned that the throne required a senior person. This act of sacrifice had endeared him to people of Mathurā.

'After the birth and death of their sixth child, Vasudeva asked for Rohini. They were allowed to meet family members once every month. His wives, sisters of Devaki, would take turn to meet him but the eldest Rohini rarely came. She had taken upon herself the duties of Vrishni Chief in the absence of her husband. Their lands and gaushalas were across the Yamunā in Nanda Upavan at Gokul. It was the biggest gaushala that supplied milk and butter to Mathurā. They had a fleet of boats, which ferried the milk and butter from Mathurā. Vasudeva's mansion was located at a high elevation on the banks of Yamunā. Other than what was required for Mathurā, all the milk was processed into buttermilk and butter in Nanda Upavan itself, then brought and stored at Vasudeva's mansion. The prison gate was about one hundred steps away from Vasudeva's mansion. It was a multilayered prison. Political prisoners were kept in the front courtyard of the prison. They were not kept chained or manacled, and would be free to walk around in their area during the day and would be locked into their allotted well-provided room in the night. All facilities were allowed to them. Kamsa was happy he was able to successfully kill six children of Devaki without any resistance from Vasudeva. As a matter of fact, Vasudeva had quietly suffered the detention, which had gradually become more of a house arrest in a royal prison. Vasudeva had his separate quarter within the prison; he was free to go to his house whenever he wanted. Entire Prison Guard was devoted to him.

'Rohini came within one hour. It was, after all, just a walk from their house. This time, however, the discussion was serious.

"Rohiṇi, I want you to go and live in Nanda Upavan", said Vasudeva.

"Why, Āryaputra. Here in Mathurā we are able to meet whenever we like. Going across the Yamunā to Naṅda Upavan would mean that I would not be able to see you for months. Here I am able to come to you in minutes", Rohiṇi remonstrated.

'Vasudeva grew thoughtful. "Look, Rohini. All of us have our own little roles in upholding Dharma. In every epoch, we have to endure evil forces. Evil forces cannot be fought alone. We may get guidance and wisdom, but action has to come from our own selves. I beseech you to make your own offering to this dharma yajna."

"Don't speak in riddles, Aryaputra. If you think I can be of any service in the cause of Dharma, I will go, but I have, as an equal partner, the right to ask for clarification. What is it that you are planning?" Asked Rohini.

"Devaki is going to deliver her seventh child in a few weeks. I want you to receive that child in Nanda Upavan and bring him up in secret as your child. If you are away from Mathurā, it will be easier for me to spread the news of your pregnancy. That we have been living practically together is no secret anyway. So will you, please?"

'Rohiṇi left for Naṅda Upavan the next day. She went straight to Naṅda, the chief of Gokul. He made all the arrangements for her to stay within Vasudeva's estate. She and Yashodā -- Naṅda's wife -- got along quite well. They spent majority of their time with each other. Rohiṇi made pretense of a pregnancy. That made Yashodā even more caring and solicitous. She was much younger to Rohiṇi. She had not had a child of her own from ten years of marriage.

'When the seventh child of Devaki came, Vasudeva had made all the preparations. Initially it was a great struggle for him to reconcile his svadharma with the deceit he was going to practice. Even Devaki had confronted him with this question. He had sworn to Kaṃsa that he would give him his eighth child. Yet, Kaṃsa had stripped him of his position of Dharmādhikāri and put him under house arrest. He had to reconcile the higher dharma with his svadharma. On that yardstick,

Rāshṭradharma won every time. Bhāratavarsha needed Kaṃsa to be destroyed. Vasudeva knew that Kaṃsa would be three fourth dead with the mere fact that the eighth child he so dreaded had managed to find his way into the world. He was too attached to the trappings of power to even harbor a thought of having to lose it all. Rebellion was already in the air among the various clans, specially the Vrishṇis and Kukur. The city of Mathurā was reeling under the atrocities committed by the Magadha soldiers, and Bāṇakanṭaka's cult. Vasudeva had to make his offering to the Dharmayuddha even if his svadharma got compromised in the process.

'The seventh child was quietly spirited away to Rohini and replaced with a dead newborn. Vasudeva's Vrishnis gave him all the support in this endeavour. When Kamsa came to know about a stillborn child, he got suspicious.

'Kamsa came to the place where Vasudeva was kept under detention. He tried to invoke Vasudeva's sense of highest commitment to Dharma to find out the truth. Kroorasena, the astrologer, compounded his insecurity by saying that his calculations did not show the birth of a dead child.

'Kamsa lost his patience with Vasudeva. He had him put in handcuffs and manacles and placed him and Devaki under solitary confinement.

'A year had passed. Devaki was expecting her eighth child. The solitary confinement had been rigorous as Magadha supervisors had been put in charge of the prison. Kaṃsa had been spending sleepless nights. However, the Yādava Prison Guard still managed to provide most of the services he had enjoyed under their house arrest. Maharshi Gargāchārya had put his disciples on the job. They had connected with Naṅda, himself a Vrishṇi, on behalf of the Rishi and Vasudeva and it was settled that Vasudeva would make a determined bid to save the eighth child. Without a conscious karma, Vasudeva did not expect automatic results. He was able to make a distinction between niroddeshya karma¹²³ and nishkāma karma¹²⁴. He had decided that it was his duty to make an attempt. Success or failure was not in his hands. *Endeavour has an element of certainty, the outcomes are always uncertain in human affairs*.

'Raksha Bandhan had just passed. The day had dawned. It was the eighth day of the dark cycle of Bhādrapada. It had been pouring from early morning, from before dawn. Mathurā had not seen that kind of rain in living memory.

'Vasudeva was getting worried. He had his plan worked out, even to the extent of drugging the Magadha commanders. His boat was ready below his house at his private ghāṭ. He was besieged by worry as to how his men would accomplish the task of exchanging the child. Last time was not difficult, as Rohiṇi had been briefed. If it went on raining like this, he would have his task cut out.

'It went on raining, introducing a great element of uncertainty in the outcome of Vasudeva's endeavour. Vast sheets of water were flowing everywhere in Mathurā. The prison compound itself had got flooded. Devaki's labour had started a little before midnight. Magadha supervisors had left the prison to look for some high and safe ground. Prison was left totally to the Mathurā Prison Guard loyal to Vasudeva.

'Right at midnight, Devaki delivered her eighth child. Guards were very comfortable as the heavy rain meant nobody was going to check. The daily visit by the midwife had also not materialized, so Kaṃsa was also in the dark. He was busy in preventing Yamunā from entering his palace.

'Devaki had not recovered from the pangs of childbirth. Vasudeva kept the child in a basket secured from all sides with clothes to prevent ingress of rainwater, taking care to leave space for breathing, and set off on his mission. A mission he thought would redeem humanity from a tyrant.

'Just as Vasudeva was leaving, Devaki made a superhuman effort to call back Vasudeva. She wanted to have a look at this child. She was about to break the practised routine of not having looked at the faces of the previous seven children she had delivered. Vasudeva brought the basket near Devaki. It was pitch dark.

'As if by divine intervention, a big shaft of lightning lit up the basket. There, at that blissful moment, Devaki saw a slightly dark child who seemed to be giving her a playful naughty smile. Devaki thought she had had a glimpse of the eternal at that moment. She swam in oceans of rapture.

'Vasudeva kept the basket on his head, and waded through water to his own house where his personal boat was waiting.

'As he reached his house, went at the back exit towards the ghāṭ, he could not see the boat. Yamunā had risen by nearly fifteen feet. It was pitch dark and raining. Everyone in the house was asleep. He did not want to share the secret with anyone. This was a mission to rescue the Rule of Dharma.

'Vasudeva was struck by a panic.

'He came back into the room. The room was getting flooded, he opened an adjacent room and lo and behold, his boat was there in that largish room. He could float it right out of the room. He did that quickly and set off in the roaring waters of the Yamunā. He was not sure how far downstream the current would carry him. Gokul was slightly upstream from his palace.

'He floated the boat out. It was a well-prepared boat of medium size, protected and sheltered. Vasudeva took the oars and set off. He rowed furiously to stay in a straight direction. He was a formidable oarsman. It was taking him all his skill to take the boat in a straight path across the river. Then the rain stopped, and the wind dropped. He had only to battle the current. After a furious battle with the current lasting nearly an hour and a half, he reached the other bank. He pulled the boat out to prevent it from washed away by the current, took out the child and set off towards Nanda Upavan in Gokul.

'He walked fast. It took him another half an hour to reach Nanda's quarters. Nanda lived a nomad's life. His was a thatched quarter, larger than all his folks, but modest.

'Exactly one prahara 125 after the birth of child, Vasudeva knocked at the door of his cousin, Nanda'.





<u>- 16 -</u> GOKUL

R ishi Chandakaushika continued without interruption. He was looking a bit animated now.

'Yashodā was in labour too. Nanda Upavan had been completely flooded by the incessant downpour. The midwife had not been able to reach Nanda's quarters. Yashodā was having a difficult labour. Nanda was in a quandary. She seemed to be in so much pain that if Nanda chose to go and fetch the midwife, she might require him in this condition any time. He chose to stay with Yashodā because he was fearful that the kind of labour she was in, he was having doubts whether she would survive the ordeal. He did not want to take the risk. So he stayed put with Yashodā's hand in his hand. Then the rain stopped. Yashodā's labour pains reached their crescendo. She was bawling with pain. It was so hard to bear this for Nanda. He was going insane with mental pain. "Oh, Parmātma, why do you put the lady of the house, the Annapurnā, the Lakshmi, through so much of pain." Then the cries of pain stopped. Yashodā had delivered a baby girl.

'Nanda had no experience in childbirth. Men were not allowed anywhere near their wives during childbirth. It was a carefully drawn custom as they were not likely to understand the horrible pain of childbirth and get panicky. Only experienced women and midwife were allowed near a woman in labour. Men were supposed to be on hand for carrying out the necessary chores. Yet, he knew that the newborn was supposed to cry. The girl was not crying. He felt the infant's pulse. It seemed too faint. The child was either dead or nearing death. He did not know what to do with the placenta either. He looked into the midwife's instruments that were kept in the house itself. He found the midwife's knife, chopped the cord off and tried to revive the baby.

'Nanda heard a knock on the door. He wasn't sure whether he heard it correct. Maybe the midwife has managed to reach. He was desperate for some help.

'There was another knock on the door, much louder this time.

'Nanda carefully laid the baby on the bed next to Yashodā and opened the door.

'Vasudeva was standing in the doorframe.

'Vasudeva was absolutely drenched, but radiating in the dark night. He had a look of accomplishment about him. Nanda was not surprised greatly as he was part of the scheme, but a little intrigued at the sheer coincidence of Vasudeva's arrival. They had not one, but two newborns to tend to.

'Vasudeva whispered to Nanda, "Brother, I have managed to bring this little boy to you, the Kaal¹²⁶ of Kamsa. Please take care of him. I have to go back to my prison cell; otherwise Kamsa will kill Devaki as soon as he finds out.

"Vasudeva's eyes wandered over to where Yashodā's newborn was lying beside her.

'Nanda looked forlorn and distraught. "Vasudeva, Yashodā has delivered this baby girl in the tenth year of our marriage. Baby is not looking a pretty sight.

'Vasudeva carefully took out the baby boy from the little covered basket, dried him up and put him down beside the baby girl. "Let me check here, Nanda. I have worked as a midwife to Devaki's eight children. I have quite a lot of experience".

'The baby girl was breathing with difficulty. She had turned blue with lack of breathing. Her pulse was failing. She seemed to have very limited time to live.

"Let me take her with me. She will not survive here. With my and Devaki's experience, we may just be able to save her. As she is a girl, Kaṃsa may let her live. Otherwise she won't last more than an hour here", said Vasudeva.

'Nanda thought for a moment. Yashodā was still in a state of semi-consciousness. She would not know whether she had delivered a boy or a girl. "Ok, Vasudeva. Take her with you. This is virtually the Yog Māya who has shown us the way. May she bring luck to all of us and death to Kaṃsa! Move on now".

'Vasudeva picked up the girl, rubbed her strongly, revived her a little, wrapped her up carefully and quickly and went back the way he had come.

'He came back to the place where he had secured his boat on the dry area. The river had receded in the one-hour and a half he had spent in Nanda Upavan. He placed the baby girl in the boat and expended a fair bit of sinews to put it back in the river. The current was still fairly strong, but he had to row downstream now. He was back in the prison in the next half hour. Nature was helping him. As soon as he got back to the prison cell, it started pouring again. He was helped back to his handcuffs and manacles, while Devaki fondly tended to the newborn baby girl.

'Kaṃsa came to know about the birth of Devaki's eighth child only towards the next afternoon. He was furious with the midwives who had been put on a round the clock duty in the prison. Prison was on high ground, yet was flooded. Everything below the prison and the royal quarters was virtually inundated. The massive flood had cut them off. The Magadha prison supervisors were cut off. Pradyot, who in turn had been told by one of his Mathurā guards on duty in the prison, told Kaṃsa. Kaṃsa rushed to the prison, wading through the floodwaters. Kroorasena followed him.

'When Kamsa reached the prison cell housing Vasudeva and Devaki, he found both of them in state of deep bliss and radiance. Vasudeva had his chains on, and Devaki was trying to feed the little baby girl, who was gasping for breath. She was trying to keep her revived. As soon as Devaki saw Kamsa, she smiled. Kamsa found this to be a rather unusual behaviour. She had always found Devaki

trembling on his sight, begging him to let go of her children. He had enjoyed those moments of helplessness on their part.

'Here he was, hoping to wipe out the last threat to his life, and the couple were in a state of bliss. Vasudeva saw Kaṃsa and got up to hug him – very unususal behaviour.

"Why was I not told of the birth immediately?" roared Kamsa.

'Vasudeva laughed. "How can a prisoner tell you that, Kaṃsa? Did we ever tell you earlier? I thought your spies and prison guards were under an obligation to tell you.

'Devaki smiled a most gracious smile and said, "Brother, do not always believe in tāntrics. Believe in astrology, but never believe in astrologers. See, this eighth child is a baby girl and not a boy. You can always spare this girl. How can a girl be of any threat to you? In any case, she is so feeble that I don't know whether she will live. Let me nurse her well. Girls bring great luck. If you want, you can even adopt this child after she grows up. You do not have a daughter and your life would not be fulfilled unless you do a kanyadan.

'Kaṃsa hesitated, but Kroorasena egged him on. "Rājan, this universe is made up of male and female aspects of energy. Both are complementary. Shiva is incomplete without Pārvati; Shiva Linga finds its place only in the Yoni. Shakti swaroopā Durgā kills thousands of monsters. You cannot distinguish between a boy and a girl. Saying this, Kroorasena started meditating on his Kuladevi. Kamsa, for some reason, was still hesitant.

'Kroorasena came out of his meditative posture and shouted, "Kill the child, Kaṃsa". Kaṃsa was jolted out of his indecision. He snatched the baby girl out of Devaki's lap and tried to smash her against the prison wall. The girl slipped out of his hands. Her prāṇa had escaped the moment Kaṃsa had touched her. She fell on the floor – dead.

"Vasudeva laughed hysterically. Devaki was cursing him without a pause. Kroorasena was extremely uncomfortable as uncomfortable can be. He thought for a moment and pronounced his verdict – Kaṃsa, the eighth child has already been born. Your nemesis is already born. You are a fool. You could not guard them. One flood and the whole of Mathurā collapsed. They have hidden the child. Get it out of them.

'Kaṃsa was livid. He ordered torture on Vasudeva and Devaki, but to no avail. They looked so much at peace amidst the worst of torture that the guards lost heart. Some of them started suffering from self-loathing. Devaki in particular was a picture of supreme radiance. Vasudeva was a picture of patience and fortitude. Ten days of continuous torture had not the least effect on them. Kaṃsa had to change tactics. He removed all the chains on them and put them back to the house arrest. Then he put his best Magadha spies around them. But they were both enjoying a state of bliss.

'Kaṃsa put his spies on alert. He collected every child born in Mathurā over the last ten days and killed them. Whole of Mathurā was up in arms at this unspeakable atrocity, but Kaṃsa would not tolerate even a squeak of protest. Bāṇakanṭaka used this opportunity to drive his cult. At least fifteen temples were demolished and Pralayālayas built in their place. A massive drive to get people to join his cult was put in place. Yet, none joined.

'After killing all the children in Mathurā, Kaṃsa made his spies fan out in all directions. Kaṃsa had lost his sleep, his composure, and his senses. Vasudeva was quite certain that Kroorasena would drive Kaṃsa insane. The very fact of the eighth child being alive would kill Kaṃsa, first mentally, and then physically. Kroorasena seemed to have made a self-fulfilling prophecy. Kaṃsa was a mental wreck in barely a fortnight.'





<u>- 17 -</u> <u>CELEBRATIONS</u>

Yashodā gained consciousness about half an hour after Vasudeva had left. She immediately felt around for the newborn, and found her lovely boy sleeping beside her. Even as he slept, a smile played on his lips. Yashodā was overcome with vātsalya, motherly love, trying to cuddle the little one. Nanda put a gentle hand on her. "Yashode, you are still weak. Let the boy sleep." He warned Yashodā to not exert too much. Rain had stopped. The dirt lanes were still inundated, but the water would recede quickly as Nanda Upavan in Gokul was located at the highest ground in the village.

'Midwife Kaṅkaṇā was the first to make it to Naṅda's house. She found both mother and son sleeping blissfully. The newborn was a little darker than both Naṅda and Yashodā, but had a bewitching smile playing on his lips. Kaṅkaṇā brought out the ghaṅṭā¹²⁷ and started striking it furiously.

'Nanda Upavan forgot its misery and devastation brought about by the incessant rain over the last two days. It mattered little that there was slush, mud and water everywhere. In less than half an hour, every household was at Nanda's door. Rohini was the last one to reach. She had the toddler Balarāma to bring with her, causing her to reach last.

'Great excitement was in the air. The Chief had been blessed with a baby boy. It was tenth year of their marriage. They had virtually given up all hope.

Rohiṇi was the eldest in near family of Nanda. She took charge of the festivities as soon as she reached Nanda Bhavan. Yashodā was woken up. The newborn was bathed in warm water, his umbilical cord disposed off. A placenta was found and disposed off too. Mother was taken to her bathing space, was bathed, dried and fed on customary post-natal goodies, with lot of dried ginger, jaggery, ghee and curd. They had to make do with whatever was available, as the cows had not been milked for two days.

'After this, there was an elaborate feeding ritual. The Yādavas believed that the first breast milk was like nectar for the newborn. It had been sanctified as a ritual, where the entitled lady, Rohiņi in this case, would carry the newborn to the mother and with songs for the occasion and ḍholak¹²⁸, and make Yashodā feed the newborn. The festivities had started.

'Nanda was busy organizing a feast. It was difficult because of the devastation wrought by the heavy rains. Anyone who had any excess rations was bringing it and contributing to the temporary store put up at the Nanda Bhavan. Every contribution was being meticulously recorded, to be returned later with interest.

'Every family in Gokul had been invited to Nanda Bhavan. A general announcement through the traditional dugdugi¹²⁹ was made within one yojana -12 km radius of Nanda Upavan. People of every caste, creed and persuasion flocked to Nanda Upavan. Festivities started around the third prahara of the day and continued well into the night.

'It was a grand evening in Nanda Upavan, the kind the little hamlet of Vrishni cowherds had never seen before. Gopis were singing and dancing through the night, the feast went on till late in the evening. People braved mud and slush, overflowing rivulets and drains, to reach Nanda Upavan. Gokul had become one focal point of joy and verve of life.

'Mathurā was slowly limping back to life after the devastation of Bhādrapada ashṭami. Kaṃsa had been forlorn. After failing to extract any information from the midwife Pūtanā, and the guards, he had found out from his spies that on the fateful night the gurads and the midwife were absent due to the rains. Pūtanā had gone home in the evening for her meals, and got stuck on the way back, while the guards had absented to save their houses and belongings. He had become very suspicious. Kroorasena advised him to ease the restrictions on Vasudeva and Devaki, so that they could be able to sense something from their free movements. Accordingly, they were released and sent to their palace, but a covert band of Magadha spies was placed on the perimeter. A maid, Vatsalā, was specially deputed in their service. All privileges of Vasudeva as Rājapurush were restored, but the position of Dharmādhikāri was not given back to him.

'For nearly a week, Mathurā was braving shortage of milk and milk products. Gokul was the main supply point for Mathurā, but nothing was coming in. For 3-4 days, it was thought that this was the after effect of the devastation of rainstorm. On day five came the news that entire Gokul was busy in festivities and revelry, and that was the reason for shortages.

'Kamsa called the spymaster to his inner quarter.

"What is the celebration about"? Kamsa asked

"Mahāraj, Nanda the chieftain of the Vrishnis in Gokul has been blessed with a son. The gopas and gopis are on an extended holiday. Festivities have not ceased since the son was born".

'Kaṃsa got extremely suspicious. He was aware of the coincidence of Rohiṇi's son being born on the same night as the seventh child of Devaki. He dreaded a repeat of that occurrence.

"When was the child born"? Kamsa asked the spy.

"Mahāraj, I am not sure. This is the seventh day of festivities today. Then he must have been born on saptami". Spy answered.

'Kaṃsa got furious. He bellowed for Bāṇakanṭaka. He flew into a rage at the sight of Bāṇakanṭaka. "What the hell you employ these spies for. They cannot get single correct information. I will finish his chapter right here", Kaṃsa drew his sword to kill the spy. Bāṇakanṭaka came between Kaṃsa and the spy and saved his life.

"Mahārāj, leave it to me. If I do not get you the correct information to you, you may kill me. I will be the Kaal¹³⁰ of your Kaal. If you permit, I will dispatch my Kuṭil Sena to Gokul and exterminate every living person from there. Kuṭil Muni is upset at my inability to advance his cult into Mathurā. We do require his good advice from time to time", said Bāṇakanṭaka.

'Kaṃsa was furious. "I have no patience with you and your vile cult. I had never understood Sanātana Dharma nor do I understand your philosophy. All I understand that you are destroying temples, eating flesh and desecrating Sanātana symbols. While it gives me a lot of satisfaction to destroy the will of the people of Mathurā, my father-in-law Jarāsandha has expressed displeasure at your activities. We cannot annoy Vrishṇis beyond a point. I have already been reduced to a vassal of Magadha because I cannot trust the federated army comprising mostly of Vrishṇis and Kukurs. Your vile scheme will make the entire countryside rebel. You vile man, you want Mathurā to starve. You better find out about Devaki's eighth born in forty-eight hours starting now, or I will have you impaled in the City Square in the same manner you have been impaling temple priests".

'Bāṇakanṭaka was taken aback at this outburst. He immediately rushed out, formed ten bands of his spies and combatants and within one hour had them dispatched across the Yamunā to Gokul.

'Celebrations had only formally ceased in Gokul and its Nanda Upavan enclave. The mood was still celebratory. Spies went under cover, using different decoys, disguises and camouflages. The entire spy wing of Mathurā was under Bāṇakanṭaka, and was trained under Kuṭil Muni at Khānḍavaprastha.

It was an easy task. Out of the ten units dispatched by Bāṇakanṭaka, eight had reported back by the end of first prahara the next day. The conclusion was unanimous. Bāṇakanṭaka went to Kaṃsa immediately, and was taken in. Kaṃsa had apparently not slept all night.

"Yes, Bāṇakanṭaka, what do you have"? Kaṃsa asked.

"Mahārāj, Yashodā nad Nanda's son was born around the same time Devaki's son was born. Ashtami is confirmed".

'Kaṃsa felt a lightning bolt of dread going through his mind and heart. He felt dizzy'.





<u>- 18 -</u> Pūtanā

A chārya Chanḍakaushika meditated for half an hour before resuming.

'Vaidya Anantagupta had to be called to have a look at Kaṃsa. Prime Minister Viprathu accompanied him. Viprathu was well known as a sage like figure who would give an advice only when asked for.

'Vaidya Anantagupta made a quick diagnosis. "There is nothing wrong with the Mahārāj physically. Vāta, pitta and kaf¹³¹ are otherwise in balance as Mahārāj is a physically strong person, but are disturbed from time to time by three factors — anidrā¹³², atisomarasa¹³³, and atichintā¹³⁴. I cannot cure any of these. A person cures these by following yama and niyama, the first two ladders of Ashtānga Yoga¹³⁵. In Sanātana Dharma, the job of a King is to rule on behalf of Dharma. If that does not happen, all these symptoms will appear. Even Brahmā would not be able to stop them from appearing."

'Vaidya Anantagupta was known as a virtual Dhanvantari¹³⁶, but was a very blunt man. Viprathu motioned to him to keep quiet, but Vaidya was in no mood to relent. "Mahārāj has to make a decision.

All the three conditions subsist as a vicious cycle. The cyle can be broken only by breaking the karmic cycle that has brought these conditions about. It is for Mahārāj to devise ways of doing it. Mahārāj is in deep dread of his Kāla, but that is a consequence of his own karma", Anantagupta paused. He continued in a whisper, "Mahārāj, we can provide the outer veneer, but the inner foundation will be provided by your spiritual grounding. When did you visit Rishi Gargāchārya last"?

'Kaṃsa was feeling weak. He thought about the question and whispered, "But Āchārya Gargāchārya thinks low of me. He neither comes to Mathurā nor does he grant me an audience".

Anantagupta laughed derisively. "If that is the esteem in which Achārya Gargāchārya holds you, how can you expect any succour for yourself? He has condemned you to a life of turmoil. You must do some great penance and penitence to get him to start advising you. Yādava Kingdom of Mathurā has always lived and died for Dharma. King has always been a mere representative of the Sudharmā Sabhā, and never has the Sudharmā Sabhā failed to consult Āchārya. It is nine years of steady downhill journey for Mathurā. Your kriyā of imprisoning your father and reducing Sudharmā Sabhā to servility has begotten terrible karma for you, Mahārāj Kamsa. You are now feeling its effect. The karma earned by you by killing Devaki's children, and letting this Kutil cult loose on the hapless prajā, is now coming back to haunt you. I know the reason for your illness, Mahārāj. It is the same reason that whole of Mathurā is talking about – that eighth son of Devaki has been born. He has captured your mind. Now ask your Kuţil tāntric how he managed to miss this event. Mahārāj, there is still time for you to make course correction. Go to Sudharmā Sabhā and become its true representative".

'Kaṃsa was listening to all this with a resigned attitude. Even Viprathu was surprised how Kaṃsa was able to take all this. He made a motion to Anantagupta. Vaidyaraj gave a few medicines and wished Kaṃsa well. While leaving, he again told Kaṃsa to see Gargāchārya anyhow and stay off drinks.

'Kaṃsa was feeling even lower than when the Vaidyaraj had come. He called for Chānūra, Kroorasena and Bānakantaka.

'The threesome came and comforted Kaṃsa. As was their wont, they spun a conspiracy theory to run down Vaidya Anantagupta. Bāṇakanṭaka bragged big about killing Naṅda's young child.

'Kaṃsa was feeling weak. He interjected, "Bāṇakanṭaka, you stop this nonsense of yours. You will not directly harm any of the Vrishṇis. Not one. The child must be killed, but covertly. I cannot antagonize Vrishṇis openly. Vasudeva is bad enough. I cannot have Naṅda going against me. My Sudharmā Sabhā is full of Vrishṇis. Even Viprathu is a Vrishṇi. This idiot Bāṇakanṭaka is always looking for advancing his fundamentalist cult. I am the King. I have to think of hundred other things. Listen, Bāṇakanṭaka, if you exceed your brief, I will have you impaled in front of your Pralayālaya the same way you had impaled the poor priests. Now get going and get the plan approved. You chaps will not put any plan into motion without getting it approved from me first". Kaṃsa was exhibiting signs of confusion, which had been brought about by his conversation with Vaidya Anantagupta.

'Kaṃsa's conspiratorial band stayed behind even as the sage-like sane voice Viprathu sought permission and left. Kaṃsa's mental state was not much better. He felt a deep urge to immerse himself in more drinks, but the admonition of Anantagupta was ringing in his ears.

'Bāṇakanṭaka chimed in, "Do not worry, Mahārāj Kaṃsa, I have an answer to this problem".

"You are a big mouth, that's all, Bāṇa. I believe they call you Bāṇāsura now, because of that strange cult of yours that goes around creating mayhem and destruction everywhere, wearing that Swastika symbol of Jhaṅkāl on their necks. I have no patience with your tricks. It was that silly midwife of yours who is the cause of all the trouble. I would have slayed her then and there, but you interceded on her behalf".

"She is my consort", confessed Bāṇakanṭaka, and now she will do the job that we could not do in Mathurā. We killed 172 children born on ashṭami in Mathurā and in nearby villages. Now Pūtanā will kill the 173rd, the real one.

'Bāṇakanṭaka called Pūtanā in. Pūtanā was a very attractive young woman. Her family was renowned in the science of midwifery

for many generations, and had trained her in midwifery over many years. She was married without children. Bāṇakanṭaka tutored her over the next few days. Fully satisfied with the training imparted by him, he let her cross the Yamunā on the Shukla Paksha ashṭami, exactly fifteen days after the child had been born.

'Naming ceremony of the infant was being done in Nanda Upavan. With due ritual and ceremony, the purohit asked the family for four names, one each for Rāshi¹³⁷ based name, Nakshātra¹³⁸ based name, favourite deity based name (Deva nāma) and common name. First right went to the eldest in the family, but Nanda waived that right. He stated that he might me the eldest in age but Rohini had the highest title, being his elder sister-in-law. Rohini took the offer without a demur. She admired the lovely form of the child. His bewitching smile lit up the entire personality of one so small. Rohini saw a little cowherd in that small form. Purohit chanted some mantras and the child got his rashi name as Bālagopāla, in the Vrisha Rashi. There being no other elder, she also got to give his nakshātra name. Being born in Rohini nakshātra, Rohini saw the form of entire universe in that child, and named him Vishvarūpa. Yashodā got the next opportunity, and gave him the name Mohan after her favourite deity, Mohini. Nanda bābā came in last but the last person got to give the common name. It was then that Rohini realized the trick Nanda had played. She feigned resentment, but eventually burst out laughing -"Nanda, you played the smart one". Nanda smiled and asked for her permission. Permission granted, he named the child Krishna, because of his dark complexion. The boy was suitably named and all the gopis made a beeline to hold the baby Krishna. One would kiss him, another would admire his captivating features, a third would go mad on his smile and a fourth would wonder at the little one's great patience with them. He went through tens of them, without once bawling or crying. Pūtanā had been led to the place by a gopi rushing to catch the ceremony.

'Pūtanā had come prepared with a poison paste. She had been told to suckle the child when she got an opportunity to do so. Before suckling the child, she had to put the paste on her nipple. The child would suck at the nipple, ingest the poison and be dead, without anyone realizing as to what happened. It was a slow acting poison.

'Pūtanā got into the line. Padmā the nurse spotted her. She had never seen the woman in Nanda Upavan before. She was extremely beautiful, rather like a seductress. She had been hearing about the mysterious killing of young children all around Mathurā. Though she was working as a nursemaid in the Nanda household, her position was akin to a member of the family. She had been caring for the young Krishṇa, and she tagged on to Pūtanā like a leech.

'Padmā got in behind Pūtanā, and nudged her. Who are you, beti¹³⁹? I have never seen you in Gokul.

'Pūtanā was startled. She got nervous. The packet of poison was kept in her cleavage, to be used when opportune. She started sweating. "I am from Vrishabhānpur, aunty.

"Which family in Vrishabhānpur, dear"? Asked Padmā.

"I am from the family of Vrishabhānu ji, aunty. I heard of a celestial child born to Naṅda bābā, so I just came here out of curiosity", said Pūtanā.

'Padmā was a crafty old woman, wizened by experience. She persisted even as they closed in to where Krishna lay in his cradle. Gopis were picking him up, and showering their fascination and love in the best way they could. Some would squeeze him to their bosom, some would plant a kiss on his cheek, and still others would just fondle him. Yashodā had dressed him up for the occasion. In a predominantly fair community, this little darling with slightly dark complexion held the entire locality in thrall. It was not as if the community was there because Krishna belonged to their chieftain. His smile and playfulness was already the stuff of legends around the entire Vrishni kingdom. Nanda was worried about it, but the fame of the little cherub had spread far and wide. Nanda remembered what Vasudeva had advised him. He had never wanted such great fanfare, but his status had made it impossible for the birth to remain low key. He had himself told Padmā to be very mindful of Krishņa as many Kutil karmis were around in Mathurā who loved the sport of killing young children and raping young women.

'Padmā stayed close to Pūtanā as she picked up Krishna, held him close to her bosom and opened her breast, taking care to bring the packet of poison to her other hand and open it in one swift motion quickly for pasting it on her nipple and offering it to Krishna. The playful child looked at Pūtanā and smiled. The smile was so captivating that the childless Pūtanā lost her senses for a moment. There was a surge of maternal love, mamātā, within her bosom. Pūtanā got so taken up by the feel of beautiful Krishna close to her bosom that all her well-rehearsed plan went awry. She felt paralysed. The child Krishna took the offered nipple even as the poison pack remained in Pūtanā's hand. Padmā saw this unusual movement and pushed Pūtanā, who then came into her senses. She thought she was caught. Before she could apply the poison to her nipple, the push by Padmā caused the child to make a gash on the tightly held nipple with his suckling grip. Pūtanā thought she was trapped but she was successful in applying the poison to her left nipple even as she held Krishna close to her breast with her left hand and used her right hand to manipulate the poison. The poison got into the gash, bringing her such unbearable pain that she dropped Krishna and let out a shriek of a stricken woman. Padmā caught the dropping Krishna, even as Pūtanā fell down with the pain of the poison getting into her bloodstream through the gash. Padmā had won the day. Her actions had saved Krishna.

'A huge commotion followed. Pūtanā lay dying. Nobody understood what had happened. Krishṇa was still smiling in Padmā's lap. Yashodā ran to take her in her lap. Padmā pointed out to Pūtanā. This is a Kuṭil karmi. She had come to murder Krishṇa. I spotted her right at the beginning. Yet, nobody could understand what caused her to writhe in pain, froth at the mouth and slip away into a coma. In less than half an hour, Pūtanā was dead'.





<u>- 19 -</u> TRI<u>ŅĀVARTA</u>

A chārya Chanḍakaushika continued after a small break for having some water and fruits.

'Bāṇa's spies brought the news of Pūtanā's death to Mathurā in no time. Bāṇakanṭaka had the mortification of taking the news to Kaṃsa.

'Kaṃsa saw Bāṇakanṭaka in his private quarters. He got up in anticipation as soon as he saw Bāṇakanṭaka and moved forward with open arms to embrace him. As he got close, he saw the grim face of his commander-in-mischief and stopped in his tracks.

"What happened? You don't look well?" Asked Kamsa.

"Mahāraj, the Mission Pūtanā has failed", informed Bānakantaka.

'Kaṃsa sank to his haunches as he felt his legs give way. Bāṇa gave his hand to him and propped him up. Kaṃsa looked so despondent and broken that Bāṇa feared for his life. He started perspiring, held his heart and nearly collapsed in Bāṇa's hands. He let out a stricken cry. The guard came running. Bāṇa told him to call the Rajavaidya immediately.

'Kaṃsa did not relish the prospect of another dressing down by the Rajavaidya Anantagupta. But he felt faint and sinking. Mercifully, when the Rajavaidya arrived, he concentrated on the medical emergency, and asked for the queens to be by his side. He gave some medicines, and asked for his condition to be reported to him in the morning. Viprathu had also arrived. He requested the Rajavaidya to depute someone and come back in the morning. A disciple was deputed for round-the-clock monitoring and nursing. The queens took their turns sitting by him.

Anantagupta, Bāṇakanṭaka and Viprathu were all back in the morning. Kaṃsa was much better. He was awake and conscious. Anantagupta did the nāḍi-pariksha¹⁴⁰ and pronounced him out of danger. "Mahārāj has obviously not heeded my counsel. He has neither given up liquor nor has he eschewed bad company. He does not even know that the Kuṭil Dharmis vandalized Āchārya Gargāchārya's Āshrama yesterday".

'Bāṇakanṭaka took offence. "Enough, Rajavaidya. I know you do not like my cult. You should at least follow the Vedic teachings. Our cult has every right to exist. Even your Sanātana Dharma teaches 'Ekam Sat Viprā Bahudhā Vadanti – Ishwar is one; wise men call him by different names. Why should you treat our Kuṭil Dharmis like outcastes? That is not the Sanātana Dharma we know."

'Anantagupta was cut to the quick. He was a learned man. He learned Āyurveda from Āchārya Gargāchārya himself. He was a great scholar but Āchārya had ordered him to serve the humanity with his gift of Āyurveda. He took on the fearsome Bāṇakanṭaka. "Look, Asura, you follow a cult which is based on blood-letting. I have studied your philosophy; it is neither materialistic, nor hedonistic. It is atavistic, just a bundle of ignorant rants of people who never evolved. A self-obsessed psychopath, who just loves himself and his word, leads it. 'Ekaṃ sat viprā bahudhā vadanti' does not apply to evils like you and Kuṭil Dharmis. A vipra is a noble person, not member of a savage cult. So what you and your guru say has no weight for a Sanātani. Height of irony is that bloodthirsty people like you should appeal to tolerance of Sanātana Dharma. We are also taught to resist evil, even by using violence".

'Bāṇakanṭaka was very sensitive to criticism of Kuṭil Muni and Kuṭil Dharma. In fact, Kuṭil Muni had ordained that any criticism of

Kuṭil Dharma was a sin punishable by instant death. He had also ordained that Jhaṅkāl would reward anyone with great pleasures in afterlife if he converted people to Kutil dharma.

'Bāṇakanṭaka reacted violently to Anantagupta's jibe. "Look, Vaidyaraj, you are here to tend to Mahārāj Kaṃsa's health. Your remarks on my faith are quite unwarranted. Mahārāj, this is not fair".

'Anantagupta was quite a choleric personality at the best of times. Kaṃsa had to tolerate him because he was reputed to be an incarnation of Dhanvantari himself. Kaṃsa extracted lot of diplomatic goodwill by inviting Rājās and Rājpurushas to Mathurā for having the benefit of a session with Anantagupta. He was a priceless asset, and Kaṃsa put up with him for this reason. He must have brought Kaṃsa back from nervous breakdown half a dozen times in the last nine years. His only demerit was that he did not mince his words. He had the full backing of Sudharmā Sabhā as well.

'Anantagupta looked at Kamsa and then gave a deep hard glare to Bānakantaka. Quite a dare, as Bānakantaka was a fearsome and large personality. Over six and a half feet tall with a big muscular built. He had the reputation of having killed an elephant with his bare hands. "Bāṇāsura, you are squarely responsible for this sorry state of Mahārāj and Mathurā. You do not have the commonsense to distinguish a Rajavaidya from Vaidyaraj. On top of that, you follow some stupid dogma that the first humans might have believed in their non-evolved state. What is this wooden vilom swastika¹⁴¹ you hang round your fat neck? Reverse of Sanātana Dharma and evidence of the wood in your head? Your stupid creationism and spreading your dogma by force appeals to Mahārāj, as he is a cruel person by nature. That is why I am always trying to control his pitta dosha. He loves being the agent of a Creator, even as the Regent of your Creator Jhankāl, Kutil Muni sits in Khāndavaprastha devising suitable war doctrines".

'Baṇakantaka responded with murder in his eyes. "Vaidya, you are alive only because Mahārāj Kaṃsa gives you undue importance. Jhaṅkāl is the Creator. Kuṭil Muni is his Regent on Earth, and he has appointed Mahārāj Kaṃsa his agent on earth on the condition that he agrees to adopt Jhaṅkāl as his Master, Kutil Muni who is

Jhaṅkālputra as Jhaṅkāl's Regent, and Kuṭil Dharma as the new Dharma in Āryāvarta. He cannot get over his love for his queens who would not formally let him come into our fold, or maybe it is his dread of his father-in-law Jarāsandha. We can provide every substitute for Magadha garrison with our Kuṭil warriors. How can you be so silly as to discount the presence of a Creator? Have you ever seen a sword getting built by itself, or a flowerpot, or even a simple somarasa. Everything requires some force to create it. All this earth, these rivers, these mountains are all created by Jhaṅkāl for humans to enjoy. Jhaṅkāl has created all animals, forests, and bounties of nature for humans to enjoy. All of you will burn in eternal hellfire".

'Anantagupta was more calm than usual. He laughed derisively, "I do not think I have the capacity to indulge in a shāstrārth with a fool like Bāṇāsura. Get your regent Kuṭil Muni to debate with me, if at all. What will he do? Who doesn't know the story of what Kutil Muni did when he lost the debate to Raghavāchārya? All I need to tell you is that your thick head cannot understand the concept of evolution. Have you seen a mechanical tool evolve? Have you seen the evolution of consciousness in human beings, and even animals? These experiences can only be had if you have an open mind. Don't even call your cult Kutil Dharma; it is pure and simple evil. It is Kutiltam adharma. When a con man called Kutil Muni met many fools like Bāna, a religion called Kutil Dharma was born. So shut up and go rape a few more women, kill some innocents and destroy a few more temples. Good news for Mahārāj is that after this demon Bānasura vandalized Rishi Gargāchārya's Āshrama and desecrated the temples there, he has left Mathurā permanently. Even I am thinking of leaving. There is a good offer from Hastināpur, as well as from Pānchāla. Better to go there than live with blood sucking leeches like Bānasura".

'Bāṇasura pulled out his sword. Kaṃsa shouted at Bāṇakanṭaka. "Stop, Bāṇa. Go out now and send Pradyot. Bāṇakantaka sheathed his sword but stayed put. "Mahārāj. I may have failed with Pūtanā, but do allow me to plan further".

'Anantagupta interjected, "Mahārāj, let me be blunt with you. Nine tenth of your problem has to do with your fear of the eighth child of Devaki. Bāṇa's idiots are the ones who have put that fear in you. Your body has lost its harmony, and it cannot be restored without you following the path of Dharma. Dharma alone has the capacity to balance the Karma, and soothe your nerves. So throw out these Kuṭil Dharmis from your State. That will bring you more love from your queens and even the Magadha Emperor. You will feel secure and live longer. Unless you can overcome your habit of killing innocents, and defiling chaste women, even my medicinal skills will not be of much help".

'Kaṃsa stayed on the path shown by Anantagupta for some time. He freed Vasudeva and Devaki and allowed Vasudeva to participate in Sudharmā Sabhā, without restoring his position as Dharmādhikāri. He kept Bāṇakanṭaka under a tight leash by putting him under Pradyot, but his weakness for flesh and liquor landed him right back into the grip of Bāṇakanṭaka and his Kuṭil Dharmis.

'Bāṇakanṭaka introduced another spy to Kaṃsa. He was named Triṇāvarta. He looked deceptively like a Yādava. Extremely well-muscled, he had a great reputation as a fast runner. He had been given a nickname of 'jhanjhāwāt' Bāṇakanṭaka assured Kaṃsa that Triṇāvarta would abduct Krishṇa and run away so fast that nobody would be able to catch him. Away from Naṅda Upavan, he would kill Krishṇa and bring his body to Kaṃsa.

'Kamsa gave his concurrence to the plan.

'Triṇāvarta chose Krishṇa's birthday for the plan. Entire Gokul was busy with the celebrations. The day was fondly named as Krishṇa Janmashṭami. Disciples of Aangiras from Prayāg had themselves come with the blessings and message of Guru Ghor Aangiras, who had become the chief of the order. He had been born in Gokul to an ordinary Vrishṇi family, but had migrated to Prayāg at a very young age. He along with Gargāchārya, Sāndipani, and Chandkaushika formed a formidable quartet of Rishis under the broad umbrella of Veda Vyas.

'Triṇāvarta made elaborate plans. He had a ready disguise. He decided to go to Naṅda Upavan on the Janmāshṭami day to mingle in the crowds who would be milling around that day. He hoped to somehow reach close to Krishṇa and run away after abducting him.

Once he had put in his famous run, nobody would be able to catch him.

'Krishṇa was a precocious child. All his motor functions were far more advanced than a normal child of one year. He had already started walking without support. He had turned out as extremely playful and naughty. His speed was noticed even as a toddler. His attraction as a child had acquired great renown all over the Āryāvarta. Many great sages and rishis would come to Gokul to see the charming Naṅda lalā. Gokul and the little hamlet of Nanda Upavan had become a veritable pilgrim centre. Never had anyone seen the fame of a child spread so much for his good looks and smile. Added attraction was the rumour doing the rounds of Āryāvarta that he was actually the child that Kaṃsa was mortified of.

'Triṇāvarta managed to reach his subject quite easily. He managed to sneak in close to child Krishna who was seated on a little throne.

'Triṇāvarta went close to child Krishṇa and bowed to him. A smiling Krishṇa looked at him. Even as a child, he had a very keen sense of recognizing the feelings in a human being and even in animals. The child Krishṇa could immediately sense something amiss.

'Triṇāvarta reached close to Krishṇa and made a quick grab for him. The alert child that Krishṇa was, he slipped through his grasp and ran away from his little throne. Triṇāvarta made another grab for him, Krishṇa again slipped out from his grasp with a swift movement. This was seen by the crowd, which started shouting and ran after Triṇāvarta. The swift Triṇāvarta made a third attempt to grab Krishṇa and make his dash. His third grab also missed the target. By now, the entire gopa crowd was after Triṇāvarta. He was caught.

'Even before Nanda could come to know about the incident, Trinavarta had been lynched'.





<u>- 20 -</u> BRAHMĀNDA

A chārya Chanḍakaushika meditated on Krishṇa, chanting the now famous chant of 'Krishṇam Vande Jagadgurum', which had become so irritating for Jarāsandha and his entire clan.

'As Krishna grew up into his second year, he started attracting more and more visitors. He was a very inventive, playful and naughty child.

'Gokul was also developing as a hub of spiritual schools. Āchārya Gargāchārya relocated to Mathurā-Pānchāla border, which was barely two yojanas from Gokul. Yamunā protected it. The unique federated force gathering method of the Yādavas ensured that the troop movement was always from the Vrishņis to Mathurā and never viceversa. Many Gaargas and Aangiras gathered in the Gokul Āshrama of Aangiras. My disciples also went there to take part in satsang. Nanda and Yashodā were regular visitors to the Āshrama for Satsang and Yoga practices. The child Krishņa became particularly adept at Āsanas. He would tease his gopala brigade by challenging them to copy him, and would even hold competitions. The boy was developing into a natural leader even at the tender age. By the time of his second birthday, he had developed a good reputation as a sweet child.

'An Aangiras was so taken up by the Krishna's pranks, that he even composed a song extolling his sweet smile, speech, his sweet eyes and laughter, his sweet walk and poise, his playful pranks, his teasing of Yashodā, his little fights with Balarāma, his bonding with the young calves – all of it was weaving itself into nuggets of stories around the young charmer.

Ācharya started singing Krishņa's praises again.

The ladies were secretly enjoying the sonorous voice of the Āchārya. They looked askance at Jarāsandha, who sat with a straight face, trying to control his annoyance.

'At the time of his second birthday, Nanda was very apprehensive. He had seen two attempts at the life of the child, first on his naamkaran ceremony, and the next on his 1st birthday. For the second birthday, Nanda decided not to have any celebration at all. Instead he organized a satsang and a paaṭh 143 for select families at the Āshrama.

'After an āsana and prānāyāma session, the young Aangiras started talking about the cosmos and the cosmic energy. He dwelt on the common element of the cosmic energy in every being, animate or inanimate. He described the cosmic dance of Shiva and the unity of all things. "There is an indivisible reality immanent among all beings. You can call it by various names. That is a small sliver of the cosmic energy that drives this universe. You can call it Shiva, or call it Brahman, or just call it Self. Whatever divine has to be found has to be found within you first. Look within, you will find the Supreme there. It is not to be found outside. The cosmic intelligence is present within all of us. Look at the wave of Yamunā that strikes the steps of a ghāt. As the wave strikes, it breaks into a million drops. Each drop has its own energy but is also part of the immense waters of Yamunā. You have not seen the waves of the oceans. If you did, this would become even clearer to you. Each drop of the wave is both separate and one with the mass of water that comprises an ocean. Go and sit on the bank of Yamunā at sunrise and sunset, and try and find out the Brahmānda present in every drop and the whole".

'Suddenly the young Krishṇa chimed up from the lap of his mother in his lisping speech. The sense of what he said roughly translated to, "Does the Brahmāṇḍa reside within me too, Guruji?"

'The Aangiras smiled and said, "Of course it does. Do you want to see it?"

'Krishna slipped out of Yashodā's lap and ran to the Guruji. "Show me, show me". The whole hall erupted with laughter. "Come, Krishna. Sit on my lap. Now look at this gathering. Who all do you see?"

"I see you, I see Ma (Yashodā), elder Ma (Rohiṇi), father (Naṅda), elder (Balarāma), aunty (Padmā), and I see my so many aunties, uncles, gopa, gopi". He paused, "Outside the kuteer, I also see trees, plants, grass, sky, birds, but I do not see my cows and calves".

"Now close your eyes, Krishan", said Guruji.

'Krishna closed his eyes.

"What do you see now".

"I do not see anything now, Guruji".

"So my dear Govinda, Brahman is not what you see, but it is that with which you can see".

"Then please tell Brahman to show me my Nandini", chirped the little Krishna.

'Balarāma burst out laughing and Guruji looked intrigued. "He is talking about his favorite cow, which has gone grazing".

'Guruji smiled at the playfulness of one so young, but also realized the profundity behind that question. The young Krishṇa was asking him whether the vision was limited to the vision of the eye or went beyond. He patted him on the cheek; "I will answer this question when you grow up, Krishṇa. For now, it is enough for you to know that Paramātma lives in every person as his or her ātmā. Wise men call him by different names".

'After the satsang, a brief ceremony was held to celebrate Krishṇa's birthday. A lot of sweets and fried food was served, but Krishṇa refused to eat anything. He was importunate for his butter, and would eat only after had his huge fill of raw butter.

'They walked back home in the afternoon. On the way back, Angirā, the sweepress crossed their path. Padmā shooed her away – "Don't block our path, can't you see who is coming this way"?

'Little Krishna playfully went and hugged the legs of the cleaning woman. She was so surprised and embarrassed that she just stood transfixed like a statue.

'Padmā shouted at little Krishņa. "Come here, what is it you are doing dirtying yourself".

'Krishna asked very innocently, "Why, Ma, Angirā chāchi does not have the Paramātma in her ātmā? Who is it that Padmā chachi is telling to move away? Is it her body or the ātmā? Look, she is wearing new clothes, even wearing a perfume. How is it that I will become dirty?

'Nanda was walking twenty steps ahead of the pack. He overheard this and turned back. He was overcome with unspeakable joy as he heard this. "Vasudeva was right. Kaṃsa rightly suspected this little boy to be one with supernatural powers. How could one so young ask such profound questions". He could see the genius of the boy making a statement. He went and clasped the little Krishṇa in his embrace, making sure not to keep distance from Angirā.

'Two persons were crying tears of divine joy; Nanda and Angirā. They seem to have seen a glimpse of the Brahman in those innocent statements. The whole party became overcome with emotions. Angirā was invited to the Nanda household and became a part of it because Krishna would not let go of her.

'Krishṇa was not done yet. As they sat down in the Naṅda Bhavan, discussing the events of the day, Krishṇa came and sat in Yashodā's lap. "Ma, show me the Brahmāṅḍa". Yashodā got irritated. "Brahmāṅḍa is within you, idiot. Go and see it". Krishṇa persisted, "Ma, have a look. I cannot see it myself within me. I am very small. Please see", said Krishṇa and opened his mouth big for Yashodā. Yashodā was totally overcome with emotion at this innocent playacting of her little one. She lost control of her senses as Krishṇa opened his mouth to show it to her.

'Yashodā went into a trance. Her little one was mesmerizing everyone today. She was proud of him, and apprehensive in a very motherly way. The child Krishṇa was being appreciated for his sharp questions by the wise and lay. Mother Yashodā actually started seeing the entire universe in little Krishṇa's wide-open mouth. She was hypnotized by Krishṇa's mannerisms. She lovingly looked into little Krishna's mouth. She imagined seeing the sun, the moon, the stars,

the panchmahabhutas 144, and many divine figures she had only seen images and Murtis of. She did not know how long the spell lasted. Then she saw the little Krishṇa's captivating image within his mouth and her spell broke. She gathered herself quickly. She realised that she had been transported to the realm of another world. She loved the entranced stage. Getting out of the trance, she fondled the locks of little Krishṇa, and said, "Ok, I have seen the Brahmāṇḍa in your mouth. You, I and everyone else; Angirā and Padmā, all have the Brahmāṇḍa within ourselves. Thank you for teaching me. Now go and look after the cows that must be coming back. Go play with Dāu Balarāma.

'Krishna left, and Yashodā sat thinking for many hours whether she had seen a dream or it had been for real.'





<u>- 21 -</u> SHAKAṬĀSURA and BAKĀSURA

*T wo years had passed after Triṇāvarta's death. Krishṇa's third birthday was celebrated with just a visit to the Āshrama and the temple. Naṅda bābā had become very superstitious with the celebration of birthdays. He had told everyone that nobody should even wish little Krishṇa on his varshagānṭh¹45, nor would anyone bring any gift. Naṅda bābā suspected snakes in every gift. He stopped taking any gift from anyone, except from the nearest relatives like Rohini.

'Krishna was getting naughtier by the day. He had the elder Balarāma as his willing accomplice. Besides, he was getting ever more inquisitive. He had a question on everything he perceived. Yashodā and Nanda would send him to the Aangiras Āshrama every other day to exhaust his quota of questions. Āchārya Ghor Aangiras sent a senior guru by the name of Swarupa Aangiras. The younger Aangiras were no longer in a position to satisfy Krishna's curiosity about the world around him.

'On the other side of Yamunā, Bāṇakanṭaka was slowly weaning Kaṃsa away from the influence of Anantagupta. After nearly two years of quiescence, he was able to make Kaṃsa insecure about Krishṇa again. It took him every bit of his persuasive skill along with plenty of liquor and girls from every corner of Āryāvarta. Bāṇakanṭaka's cult had also suffered as it was reined in, not allowed to convert, and the Sudharmā Sabhā punished many key members of Kuṭil Dharma. All the temples taken over, or destroyed by Kuṭil Dharmis were restored and repaired. Bāṇakanṭaka's close confidante Kshetrarakshak was sentenced to death and hanged in the public square. Bāṇakanṭaka was also advised to be in hiding for a while as Jarāsandha was baying for his blood for destroying Shiva temples. Things were changing now. Bāṇakanṭaka managed to instill enough insecurity in Kaṃsa to let him make a few more attempts at killing Krishna.

'Krishṇa was fond of the little calves. Gokul was known for supplying the major milk and butter requirement of Mathurā. Most calves were not even left with the bare minimum feed. He was pained to see the calves tied up and beaten when they went to their mother cows upon their return in the evening. Their only use seemed to be to suckle the udder of the cows to make them release milk. Krishṇa would play naughty in the evenings. Whenever he found a young calf looking hungry or emaciated, he would release the calf. The calf would then have its complete fill, leaving little for the milking gopis for the next day. Initially it was thought to be an accident. Then one night the entire herd of Nańda Bābā turned up dry in the morning with all the calves happily free and suckling their mother cows.

'Yashodā detected the rebellion. Krishṇa was the immediate suspect. His quiver of naughty pranks had been increasing every day. He had taken a liking to raw butter, and would finish off whatever he could lay his hand on. As if he alone was not enough, he would get all his friends to take part in the butter heist, and anything they could not devour would be fed to Gokul's famous red-faced monkeys. After some time, action started shifting to other houses as well. The cowherds earned a large part of their income from selling their milk and products to Mathurā. Gokul had two large herds of about two

hundred cows each with Nanda and Vasudeva and several smaller herds. Gokul alone had about one thousand cows, plus their offspring and a large number of draught cattle for sale. Among the pastoral agricultural communities, they were considered quite well off. The local purohit had traditionally taken care of their basic knowledge of letters and numbers. Some families sent their boys and girls to Rishi Gargāchārya's Āshrama. After Krishṇa was born, the Aangiras from Prayāg had set up the Āshrama in Gokul, which now even had a senior Āchārya posted there to take care of the community of Rishi Ghor Aangiras.

'Once Krishna was caught, Yashodā scolded him badly. She got genuinely angry with him. Krishna, the great playful actor, did his playact as if he was full of remorse and penitence and went to lie under a cart laden with a lot of household goods.

'Bāṇakanṭaka had sent one of his ace spies, Shakaṭa, to go to Naṅda Upavan in disguise and make an attempt at Krishṇa once again. He lay in wait in that cart. The sharp Krishṇa sensed something amiss. He was lying under the cart, fully alert. He had no fear. He was already confident about his super speed of movement. He knew that even if somebody were there in that cart, he would be able to move out of his way a split second early. Shakaṭa could not believe his luck. He had a butcher's knife with him. The child described to him as Krishṇa was lying under the cart where he was hiding.

'Shakaṭa was lying at the back of the cart, whereas Krishṇa was lying under the middle plank of the cart. This was a cart made up of wooden planks. Shakaṭa would have to move out and attack the child lying below the cart. He was not sure of the exact spot where the child lay. He tried to sense the distance of his prey, and whether he was asleep or awake. Shakata was getting impatient with anticipation. He started imagining the big rewards that waited him if he was successful in his venture. The menfolk were away. Only the women were at home. Naṅda was in the public chambers of his chieftain's section of his quarter. Padmā and Angirā were around, besides Yashodā.

'Shakata removed the sheets under which he was hiding. Two wooden bars propping up the front yoke, and resting on its wheels

had stayed the cart. A good amount of household provisions, big boxes and a massive iron plough was on the cart. As Shakaṭa tried to slink across looking for his prey, the cart made a creaking sound. Shakaṭa stopped dead hoping he had not been heard. Young Krishṇa, all of three and a half years, slunk towards the front of the cart as he sensed the movement.

'Shakaṭa tried to get up, sidestep the plough and the boxes, and tried to climb down from the back. At that precise moment, Krishṇa used his speed to hit the front props with his feet. The cart overbalanced and collapsed towards the front. Shakaṭa lost his balance and was lifted up from the backside, took a somersault and was lying in the front of the cart. The massive plough and the big box of household goods came slowly tumbling down. The box came down first and pinned Shakaṭa down. Immediately followed the sharp end of the plough and impaled Shakaṭa through his neck. He was dead.

'Krishna had done the mischief and stood watching. His good friend Raghu had come in just before Krishna had kicked the cart props. There was a huge roar as the goods, plough and other items fell over the unfortunate Shakaṭa. Yashodā, Padmā and Angirā came running. They found a huge dead man lying under a pile of load with his throat impaled by the plow coulter edge.

'The three women did not know what to do. There was the little impish Krishna, standing in one corner of the courtyard, acting innocent. In the other corner, there lay a monster of a man, dead.

'Angirā ran away to call Nanda. Yashodā hugged the little Krishna close to her, sitting down and kissing his face in an unfettered gush of emotion and relief. All his pranks and transgressions forgotten, an enormous sense of thankfulness to the almighty pervading every inch of the little world they inhabited.

'Raghu spoke to Yashodā, "Chāchi, Krishṇa kicked the props and brought the cart down." Yashodā scarcely heard him.

'Nanda came running. His first instinct was to cuddle Krishna. Questions to Krishna yielded only sketchy information. Nanda was caught by the dread he had till a year back. He remembered that dark night and the warning by Vasudeva – "Nanda, if Kamsa comes to know about Devaki's eighth child, he will spare no effort to kill him".

He had already seen two attempts made on his life; Gokul had thought Pūtanā and Triṇāvarta were mere accidents. Naṅda was always sure they were attempts at Krishṇa's life. This was another confirmation.

'Raghu tried another time. "Uncle, it was Krishna who brought the cart down." He was again ignored, even as Krishna was making discreet signals to Raghu to pipe down. In the hubbub, poor Raghu's eyewitness account went unheeded.

'Nanda and Yashodā became even more protective. Yashodā went to Rohiņi's house to request that she should always let Balarāma be near Krishņa. Balarāma was nearly 4 years older and turning out to be a strong boy. Krishņa was thin but extremely fast and nimble. He seemed to have inherited fast muscles from Devaki's side.

'Nanda arranged for the two brothers to go to the Āshrama every day along with other children. Krishṇa was nearly four years old and it was a good time for him to be formally initiated into learning. His upanayana sanskāra was done one day and he started going to the Āshrama.

'It was the beginning of third prahara of the day. Āchārya Swarupa Aangiras came visiting. Nanda welcomed him at the entrance and ushered him in with all due respects.

'Āchārya Swarupa took his asana.

"Where are the children, Nanda rāj? Why are you not sending them? They haven't come after the first two days".

'Nanda was astonished. "But they are going from here to the Āshrama every day. My trusted man Dharmakalpit escorts them to the Āshrama.

"Yes, Dharmakalpit comes every day, but not the children. I have asked Dharmakalpit also. He doesn't have a clue".

'Nanda was confused. He was chary of Krishna's security. What on earth was Dharmakalpit doing? Where are the children?

'Nanda saw off Āchārya Swarupa, and then himself got up to find out what the children were up to.

'As they came out of Nanda Upavan and turned towards the bigger conglomeration called Gokul, they saw Dharmakalpit coming towards them, running.

'Dharmakalpit was breathless. "What happened?", Nanda asked with alarm in his voice.

"They have killed someone on the banks of Yamunā", Dharmakalpit blurted out.

'All of them ran to the Yamunā.

'On the banks of Yamunā, they found a large sized man, almost of monstrous proportions, lying lifeless. He was wearing a strange costume. The children, seven of them, were busy playing a game of chase-me-if-you-can without paying it the least attention.

'They saw Nanda and paused their frolic. Krishna was the first one to realize that their truancy had been caught. Nanda, however, had that as the last thing on his mind. He was looking at the dead man.

"What is this, Balarāma"? He asked the eldest of the pack.

"Bābā, Krishṇa killed him by pushing him down from that big tree", said Balarāma.

'On a little more prodding, the truth came tumbling out. After the first two days, Krishna made a playful plan. He was asking a lot of questions in the Ashrama, which annoyed the younger teachers in whose care the boys had been put up. So he offered Dharmakalpit a potful of butter from his household if he would just double up for them in the Ashrama and make excuses, as they were not enjoying the lessons. Dharmakalpit fell for the bait. They found a convenient and lonely spot near the Yamunā banks, where they spent the next few days playing and enjoying. Dharmakalpit came to know when the senior Āchārya left for Nanda Upavan to enquire the whereabouts of the children. So he ran to inform them about the impending disaster. As he came to the clearing where he had left them in the morning, he found this huge man lying lifeless on a rock outcropping near the clearing. He ran to the boys who were nonchalantly busy with their games. When Dharmakalpit asked them about the dead body, they just casually told them that they had killed the man.

'On further enquiry, it was found that the man had come dressed as a crane. The large beak he wore, and the colourful costume he was wearing enchanted most of the boys. He was sitting on top of a large banyan tree. He wore this to attract the boys to the tree. His plan was perhaps to get them as close to the tree as possible, swoop down on them and carry away Krishṇa to kill him. Krishṇa was the first one to realize that the crane was not real. He told the boys to be careful. They watched him closely; till they were certain that this was a decoy. Balarāma was incensed and wanted to throw stones at the intruder. Krishṇa, however, had a different plan. The little four year old surreptitiously climbed up the tree, nimble and swift as he was, and pushed the giant from his perch. He fell down on a rocky outcropping, and was dead the minute his head hit the rock. Krishṇa climbed back and they resumed their play as if nothing had happened.

'All of Gokul celebrated by lighting of lamps. They had found out that the giant was none other than Baka, also called Bakāsura by the Mathurā residents. They also marveled at the presence of mind of the young Krishṇa. Many ascribed him with supernatural powers. Naṅda was, however, more particular about sending the children to the Āshrama from the next day. He got a band of four armed soldiers from the Vrishṇi collection of warriors assembled by Vasudeva in his cow farm. He also went to request Āchārya Swarupa personally to request that he should take personal care of the impish Krishṇa, as it was not an easy task to satisfy his humongous curiosity level. The boy had a certain spark that needed to be nurtured and contained'.





- 22 -

ASHRAMA and **PRANKS**

I t was getting well past the last prahara of the day, but Āchārya Chanḍakaushik was enjoying the discourse. Swarupa was his own initiate, who went to Prayāg at the Aangiras Āshrama. Guru Ghor Aangiras specially chose him for the Naṅda Upavan venture. He had an intuition that he was about to birth a genius. Āchārya Chanḍakuashika proudly announced that from this point onwards, he did not have second or third hand account, but first hand account of what happened in the Yādava land.

'Swarupa took Krishna under his wings. Right on day one, the little imp confronted him with some tough questions.

'Āchārya Swarupa asked Krishṇa, "What happened yesterday? People are saying you killed a demon. How did you do it"?

Four-year old Krishna stumped him with his answer. "Guruji, how can I kill anyone? Isn't it Lord Shiva who takes care of death and destruction? Ma was saying that if a man completes his time on this earth, Yamaraj comes and takes him away. Then how am I responsible for his death"?

'Swarupa's head started swimming. He had himself asked these questions, but not at the age of four. He remembered asking these questions when he was sixteen or seventeen. This indeed was a

precocious child. Moreover, he looked so innocent and charming that one scarcely associated such insightful questions with one so young.

'Swarupa had already been told by Nanda to take care of the inquisitive child, or it would be difficult to keep him away from his pranks. The child had boundless energy that needed to be channelized.

"That is a good observation, Krishna. It is true that Ishwar pervades every nook and cranny of this Universe. He is present in you, your Nandini cow, the trees, the rocks, the river and me. Yet, human beings are special as they have the faculty of Buddhi through which they can regulate and choose their actions. They can use their Buddhi to discover their Chitta and relate it to the Brahman within and without. Once you discover the connection, you will not die. If you have consciously killed someone, you are the killer; if you have killed someone to save your own life, you are the defender of your own Self, if you kill someone to protect others, and you are the protector. Please tell me which of this description fits you for yesterday's act"?

"Guruji, then I am the protector", chirped the little Krishna.

'Balarāma intervened in this discussion. "Krishņa killed him for fun. How is he the protector"?

'By this time, Āchārya Swarupa had sensed the direction of the discussion. He could already sense the spark in the child Krishṇa. "Krishṇa is right, Balarāma. If he had not pushed that monster down, he would have come near you and killed you all. No blame attaches to him as he did it to protect not only himself but to protect all of you. We know that all these asuras are from Bāṇasura's new adharmi cult, which believes in strange things, and is very cruel with women and children. Now, let us have some akshara gyān."

'Thus started the first formal lesson of the four-year old Krishṇa and eight-year old Balarāma. Four days a week, the boys would go to Āshrama for their lessons. After a few days, lessons diversified into yoga, and astra-shastra parichay. Balarāma loved wrestling. He was able to beat people many years older than him. Krishṇa, on the other hand, was an all-rounder. He possessed great grasping ability. He was a very quick mover, and could beat boys many years older than him

in running, jumping, and swordsmanship. He could maintain his body balance even after extreme twists, turns and jump actions. He challenged his gurubhais often to make him fall down by any method. By the time he was five, his fame as a boy with tiger's swiftness had spread far and wide. His speed impressed the gurus so much that they even named him Achyut – one who cannot be dislodged or felled.

'After Krishna turned five, he started going to graze his herd as a part of his vocational education. Four days a week was the schedule of lessons in the Āshrama, and the remaining three days would be spent in going to Madhuvan for grazing.

'Krishṇa had already created a ruckus once by releasing all the calves in the night. That was his protest against what he thought was injustice against the calves. He was against the slavery of Naṅda Upavan to Mathurā. His pranks had become legion and legend. When he started going to Madhuvan, it was found that the stock of butter started disappearing from most households. Gokul was a relatively prosperous community. Their prosperity was built up on the milk and the products they sold to Mathurā. Krishṇa was hearing tales of Kaṃsa's cruelty and injustice towards his praja every other day. The milk and products were being sold to the King's men. Krishṇa did not like the arrangement. Thefts of butter increased exponentially. Krishṇa was questioned by Yashodā, as the entire habitation suspected Krishna and his band of pranksters.

"Ma, how can I eat so much butter? Every morning, you send me to either the Madhuvan to graze the cows or to the Āshrama. Tell me, when do I get even the time"? Krishṇa put a counter question to Yashodā.

'Yashodā had no answer; after all, they had not caught him redhanded. Yashodā, though, was nearly sure that her Kānhā was the culprit. Mothers have the sixth sense. She could make out from the mischievous smile and the glint in his young boy's eyes that everything was not so straightforward.

'Yashodā advised women to hang the butter on a height. That was of no avail. They still found it either stolen, or the pot broken. Then one day, Krishṇa was found throwing stones and breaking the big clay pots of the gopis that they were carrying to the boats on the

Yamunā for transportation to Mathurā. They could not see him, but who else could do some mischief, except the little imp Krishna?

'Yashodā became even more observant of her Krishna. The little one was a genius in using her motherly instincts. He had learnt to sing and dance. His lilting voice had a cadence all its own. He knew when Yashodā was trying to observe him on the quiet. On such occasions, he would practice his dancing steps, and sing little songs to his favourite cows. He would importune his mother for butter and bread. He would complaint to her that she was feeding him raw milk on the pretext of making his hair grow. He would do it consciously, and even make little scenes when he needed to distract her.

'The young Kānhā knew very well how to make her mother's love overflow and cloud her judgment. One of his frequent teasing tricks was to refuse to eat and make impossible demands. He would demand the moon to play with. Poor Yashodā would bring some water in a thāli¹⁴⁸ and try and inveigle Kānhā with the reflection of moon. If Kānhā were in the mood to oblige, he would accept it, or would create a great ruckus. Yashodā was harassed with his tantrums and pranks, but enjoyed every bit of it. The sheer joy of dealing with the boy's brilliant stratagems each day was enough to fill Yashodā with unbounded joy.

'One day Krishna decided to put his anti-Mathurā project to implementation. After they left with the herd in the morning, Krishna persuaded Balarāma and others to change course to the Yamunā banks where the gopis would come to put their supplies on the boats. That day not one pitcher of milk could be loaded as the boys destroyed everything with their accurate stone pelting. Nanda was informed of the war being waged. Nanda had to himself reach the spot and catch the boys. They were produced before him in some kind of a trial.

'Nanda was livid with this show of defiance by this monkey brigade. He had been receiving complaints of their pranks but had shaken them off as little pranks, but this had crossed the limits.

"Who was the leader of this venture", thundered Nanda. All the boys turned their gaze towards the youngest of the pack, Krishna.

"Krishna, you led them into this. Are you mad? You are destroying livelihoods of these subjects of mine"? The answer floored Nanda.

"Bābā, why do you deprive your own people of nourishment to feed Kaṃsa's treasury? Why can't we first feed our people, and then take our own milk to Mathurā? Why do we fatten that monster Kaṃsa who only wants to crush us? These middlemen appointed by Kaṃsa take away our milk and products for cheap. Our people don't get enough milk, and calves go hungry. I want fairer business relationship with Mathurā".

"Nanda was agape. Was this a six-year-old boy? He was teaching him economic relationship logic. Yet, what he was saying was making perfect sense".

'Nanda called a meeting of all his counselors to have a discussion and in less than a week, they renegotiated the terms with Mathurā. Kaṃsa was incensed with the stoppage of supplies from Gokul, but Mathurā had no choice. Gokul catered to eighty percent of their supplies. Under the new deal, Gokul would land their supplies to Mathurā through their own boats, and charge new prices. The new arrangement improved all the vital areas Krishṇa had pointed out. He became an even bigger hero. The breaking of pitchers became a new monthly sport.

'Krishna was creating a legend around himself'.





<u>- 23 -</u>

AGHĀSURA and ARJUNA TREES

The flagging interest of Jarāsandha was amusing Āchārya Chanḍakaushika. Queen Saudamini and her daughters, the two widows of Kaṃsa were listening with rapt attention with more and more interest.

'Āchārya Swarupa caught hold of Krishṇa the day after his stone pelting had led to reforms in the business relationship between Mathurā and Gokul. He accosted Krishṇa, "What led you to think of such a measure, Achyuta"?

"Guruji, you only told me that all creation was manifestation of One Brahman. If that were so, why should humans exploit each other, and why should they exploit the animals that give them all the riches they possess.

'Krishṇa, you have a great sense of justice. We have already discussed that there is little difference between humans and animals except that additional faculty of Buddhi, through which we can discover our Chitta, is bestowed on us. All animals have their ahaṅkāra 149 as well as their manas 150. All plants have their sense of

perception and inanimate objects do not possess any of these but even they do comprise of their unique properties they get out of their kaṇa¹⁵¹ structure. Nothing in this universe is without its own purpose. Human being is at the highest pedestal as it can use its faculties to become one with universal consciousness. Everything in this universe is part of Rta, that cosmic consciousness, which the Vedas called properties of Rudra, the Shiva in us.

'Āchārya paused, thinking that the arsenal of Vedanta he fired on the little six-year old was too heavy for him.

'Krishna seemed to grasp whatever was being told to him. He asked a counter question, "Does that mean that your reality may not be my reality"?

'Āchārya was overjoyed. His own Guru had told him that the life of a teacher attains fulfillment when he gets a disciple more intelligent than him. He was sure that he was in possession of a disciple many times more perceptive and intelligent than him. He decided to introduce him to Pānini and Hiranyagarbha.

"Come Krishṇa. I will teach you something that I have not taught anyone till now. Āchārya Ghor Aangiras had told me that this vidyā¹⁵² should be given only to a deserving child. Vidyā is of many dimensions. One, which is to be given to all without discrimination; and the other specialized knowledge or vigyāna, which should be given only to the deserving. I think you deserve many of these specialized lessons. May Ishwar be kind to you".

'Krishṇa and all other children were being taught the kriyā yoga of yama, niyama, asana and praṇāyama as a course curriculum. Āchārya Swarupa introduced Krishṇa to Pratyāhāra, the first step of higher yoga, as a discipline of detaching oneself from the fruits of sensory perception. As a beginning, Swarupa told him to sit for fifteen minutes and watch his thoughts. "Don't try and shut out the thoughts. Let them flow. Just observe them. We will see how many of them remain with you after fifteen minutes". After fifteen minutes, he was to write down what he observed. Āchārya did not think that anybody could last fifteen minutes of awareness at such a young age in the first attempt.

'Krishna went into a deep state of self-observation right at the outset. Āchārya had to shake him up after thirty minutes, thinking that he had fallen asleep.

'That was not the case, however. Krishna was able to accurately describe most of what he had observed.

'Āchārya was amazed at the ability of the young precocious Krishṇa Kānhāiyā. He went into many hours of observational state without falling asleep. His self-awareness seemed to be a gift of Ishwar. Other children were busy playing other learning games. Krishṇa's grasping ability was of a much higher order. He was not only learning letters, numerals and combat, but was also becoming proficient in nritya¹⁵³, nāṭya¹⁵⁴ and sangeet¹⁵⁵. He was particularly good at playing the flute. He showed so much promise that Āchārya Swarupa sent for masters from Prayāg, who would come and teach him the fine arts and martial arts. Balarāma loved his wrestling sessions, but Krishṇa could learn in thirty minutes what the others would take many hours to learn.

'One day the boys were returning from guru Āshrama. One more friend of Bānakantaka, Agha, was sent in the disguise of a snake charmer to take out Krishna. The boys were getting back home with their guards trailing some distance. On the way, they saw a snake charmer sitting on the wayside, and a small crowd of villagers gathered there to watch the performance. He was playing the been $\frac{156}{1}$ and a King Cobra was swaying to its tune. The charmer had two baskets, one of which had a pair of King cobras on display. Unknown to everyone else, the other one had a small killer viper. The snake charmer had been doing a reconnaissance of the route and prey for over three weeks from a vantage point in the disguise of a Sadhu. He did not, however, reckon with the extraordinary observational ability of Krishna. He had a photographic memory. After having seen the Sadhu twice on their route, Krishna had observed him every time and his instincts had told him to be on guard against this Sadhu. For very nearly three weeks, he had seen this person on and off, lurking in the corners, tailing them at times, and being at the gate of the Ashrama at times in the guise of a mendicant. He also had an accomplice who

was also on the mental radar of Krishna's perceptive brain. This accomplice was hailing people to the snake charmer's performance.

'Krishna saw the accomplice, and was on his guard immediately. The other boys did not have a clue as they had hardly bothered to observe these characters. Their level of awareness was many notches below the natural ability of Kanhāiyā.

'The boys eagerly went in for the free entertainment on offer. Krishna stayed a step behind them. Agha saw the boys, but he was looking for his actual prey. Krishna was the youngest among them, so other children dwarfed him. He was staying back and observing Aghāsura from a space between Balarāma and Mansukhā, even as Subala, Gandharva and Vasanta pushed out right in front. The shy Ujjvala hung back with Kānhāiyā.

'Agha was looking for Krishna. He spotted him through an opening between Balarāma and Shridāmā, and kept trying various stratagems to somehow get Krishna out to the front. He did not succeed, and was getting increasingly frustrated. The observant Kānhāiyā could make out his frustration. His curiosity was centred on the second basket. He could make out a clear correlation between Agha looking at him and then looking at the other basket. He was trying to remember a lesson on snakes he was taught in the Āshrama. As dwellers of grazing lands and forests, it was very important for them to know about snakes. Then he saw Agha making a clear move to open the other basket. Agha was very skillful with snakes. He took out a small venomous viper from the other basket, held it by the tail a little away from him. Everyone thought it was a part of the entertainment. Then he looked at is accomplice who coaxed Krishna to come in the front. "Come on, little boy, come to the front to get a better view, come".

'Krishna came forward. As soon as he was a few feet away, Agha threw the viper at him. A nonchalant Krishna just swayed to his side, ducked below the path of the throw, caught the tail of the viper as it flew past and threw it right back at Aghāsura. It turned out that Agha was not even a tenth as nimble. The viper landed right on his face and burrowed its teeth in his face and delivered its load before slinking away into the woods.

Aghāsura was reeling on the ground the next moment. He was dead in less than five minutes.

The guards of Vasudeva woke up from their induced stupor. The legend of Krishna spread even more. Krishna was acquiring the reputation of a boy possessed of divine powers. Nanda was getting even more worried.

'On the grazing front, the stone pelting had stopped, but the theft of butter was going on exactly as before. Gopis and Gopalas were happy with Krishna. They were getting much better remuneration, and there was a lot of spare milk for their children, as well as for the calves. Happiness seemed to pervade the whole of Gokul, as also an oozing of affection and admiration for the young brat. There was also a feeling of awe towards Kānhāiyā. He did not wish this to become some kind of hero worship, so he resumed his pranks and playful filching, all the while maintaining a straight face. Complaints started rising once again. Yashodā was feeling harassed a great deal.

'The boys had a routine that they would move out with the cows on the three days they were supposed to go grazing, and come back after herding the cows to their grazing areas. They would then eat some stuff, waste double that and even feed the monkeys. Young Krishṇa would stand on the shoulders of the older ones and do most of the mischief.

'One day Krishna was caught red handed. He had just wandered into a house and had his hand into the butter pot when the house owner gopi walked in.

"Who are you and what are you doing here?" She asked.

'Quick witted Kanhaiya was swift in response, "I am Balarāma's brother, chāchi. I mistook your house for Balarāma's house. Sorry for the mistake".

"Most houses are identical, but not Rohini's. Even if I accept that excuse, what are yo doing with your hand in the pot", the gopi asked.

'There was no real answer to that. Kanhaiya's crime was out in the open. But you could never stump him. He had an answer ready even for this.

"Chāchi, my young she-calf has gone missing. I was just looking into the pot to check if she could have hidden there".

The reply was so implausible and funny that gopi's anger vanished. She doubled up with laughter. She caught him by the ear. "Naughty liar. Come, I will teach you how to locate calves in a butterpot".

She dragged him by his ear and called out Yashodā to the scene of crime. Krishṇa got a few hard slaps. Yashodā was already incensed because of the persistent complaints. She brought him to her house and tied him to a large wooden mortar, and tied his hands together with another rope. She thought that would be a good lesson to the young brat, and would mollify the Gopis as well. Little did she realize that the complaints of Gopis were not serious any more but were part of playacting? They were enjoying the playful frolics with the children.

'The moment Krishna sensed that mother was away; he took off with the wooden mortar tied to his belly. He dragged it slowly till he reached a spot a fair distance out of Nanda Bhavan. He saw two Arjuna trees standing there close to each other. He deliberately went between the trees. The mortar turned crosswise and got stuck between the trees.

'Krishna looked around. The trees were medium sized, and superficially rooted, as the Arjuna trees usually are. The ground was wet with recent rains. Krishna knew that he could not use strength to go through the trees. He went back close to the mortar, and lunged forward with speed. His speed was like lightning. Arjun trees' superficial root structure in a soaked ground was shaken up, and loosened out. Krishna tried it one more time, more roots got loosened. Finally, a third lunge brought the two trees down with a big noise.

'Two girls happened to be passing by, both around ten to twelve years of age. They witnessed the whole scene. They were amazed at the boy's prowess.

'The elder of the two could see that this was a deliberate mischief. She had seen the boy go back and forth. She was impressed by his speed, but the younger girl was full of concern and sympathy for the young boy. She ran to the scene and freed him from the mortar, and untied his hands. The elder one stood watching.

"Who are you? Why did you drag those two trees down? You could easily have dragged the mortar to the other side. You could easily have loosened the tied rope on the hands. Tell me what you were up to"?

'Krishna never had any hesitation in striking up a conversation. He gave her usual bewitching smile. "My name is Krishna. I was just trying my strength".

"Okay, Krishna dear. I am Rādhikā from Vrishabhānpur. So any particular reason you were trying out your strength"?

"I must find out the limits of my capacity, isn't it"? Chirped Krishna.

"Tell me your house. I must tell your mother what you were up to", said Rādhikā.

"Why do you want to do that? Don't you think we can strike a deal"? Krishna was at his crafty best.

'Rādhikā was laughing away at this young boy's presence of mind and wit. Her younger friend Lalitā was also smiling. "So, what's the deal on offer, dear friend?"





<u>- 24 -</u> RĀDHĀ RANI

A chārya Chanḍakaushika looked overwhelmed after the narration of the first meeting of Rādhā and Krishṇa. He went into a Samādhi avasthā for a while. As he came out of the trance, he had copious tears falling out of his eyes. He then wondered aloud at the great fortune of Swarupa. He also prayed to Lord Shiva to grant him his blessings to witness the wondrous deeds of Krishṇa himself. Even as Jarāsandha was getting incinerated, he started chanting, 'yatra gopeshwarah krishno, yatra Rādhā yogini; tatra muktir ānaṅdam, dhruvāpritirmatirmama 157.' Āchārya composed himself and resumed.

'Rādhā was amused by the innocence and quick thinking of the young boy. She took a liking to him instantly. "Ok, friend, tell me what is the deal"?

"Come closer, I will tell you", Kānhāiyā did some playacting. When Rādhā came close, he whispered in her ear, "I will not tell your bābā¹⁵⁸ and maiya¹⁵⁹ that you crossed the Yamunā without telling them".

"Rādhā was flabbergasted. They had come to Mathurā with their village group. They were from Vrishabhānpur. She was the daughter

of the village chief Vrishabhānu and quite independent minded. Rohiņi was her mother's cousin, and very fond of her. So the intrepid duo just slipped out and thought of making a quick trip to meet their favourite aunt. Not that it mattered because they always had that independence to do such route deviations on their own. Besides, Rādhā was herself an accomplished combatant, well versed in many martial arts and even swordsmanship. So her parents had sufficient confidence in her. Here was a seven year old boy trying to blackmail a twelve year old".

'Rādhā burst out laughing. "Ok, friend, that's a deal, but how do you know that we have not told our parents"?

'Kānhāiyā gave that captivating smile of his, spreading his charming sweetness. "It is simple. You are coming from Vrishabhānpur, so you have to have crossed Yamunā in Mathurā. If you had told your parents, they would have sent someone to tell the boatman, and a guest of Rohiņi Tai cannot come unaccompanied from the wharf".

"Rādhā was suitably impressed by the young boy's intellect. "Ok, friend, now that you have managed to catch us, would you please guide us to the place of Rohiņi aunty".

"Yes, by all means. Follow me this way".

'Krishṇa led them to Rohiṇi's big house. She was full of joy to see Rādhā and Lalitā. She hugged them and seated them. Then she noticed Krishṇa. "Oh, my Kānhāiyā has shown them the way". "Yes", said Rādhā. "He is such a naughty boy".

"Why, what happened? I hope he has not played any of his pranks on you two". Rohiṇi looked genuinely worried.

'Rādhā then related the incident of the Arjuna trees. Rohiņi was filled with anxiety; the two trees had a tale associated with them. She started wondering whether uprooting of the trees would bring bad omen to the village. Then she heard Yashodā calling her out from outside. Rohiņi went out. Yashodā was standing outside, looking mighty worried. "Have you seen Kānhāiyā anywhere, didi?"

'Rohiņi smiled expansively. Krishņa came and hid behind her, expecting a full spanking. Rādhā and Lalitā came out and did praṇām to Yashodā.

"This is Rādhikā, Yashodā; Vrishabhānu ji's daughter. She can tell you something about Kānhāiyā".

'Bubbly Rādhā immediately sought an assurance. "I will get you Kānhā, Yashodā chachi, but he has made us his friend, so please promise you will not give him a hiding".

'Yashodā was mighty relieved. She conceded the condition. Rādhā pulled Krishṇa out from behind Rohiṇi and produced him before Yashodā.

'Yashodā was deeply relieved from within, but she made a good show of being upset with Krishṇa.

'Kānhāiyā was a pastmaster in getting the affection of her mother flowing. He quickly moved to her, and caught the end of her sāri. "Maiya, I did not do anything. You had tied me up, so I was just trying to go round and round to free myself. I did not even realize that I had gone such a long distance. Yashodā shook her head in bemusement and clasped the young brat to her bosom. Rādhā and Lalitā burst out laughing. They narrated what they saw in copious detail, including the deals they made with each other.

'All of them stayed on in Rohiņi's house. They enjoyed a good meal even as Krishņa regaled them with tales of his exploits. After the meals, Rādhā and Lalitā sought permission to make a move. Rohiņi told Kānhā to see them off till the boat.

'The talkative and playful Kānhā kept a lively conversation going, asking all about Rādhikā and her friends, their teachers, pastimes, hobbies and even the names of their cows.

'The girls indulged him patronizingly. Rādhikā asked Krishņa, "Will you tell us something about yourself too?"

"I can tell you a lot about myself. Which facet of mine you want to know; at home, at Āshrama, or at the pasture"?

"Hmmm. Ok, tell me what you are at home"?

"I am a son, who is supposed to do naughty things to please my parents".

"And as a cowherd"? Asked the usually quiet Lalitā.

"As a cowherd, I please the cows by playing flute and entertain my friends by playing games with them and testing their prowess in various sports. We also play combat games to sharpen our defensive and attacking skills". 'This interested Rādhikā a good deal. "What astra and shastra can you wield at this young age, Kānhā dear"?

"Guruji has given us light wooden swords and spears to practice with. I can teach you also".

'Rādhā burst out laughing again. "Well, Krishṇa Kānhāiyā ji, I can defeat you in sword combat, do you know that"?

'Krishna was unfazed. "Friend, you may have learnt the skill of combat, but my style of combat is different. I win the combat by first defeating the other person in the mind. My Guru teaches me that if you are at the level of chitta, you can beat anyone with your mind alone. You cannot face me".

'Rādhikā had also been to Gargāchārya's gurukul before it shifted out of Mathurā, and there was a flourishing Āshrama in Vrishabhānpur. King Vrishabhānu laid great stress on education for all, including girls. Rādhā was a known combatant, who would take on boys much bigger her age and defeat them. She was also taught to win the combat in the mind first. But the boy seemed too young to have a thought process as advanced as that.

"Great, friend Krishna, so next time you be prepared to face off with me. I will beat you hollow. I beat all the boys in Vrishabhānpur".

"That is a challenge accepted sakhi¹⁶⁰. I will make a few concessions to you. After all, you are a girl, Krishṇa said mischievously".

"Rādhikā was enjoying the conversation. "Which part of me is the girl, Kānhā. Chitta, manas, ahaṅkāra or the buddhi, or just the body"? Rādhikā trumped Krishṇa. She had got the cue from Krishṇa mentioning chitta".

'Krishna put out his inimitable smile. He would do that when he needed to disarm someone. Nine times out of ten, the person in front would get so distracted by his charm that he could win the argument even without speaking a word. Rādhikā was not distracted.

"Trapped, Krishna? No answer"?

'Krishna came up with the most ingenious reply imaginable at his age. "Do not mix up your skill in swords with the result you will achieve. Someone who performs by staying at the level of his highest consciousness, or chitta, will win even if he seems to lose. Have you seen a fighter who fights for his life? How he fights? How he

concentrates? He does not see anything other than the opponent, his movements, and his flashing sword. You may be watching from only a few feet away, but he would not see you, sakhi. So be prepared to lose in any case".

'Rādhā was flummoxed for a moment, but she was equally sharp. Ok, yogiraj, what makes you think that you are the only one who has transcended your senses? Your kriyā¹⁶¹ is not always your karma¹⁶², do you know that''?

'It was now Krishṇa's turn to be stumped. Other than Āchārya Swarupa, it was the very first time he was getting a good and satisfactory reply to which he had no ready counter. He thought he had to get into his self-awareness mode to understand the import of what Rādhā had said.

"Hello, sakha¹⁶³, what happened"? Rādhā teased him.

"I think you are more intelligent than I thought you were. You can teach me a thing or two, sakhi".

"Yes, I can. You have to be rooted in your consciousness to know what you are doing, Kānhāiyā. Most of us are not much better than animals in that our senses rule us, not the other way round. When you call me sakhi, it can have many meanings, and relative meanings – one for me, another for you, and a third for Lalitā. *Knowing is not seeing*. Understand"?

'Krishna was listening intently, not understanding everything, but very impressed.

"When will you come here next"? Asked Krishna

"Your turn next, Kānhā. Between friends, there should be an equal give and take. I am inviting you to Vrishabhānpur. I have come here after many years, because crossing Yamunā is always a problem".

'They had reached the wharf. Rādhikā and Lalitā got into the boat after patting the cheeks of the charming little intelligent boy'.





<u>- 25 -</u> Vrindāvan

A chārya Chanḍakaushika continued the narration.

'The boys-company was in the Āshrama the next day. In Naṅda Bhavan, the village elders had requisitioned a meeting.

'Āchārya Swarupa put the boys through their kriyā yoga routine, then put Krishṇa through his Pratyāhāra routine- the first step of the higher yoga sādhanā. Krishṇa was taken out of his meditational posture after about an hour. Āchārya had summoned him.

"Come, Krishna, tell me what happened yesterday? You uprooted those two old Arjuna trees yesterday. There is a legend associated with those trees. Did you know that"?

"No, Guruji. I did not know about that", said Krishna.

"The villagers believe, rightly or wrongly, that those two trees were the protector angels of the village. That those trees were fallen devatās, ¹⁶⁴ and you redeemed them yesterday. Did you hear about that"?

"No, Guruji. How can that be even true"?

"But why did you think of uprooting those trees. Why did such a thought even cross your mind"?

"I had heard my friend talk about that. So I just wanted to check out the veracity of those beliefs".

"Kānhāiyā, there are thousands of beliefs which have no basis in reality. How will you check all of them"?

"Guruji, if we are able to find the true nature of our own Self and relate it to its manifestation in others, won't it be possible for us to know? Someone told me yesterday that knowing is not seeing. Seeing knows automatically, but is seeing also true knowledge? If the Supreme permeates every being, why does he not establish a way for them to communicate in total intimacy? Guruji, what I did yesterday was a conscious kriyā, so it was Karma. How will that affect me"?

"Krishṇa, you are asking questions that even I have not had the courage to ask my Guru yet. I think you will very soon outgrow me, and require a great Rishi to teach you. All I can tell you is that conscious kriyā is Karma alright, but if you concentrate on the process rather than the result, that kriyā becomes your conscious but nishkāma¹⁶⁵ karma. Then your Karma does not bind you. The whole world is seeking to tie itself up with newer and newer ropes. Knowing is seeing if you see the Truth, Kānhāiyā. Whoever told you about 'knowing is seeing' was not talking about your sense of sight and vision".

"That is right, Gurudeva", Krishna perked up. "What I did yesterday did have a conscious purpose of testing the belief of Gokul residents, but I was not thinking of the result. I dedicated myself to the process, as I could best understand. That it has brought forth such a churning is good for all of us".

'There was a meeting going on at the Nanda Bhavan. The topic of the meeting was predictably the uprooting of the Arjuna trees that were considered as the guardians of Gokul. Paṇipāda, one of the elders of Gokul, initiated the discussion. "Nandaraj, these two trees were regarded as the sons of Kubera and they brought us all our prosperity and wealth. Gokul has been the richest area, richer even than Mathurā, because we had the blessings of Kubera. The uprooting of these trees, which have been known for centuries as Nalakuvara and Maṇigriva, worshipped every year at the time of Deepavali by all the families, is a very bad omen. This has been preceded by attack by a number of Asuras. I can recall at least five such attacks. All attacks were directed on Krishna. I think this place is no longer safe for us. We are cowherds. We should not remain attached to a place for long,

but we have resided in Gokul for many centuries, yet always ready to move. I think the time has come that we should shift out of this place. Rightly or wrongly, Kaṃsa thinks that the young Krishṇa would be the cause of his death. We should go to a safer area".

'The proposal was seconded by UpaNanda, and after him by almost everyone present. Even Nanda had been very worried about the spate of attacks on Krishna. He had been secretly wishing to move to a safer place. Gokul was right across Mathurā. In the leaner months, anyone could just wade across Yamunā to Gokul. There was no natural defence available. Even though the Vrishnis supplied troops to Mathurā under their federated arrangement, he knew very well that if Kamsa ever lost his head and attacked Gokul, they would not have even an hour to save themselves. He immediately proposed appointment of a committee to find a new place to relocate. Paṇipāda proposed that they also consult Āchārya Swarupa for the purpose. The gathering made way to the Āshrama under Nanda Mahārāj.

'When the group reached the Āshrama, they found the Āchārya engrossed in a conversation with the little Krishṇa. They even caught the last bit of their conversation. Āchārya saw Naṅda Mahārāj and came out to greet him. He motioned to Krishṇa to go and be with the other boys of his group.

'As was customary, Nanda was given a higher platform to sit at par with the Āchārya. All others sat on the ground.

'Nanda opened the conversation, "Āchārya, there has been a very bad omen in Gokul".

'Āchārya smiled and added helpfully, "you are perhaps referring to the Yamala-Arjuna trees".

"Yes, Āchārya, I heard you talking about it to Krishṇa. Perhaps you think that we are being superstitious".

"Naṅdarāj, you are a fortunate man. Your child is going to be a world figure, have no doubt about that. He is not just a Kṣhatriya in that he protects his people and fights injustice. He also pursues excellence like a Brāhmaṇa. I found out from him. *This is a conscious attack by Krishṇa on your superstition*. You have been in the Gargāchārya gurukul. Only you can understand him".

'Nanda understood that the conversation was taking a very different direction, so he quickly changed the topic.

"Āchārya, there have been too many attacks on Gokul in the past few years. The unanimous opinion of all of us, and also our women, is that Gokul is too close to Mathurā. Even though there is the Yamunā in between, it is very easy to move across and attack us. Bāṇāsura's Kuṭil Dharma followers have been attacking us and trying to kill Krishṇa. We think we should shift to a safer place, which has more grazing area, and also some natural defences", said Naṅda.

'Āchārya readily agreed to the proposal.

'A committee was formed to look for a suitable place that would retain the advantages of commerce with Mathurā, and distance with natural defences. After a few months of research and travelling around Brij, the elders settled on Vrindāvan, a clearing within a well-forested area located at a distance of about a yojana (12 kms) from Mathurā on the other side of Yamunā from Gokul. The milk trade could carry on through Yamunā, and would have the additional advantage of a land route as well.

'The boys were also enthused about going to a new place. Rohiṇi was not very enthusiastic about shifting, as Gokul was the original place of Vasudeva. Nanda went and met Vasudeva to obtain his consent. Vasudeva understood the rationale and readily agreed to the proposal. So the stage was set.

'Exactly six months after the Arjuna trees uprooting incident, on the day after Phālguni Pūrṇimā, the day of Holikā, entire Gokul set off to Vrindāvan. Yamunā was at its lowest ebb, and there was a wide spread of Yamunā where the carts would be able to cross through shallow waters and easy current. The movement was completed in about twelve hours, with a few to and fro trips by the bullock carts.

'Krishna and his friends were the first to reach Vrindavan. They marked out their games spots. They found many convenient clearings within the nearby forests, and also on the hillocks close by. At about one yojana, there was a useful trek up the Govardhana Hills, which Krishna particularly liked.

'Life in Vrindāvan was new, fresh and exciting. Āchārya Swarupa also shifted to Vrindāvan. Krishṇa also looked forward to meeting his

friend Rādhikā, whose village Vrishabhānpur was less than three yojanas - on the other side of Govardhana hills.'

Āchārya Chanḍakaushika wound up the day to the great relief of Jarāsandha. Āchārya was smiling. Two more days, Mahārāj, and the lessons will be complete. After that, you can take a decision whether you want to take on this adolescent boy or not. I am grateful to you that because of you I have this fortunate task of being a raconteur of this great tale. Let me tell you this again – yatra gopeshwarahkrishno, yatra Rādhā yogini; tatra muktirānandam, dhruvāpritirmatirmama.



PART IV





<u>- 26 -</u> Fury

Younger brother Kanka was the only one present. His face was blood red. Kanka had just brought him the news that entire Gokul had shifted to Vrindāvan, where they had built defences. He also brought the news that almost the entire youth of Vrindāvan was now being compulsorily trained in hand and weapon combat. Kanka also told Kansa that Balarāma, the son of Rohini had become a well-accomplished combatant at the age of twelve, and the eight-year-old Krishna was being taught use of astra weapons by a trainer from Hastināpur.

Kaṃsa was wringing his hand, as if he had just lost something valuable. His expeditions to Gokul had failed every time, but he ascribed them more to the bad luck and incompetence of the persons who undertook the job. He was losing faith in Bāṇakanṭaka's ability to take out Krishṇa. He still retained his liking for him for his ability to terrorise the people of Mathurā and to entertain his loins with a new young woman every day. He had abstained from these pastimes for a few years under the influence and advice of Anantagupta, but as soon as his health returned to its pink, he was back in the grip of

Bāṇakanṭaka. After Pūtanā's death, he had taken seriously ill. That was the little time he had abstained from evil pastimes.

Kaṅka kicked the ground with disgust. 'Brother, I have always told you to stay clear of Bāṇa. His reputation is so bad among the Maathurs 166 that he is earning you enemies by the hour. His savage cult is becoming more and more reckless. Till now, it was the lay public that bore the brunt of his atrocities. Now, he has started threatening Yādava elites as well. Unless you control him, you would have a full revolt facing you. Moreover, even Maagadh 167 commanders cannot countenance his temple breaking activity. If the Maagadh turn against you tomorrow, at least I am not going to be surprised.'

Kamsa was taking all this in, but his mind was elsewhere. Kroorasena had been temporarily out of favour, but Kamsa was getting increasingly jittery with all the news floating in from Gokul and Vrindavan. He was hearing about the exploits of young Krishna in highly adulatory terms. That was causing him even more worry. All his expeditions, full five of them, had failed. Even worse was the fact that his subjects had come to know about them, and attributed the failures to a divine power residing in Krishna. Even if the cowherd was not the eighth son of Devaki, and what Kroorasena predicted was all balderdash, this legend being woven around him would make him a natural leader of resistance against him. As a matter of fact, Kamsa was quite sure that Kroorasena was responsible to a great extent for creating this halo around Krishna. He had thought of invading Gokul and wrenching the boy away and killing him after Aghāsura's failure. Now the shift to Vrindavan made it much more complicated. He had to simply drop the idea, and concentrate more on preventing Krishna from becoming a natural leader of a future popular resistance.

Kaṃsa shouted at the top of his voice, 'Call that idiot Bāṇakanṭaka.'

Kanka remained rooted to his perch. Kansa continued pacing up and down.

In a matter of about half an hour, Bāṇakanṭaka was ushered into Kamsa's presence.

Bāṇakanṭaka could sense an angry, almost blindly raging Kaṃsa. He made his obeisance and sat down. Kaṃsa remained standing and towered over both Kaṅka and Bānakantaka.

'Bāṇa, you have turned out to be totally incompetent. Not only have you failed to eliminate Devaki's eighth child, your blundering attempts have invested that little shrink with a halo. You and your spies are fattening on the blood and wealth of Maathurs, and you could not even detect that those Nanda's cowherd escaped to Vrindāvan. Now, they have made blessed defences and secured the entire territory up to Govardhana. I am going to take your head off your shoulder; bloody incompetent swine.'

Bāṇa was parlaysed with fear. He had never seen Kaṃsa so incensed. He was red in face, frothing at the mouth, and his hand on the grip of his sword, taking the blade out and sheathing it back again and again. Bāṇa's throat was dry, his spittle became thick. Bāṇa was not sure what Kaṃsa would do next. So he decided to play on Kaṃsa's insecurities again.

'Mahārāj, my head is yours today and forever. I admit my failure in eliminating Krishṇa, but My Lord should consider what Kroorasena has been saying of late', said Bāṇakanṭaka.

Kaṃsa was dismissive, but curious at the same time. Kroorasena had lost much of Kaṃsa's favour over the last few years. He had not even been granted an audience in the last two years, but Bāṇakanṭaka deliberately played up his name to bring back Kaṃsa's insecurities.

Kamsa asked, 'what is that idiot saying? He is up to no good anyway.' All the while trying to look unconcerned.

Bāṇa saw the opening. He sought permission and called for Kroorasena. He was produced in a matter of minutes, as if he knew he would be called.

Kaṃsa saw Kroorasena, made a face, and said, 'what new lie does this vermin want to spout?'

Kroorasena did his obeisance and asked for forgiveness. 'Mahārāj, even astrologers have their bad periods. When malefics rule their horoscopes, their predictions may go off a little, but not by much. I had correctly predicted that Devaki's eighth child would be your Kaal. Now I am sure that Nanda and Yashodā's son Krishna is that

eighth child. I have also found out that whole of Mathurā believes that he is the incarnation of Vishņu, and it is not possible for us to end his abode on this earth by ordinary means. We have to get the help of some people with supernatural powers.'

Kaṃsa looked worried. Bāṇakanṭaka was standing before Kaṃsa with bowed head, but looking at him with corner of his eyes. He could see the change in Kaṃsa's complexion. The red of his face slowly gave way to yellow. Kaṃsa sat down with his head in his hands.

'What on earth is going on?' Kaṃsa shouted at the top of his voice. 'Call Prasādānaṅda, the Rājpurohit.'

'Mahārāj, no Sanātana Dharma will assist you now. In any case, this Rājpurohit is a salaried employee. Will you take a risk with a salaried employee? This news has spread everywhere that Krishṇa is an avatār of Vishṇu. You know these Sanātanis. They are big fanatics. Not only will they not help you, they will spread the word everywhere, and spread disaffection among the public.'

It struck Kaṃsa. In his state of high dudgeon and heightened anxiety, his decision-making had become fitful. He immediately dropped the idea of calling the Rājpurohit. He badly wanted to seek the wise counsel of Rishi Gargāchārya. He knew that the Rishi had forsaken him. He remembered Anantagupta, the only other person who had the courage to give him fearless counsel. He shouted instructions to bring Anantagupta to him.

Unknown to Kaṃsa, one of Bāṇa's spies had already met Anantagupta an hour back. As soon as Bāṇa received summons from Kaṃsa, he wanted to make sure that summons to Anantagupta would not neutralise his advice. It had happened so often in the past that he wanted to fully guard against it.

Anantagupta was already badly disaffected. His duty kept him in Mathurā. He had wanted to migrate to Pānchāla Āshrama of Gargāchārya for long. The spy told Anantagupta that Kaṃsa wanted to imprison him for his views. He was also told that he had very little time to escape. The spy Karshak offered help in quickly relocating Anantagupta. In a matter of an hour, Anantagupta had crossed Yamunā towards Pānchāla.

Kaṃsa's guard came back to bring him the bad news that Anantagupta was no longer in Mathurā. Kaṃsa was crestfallen. In times of great trial and tribulation, Anantagupta had always given him correct counsel. Bāṇakanṭaka made a great show of disappointment. Even offered to chase him and bring him back wherever he might be. Kaṃsa was in too much of a muddle to tell anything to anyone. Bāṇakanṭaka had Kaṃsa exactly as he wanted him to be - as a mental vegetable. Kaṃsa asked everyone to exit and called for the queens.

The two queens were equally surprised to get a call-up from Kaṃsa. Usually, they were the ones who would call Kaṃsa over at the time of festivals, or at times when they felt that they must keep a claim on their conjugal rights intact. This call-up to the royal chambers was unprecedented. Everyone knew that Kaṃsa used his royal chambers in the nights for his own brand of reward and punishment. He used to give shayya-danḍ to women who defied him. To those women who managed to please him, he would award shayya-puraskār 169. Either way, it was a place for extreme debauchery.

Kaṃsa, for the first time in his life, conferred with the two sisters – Asti and Prāpti. Asti was rather weak in matters of State, but Prāpti was very sharp. She told Kaṃsa that she had heard that public was very badly oppressed. She also said that Rājdharma mandated that King's conduct should be exemplary. She advised Kaṃsa to convene Sudharmā Sabhā and discuss these issues there. She also advised the King to get rid of selfish people around him, and advance people like Anantagupta, Vasudeva and Viprathu who would give him fearless advice. When the queens left, Kaṃsa was even more dejected and confused.

Immediately after the queens left, Bāṇakanṭaka entered the chambers with somarasa and a gaṇikā¹⁷⁰ to liven up the King's mood. Both were Kaṃsa's weaknesses. In his muddled state, he found these two activities as a good prop and immersed himself in these two.

When Kaṃsa got up in the second prahara of next day, Bāṇakanṭaka had all the bases covered. He brought in Kroorasena again. Kaṃsa had been softened up enough to give an audience to Kroorasena.

Kroorasena dwelt on the futility of appeasing the Mathurā public, 'Mahārāj, the public is totally in the grip of Krishṇa fever. When the public mind is imbued with such hatred for the King, you need something drastic to change the narrative. Without controlling the narrative, you can't get the public on your side. The counter narrative needs to be strong enough to smother the present euphoria of Sanātani euphoria. You ought to think of equally radical solutions.'

Kaṃsa heard Kroorasena with rapt attention, for once. Kaṃsa held his power and throne very dear -dearer than his life. Kroorasena's words were sounding like music to him.

'What do you suggest, Kroora?'

Use of Kroora instead of Kroorasena was not lost on either Kroorasena or Bāṇakanṭaka. They exchanged understanding glances.

Kroorasena deliberately delayed giving an answer. Kaṃsa grew impatient. 'Kroorasena, I am talking to you.'

Kroorasena drew a deep breath. 'Mahārāj, I think we must consult Kuṭil Muni, who is residing close by in Khānḍavaprastha. I think we have to thank the almighty that a great man is on hand to advise us', he deliberately left the rest of the sentence hanging.

Kaṃsa sighed and looked at Bāṇakanṭaka. 'Okay, get Kuṭil Muni in.'





<u>- 27 -</u> TUTORIAL

Bāṇakanṭaka just needed an excuse. He had already sent emissaries to Kuṭil Muni in Khānḍavaprastha where he was living under the extreme discipline of the Nāgas, not able to preach anything beyond battle tactics and war strategies. Much as he tried to win some people over to his cult, Maṇimālā would frequently disrupt his subversive activities, to the extent of physically roughing him up at times. Takshak had come to the conclusion that they had extracted whatever they had to from Kuṭil Muni. Takshak wanted to throw him into the Yamunā snake pit to feed his favourite snakes. It was at such a time that an irresistible offer from Bāṇakanṭaka made him give up Kuṭil Muni. One mound of gold coins on offer was a great hoard to let go for someone as useless as Kuṭil Muni, as far as he was concerned. Vāsuki was also in agreement.

So Bāṇakanṭaka was able to extricate Kuṭil Muni and had him brought to Mathurā within three days of Kaṃsa's permission.

Bāṇakanṭaka housed Kuṭil Muni in his own quarter. After many years, Kuṭil Muni felt at ease. He was able to move about freely. He was able to offer his prayers three times a day. He could now flaunt his wooden Reverse Swastika openly. In Khānḍavaprastha, he was

not even able to do his prayers properly. Maṇimālā's female agents were always lurking. They were so fierce that they would give a beating to Kuṭil Muni whenever they felt he was crossing the line.

Kuṭil Muni had kept in touch with Bāṇakanṭaka throughout. He was aware of his vicissitudes in the Mathurā Court. He was aware that Bāṇa's star was in the ascendant right now. So he made a big show of the Kuṭil Dharma cult at Bāṇa's house. He had a large Vilom¹⁷¹ Swastika sign put up at Bāṇa's house. He let go of his suppressed sexual urges by choosing from the endless supply of Bāṇa's concubines. Kuṭil Muni floated in an endless ocean of pleasure and sensuality for nearly a week before Bāṇa set up his meeting with Kaṃsa. He created such an aura of Kuṭil Muni before Kamsa that Kamsa himself came to see him.

Bāṇakanṭaka did a complete dramatic performance in the honour of his guru. Kaṃsa was made to wait a full hour. He was told that Kuṭil Muni was carrying out his ablutions and prayers, whereas he was frolicking with a new concubine brought from Pānchāla, enjoying ever-new positions prescribed in the erotic poetry found in Āryāvarta. He granted audience to Kaṃsa exactly at noon.

As Kaṃsa came into the presence of Kuṭil Muni, he was greeted by a one-finger salute by him. He saw a very ordinary man; fair of complexion but obese and of a medium height. He possessed a very ugly face with two front upper teeth missing. He saw no radiance of the kind he had always associated with men of spiritual accomplishments. Instead, Kaṃsa could only see a puffed up face he associated with excessive drinking and debauchery. Kaṃsa was a trifle disappointed, yet he began to prostrate before Kuṭil Muni.

Kuṭil Muni shouted at the top of his voice, 'Paapam, paapam, ghor paapam; what are you doing? Do not prostrate before any human being. I am but a human being. I am just a Regent of Jhaṅkāl, the great Creator of this earth, this universe, you and this animal kingdom, this plant kingdom, me. All these are created by Jhaṅkāl for humans to enjoy while they are on this earth, and thence to rest in peace till the Day of Last Reckoning in preparation of a retirement into a physical heaven full of nectar and honey and fruits and wines. Jhaṅkāl will decide each one's fate on that day and destroy this earth

and universe, so that you either enjoy heaven for eternity or burn in hellfire for eternity. So do not prostrate before me, but before Jhaṅkāl. Jai Jhaṅkāl. Repeat after me exactly like I do'.

Kuṭil Muni lifted his left hand fist straight in front of him, bent his head down, closed his eyes and shouted 'Jai Jhaṅkāl'.

Kaṃsa followed him in exactly the same manner. Clenched his left fist, bent his head, closed his eyes, raised his fist level with his eyes and shouted, 'Jai Jhaṅkāl'.

Kutil Muni hugged Kamsa in a tight embrace. 'Kamsa, you are indeed fortunate that Jhankal has considered you worthy of consideration. Now you have to do a Pralaya Mantra recitation along with your wives to fully surrender yourself to Jhankal, his revealed mantras in Pralaya Shāstra and take a vow to destroy Sanātana Dharma. I am aware of your enemy Krishna. You will never be able to kill him by using the methodology of Sanātanis. These tactics and strategies are available only to the students of Pralaya Shāstra. You must realize that Kutil Dharma is irreconcilable with any other system. Our system is one of domination over our subjects through force-feeding our religion to the subjects. After the praja has digested the religion imposed by us, it is easy to indoctrinate them. Every step of indoctrination leads to identification of the King with Jhankāl. Once the indoctrination is complete, the public treats King as the agent of Jhankal on earth. Sanatana Dharma treats King as servant of Dharma, and servant of the public by extension. In a gaṇatantra¹⁷³ like Mathurā, it is even worse'.

'But Mathurā is not a gaṇatantra, Munivar. I am the absolute ruler of Mathurā', interjected Kaṃsa.

'That's what you think, Kaṃsa. You have not a single trapping of a ruler. People live in fear of you as a person, but they consider you to be an adharmi. A ruler cannot rule through fear alone. If this fear of Kaṃsa were to be replaced by the fear of the unknown, then what?' Asked Kuṭil Muni.

Kamsa was impressed with the narration. He was always worried with the threat of rebellion from the Yādava chieftains. It was only the Magadha soldiery that he could have implicit faith in. Yet the King of Magadha was one of the greatest Shiva devotees in

Jambudweepa¹⁷⁴. To even broach the subject to the Magadha princesses, his two queens, would require not just diplomatic skills, but the utmost care too. If Jarāsandha disowned him as a Manḍaleshwara, the Yādava chieftains would take care of him in no time. He had no faith even in his Senāpati Pradyot. Satyajit, Sātyaka, Prasenjit were all great warriors but if they saw a chance for the triumph of Dharma, they would desert him in a minute in the same way they had deserted Ugrasena. They were not deeply wedded to Dharma, but given a chance, would definitely prefer it to Kaṃsa. Kaṃsa knew that. He was not able to decide how he would reconcile the irreconcilable between Jarāsandha and Kuṭil Muni. Besides, Kuṭil Muni would not give the classical choices available in Sanātana Dharma, where each member of the family could follow a different path.

'Look, Kamsa. We will convert your entire public for you. It may involve some atrocities, a little brutality, some demolishing of temples, and brainwashing of women. Women are the biggest impediment to the march of new ideas. So we will have to have a special strategy for women. We will work on the insecurity of Sanātani women about their chastity. So we will violate them so that they cannot go back to their families, and others see that example. This will make us build pressure on their menfolk to gravitate towards Kutil Dharma.'

'Secondly, I need some prominent targets. Bāṇakanṭaka is an old disciple, but all he can show for his 15-20 years with you is about 50-60 people who are there not because of conviction, but because of goodies they can get as riches or rape property. This is very shallow. I need to convert one of your prominent elite to Kuṭil Dharma.'

Kaṃsa interjected. 'How will you convince these people? They are highly advanced in logic and spiritualism. How can we convince them that there is a Creator who has created this earth for their enjoyment alone? They have highly developed concepts of harmony with animal and plant nature. How will you explain flat earth to them, when Vishṇu's Koormavatāra is supposed to have pushed the globe of earth out of the cosmic ocean to its present operational field?

These are people with highly developed sense of cosmology, astronomy, spirituality and occult?'

Kuțil Muni looked irritated. 'Look, Kamsa. It is your fault that you allowed these people to be educated. They should only be given the education that would keep them compliant. Your system of Gurukulas is the problem. It encourages people to have critical thinking. Critical thinking promotes independence and independence cannot be handled by a person like you. You need blind obedience, Kamsa; blind obedience. Kill all independent minded intellectuals. Be ruthless. Get rid of Sanātana Dharma; establish Kutil Dharma in Mathurā Rājya. Once you establish it and spread it among your soldiers, they would become so ruthless and result oriented that you would never lose a battle, not just war. All these silly codes of battles are mere obstacles. Our Kuțil armies know only one way – victory and terror. Imposing total submission is our holy goal. You are so lucky Kaṃsa that Jhaṅkāl has chosen you as the Maryādā Purusha 175 of Pralaya Shāstra. You take your lessons in Pralaya Shāstra theology for a month. After that, you will have no difficulty", said Kutil Muni.

'Every victory needs a narrative, Kamsa.'





<u>- 28 -</u> MESSAGE

ext day, Kaṃsa reached Bāṇakanṭaka's quarters at around noontime for his first tutorial on Kuṭil Dharma.

Kuṭil Muni took Kaṃsa to his inner chambers, where there was a large wooden Vilom Swastika on a raised platform, with incense sticks and camphor globules burning below it on the platform. Kuṭil Muni kneeled before the Swastika, took a posture of Siddhāsana. Kaṃsa was too big to sit in that posture, he was told to sit in ardha siddhāsana. Kuṭil Muni recited the Pralaya Mantra, his prayer, in honour of Jhaṅkāl:

'Jai Jhaṅkālam jai Jhaṅkālam, jai Jhaṅkālam namo namah; ekam tvamasi ekam tvamastu saṃsārasya kāraṇam; Jai Jhaṅkālam jai Jhaṅkālam jai Jhaṅkālam namo namah.'

He repeated it three times and then did a dandavata or full prostration in front of the Vilom Swastika.

He got up and sat in the siddhāsana posture again. He then asked Kaṃsa to follow what he did. He explained to him, 'Look, Kaṃsa, you are not yet initiated into Kuṭil Dharma. Our practice is to normally initiate the whole family together. In your case, it is even more important because you are almost like a vassal of your father-in-

law, so till you and your family are formally initiated, you will only be allowed to do this little ritual.'

Kaṃsa followed Kuṭil Muni in shouting Jai Jhaṅkāl three times, and the tutorial began. Kuṭil Muni continued sitting in siddhāsan, but gave the option of sitting in any posture to Kaṃsa, who promptly switched to sukhāsana.

'First lesson, Kaṃsa', began Kuṭil Muni. 'This world is created by Jhaṅkāl the Creator for the enjoyment of human beings. He created the world out of nothing. He created the first two human beings, one male and the other female. Their names were Manu and Shatrūpa. They copulated without permission, and were cursed by Jhaṅkāl. When they asked for forgiveness, they were commanded by Jhaṅkāl and told to preach Pralaya Shāstra and convert the whole world to Kutil Dharma.'

'Lesson Two: Pralaya Mantra is the highest prayer. Every person, male or female has to ideally recite the Pralaya Mantra three times a day, at dawn, noon and dusk in the proper manner as demonstrated by me. However, even two times is acceptable. This binds the person to Pralaya Shāstra and through Pralaya Shāstra to Kuṭil Dharma. The highest duty of a person is to remain tightly wedded to Pralaya Shāstra and do what the agent of Jhaṅkāl asks him to do. If he is able to perform this duty well, he goes to heaven, and if he does not he goes to eternal hellfire.

'Lesson three: after a man dies, he remains in quiescence till the time of Pralaya, and Jhankāl will appear on the day of Pralaya, and assign everyone his or her place in hell or heaven. Those who do not follow Kuṭil Dharma will all go into hellfire for eternity, whatever their merit. Morality in Kuṭil Dharma is not borne on Karma, but on how well you follow the Pralaya Shāstra. Everything is fair in the cause of advancing Kuṭil Dharma and Pralaya Shāstra.

'Lesson four: There are seven basic duties for a Kuṭil Dharmi, namely, Faith in Jhaṅkāl, faith in Pralaya Shāstra and Vilom Swastika, faith in Jhaṅkāl's agent on earth, prayer, procreation, women's subservience to men, and charity for Kuṭil Dharmi.

Kamsa was getting restless. He interjected at this point.

'Munivar¹⁷⁶, I can see the sense in what you are preaching, but how do you get a public to embrace blind faith. These people have been learning for thousands of years to look inwards and find God within, and not take the word of sages for granted unless corroborated. If we ask them to suspend their judgment and believe without questioning, I doubt if they would be impressed.'

'Kamsa, don't be a wimp. You are the King. It is your job to force your public by using every stratagem. Imagine how secure you would be if your entire public believed that there was a Creator by the name of Jhankāl, having a universal symbol and having the power to punish and reward people. Imagine what your power would be if you are designated as Jhankal's agent on earth. After that, the religious and State power would be combined in you, and public would not only have to follow the commandments of the King, but also have to follow the edicts of the religious head. Use everything at your command – reconciliation, blandishments, punishments, subversion 177 – everything is fair in statecraft. A political religion is the best firewall against disobedience by public. This is the pragmatic aspect of Kutil Dharma. This name Kutil Dharma is deliberately given this pungent flavor. People should fear religion. Sanātana Dharma does not have this fear element. That is the reason the public can pass moral judgments of right and wrong. What the Book says is right is right, and what the Book says is wrong is wrong.' Kutil Muni paused to take a long breath.

He continued, 'Never give this liberty to Rishis or purohits or the public to look for moral judgments within oneself. Moral is that which the Book says is moral. Kuṭil Dharma is about brainwashing the public. Eliminate diversity and plurality with One Symbol, One Prayer, One Book, One finger-salute and One Jhaṅkāl. Never propagate "ekam sadviprā bahudhā vadaṅti", but "ekam sat, tat Jhaṅkālah". Besides, Jhaṅkāl has prescribed a very strict set of punishments. He has also made me, the Jhaṅkālputra 178, the final arbiter of all that passes in this world. You are lucky, Kaṃsa, to be under my direct tutelage. After I am gone, you will be designated as the Jhaṅkālpautra and will rule the world in His name. Imagine the

power. You will not require Magadha army after that. All you need to do is to surrender your brains to me.'

'Besides', continued Kutil Muni, 'Kutil Dharma presents a clear hierarchy. Women are slaves of men. They are born to do the men's biddings. The women keep most of the Sanātana Dharma alive. In Kuțil Dharma, we do not grant such a position to women. The job a woman is to surrender her brains to her father, husband, or the son; as the case may be. Her job is to bear children and nurture them for the family line to continue. She cannot have any independent existence. Once you are able to put this in the head of the women, you are safe forever. You have to ingrain helplessness among your women. All this business of Mother Nature, Shakti and Shiva, female deities, is deplorable. Jhankal has personally given me the message that He created women for enjoyment of men, and for continuing the family line. Their position is above animals, but below men. So you should be able to force your queens to do your bidding. Woman has no right to family property. She is herself a property. Can you pull your queens by the hair and bring them to me for initiation tomorrow? You are a powerful King.' Kutil Muni gave a wicked smile while throwing this challenge to Kamsa.

Kaṃsa was feeling very uneasy. On the one hand, there was this great prospect of ruling his subjects with full force of both religion and royalty; yet on the other hand he was finding himself very uncomfortable with the idea of making women his slaves. Not only a woman enjoyed a high position in Sanātana Dharma, but she also had an inalienable position in all prayers, rituals, and yajnas. You could not have a complete ceremony without your ardhangini, the other half. There was no male deity in the Sanātana pantheon, which could be worshipped without his female partner. Every village had a guardian female deity. Many purāṇic female deities represented the essence of energy of the Cosmos, or Shakti. The symbol of creation and destruction and universal consciousness, Shiva was symbolized by a Linga encircled by a Yoni, representing male and female fecundity. He was in no position to give an answer.

Even more difficult for Kaṃsa was his situation with his queens. He was able to dethrone Ugrasena because he had an army that was divided in its loyalty to him and the Sudharmā Sabhā. However, the

Magadha Army stationed in Mathurā was wholly under control of the Magadha commander, Prabala, who in turn would not brook any oppression of the queens. Queen Prāpti was herself quite a combatant. Jarāsandha's army would crush him if he so much as batted an eyelid against the queens.

Kaṃsa shook his head vigorously in the negative. 'I am sorry, Munivar, what you say is not possible. Women in Āryāvarta have a very high position in society. Among Yādavas, their position is even higher. Among Yādavas, they do not even follow sexual taboos. What you want to impose on the women is simply not possible. Find some other way out. This will not work out.' Kaṃsa grew thoughtful.

Kaṃsa snorted his annoyance at Kuṭil Muni and continued, 'Find some way of creeping conversion. Once you have got some families within your fold, those women can then be used to persuade other women. Don't do something that pushes the people even more towards those cowherds of Gokul Vrindāvan who are already catching the imagination of the people in the lands of Mathurā. I am granting you a concession to propagate your Kuṭil Dharma in Mathurā by using all the four methods. Once you have managed to convert a tenth of the population, I will let you have an official position in the Sudharmā Sabhā, so that you can subvert the Sabhā itself. All this while, you shall not let the plan leak out. I respect you. Your advice got me this throne, that is why I am here but do not think you will remain away from my prying eyes. Kaṃsa does not forgive treachery.'

Kaṃsa glowered at Kuṭil Muni. 'You are Bāṇakanṭaka's guru. This idiot has had all my support and has not been able to deliver. He has some fifty-sixty followers, half of whom are Kuṭil Dharmis. They have demolished many temples, but have not been able to scare even a mouse. All that he has achieved is a simmering discontent against me. Now that you are here, I give you another year to do something. I give you permission to hold meetings and to do selective oppression. If you are not able to deliver, I will have your head off.'

Bāṇakanṭaka smiled approvingly at Kuṭil Muni. He saw a huge opportunity for himself in the mandate being given by Kaṃsa.

Kaṃsa got up, waved his hand insolently at Kuṭil Muni, and walked out without even saying Jai Jhaṅkāl.

Kuțil Muni experienced a sense of a tinge of fear mixed with a sense of great expectation.





<u>- 29 -</u>

Baṇakanṭaka now had a sweeping permission. He gathered a band of thirty horsemen the next day and attacked the deserted Gokul village across the Yamunā. It had a few civil guards and about fifteen households who had not gone to Vrindāvan. Besides, there was the family of the village priest to look after the local Shiva temple, and a few disciples of SwarupĀchārya in the village Āshrama. All the leftover cowherds tilled the fields.

The first person they encountered was the village sweeper woman, Angirā, who had chosen to stay back at Gokul. Bāṇakanṭaka was leading the pack. Kashṭakāraka, his favourite second-in-command, and Vrishṭivāhak, next in hierarchy to Kashṭakāraka, were bringing up the flanks on either side. They pulled the reins of their horses to bring them to a halt. Bāṇa put the blade of his sword to the throat of Angirā and asked her the way to the temple. Angirā was a sharp woman. She told them to go in the other direction. As they did, she ran to the Āshrama on the outskirts of the village, and informed the Aangiras about the attackers headed for the temple. One shishya was despatched to Vrindāvan on the only horse available in the Āshrama. A dozen of them ran to collect their astra-shastra and headed for the temple. As they reached the temple, the bandits had not yet found

their way to the temple. They blessed Angirā and put her in the shelter with the purohit and the family. Six of them took their bows and arrows and climbed up the trees around the temple. The purohit was placed in the front courtyard, and six swordsmen lined up in three rows and double file. Having prepared themselves to receive the enemy, they asked the purohit to blow the conch. They knew that if the bandits did not find the temple, they would cause unnecessary bloodshed.

After having taken the path shown by Angirā for about twenty minutes, the village was left way behind. Bāṇakanṭaka realized that they had been misled. He cursed the woman loudly, and pronounced her as Jhaṅkāl's sinner. She will have to be raped and then fed to jackals, as per the Pralaya Shāstra's expiatory manual, Kleshakarma¹⁸⁰. She had betrayed the cause of Kuṭil Dharma. That was a terrible crime. All sin and bliss related only to the actions done in the cause of Kuṭil Dharma. Morality relates only to what is written in the Book of Pralaya Shāstra.

Bāṇakanṭaka ordered an about turn. They cantered right back into Gokul and looked for an inhabited house. They found one deep inside the village. A young woman was preparing food for her husband in an earthen oven outside her house who would presumably be in the field. Kashṭakāraka shouted at the woman to come to them. She looked at them, showed no sign of anxiety and continued with her chore. Bāṇa got incensed. 'This village seems full of insolent idiots. Looks like we have to do some sharīr-shodhan 181.'

Kashṭakāraka dismounted his horse. He went close to the woman and shouted at the top of his big booming voice. 'Slut, you are taking no notice of us.'

The woman looked unperturbed. 'Come, yavana¹⁸². You are doubtlessly here to plunder us. No use. The village has shifted to Vrindāvan. If you do anything here, the Gopas would come here in no time and take care of you. So you sit down here as a guest, have some food and go back.'

'Stupid woman, be scared of us. We can kill you too.'

'That is your delusion. You are but the medium. Who kills and who gets killed?'

Kashṭakāraka put the blade of his sword on the woman's cleavage and said. 'Woman, have some fear. I have little time right now. Otherwise I would have picked you up, taken you to the grove and raped you. Tell me the way to the temple. Your village is blessed. We have come to liberate you and give you the gift of Kuṭil Dharma.'

The woman displayed no effect of this threat. She laughed and said, 'Who rapes and who gets raped, bhadra; Dharma can never be Kuṭil and Kuṭil can never be Dharma, so you remain happy with what you have and we will remain happy with what we have.'

At that very moment, a conch started blowing in loud and deep reverberating notes.

Kashṭakāraka left the woman and rushed towards the sound of the conch on foot. His horse and other horsemen followed him. They had planned to first demolish the Shivalinga in the temple, along with the other Murtis and images and install their Vilom Swastika. They had hoped to terrorise the small population of Gokul with this action, have the people converted to Kuṭil Dharma on the pain of sword, and then publicise this to the nearby villages. The plan was to surround all the villages around Vrindāvan with Kuṭil Dharmi villages.

So Bāṇakanṭaka strode in full regal armour to behead the purohit blowing the conch standing outside the main entrance to the temple. As he raised his arm, an arrow came and hit the sword with such force that not only the sword was forced out of Bāṇakanṭaka's hand, he fell down from his stirrup to the ground.

Kashṭakāraka got down from his horse to lift Bāṇakanṭaka up, and Vrishṭivāhak moved in to decapitate the Purohit blowing the conch. As he moved towards the Purohit, another arrow came from the left side and severed his right arm right at the point where there was a gap in his armour. There was no doubt that there were accomplished bowmen manning defences in the area.

Before the band could recover, there were exactly six arrows that burrowed in the necks of the next six horsemen. As Kashṭakāraka got up, he witnessed the spectacular scene of six of best warriors go down, dead.

It was clear that they were trapped. They did not know how many bowmen and arrow men had trapped them. As Bāṇakanṭaka stood there bewildered and shaking, another six arrows took care of the next six warriors. Bāṇakanṭaka shouted, run and hide in the temple. In a jiffy, eleven great warriors, one of them with half an arm missing, were hiding behind the outer pillars of the Shiva temple. Purohit stopped blowing at the conch, and addressed them.

'Kuṭil Dharmis, I know why you came here. You came here not just for your depredations but also for converting us to Kuṭil Dharma. You forgot that this is a Vrishṇi village, and Vrishṇis never leave their villages unguarded; even if they have left for other pastures. There is only one way you can be saved. Submit yourself to Mahādeva and ask for his forgiveness, otherwise not one will be spared. Our Dharma is Rāshṭradharma, we will not leave the savages untamed and with their fangs intact. If we do that out of compassion to add credit to our svadharma, you will go and murder a million more. So we follow Rāshṭradharma and defang the serpents, and kill them if required. If you want that we only defang you, come and submit to Mahādeva, or be prepared to be killed', said the purohit with great flourish.

Bāṇakanṭaka tried to engage the purohit in small talk. 'Munivar, please forgive us. We will go back. Sanātana Dharma has a great tradition of forgiveness. We will not make such a mistake again. You are not like others. You always look for positives in others.'

Purohit Kalyāṇanaṅda laughed derisively. 'Bāṇakanṭaka, we know you very well. I am a purohit of the Vrishṇis, who are not like the ignoble Bhishma. They think straight, and are practical. They will not let you go so that you can fortify yourself again. We are Vrishṇis, we study our enemy first. We have been studying Kaṃsa, his friends, his associates and his mentors for the last eight-nine years, ever since he mounted an assault on our Kānhāiyā. Remember, that Kroorasena the idiot is correct in at least one prediction of his. Kaṃsa and his mallas will be killed by Kānhāiyā and Balarāma; just a matter of time Bāṇa. Now what do you plan to do? Surrendering to Mahādeva, or fighting to die? A Sanātani would choose to die for his faith, how about you?'

Bāṇakanṭaka remembered the Kleshakarma tutorial given by Kuṭil Muni the other day. It said that if one is cornered, one could lie or practice any deception to continue living to achieve the ultimate end – establishment of Kutil Dharma and Pralaya Shāstra. No canard,

no falsehood, no mendacity matters if it secures your end purpose. Lies and deception are sins only among Kutil Dharmis to each other.

Purohit was thinking exactly on the same lines. He said, "Stop playing this game with us. We are not Chitrāngada of the Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam variety¹⁸⁴ that we will be fooled into magnanimity. We will not let you escape without letting you have the reward for your karmas.'

Even as this conversation was taking the steam out of Bāṇakanṭaka's remaining band, Vrishṭivāhak collapsed in the hands of Kashṭakāraka due to excessive bleeding. He expired in his arms. Bāṇakanṭaka became very dispirited at the loss of his third most important warrior; after him and Kashṭakāraka. He cried out in great anguish. 'Purohit Mahārāj, our man has died. Let me cremate him.'

"Forget it, Bāṇasura. You Asuras think you are the master race. Why do you need to cremate your dead? They go straight to heaven anyway. Now you have devised this Kuṭil Dharma, so you think you have a combination of the master race and the master faith. Use the old Asura method. Throw him to the vultures.'

Bāṇa sat down and negotiated surrender with the Purohit. Accordingly, all the horsemen abandoned their horses, laid down their weapons and were taken into the temple manḍapa by the priest. They were arrested there by the six shastra-dhāraks and tied to the pillars. The other six astra-dhāraks got down from their perches in the trees and joined them. Bāṇa and Kashṭakāraka came in last.

Bāṇa and Kashṭakāraka kneeled down, lay down their arms, and then in a co-ordinated action collected some loose earth in their hands and threw it in the face of the shishyas and the Purohit.

An extra split second is all they got. They took advantage of that little extra second, and fled from the temple. Both caught one wandering horse each and rode away from the scene, only to run into a band of young Yādavas who had rushed to Gokul on foot. Led by younger brother of Nanda, Abhinanda and his band of Vrishni warriors, they caught up with Bāṇa and Kashṭa just outside the village. Bāṇa saw the Vrishṇis approaching; he took a diversion and galloped away. Abhinanda and his foot soldiers gave a chase, but

there was no way they could have caught up with the horses. They threw the horses into Yamunā and were gone into Mathurā.

Abhinanda came to the temple. He along with the Aangiras debriefed the captured Kuṭil Dharmis. All of them had been local converts. Only Kuṭil Muni, Bāṇakanṭaka, and his two close assistants, Kashṭakāraka and Vrishṭivāhak, were from Pārshva. Others were specially selected for their muscle and martial skills, all from Kukur clan of Yādavas. Each one of them surrendered to Mahādeva and was accepted back into Sanātana fold. Abhinanda took them all to Vrindāvan to induct them into his band of defenders for Vrindāvana.

Thus ended the first dismal expedition of Bāṇakanṭaka aka Bāṇasura.





<u>- 30 -</u> INTROSPECTION

Pradyot brought the news of Bāṇakanṭaka's failed depredation into Gokul to Kaṃsa nearly two months after it took place. More shocking than the failed expedition was the news of desertion of Bāṇa's surviving horsemen to the Vrishṇis. Out of the sixty men of about twenty families Bāṇa had converted to Kuṭil Dharma, thirty were gone – twelve dead, eighteen deserted.

Kaṃsa was getting more contemptuous of Kuṭil Muni and his band. Kaṃsa himself was no mean warrior. He had his own band of savages, such as Chāṇūra from Magadha, Mushṭika and his own brother Kaṅka. They were as debauched and degenerate as Kaṃsa himself. Chāṇūra stood nearly seven feet tall, with an impressive muscle mass. He looked like a man mountain from close distance. The effect got heightened due to a swarthy appearance. Even from a distance, he looked frightening. Mushṭika was a little shorter, but much thicker. He was not as muscular as Chāṇūra, but weighed nearly one and a half times more. They indulged in endless drinking and wrestling bouts. This mafia organized the wrestling bouts and bets were placed.

Kaṃsa did something he had not done earlier. He summoned Prabala, the head of the Magadha contingent.

Prabala was surprised to get a call. Under normal protocol, he would get his orders through Pradyot, the Senāpati. All secret communication would be done through the younger Magadha princess, Prāpti.

Prabala appeared before the King of Mathurā who often referred to himself as Manḍaleshwara of Magadha, and did his obeisance.

'Prabala', Kaṃsa began, 'I want you to keep track of Bāṇasura and his pack, and report to me all their plans. Whatever atrocities they commit in the city of Mathurā and my kingdom, I must come to know.'

Prabala respectfully bowed his head, and replied, 'Mahāraj, I shall try my best to stand true to your faith in me, but I have severe problems. Not one person in Mathurā dares to talk to a Maagadh¹⁸⁷. We have kept our distance, and ruled through fear of Magadha Empire. It will take us a long to time to build a network, because we will have to build trust with the Maathurs¹⁸⁸ first.'

'How long will that take?'

'A few years, sir. Maybe two to three years. We will have to bring in fresh recruits after training them in human intelligence.'

Kamsa looked disappointed. 'I was thinking of much quicker induction of these new guys.' Why can't your present guys be made to learn this".

'Sir, they will fall between two stools if we make them do that. Mathurā is peaceful only because they fear these soldiers. If we try to make them friendly, you never know what will happen. Moreover, anything that you ask from me will have to be first approved by Magadha Naresh. You have not visited Girivraja for a long time. Why don't you do it now?'

Kaṃsa took a deep breath. 'You know, Prabala. I will tell you something that I dare not tell anyone in Mathurā, and certainly not a Yādava. From the day Devaki delivered her eighth child, I have not spent a single minute without thinking about Krishṇa. He doesn't let me be free even in my dreams. Sleeping, waking, dreaming, eating, fornicating; he is always dominating my consciousness. Rishi

Gargāchārya had described this duality as a state of Dharaṇā, and a path to ultimate dissolution of ego and liberation. Yet my relationship with him is that of an adversary. I indulge in every aspect of adharma and atikarma, but all my attention is always concentrated on him. Is he really an aspect of God that will kill me?'

Prabala was never the spiritual kind. He simply could not fathom what Kaṃsa was saying. He merely stood to attention.

'Prabala, all the people who could advise me without bothering for my status have left me. *Do you know when a man becomes poor?* It is not when he loses his riches. A man becomes poor when he loses his well-wishers. Bhakta is always better than a sycophant. Bhakta is devoted to his Lord. He can fight with his deity, criticize Him, get angry with Him, and give Him a piece of his mind. I have no Bhaktas or well-wishers left. I am left with only timeservers and brownnosers. How can a King survive like this?'

Prabala found his head swimming. 'Mahāraj, why don't you ask our Rishi Chanḍakaushika? He will guide you. I have seen him chiding Mahārāj Jarāsandha so many times. He always listens to him, even if he does not like it.'

Kaṃsa took another deep breath. 'Looks like such great teachers are beyond my destiny. Is this my karma, Prabala? Is it possible to transcend one's Karma, Prabala?'

Prabala obviously had no answer for all this. Kaṃsa was taking and letting out deep breaths after deep breaths. Prabala regretted having found Kaṃsa in such a reflective mood. Kaṃsa sat for a long while, just staring into the yonder with blank eyes. He let out another deep breath, and then asked for some liquor to be brought by an abhisārika. 189

After immersing himself in half a day and a full night of revelry, Kamsa slept for another two days. Meanwhile, Prabala had given a full account of his conversation to the Magadha princesses, who had dutifully sent it across to their father, and requested an early visit by him.

Jarāsandha received the communication, and like a true Emperor, decided to inspect his half manḍala¹⁹⁰ of Mathurā. Advance parties

were despatched. Magadhamādana, the Senapati, got ships and boats ready.

On the other hand, Kuṭil Muni was devastated by the loss suffered in the Bāṇakanṭaka's Gokul campaign. He also received information that Pāṇini's disciples had overrun his Āshrama at Suvastu. All the vidyārthis in his gurukul at Suvastu had joined Pāṇini's gurukul and reintegrated with the Takshshila system. After suffering successive reverses at Rakshāgriha, Khānḍavaprastha, Gokul and Suvastu, he was in a low mood. His political ideology of an authoritarian religion had no takers in these parts. He felt even lower as his friend from Takshashilā; Yama Shreshṭha¹⁹¹ had propagated a similar but moderate form of monotheism in Pārshva and was successful. Ahur Mazda and Zoroastrianism had spread in Pārshva without any bloodshed and force. Kutil Muni was beset with doubts and anxiety.

He saw a glimmer of hope in Takshak and Kamsa, as well as in the young princelings of Hastināpur. If he did not get his narrative rooted in the soil of the land of Āryāvarta, he would have to make do with a dedicated following of no more than two dozen men. He gave up the idea of doing anything spectacular and got reconciled to a slow process of winning followers through a hard grind. He built a Pralayālaya in a small parcel of land in the sprawling mansion of Bāṇakanṭaka with open access to public. He built a Vilom Swastika hall with reading rooms around it, and set up an elaborate ritual of prayer around the Swastika symbol. This was an attraction to the unsuspecting Mathurā residents. They had no issues worshipping any symbol of divinity as long as they could establish oneness with it. Sanātana saguņa¹⁹² permits worship of the Supreme in any form, even in formless form. Vilom Swastika was a perfect embodiment of a middle path between the form and the formless. People were not concerned about the theology behind the temple as long as they were allowed to come and pay obeisance to the Swastika.

Kuṭil Muni let the temple remain open untrammelled for nearly a year. After that, he started conducting prayers in the evening. His prayers included the customary Pralaya Mantra and the worship of Jhaṅkāl. People continued to take part out of pure curiosity.

Nearly two years after the failed Gokul expedition, Kuṭil Muni started full-scale discourses twice a month, on Purṇamāsi¹⁹³ and Amāvasya¹⁹⁴. He delayed the launch of Kuṭil Dharma because of Jarāsandha's prolonged sojourn in Mathurā. He landed in Mathurā six months after Prabala sent him a word, and stayed around for over a year to strengthen the intelligence apparatus of Mathurā, and also to ensure that Kaṃsa was insulated from any challenge to his unquestioned authority.

As long as Jarāsandha's entourage stayed around, there was no question of any propagation activity on part of Bāṇa or Kuṭil Muni. After Jarāsandha left, Kuṭil Muni saw an opportunity to resume his activities.

Initially, he kept his discourses limited to his One God Jhaṅkāl theme. Sanātanis were exposed to so many strands of philosophies ranging from monism to dualism to nature worship that did not find anything remiss. Over a six-month period, Kuṭil Muni started attracting 400-500 devotees. They would even shout Jai Jhaṅkāl with him.

On the Guru Pūrṇimā day of the 12th year of Krishṇa's birth, Kuṭil Muni asked for Guru Dakshiṇā¹⁹⁵ from the regulars in the congregation. Around 300 regulars consented to do his bidding. Kuṭil Muni took them all into Bāṇakanṭaka's house and into the inner sanctum, and asked them to accept Kuṭil Dharma and renounce Sanātana Dharma.

A huge commotion followed. One woman Karţikā shouted at the top her voice, 'what is this nonsense? Why are you asking us to exclude Sanātana Dharma? We accept all paths. We have not denied your ekeshvaravāda¹⁹⁶ either. What is this stupidity?'

Kuṭil Muni roared out in a coarse guffaw. 'You slut. Accepting Kuṭil Dharma is never complete till you deny the right of existence to all other paths.'

Karţikā shouted a loud no, and turned to others. 'Let's go back', she said.

Kuțil Muni was hit by a sense of panic. He looked at Bāṇa and put his palm on the side of his neck. That was an indication. Bāṇa

took out his sword. With one flash of the sword, he beheaded Kartika in one motion. As her head severed from her torso, a fountain of blood shot out from the torso, spraying the crowd with the red gore. A collective howl went up.

A pandemonium followed as the people attacked Bāṇa's men in a flurry of action. In the confusion, Bāṇakanṭaka's bodyguards killed about one hundred people, half of them women and children. Around two hundred of them escaped from the inner sanctum. They burnt his Pralayālaya and went on a rampage against any Kuṭil Dharmi they could recognize from the Pralayālaya. Seven Kutil Dharmis were killed in the rioting that followed.

Matters reached such a head that Pradyot had to alert Prime Minister Viprathu, who ordered the arrest of Kuṭil Muni and Bāṇakanṭaka. Some Maathurs were also arrested. The whole of Mathurā started reverberating with the shouts of 'Mar Jhaṅkāl' 197. An emergency session of Sudharmā Sabhā was called by Kaṃsa to discuss the situation.

The Sabhā convened in the Special Sabhā chambers of Kaṃsa's Royal Palace, the same place where Kaṃsa had deposed Ugrasena. Kuṭil Muni and Bāṇakanṭaka were brought in shackles and Viprathu read out charges, as the position of Dharmādhikāri was still vacant. Many Kutil dharmis and a few Mathurā residents (Maathurs) were also charged. Vasudeva could only attend the sessions, as he had not been restored to his original position of Dharmādhikāri.

Kaṃsa was deeply troubled by the turn of events. Bāṇakanṭaka and Kuṭil Muni were asked to give their side of the story.

Kuṭil Muni justified the killings of the Mathurā civilians as an act of self-defence. Bāṇakanṭaka supported him by saying that he came in with his bodyguards when he heard a pandemonium in the quarters of his guest. He was attacked by the people gathered there, so his bodyguards tried to save him and his guest, resulting in the killings.

Kaṃsa had made up his mind to exercise his special power of pardon in favour of Kuṭil Muni and Bāṇa. However, following the protocol of the Sudharmā Sabhā, he asked whether anyone had anything to say. Kamsa did not expect anyone to say anything.

To his utter surprise, Vasudeva got up and asked permission to cross-examine the accused.

Kamsa had no option but to grant permission. He had been taken by surprise, and cornered.

Vasudeva began by addressing Bāṇakanṭaka. 'Bāṇasura, how did children and women attack you. Do you realize that 53 children and women were killed by your bandits?'

Bāṇakanṭaka was nonplussed. He never expected to be cross-examined. Kaṃsa's emissary had promised him that everything would be stage-managed. He merely mumbled, 'they got caught in the cross strife.'

'How many body guards were there, Bāṇa?'

'Seven.'

'So, seven guards killed one hundred two people, and fifty three of them were women and children?'

Bāṇakanṭaka could not answer the question.

Vasudeva turned to Kaṃsa, 'Mahārāj, this was a wanton and deliberate massacre of Sanātana Dharmis by Kuṭil Dharmis because they refused to convert to their vile creed. They should be hung in the public square in full view of the public', he concluded.

There was a general murmur of assent in the Sudharmā Sabhā. Even Sātyak and Satrajit stood up and supported Vasudeva.

Kaṃsa was deeply embarrassed. He got up and said, 'I agree with the Sudharmā Sabhā that these people have committed a ghastly crime, and I sentence all of them from both sides to life imprisonment. However, sentence will not come into operation till such time that they commit another crime. It is a suspended sentence.'

There was a gasp of disbelief in the Sudharmā Sabhā. Nobody spoke.

In the night, Kaṃsa's emissary went to Bāṇakanṭaka with a simple message – 'if Krishṇa is not killed within the next one year, I will have you both hung from the nearest tree. Deploy all your best assets.'

Kuṭil Muni saw no way out of the impasse. He tutored Kashṭakāraka to a high degree of proficiency and smuggled him out to Khānḍavaprastha with the instructions that he should use every

artifice to win the heart of Maṇimālā, and carry on the teachings of Pralaya Shāstra and Kuṭil Dharma. This was his way of continuing his legacy. He also made him carry an introduction to Dhritarāshṭra, the King of Hastināpur.



PART V





<u>- 31 -</u> TWO ASURAS

A chārya Chanḍakaushika began the next day's discourse with the same prayer that was so disconcerting to Jarāsandha. He announced that he would continue the discourse till the end. Jarāsandha was greatly relieved. Queen Saudamini and Asti and Prāpti were eagerly looking forward to the narrative.

'Vrindāvan was a virgin grove on the right banks of Yamunā. With hard work, the Vrishnis found out new pastures that extended to nearly a yojana, where the outer boundary of the Govardhana hill lay. The peak of the hill was about one thousand feet high, and on the other side lay Vrishabhānpur¹⁹⁸, which Krishna remembered very well as the village of his one-day sakhi, Rādhikā. Govardhana Hill provided a natural defence on the western side of Vrindāvan. Yamunā was the natural defence on the eastern direction. In the remaining two directions, Nanda had strong defences built.

'Nine year old Krishna and thirteen year old Balarāma were turning out to be fine combatants. Āchārya Swarupa had to bring in experts to train these two. Balarāma was growing very big with a penchant for wrestling and mace combat. He was a fine component of shastras, the hand wielded weapons. Krishna, on the other hand, was developing as an all round combatant, intelligent in the art of hand

and sword combat, but unparalleled in the use of astras, the dynamic weapons. Nobody could come anywhere near Krishna in use of bows and arrows, and similar contraptions of distance weapons. Competitions among villages were common in various combat categories. Krishna and Balarāma started building a fearsome reputation for an all-conquering duo. Kaṃsa's spies did not miss on that.

'Bāṇakanṭaka launched his spy Vatsa to kill Krishṇa and Balarāma. He prepared a dress of a calf, with enough room to hide a spear behind the dress and waited near Govardhana pastures for several days. Krishṇa and Balarāma were given only three days in a week for their day out from the Āshrama. They would rarely repeat a pasture, as Krishṇa combined his activity with several exploration trips up the Govardhana Hills. The hitch hiking was a very popular pastime with Krishṇa and his friends.

'After nearly a fortnight, Vatsāsura got his opportunity. He had been living off the forest all these days. A hardy and small man, he was an expert in living off forests.

'He saw clouds of dust and heard the mooing of cows. He quickly dressed in the dress of the calf, wore hooves on all fours, and got in with the calves.

'Krishna and Balarāma were a little away from where Vatsa got in with the calves. Vatsa was wearing a black and white camouflage. He had done this expert assassination act a number of times. He had perfected a calf's gait, but those whom he managed to deceive earlier were lesser mortals. Cows and bulls sensed the alien presence and started mooing and bellowing loudly. Krishna noticed something amiss. He was so good with the cows that his friends even suspected him of knowing the language of the cows.

'Krishna raised his hands, motioning everyone to stay quiet. He waved them to come with him, told Balarāma to pick up his mace, and asked Mansukhā to bring a rope to tether the calves.

'Vatsa's vision was hampered by the dress he was wearing. He was getting uneasy with all the attention the cows were giving him, by mooing and bellowing in turn, and gathering up close. His vision was restricted to a 90° funnel, so that he had to turn his head from side to side to size up his prey, Krishna. This movement gave him

away. Krishna at once found out a calf surrounded by a number of cows and bulls, moving his head from side to side in a very un-calf like manner. Cattle have a 270° vision range. This one was looking as if he was blind in one eye.

'Krishna knew by now that here was another of those Mathurā Asura attacks. He took a rope, made a loop with a slipknot, swung the rope over his head a couple of times, and ringed the neck of Vatsa with a single throw.

'The game was up for Vatsa. He threw out the dress and got up on his feet, took out his spear to take an aim at Krishna.

'Krishna playfully pulled at the rope. The slipknot became tight around Vatsa's neck. The spear dropped from his hand. All the gopalas played with the trapped Vatsa. In the end, all of them swung the rope together with Vatsa's lifeless body at the end of the rope. Together they heaved the rope with such force that Vatsa's body flew into the air a fair distance and then got stuck in a tree.

'The boys continued up the Govardhana Hills as if it was just another day's work. Krishna was looking to explore caves, canyons and caverns in the hills. Half way up the hill, Krishna discovered a huge cave that was so big that it could house the entire Vrindāvan settlement along with its cattle. It had started raining. They took the cattle inside and waited there till the rain subsided. Krishna got the gopalas to use some boulders to secure the cave for future use, and they all got back to Vrindāvan.

'Nanda was told about the incident by Subala's father. Subala had confided in his father who in turn deemed it proper to bring it to the notice of UpaNanda. UpaNanda told Nanda, who summoned the boys next morning before they left for the Āshrama.

'Krishna had no trouble accepting the narrated tale. "Yes", he said. "The Asura did come, but he was frightfully naïve and gauche. If these are the best spies and agents at the command of Kamsa, he has no hopes. I think the people of Brij are right. Such a uselss King deserves to die at our hands, father".

'Nanda was mighty impressed with the confidence of the boy. He had been getting superlative reports of the capacity, potential and courage of the young Kānhāiyā. He sometimes thought that Āchārya Swarupa was exaggerating to please him, but events such as these

forced him to take Krishna seriously. He was probably dealing with an extraordinary boy, who had the additional problem of knowing he was good. He did not labour the point too much. More time had to be spent in placating Yashodā, who became hysterical when she came to know that one more killer was sent by Kaṃsa to kill his little Kānhāiyā.

'Āchārya Swarupa now directed the boys to carry their astras and shastras with them whenever they went out. He had become quite confident of their ability to take on sundry attackers. Guru Ghor Aangiras considered his martial training first rate. In addition to the training that he gave, he also had a disciple in Krishṇa who was blessed with superhuman intellect, and bodily speed combined with agility. That was the main reason he was chosen to head this Āshrama.

Jarāsandha was suddenly becoming more interested in the discourse by Guru Chanḍakaushika. He was now beginning to get a peek into the capabilities of the man who is supposed to have killed Kaṃsa at the age of less then twelve.

Āchārya Chandakaushika resumed.

'Kaṃsa was not told about this mission by the Asuras. He came to know about it a little later through the Pradyot network. Kaṃsa's confidence in Bāṇakanṭaka went down even further. He confronted Bāṇa with the facts. Bāṇa had no option but to accept responsibility. He promised that he would launch another foolproof operation soon, with one of his better operatives.

Bāṇa did a very careful reconnaissance. He marked out different routes that the boys used to take on their days out to pastures. He spent three months working out correlations, and finally found that on full moons, boys went to Yamunā in the evening and entertained themselves with dancing and music, in which the local girls also joined at times. He discovered another facet of his quarry, Krishṇa. He had developed into a fine flute player. He was becoming so proficient with his flute playing that even the cows had started following the commands of his flute. Balarāma was beating everyone in wrestling bouts, even men twice his age. The boys were also gaining fame in their proficiency with astras and shastras.

'Bāṇa got his master agent Dhenuk to head the next operation. They had found out that Pūrṇimā was a day of learning, and about the time of dusk, boys would go to Yamunā banks. He got a fleet of donkeys and asked Dhenuk to wear a dusky dress, stay low among the donkeys, get close to the boys and use a poison dart to strike Krishṇa. He was to make good his escape in a waiting boat with soldiers inside. There was a back-up plan too. Once Krishṇa had been hit, Dhenuk would send out a signal, the soldiers would jump on to the banks from the boat and massacre all the boys. That would delay the message back to Vrindāvan and the nearest defence fortification, allowing them to avoid a strong Vrindāvan soldiery chasing them. But the best of plans are only as good as your adversary would allow them to be.

'Nanda had already put cautions in place. Boys were to carry their astras and shastras wherever they went. Even in their full moon frolic, they had to concede a ring of soldiers at a distance. Bāṇa never reckoned with the sharp eye of Krishṇa, not the Nanda brothers, nor the Asuras.

'Krishṇa immediately sized up the scenario as the boys closed in to the Yamunā banks. He saw a boat bobbing near the banks in fading light. It was not the usual freight boat, but much bigger. In any case, no boats would be tethered there. The freight station was on the other side of Vrindāvan. Krishṇa's agile brain mapped that out and looked for other evidence. He saw a herd of donkeys approaching at a distance. There were no donkeys in Vrindāvan. Donkeys were kept by Mathurā residents for carrying loads. In Vrindāvan, it was either the people themselves or bullock carts that carried the load. Krishṇa smiled to himself and spoke to Balarāma.

"Dāu¹⁹⁹, looks like you will get some exercise. A donkey of an Asura seems to be here again".

'Balarāma was the strongest of them all, also the oldest. He had a high ego but he always respected Krishṇa's nimble mind.

"Where"? Asked Balarāma.

"Just check that two legged donkey hiding in the middle of those donkeys, do you see him. He is trying to cover himself under a donkey's skin. I am his target. So I will move to left, a little away from Yamunā. They will change course, then you are free to give your mace a little workout. We need to check whether your boast of killing an elephant with one blow of your mace would hold true with a donkey".

'Balarāma did not like the taunt, so he got fully charged up and moved straight towards the donkey herd, even as Krishṇa started playing on his flute and moved left. Dhenuk saw the unexpected change of direction of Krishṇa. He was confused. They had reconnoitered a long time, and recognized Krishṇa well. Dhenuk was unable to understand this change of plan. So he stopped in his tracks and waited.

'In no time, Balarāma was upon the herd. He had Dhenuk in the centre of his eyes. He let out a roar as he approached the herd. The donkeys were frightened, and scattered in all directions, braying loudly to compound the effect. Dhenuk was hesitant to waste his poison darts at Balarāma, as he had only a limited supply. That led to a split second delay. It was to prove fatal.

'One blow of Balarāma's mace was enough to relieve Dhenuk's body of his evil ātmā.

'Krishna saw the action, asked the accompanying guards for his astras, and rained arrows at the parked boat. In a matter of seconds, the boat was sailing away with fifteen dead, five wounded and three lucky soldiers.

'Nothing of the incident seemed to weigh on them as the boys danced till midnight. Nanda came to know of the action only the next day.

'Kamsa came to know the loss of soldiers and another failed plan the very night as the boat sailed into the royal jetty'.





<u>- 32 -</u>

RĀDHĀ'S DHĀRAŅĀ²⁰⁰

A chārya Chanḍakauśika took a pause and recited the mantra again:

yatra gopeshvarah krishno yatra Rādhā yoginī tatra muktirānandam dhruvāpritirmatirmama

Jarāsandha grimaced in the presence of Āchārya for the first time. Āchārya smiled and reminded Jarāsandha, 'Rājan, it seems you have forgotten the condition on which I accepted this anushṭhāna of pūrvapaksha.' Jarāsandha folded his hands in supplication and apologised. Āchārya relented and continued his discourse.

'The discipline of the Āshrama was getting more and more rigorous. Krishṇa had progressed beyond Pratyāhāra. His observational capacity of his inner manas had grown phenomenally. Āchārya had started initiating him into dhāraṇā, the sixth step of Hiranyagarbha's ashṭānga yōga. The boys did not let go of their three free days in a week. They compensated for the more arduous combat training, shāstra training and shastra training by devoting extra hours.

Krishna was the only one who could combine this entire regimen with his yoga training.

'Another day out in the pasture, the boys decided to venture beyond Govardhana. They left Vidagdha and Ujjvala with the cows, and ventured off to the west of Govardhana Hills. Half a yojana into their venture, they came across a group of girls practising martial skills. Krishna immediately recognized two of them, Rādhikā and Lalitā.

'Rādhā had grown into a fine adolescent, all of fourteen years and indescribably beautiful. Lalitā was not far behind. They had both grown into fine young women in the three years that had lapsed since they last met. Rādhikā had her full complement of friends — Vishākhā, Champakamālikā, Tungavidyā, Chitrā, Indulekhā, Rangādevi, Sudevi and ten others. They were practising under the keen eye of their guru Kalpāchārya.

'Guru Kalpāchārya looked at this group of boys and paused his practice. Even before he could ask for their introduction, the ebullient Rādhā jumped up and told Guruji – "Guruji, this is Krishṇa –you know, the Kānhāiyā of Naṅda Bābā".

'Kalpāchārya looked startled. Was this the boy the whole Achārya pratishṭhāna was talking about? The boy looked so simple yet captivating. He had radiance and a glowing confidence on his person. He made the due gesture of obedience to Guru Kalpāchārya.

'Rādhikā just could not stop talking. "You know, Guruji, when this boy was hardly six or seven, he used to talk about chitta, buddhi and manas".

'Kalpāchārya was a disciple from the Sāndipani school of Avanti. He was specially brought in by Vrishabhānu to teach and train Vrishabhānpur's boys and girls to high proficiency in every aspect of yoga, astra, shastra, shāstra, and kalās. Kalpāchārya had been in Vrishabhānpur for over ten years. Rādhikā was his best disciple among all boys and girls. He was struck by Rādhikā's statement.

"Ok, young man, so what have you been learning in Yoga shāstra", he asked Kānhāiyā.

'Never short on confidence, Krishna set out on a long explanation of what he was doing, impressing Kalpāchārya. Krishna told him the Pratyāhāra he had been perfecting. "I am now able to act with perfect

detachment from the products of my sensory perceptions, but I have not yet learnt the art of detaching my buddhi from its object. Guruji is now making me learn Dhāranā aspect of Hiranyagarbha's yōga".

'Rādhikā chirped in, "Guruji, isn't Dhāraṇā taught with a subject and object. The boy knows the concept. He has not been made to experience the focus of Dhāraṇā. Even I can teach him that".

'Krishna remembered her boast form their previous meeting. "Looks like she is too keen to teach me a thing or two", Krishnā thought.

'Kalpāchārya smiled at this testy exchange. "Let it be", he said. "You are far more advanced in your training, Rādhā. I have no doubt, but little Krishņa is not yet ready".

'Krishna, ever the playful, taunted Kalpāchārya. "Maybe, you don't want Rādhā to be defeated by me".

'In the exalted personalities of the three, these exchanges just passed off as playful barbs, but the friend brigade got excited.

'Balarāma tried to downplay the challenge. "Look at these frail girls. Is our Krishṇa so effeminate that he would fight girls? If I put my hand on any of these weaklings, they would get buried ten feet in the earth. We will have to bring shovels to dig them out".

'Lalitā and Vishākhā shouted challenges in unison, and other sakhis of Rādhikā added to the noise in their best girlish shrieks.

'Krishna and Rādhikā were, meanwhile, smiling and sizing each other up.

'Kalpāchārya also smiled. He was game for some fun training, which was his favoured method of training in martial arts and combat.

"Krishņa, are you ready"?

'Krishna was ever ready. He could sense that something extraordinary was at hand.

"Ok, you choose your favourite shastra weapon. Rādhikā will have to choose the weapon you choose. You are the younger one. You will get the choice".

'Krishna chose the sword.

'The two combatants, Krishna and Rādhā chose their own swords. They were made to line up by Kalpāchārya. Krishna was asked to dedicate the fight to his Guru, Rādhā to Kalpāchārya. They were asked to chant the mantras leading to a fight. They did it and attained the desired concentration level. Āchārya was sure about Rādhā, but he had to test Krishṇa's concentration level. He tried to distract him by various methods, but Krishṇa was concentrating hard. His manas was under observation by his buddhi, and his initial lessons in dhāraṇā also taught him to focus on the challenge. Āchārya told both of them. "Now this combat will end either by one of you getting killed, or one of you accepting defeat, or by my stopping the fight if I think that it needs to be stopped".

'Āchārya told the friend brigade to keep cheering the combatants, and gave the signal to start the sword combat.

'Rādhā and Krishṇa started circling each other as an opening gambit. Rādhikā was the stronger of the two, and also taller by a good six inches. She had bigger reach, and was using a longer sword and bigger shield. Krishṇa realized that and kept himself a little farther back, limiting his already shorter reach. His moves would carry much greater risk.

'He heard Balarāma shouting, "Go, Krishṇa, go", and adrenaline surged through his veins. Girls were shouting in their characteristic shrieks, but all Rādhā saw was the circling figure of Krishṇa. She focused on her target. Her training soon lined her up against Krishṇa as a subject and object duality. At the same time, she could sense that Krishṇa's focus was diffuse. She made the first move.

'As Rādhā moved in and attacked Krishṇa on his left side at the level of his feet, Krishṇa barely escaped the sword. He was late in evading the thrust, and lay himself open to another attack on his chest from the right side. The follow-up attack nearly decapitated him, his shield only just deflecting the sword. He stayed back. The two moves by Rādhā had brought his focus back. Rādhā was moving like lightning. Thrusting, shielding, swinging from the right, bringing it back, swinging from the left, going below the shield to attack the legs, then jumping and attacking from a height. Krishṇa was barely able to use his sword. He was just defending, and defending. After a while, all he saw was a figure of attacking Rādhā and was parrying all her thrusts, cuts and swings. He did not realize how long this went on, before he saw her shield drop a bit and he thrust his sword to make

his first attack. It was ineffective. After a while, all Krishna knew was that he had to just keep his focus to save himself. He did swing his sword from time to time when Rādhā was catching her breath, but he never reached even her shield.

'Balarāma and his band was shouting encouragement to Krishṇa, while the girls were shrieking out their taunts. Krishṇa heard nothing, saw nothing. All he saw was Rādhā and the sword in her right hand, and shield in her left.

'Kalpa Muni stopped the fight. A sweating Krishna, and still fresh looking Rādhā, went back to their corners. The girls were delirious. They had seen Rādhā dominate the fight.

'Kalpa Muni smiled and asked everybody to drink water and get fresh. He then announced his verdict.

"This is a draw, Krishna. I had given you a handicap of 5 points, as that was the difference in your training and age. I expected Rādhā to beat you within 10 minutes, but you defended very well. You have a great future. Without the handicap, Rādhā would have been the winner, but now it is a draw. Now Rādhā would give you the lessons.

'There was a sullen silence in the Gopa camp, and a lot of clapping in the Gopi camp. Rādhā came forward, and Krishṇa sat down in front of her in Veerāsana, ready to accept knowledge.

"Krishna, you have got your first lessons in Dhāraṇā yōga. When the combat started, what all did you see and hear".

"I could see everyone. You, Āchārya, all the Gopas and Gopis, and I could hear them shout support for you and me".

"And when the combat ended"?

"I could see nothing except you and myself, my own manas²⁰¹ and your menacing figure with the sword and the shield. My buddhi told me to just focus on these and I could not see or hear anything else".

"That is the first lesson in Dhāraṇā, Krishṇa. You were able to dissociate yourself from your sensory perceptions, but you were not in control of them. You could observe, but could not direct. You were many. Now, you have learnt to be just two, you and the object. Today, this object was I. You learnt to focus in a state of extreme dynamism. With practice, you would be able to do it in extreme peace as well. When that happens, your training in Dhāraṇā would be complete.

'From two, you will have to go to one, and then to shunyata, to void, to zero.

'Kalpāchārya clapped at this lesson imparted by his favourite disciple.

'He brought everyone together and asked them to hold each others' hands. Krishna held Rādhikā's hands, and then he took out his flute and started playing. Within moments, the tension that had built up started dissipating. Krishna was absorbed in his flute so much that the notes wafting from his flutes started mesmerizing the boys and girls who started dancing to his tunes without even Krishna realizing it.

'After the third prahara had fallen, Āchārya ordered the group to disperse. Krishṇa extracted a promise from Rādhā to come to Vrindāvan on the next Pūrnimā to their dance session.

'Rādhā agreed readily.

"You would get your next lesson on that Pūrnimā day. Keep it a full holiday. We will be there by noon".

'Krishna smiled as only he could'.





<u>- 33 -</u> MURALI DHYĀNA

chārya Chandakaushika continued his discourse. 'Bhādrapada Pūrnimā was an occasion for much revelry in the cowherd community of Vrindavan. They enjoyed extended holidays starting from Ashtami. The community enjoyed nearly 3 weeks of revelry and fun filled holidays. After shifting to Vrindavan, Nanda had once again started celebrating Kānhā's birthday in a big manner. The celebrations would carry on till Amāvasya, after which there would be a brief break. Celebrations would resume on Ganesh Chaturthi and would carry on till Ananta Chaturdashi. Āshrama was closed from Guru Pūrnimā, and would resume a day after Bhādrapada Pūrnimā with homage to Indra on Ashvin Pratipada. Ashvin Pūrnimā, or Sharad Pūrnimā, would be another big festival, marking the end of the rainy season. Sharad Pūrnimā had a huge significance in the pastoral community of Vrindavan. They looked forward to next six months of plentiful fodder. Rainy season was hard on the pastoral economy of Vrishnis. Their little world would get disrupted at the onset of rains in the month of Jyeshtha. Cows would go to grazing only occasionally. Yamunā would be in spate most of the time, so the boats would not ply. Milk products would go to Mathurā and other

destinations only irregularly. Festivities were, therefore, a good way of keeping the morale up.

'On the Bhādrapada Amavasyā, at the end of Krishṇa's birthday celebrations, Krishṇa wandered alone to the banks of Yamunā. He was aware that it was a time reserved for Gopis and older women. He was reflecting over what had happened in the combat near Vrishabhānpur. He started playing a tune on his flute.

'As the tune harmonized with the ambience, and the sound of a flowing Yamunā, it produced a serene effect on all within an earshot. The Gopis were bathing in shallow waters near the bank due to a strong current of the river in the rainy season. They heard the enchanting flute notes, and huddled together to listen to the hypnotic cadences of Krishṇa's magical flute. They even forgot that they were in an undressed state. They just hid behind some bushes and enjoyed the absorbing notes wafting in the air. Krishṇa wandered over to the place where the Gopis had kept their clothes. Their appointed time was long over. This was now the time for boys and men to come to Yamunā. Krishṇa's flute put shackles in the legs of the boys and even they were busy hearing the flute's magic notes from a distance, not wishing to come near him and breaking the spell by disturbing him.

'Krishna was surprised to see Gopi's clothes scattered like this. He knew that their time had been over nearly an hour back, so how come their clothes were still there. He did not realize the disruption he had caused by mesmerizing all living beings with his celestial music. He stopped to investigate.

'As the spell broke, Gopis realized the situation too, that they were over the time period allotted to them, and were still undressed. To complicate matters, Krishna was standing exactly where their clothes were kept.

'Krishna wondered whether the Gopis had met with any accident, or some Asura had kidnapped them, or they had fallen prey to some wild animal.

'Gopis had their hearts in their mouth. They could not come out from behind the bushes in their naked state, and they feared that the boys and men would soon be coming for their turn on the Yamunā.

'Tungā Devi was a Pulinda, a non-Vrishņi, and a very bold girl. She told the Gopis that they should not think too much in this emergency. She argued in whispers that Krishna was a noble man and he would come to their help if they called out to him. In any case, they had very little time for it. She had heard Kānhāiyā talk about the unity of all ātmās, and he would not shame them even if they approached him in their naked state.

'Phullakalikā was a neighbor of Rohiņi and Yashodā in Vrindāvan, and very close to them. She mocked Tungā Devi, "Hey, Tungā, if you are the pure ātmā without a body, why don't you go and get our clothes. We are Vrishņis, we are not as exalted as you are", making a slur on her lesser social status.

'Tungā Devi understood the slur. She playacted, "Ok, Vrishņis, you stay and relax here. I am going to collect my clothes and going to go back".

'There was pandemonium among the Gopis. All of them got on to Phullakalikā till she begged forgiveness from Tungā. They unanimously authorized Tungā Devi to be their leader and get them out of this predicament. Tungā Devi quickly slid forward and got behind a bush closer to where their clothes were and Krishṇa was standing there wondering as to what had happened to the girls.

'Tungā Devi called out to Krishṇa. "Kānhā, Kānhā, Kānhā, Kānhāiyā......".

'Krishna recognized Tungā's voice. He shouted, "Where are you? Are you safe"?

"Yes, yes, we are safe, but we need our clothes. Throw them to me. I am behind this bush".

'Krishna heaved a sigh of relief. He made a bundle of clothes, threw it to Tunga, and walked away. Gopis managed to save their modesty just in the nick of time. Krishna had understood the situation, so he stopped the boys coming in, till the Gopis came back.

'The Gopis trudged back. Vrishni ladies are normally very boisterous and open-minded. Today, they trudged past the boys very quietly with heads bowed.

'Subala was always wary of confronting the girls. They never spared him a few jibes on his obese frame. He was pleasantly surprised at being spared. He wondered aloud as to what had made these little bundles of mischief into angels. Was it the flute?

'Krishna agreed with him. "Yes, I think they are greatly influenced by the flute. I will play it to them every day. I was playing Raag Kedaar today. I will remind them of it from time to time. It keeps them quiet", he smiled mischievously.

'The Bhādrapada celebrations continued with dances on the banks of Yamunā; various percussion, singing and music performances. The cowherd community was celebrating life to its fullest. Every alternate day, there would be gatherings in the local Shiva temple, and bhajan competitions would be held. Community's connect with the Supreme Lord was a very live connect. Sanātana Dharma had the open architecture to let everyone attempt a communion with the Supreme in a way one found closest to his nature. Devotion came easy to most, especially the womenfolk communicated with the Supreme through the medium of their favourite images and deities. So they excelled each other in establishing oneness with their deity. Not many succeeded, but there was an unwritten pecking order of achievement. It was a riot of plurality and fun.

'Pūrnimā was the big competition. A dance party was coming from Vrishabhānpur to compete with the Vrindāvan party. Balarāma led the Gopa brigade, while Gopis were led by Ratnalekha and Phullakalikā. Krishna was performing as the flautist, and also as the percussionist. His speed on the Mridangam was in match with his famed physical speed and agility.

'The big party from Vrishabhānpur came in around noon, in time for the day feast. Vrishabhānu led the party himself. Naṅda Bābā welcomed him at the entrance to Vrindāvan, and the entire party rested at the houses of Naṅda-Yashodā and Rohiṇi, men and boys at Naṅda's place and girls and women at Rohiṇi's place. Rādhā's mother, Ratnagarbhā Devi also came along. She was greatly enthused by the prospect of such a dance and song competition. They had all heard of the Yashodā's precocious young boy. Just as in Mathurā and Vrindāvan, his reputation as a divine child had spread a little in other villages of Brij as well. Her other daughter, Ananga Manjari was also with her. Two years younger to Rādhikā, she was an accomplished dancer as well. Rādhikā, of course, was the genius they depended on. She was reputed to be accomplished in the 8 yogas, 4 Vedas, 4 Upavedas, 6 Vedangas, 108 Upanishads, and 64 kalās. She was

considered as a Devi among Gopikas of Brij. She had been recently betrothed to Abhimanyu of their own village, son of Vrikagopa, a simple farmer with huge tracts of lands and cattle, with a very complicated mother, and a very scheming sister, appropriately named Jatilā and Kutilā.

'Yashodā was also at Rohiņi's place. She had a great liking for Rādhikā, as did Rohini. Vrindāvan gopikas also landed there. It was all round merriment and laughter. Gossip and backbiting, two very womanly pursuits, were at their highest. The favourite gossipmonger was none other than Tungā Devi, who was doing a graphic description of how Krishna first stole their clothes, and how she rescued them. Rādhā was listening to the gossip with great interest, and teasing Phullakalikā and her band of Gopis. They were tut-tutting Tungā, telling her not to distort the story. Tungā was so caught up in her own imagination that she made up the story to make it sound as titillating as possible. Elder women were listening to it with horror, and the younger ones were relishing it to their utmost. Vrindā being the chief backbiter among all the Vrindavan gopis quietly went and told Krishna what was being gossiped about. Krishna laughed aloud, took his Murali and started playing Raag Kedar on his flute. As the cadences wafted into Rohini's house, Tungā Devi got the message and piped down immediately, while it was now the turn of the others to rib her. This playful frolic went on till the third prahara of the day. Then Vrindāvan started moving to the Yamunā banks.

'On the Yamunā banks, a jury was formed to decide the winner between the two parties. Three kalās - dance, percussion and music were on test. Each side had two attempts at each, making for a total of six rounds. Guests were given the first chance. They opened with a percussion performance with Rādhā's brother Sridama in the lead. Vrindāvan replied with a percussion performance by AbhiNanda and his troupè, with Krishna as a supporting percussionist on a mridanga. The performance was anchored with a tune on a Veenā. Complicated tihais 202, and addhās were played, but the most breathtaking was a chauthai 204 played to perfection over eight cycles in a ten beat taal. Aficionados cried with delight at this complicated manoeuvre.

AbhiNanda complimented it by a very powerful performance on a drum. First round went to Vrindāvan.

'Second round was music round. Vrindāvan went in first with a singing performance by Subala the fat gopa. He had a sonorous voice; Krishṇa accompanied him on flute. Before the performance, Krishṇa bowed before elders, gurus and Rādhā. Rādhā smiled, and whispered —do murali dhyāna, Kānhāiyā. That is your next lesson.

'Subala started his performance, with Krishna supporting him on flute. Krishna experienced a surge of profound feeling within himself. He and his murali were becoming one. He could feel the murali disappearing and the music coming out of him. He closed his eyes, and murali flowed. The cadences and notes of murali flowed not from the flute, but from the very consciousness of Krishna. The effect was so magical that Subal forgot to sing; he just gaped and heard the ebb and flow of murali. Entire congregation went into raptures. Rādhā felt a sense of pride in her ward. Her eyes became moist. After half a ghați, 12 minutes, Subala came to his senses, and picked up his singing again. This half a ghati interlude of celestial flute transported Krishna to a state of single identity, one with himself, in a state of dhyāna. He and his murali existed as one, and his kriyā of producing music became an extension of his consciousness. Only his Selfidentity remained. After a half swooning jury brought the performance to an end by sounding the gong, everyone stood up and applauded. Rādhā jumped up and embraced little Krishna in front of everyone. "Kānhāiyā, did you achieve murali dhyāna"?

"I don't know, sakhi, but for a long time, I and my murali became one. Only my own Self remained. I was conscious of everything, yet I was separate from everything in this world. Just me and only me".

"You were in a state of Dhyāna, sakha".

'The women looked askance at Rādhā's act, especially from the Vrishbhānpur contingent. Kuṭilā was in the group. She did not like this public display of affection by Rādhikā, not even to a boy 5 years youger than Rādhā. Prudery was not common among the gopas and gopis. There was an open culture among the Yādavas, especially of the Shūrasena branch of Vrishṇis. Boys and girls meeting and dancing together was not frowned upon. Marriages were fixed with the consent of both the boy and the girl. Kuṭilā, however, was jealous

for a different reason. She had a nature that could not countenance happiness of others.

'Next came the dancing round.

'Boys and girls of Vrindāvan went in first. This group was made up of older gopas, including UpaNanda. The rules also prohibited the same competitor going in again. Rohini herself led Vrindāvan ladies. They performed dance of the snake, the sarpa nritya with great sensuality. Rādhā led the challenge from Vrishabhānpur.

'Rādhā was on the threshold of being at her most beautiful. Clad in a blue dress, with her golden fair complexion, a perfect womanly shape, lustrous face and lips, luscious hips and gait, doe-like eyes, she took the breath of the audience away. All her friends, Lalitā and Vishakha and the guru-bhaginis at Kalpāchārya Āshrama accompanied her. Three boys, much younger than them, gave them company. They performed the peacock dance.

'The svelte figure of Rādhā was the fulcrum in this performance. She went into the same dhyāna awastha she had taught Krishṇa. The result was nothing short of a divine experience. Time stood still as Rādhā and her friends performed this dance. The longing of the male peacock for the clouds and rains, and the female for her male was described vividly in the dance steps. When Rādhā performed the pirouette of the male peacock, and did the electric steps of the peacock dance with proper mudrās, a collective sigh went up from the audience.

'Vrishabhānpur was the clear winner in this round. In the return rounds, the results went the other way. Music and percussion rounds were won by the Vrishabhānpur parties, and the young troupe led by Krishṇa and Phullakalikā won the dance competition. Krishṇa was able to reach the same level of trance that he had in the music section. His lesson in Dhyāna was complete.

'Result of the competition was a happy denouement for all. No winner, no loser. A feast was laid out after the competition. Boys and girls got together and chatted animatedly. Rādhā caught up with Krishṇa. "So, sakha; How was the lesson today? Did you achieve singularity with the object"?

"Yes, I did. I felt indescribable beauty within".

"You achieved a unity of identity today, Kānhāiyā. You will get a feeling of complete bliss the day you lose even this identity, and become egoless. Void is what the universe began from, and void is what we have to achieve if we want our fulfillment. This universe is made up of matter, energy and consciousness. As humans, we experience these three states separately. When we experience these three states together, we become divine," said Rādhā profoundly, yet playfully.

'They held each other's hands and danced together as the winners of 'best performers' prizes.

'Kuṭilā was watching with a pang of jealousy, and so was Subala.'





<u>- 34 -</u> RĀSA LILĀ

 ullet T he Vrishabhānpur party spent the night in Vrindāvan and left the next morning. Krishṇa enthusiastically joined the management.

Everyone from both sides was congratulating him. Rādhā was also being congratulated, but Krishṇa was being given more of the attention, as he was much younger.

'He came over to Rohini's house. Lalitā and Vishakha ribbed him for his new girl friend. "Kānhāiyā, congratulations on getting such a beautiful sakhi".

"Don't be jealous, Lalitā. Even you are my sakhi, but you are saying this because she won the competition. Isn't it"?

'Everyone burst out laughing.

'Kuṭilā sat alone in a corner, unable to bear her jealousy. Rohiṇi spotted her aloofness and brought her into the group, taking her by her hand.

"Jatilā and Kuṭilā, you should be the happiest. What a bride your Abhimanyu is going to get", Rohiṇi tried to soothe the duo.

'Kuṭilā made faces, and Krishṇa made fun of her. "Rādhā, your sis-in-law can marry me if she likes".

'Kuṭilā got furious, "Who will marry a dark guy like you. God knows where Yashodā chāchi got you from? She is such a fairy,

Nanda Bābā is so fair. Where did she get this dusky duckling"?

'Krishna burst out laughing. He remembered having been similarly teased by Balarāma. Yashodā was hurt by the insinuation by an outsider. She admonished Jatilā, who reluctantly shut Kuṭilā up.

'Rādhā was smiling all this while, and as if to mock her future inlaws, she started singing a love song for Krishṇa, in which all the others joined up.

'Krishna took out his flute from the folds of his clothes, and gave instrumental accompaniment. The atmosphere became musical once again, transporting people to ecstasies, which accomplished performers like Rādhā and Krishna alone could lift them to.

'Before they parted, it was agreed among the youth brigade that the Vrishabhānpur contingent would return on the next Pūrṇimā. Sharad Pūrṇimā was the annual Rāsa of the Vrishṇis. The two villages agreed to celebrate it together from then on, alternately in each other's village.

'Krishṇa came to see the contingent off in the morning along with Balarāma and other friends. He found time to have a quiet word with Rādhā before they left. He asked her, "Rādhā, I have one doubt. While we are moving up the ladder of yogic experience, I get a feeling that our endeavour may bring us exultation and exaltation, but the public at large may not derive any benefit at all. Is our purpose in life self-liberation alone"?

'Rādhā smiled. "Kānhā, you are on the right track. Many rishis have attained Kaivalya²⁰⁵, but it is only a karmayogi who combines his state of perpetual egolessness with public welfare. I have periodically experienced the state of bliss, but staying there and combining it with detached karma is something that requires even higher training. Maybe if you work assiduously, you may be able to experience state of Samadhi or the bliss of shunyata, but sustenance of that state is a totally different cup of tea. That is called Turiya state and it is not easy to reach. That's why you require a Guru".

'Krishna's inexhaustible supply of questions was difficult for the best of Gurus. He shot off a fresh volley of questions.

"What is your explanation of Shiva's cosmic dance? Guruji had given us a simile of droplets and waves, that just as it is impossible to describe the existence of a droplet independent of the wave, it is similarly impossible to describe the existence of an individual ātmā independent of the Cosmic Ātmā. If that were the case, how does a state of eternal bliss work for an individual? Why does he need it at all? The droplet will either fall back in the wave and be consumed by it, or it will fall on the earth and disappear. Much of it is accidental, isn't it'?

"You ask very complicated questions", laughed Rādhā. "Look, the eighth and final step of yoga teaches you exactly that. You have come through the stage 5 to 7. You observe how it happens. When you are dancing, there comes a time when your very chitta, the highest consciousness, gets involved. In a normal dance, it is your body dancing at the dictation of your intellect. Did you ever make out whether it is your body dancing, or your buddhi, or your ego that defines you as Krishṇa. When you get immersed in the dance to the level that everything fuses into one and questions cease, all that remains is bliss, that is ānaṅda, and that is what yōga describes as Samadhi".

"Sounds interesting, but if the ānanda leads you to such a state, why do you come back to the normal state at all"? asked Krishna.

"Experience it, Krishna. I cannot answer that. Transcending ego and intellect is itself such an experience that you will ask your Guruji the ways of staying there - In a state of bliss, yet fully aware of the cosmos and the physical universe on this earth".

'The conversation was broken by the arrival of Lalitā and Vishakhā in their full panoply of jewellery and fineries. Lalitā teased Krishņa. "Hello, Krishņa, is your hug limited to Rādhā only or we can also fondle your curly locks and radiant cheeks".

Krishna gave his enigmatic smile. "I am for the whole world, Lalitā. Why be so selfish. Get all your friends. Let them shower me with their affections," he winked.

'Everyone broke out in laughter at the ready wit of the young impish charmer.

'Vrindāvan hosted the youngsters of Vrishabhānpur again after a month. Sharad Pūrņimā was always a major festival. Rādhikā and her friends along with Sridāma and his friends, a group of about twenty girls and five boys had arrived with Rādhā. Vrindāvan offered fifteen

girls and Krishna. Most of the Vrindāvan boys were no good in dancing, and they preferred to just watch.

'Rādhā reminded Krishṇa of the questions he had asked last time. "Today, try and explore Ānaṅda. See if you can go beyond your identity, transcend the ego. Prepare yourself before that. You need to be in the state of Dhyāna before you get there, so go step by step. I take it that you are always in a state of self observation, so Pratyāhāra is now your normal waking state, focus on the dance, then dissolve into music, and use the vehicle of dance. Understand".

'Krishna, ever the one for quickly grasping a lesson began to focus on the dance steps.

'The Rāsa began at around dusk. The boys from Vrishabhānpur played percussion and Veeṇā, while Kānhā played his flute. On the notes of music, the girls started their dance. Kānhā, smaller in height than most of the girls stood in the middle, while the other boys sat and played. The girls danced around Krishṇa. Krishṇa went into a deep trance, into his Murali Dhyāna. Rādhā went into a similar trance. The Gopis were so enchanted by the flute of Krishṇa that they lost their manas state and achieved an identity with the music and Krishṇa, the music player.

'Exaltation of the spiritual state of participants through the sheer quality of ethereal beauty of music and dance happened on that day on the banks of Yamunā.

Āchārya Chanḍakaushika suddenly broke the narration and he went into a trance. He returned after a while to a waking state, but as if he remained in the trance. He closed his eyes, suffused with ānaṅda, and started speaking slowly, as if from another planet.

'Krishṇa's flute wafted over the senses of the Gopis. The beats of percussionists melted into their feet. The Rāsa transported everyone; the participants and the observers, into the mythical swarga where the pleasure experienced by the outer senses gets transformed into a permanent bliss of highest consciousness. This is not a physical experience of body organs, but beyond what can be described by speech, felt by skin, tasted by tongue, heard by ears, or smelt by the nose. Krishṇa's flute was exploring the limits of rapture, and Rādhā's feet were as light as that of an apsarā, marking the earth with lightning quick steps, and displaying the charm of her perfect

feminine physical form in sketching unbelievable figures through the space.

'Krishna too joined the dancing after half a prahara of flute playing. The sound of the flute had mingled in the ātmā of the participants. The celebration, the playful spirit, the sheer purity of the experience infused the Rāsa into a Līlā. Rādhā joined hands with Krishna, who in turn made a large circle of all the girls, and they moved forward and back in waves describing the motion of a tidal wave. Subala lent his voice to the dance of Ocean.

'In the next round, all of them divided into pairs. Gopis paired each other while Rādhā paired Krishna. One or two observers were scandalized, but in that state of heightened rapture, most had reached a state where distinctions of form had become meaningless. Krishna and Rādhā were in the state of shunyata²⁰⁶ they had discussed the previous Pūrnimā. Rādhā was five years older, on the threshold of full maturity as a feminine form of infinite physical beauty. Krishna was a young boy of nine not yet with even first sign of upper lip hair. Both lit up the Yamunā banks as the temporal form of Shiva and Shakti. They enacted the Daksha Prasanga. Rādhā enacted the various nāyikā of Sati, vividly played her self-immolation Virahotkanthikā, spurned by her father, pirouetting a hundred times at lightining speed even as Krishna enacted the meditating Shiva. After the self-immolation scene, Krishna did the Tāndava Nritya. He played the damrū to a crescendo, and then played the various mudras with consummate perfection. Time stood still and space shrank to nothingness.

'The celebrations and fun went on till the wee hours of the morning. The first glow of dawn in the east broke the spell. The Gopas and Gopis slowly came back to their physical senses of the gross; from the subtle state they spent their time in for nearly four praharas of the Pūrṇimā night.

'Krishna witnessed the first ray of transcendence that night, becoming even more firm in his mission of life, that of bringing joy and righteousness to the planet even while bringing the curvature of space-time from the cosmos into real time experience of the humans.

He had seen time and space shrink into one whole, and disappear into his being'.

Āchārya Chandakaushika took a deep breath. "Jarāsandha, do you understand who you are going to confront? The boy may be just about twelve now, but he has experienced transcendence. He is in that serene state of dynamic action where you have been striving to reach through your devotion of Shiva, but you have not succeeded because you have not bothered to remove the sludge of your wicked desires from the kriyā of devotion to Shiva. If you think your kriyā will get rewarded, you are mistaken. It is the karma hiding behind that kriyā that will be your undoing. Your revealed action has no relation with your stated action. You have no desire to understand the reality behind your Self, but you want to play the Creator and Destroyer in place of Shiva as his agent on earth. There is very little difference between you and Kutil Muni as far as the taint of Karma is concerned. His actions are overt and your actions are covert; but there is congruence, Jarāsandha. Learn from this little boy. Learn from Rādhā. There is a fusion of ātmā²⁰⁷ and parmātmā²⁰⁸ when Krishna and Rādhā dance together. Death is nothing but a cosmic wedding of the human ātmā with the cosmic ātmā. Rāsa Līlā is nothing but wedding of the mundane with the divine. Cosmic reality is very different from what your sensory perception tells you. You have been my disciple only in name. Learning never ceases. I am learning from the character of this little boy even as I narrate this tale. I hope you also do.





<u>- 35 -</u> Kāliyā

A chārya Chanḍakaushika performed meditation of over half an hour after finishing with the tale of the Rāsa. He started with focusing on a vision of Om, the vision slowly dissolved into a shabda of ākāsha, and Āchārya started experiencing the effulgence the sun. He did not go into deep dhyāna due to the unfinished task at hand, so he came back from the Dhāraṇā stage, and resumed.

'Sharad Pūrṇimā was over. Kaṃsa was getting more and more frustrated. He had Kuṭil Muni brought to his palace. He still thought that if the Kuṭil Muni model of authoritarian religion could be implemented in place of the mind boggling plural and egalitarian Sanātana Dharma, he could rule with his brawn alone. Ruling under the dispensation of Raj Dharma, Rāshṭra Dharma and Svadharma was a big strain on his fat brain. Much though he tried, his wild and wicked nature soon got the better of him.

'The reason he called Kuṭil Muni was an alarm he received. In any case, Krishṇa occupied his mind twenty-four hours. The more he tried and failed in his venture to finish off Krishṇa, the more Krishṇa's fame as a Divine spread all over Brij. All manner of myth making had started to happen around Krishna, some exalting him

even to the stature of Vishņu. It was getting clearer by the day that people at large had raised Krishņa to the status of a leader of resistance to Kaṃsa. Credit of this achievement by Krishṇa was totally Kaṃsa's doing. As if these worries were not enough, Viprathu very cheerfully brought him the news that Gargāchārya had come back to his Āshrama - the same Āshrama that had been vandalized by Bāṇakanṭaka. Things just did not seem right.

'Kuṭil Muni brought his old formula back. He told Kaṃsa, "Look, Kaṃsa, if the people kept to the path of Dharmic morality, no King would ever be safe. Kuṭil Dharma is the only politico-religious system that does not let people think. It has simple formulations. Let them not discover their Self in this filth called consciousness. That is dangerous for a ruler. They must find it in their body. Even the concept of heaven and hell needs to be physical, Kaṃsa Mahārāj, do you understand?"

'Kuṭil Muni paused to check whether his lecture was having any effect on Kaṃsa. Satisfied that the King was paying attention, he continued, "On the day of Pralaya, everyone will get back their physical forms, and be judged by Jhaṅkāl, who is the only Creator and destroyer. This earth will dissolve on the day of Pralaya, and only heaven and hell will remain. Till then, they must worship only one form, the Vilom Swastika, be true to one ruler, be true to Jhaṅkāl, and follow the detailed rules put out for them," his tone stiffened a little.

'He gnashed his teeth before continuing further, "Women are evil, Kaṃsa. They are the source of maximum mischief because their emotional nature makes it easier for them to attain higher consciousness through the devotional route. Besides, the theory of liberation and karma makes it difficult for the State to punish those who are not in consonance with what the ruler wants. Instead, the law of punishment punishes transgressions on the basis of intentions. We must punish in a way that maximizes the control of the ruler".

'This is why Pralaya Shāstra prescribes severe punishments for insults, dissent, defections, and revisionism. Pralaya Shāstra does not allow a subject to speak against Jhaṅkāl, his regent Kuṭil Muni, or his agent, the ruler. The ruler may inherit the title of Jhaṅkālputra. He does not allow his subjects free speech, on the evidence of Pralaya

Shāstra. It prescribes a set protocol and punishes every transgression. It institutionalizes inequality between the ruler and the ruled. It does not allow him to change his faith - either in Jhaṅkāl, the regent or his agent. Imagine, how convenient it would be for you to rule if your subjects were indoctrinated in this philosophy instead of the free-for-all Dharmic doctrines. You have to either convince your public to change over to this doctrine, which looks difficult. Otherwise, you have to use force, which is equally difficult because your security is in the hands of your father-in-law. You must earn legitimacy in the eyes of your public and then convert to Kuţil Dharma.

'Kaṃsa got up and solemnly said, "I, Kaṃsa, the son of Ugrasena of Kukura do hereby swear in the name of Vilom Swastika that I, along with my wives will convert to Kuṭil Dharma and proceed to establish the kingdom of Jhaṅkāl in Āryāvarta the day I kill my tormentor, Krishṇa Vāsudeva²⁰⁹". He then turned to Kuṭil Muni and said, "Muni, you have to ensure that I get the title of Jhaṇkalputra. Don't get too ambitious. That is a title that behoves a man of arms, not a mere Regent. Understand"!

'Kuṭil Muni was both disappointed and elated. Disappointed because there was no immediate movement forward and elated because all they needed now was to kill Krishṇa and have themselves declared as a major force in Āryāvarta, with a major King in their fold. He intended to formalize his designation of Jhaṅkālputra soon. He did not like Kaṃsa snatching that title from his regency.

'Kaṃsa also told Kuṭil Muni to look for someone better than Bāṇakanṭaka in the long run. Both agreed that they needed a better following for Kuṭil Dharma. Kaṃsa agreed to patronize the conversion activities of Kuṭil Muni. He gave a preaching corner in all State patronized temples to Kuṭil Dharmis. Kaṃsa also agreed to finance take-over of temples through money. No muscle power to be used, he warned. You shall not break any Murti unless you took over a temple through money or indoctrination. Kuṭil Muni readily agreed because he had seen the fate of at least two major war-like ventures failing due to the resistance of the Brij public. He was also wiser after the fiasco in Khānḍavaprastha. His Rakshāgriha military campaign ended in his entire Suvastu Army getting wiped out. He himself

became a virtual prisoner of the Nāgas. Rakshāgriha also went back to the Kuru Empire after a brief few months under the Nāgas. Now that he had successfully smuggled Kashṭakāraka to the Nāga kingdom in Khānḍavaprastha, there was no difficulty in trying out a method of subversion to which the non-believers of Āryāvarta would be less alert. Kuṭil Muni wanted to use the Sanātana philosophy of sāma, dāma, danḍa and bheda against them.

'Kuṭil Muni started working on the revamped strategy. He also advised Bāṇakanṭaka to change his strategy of targeting Krishṇa. He advised him to use astras instead of shastras. Bāṇakanṭaka expressed his inability. "Vrishṇis of Vrindāvan have become very alert. They have also built defences. Vatsa and Dhenuk were excellent at decoy operations, but the boys are very sharp. They have now tied up with Vrishabhānu, another Vrishṇi, and secured their defences from the western side as well. The King is extremely wary of attacking Vrishṇis, as they form the major part of his Mathurā army. His own Kukurs are a meager part of the local army. That's why I have been forced into clandestine operations. I must say, though, that the boys have grown up much sharper than one ever thought. Use of astras is impossible in areas of such high foliage. We can mount an attack from the riverside, but that requires the sanction of the King. My options are severely limited".

'Kuṭil Muni tried to be helpful. "I had the Nāgas set up a water serpents' nest in the Yamunā for a future assault on the Yādavas of Mathurā. That should not be very far from Vrindāvan. Try and lure the boys there somehow. If you can excite the boys into some bravado, your job would be done".

'Bāṇakanṭaka got busy arranging his next trap.

"At the same time, Vrindāvan people were having trouble with this particular stretch of Yamunā that lay about a yojana and a half, around 18 kms, upstream. Whenever they took their cattle up the Yamunā, they had a few cows dying after drinking the water from Yamunā, and a few were even dragged into the waters by big serpents. People of Vrindāvan called it Kāliya Duh²¹⁰, the home of Kāliā Naag, the big serpent. They had forbidden cows from going in that direction. There was even a discussion of shifting from

Vrindāvan if the serpents approached closer to Vrindāvan. Krishṇa opposed it when he heard about the scheme. "What's so big about the serpents, we will drive them out," he said emphatically to Yashodā. Yashodā tut-tutted him and told Naṅda about it. Naṅda was becoming increasingly impressed with the intellect, courage and diligence of his young ten year old. He said nothing to Krishṇa. He had the sagacity to let the young boy decide his own destiny.

'Bāṇakanṭaka did not have to lay any trap for Krishṇa. He decided to launch a war against the snakes by himself. He would go towards the Kāliya duh and deliberately provoke the serpents by throwing stones into the water. His friends complained to Yashodā, who forbade the boys from going in that direction.

'That could not deter Krishna at all. He learnt the techniques of repelling snakes by using cinnamon and clove oil mixture and a mixture of chilly powder and camphor.

'On a grazing day, they let the cows out in a pasture just out of Vrindāvan, and then Krishņa started playing a game of ball-throwing and catching. Playing the game, he led everyone to the Kāliā Duh.

'The game involved two teams throwing the ball to hit another boy of the other team. Whoever got hit would have to sit out. A team that lost all its boys through hits would be the loser. Krishna, as usual, was very skillful in such enterprise. He was always the most sought after in a team, as he would not only duck a ball, but would also catch it and throw it at the other team with such blinding speed of reaction and accuracy that he would win each and every time. The other team led by Balarāma was getting increasingly frustrated. Unknown to them, Krishna had worn a sack around himself containing the repellents he had prepared under the guidance of Āchārya Swarupa.

'Even as they were playing, word went to Yashodā that boys had once again gone to Kāliā Duh. Yashodā along with Padmā rushed to the Duh, taking all available gopis with her.

'Just as they reached the Duh, they saw a frustrated Mansukhā throwing the ball to Krishṇa, who was standing with his back towards the Yamunā. Mansukhā had no doubt that Krishṇa would not duck but would catch the ball and throw it back at him. He was alert to the boomerang coming his way. What Krishṇa did this time, however, was that he ducked and let the ball pass him. Ball went into the Kāliā

Duh. Boys started shouting at Krishna for losing the ball. Losing the ball also meant losing the game. Balarāma loudly clamoured that they had won the game.

'Yashodā and the women had just come into the sight. They could overhear the argument. Knowing Krishṇa, she shouted from a distance to stop the argument. She said she would compensate for the ball.

'Balarāma was insistent, "Chāchi, this is not a question about compensating the ball or getting another one. After ages, we have got a chance to claim victory over this rogue Krishṇa. We are not going to let that pass".

'Krishna shouted over the top of their voices. "You can claim victory only if I do not get the ball back", and he jumped into the Duh.

'Yashodā nearly fainted. She got ready to jump in after Krishṇa. She let a huge wail out, "Let me jump also, what will I do without Krishṇa?" Gopalas rushed to Naṅda bābā and other men who were in the fields supervising farming. There was complete pandemonium.

'Krishna, meanwhile, was at his playful best. He had jumped directly into the serpents' nest. He let the stock of repellent flow into the water, having taken care to shield himself with a layer of oil antidote in advance.

'As the repellent flowed in, the serpents' started coming out from the nest. Krishna swiftly swam away from them upstream as the repellent was poured downstream. Serpent after serpent, including the famous Kāliā swam downstream to escape the repellent, and abandoned the nest for good. Krishna dived into the nest, retrieved the ball and was ashore in a flash. He started dancing on the massive head of Kāliā with the ball, in a blinding movement in which the boys could only see the ball moving in a dazzle of hands and feet. Yashodā saw Krishna dancing with a hundred feet and hundred hands; such was the speed of his movement. In a blink, Krishna jumped up, did a flip and landed on top of Kāliā again. The gigantic python-like snake was already troubled by the repellent. It had to stay afloat, even as Krishna practised his dancing steps on the snake's back and hood. He jumped high again and did two and a half somersaults and one twist before landing on Kāliā's hood again. The movement appeared to the

onlookers like a streak of lightning shooting up from the snake, and coming back. The snake was severely wounded, and had started bleeding. Krishṇa's feet were now looking red. The sun was setting away from the river. It let out a pink hue onto the red feet, creating a miasmic effect that mesmerized the onlookers. Time froze and space shrank. Everyone stood agape at this new feat wrought by Krishṇa.

'Yashodā stood in a daze. "O my Shiva, what Lilā is this of yours? Is this boy a human being or an avatar"?

'Serpents, after abandoning their nest, fled towards Khānḍavaprastha to the nests they had originally come from.

'After finishing with his dazzle dance, Krishna calmly jumped ashore, walked up and threw the ball at Mansukhā. Mansukhā was too shocked to even move. Then Krishna started celebrating. "Look, ma, my team won again".

'Nobody moved and nobody responded. The women surrounded Krishna and started propitiating the deities to protect him against evils.'

Āchārya Chanḍakaushika once again started chanting his favourite incantation to Krishna Vāsudeva.





<u>- 36 -</u> <u>PRALAMBĀSURA, FOREST</u> <u>FIRE</u>

A chārya Chanḍakaushika came out of his trance and resumed.

'Bāṇakanṭaka sent his spies to the water serpents' nest to devise a method of shifting it closer to Vrindāvan and luring Krishṇa to it. It seemed a very safe and viable plan to them.

'The devastating news of destruction of Kaalia's nest was brought to Bāṇa within three days. With the news came astounding bits of myths and exaggerated divinity attached to the boy Krishṇa. Bāṇakanṭaka tried to keep it secret, but such things cannot be kept hidden. Another round of Krishṇa's tales started doing rounds of Mathurā streets, and reached the ears of Kaṃsa before long.

'Kaṃsa got more worried. He was not so much concerned about the failure of another plot to kill Krishṇa, as he was about the halo of invincibility building around Krishṇa. Pradyot informed him about the frenzy building in the public in favour of Krishṇa and Balarāma. Kaṃsa was getting impatient. Summer was approaching. Kaṃsa had modified the suspended sentence of Bāṇakanṭaka by increasing the period of suspension by another two years. Kuṭil Muni was granted

the Royal Pardon. This had incensed the public even more. Fuelling further resentment was the royal patronage granted to Kutil Dharmis to preach in the temple premises. A few minor clashes had already occurred. The preaching hours of the Kutil Dharmis had to be conducted under armed security. Even after that, the Kutil Dharmis were hardly drawing any crowds. One frustrated preacher even went to the extent of abusing the temple deities. He was caught and thrashed by the devotees, in spite of the presence of the guards. Kutil Muni's grand plan of brainwashing the residents of Mathurā and Brij was not going anywhere. It was only serving to cement the resistance to Kamsa and the Magadha Armies. Mathurā soldiers were also becoming more and more sympathetic with the public. Members of Sudharmā Sabhā were acutely aware of the mood of the public and the army, but none dared to tell this to Kamsa. They feared the unpredictable behaviour of Kamsa, his cruelty, and the Magadha contingent.

'Kaṃsa did not dare to turn to any Yādava chieftain or commander. Prabala had made very little headway in penetrating the Mathurā public. Wily-nily, he had to fall back upon the resources of Bāṇaknataka. It seemed as if they were both made for each other. Even when Kaṃsa tried to distance himself from Bāṇa, destiny always seemed to conspire to get them back together.

'Bāṇakanṭaka came to Kaṃsa and outlined his plans for the next six months. He promised to Kaṃsa that he had at least six plans lined up for the next six months. Something would work, he hoped. Vrishṇis have become very careful, and Kuntibhoja has armed them at the instance of Vasudeva. Kunti, the daughter of Kunti-Bhoja, and Vasudeva are both Shūrasena's children. Kunti was adopted by Kunti-Bhoja, who is assisting the Vrishṇis now. We are in no position to attack Kunti kingdom, as they are related to Kuru Empire through marriage of Kunti and Pandu. Clandestine and covert operations are the only way out.

'Kamsa sighed and waved Bāṇa off.

'Bāṇakanṭaka planned his next move with some urgency. He summoned all his top lieutenants. He informed them that all his

attempts at eliminating their top adversary had failed, and they had to shoulder the burden.

'Bāṇakanṭaka at once made Pralambāsura (no relation of Pralamba the Gaṇanāyaka) in-charge of the next attempt. Pralambāsura was a Pārshva, and was a known wrestler, and the only one who would regularly wrestle with the famed duo of Chāṇūra and Mushṭika. Nobody thought much of the brains of Pralambāsura, but they had very few intelligent spies left with them now. Vatsa, Baka, Agha, Dhenuk, Pūtanā and Triṇāvarta were some of the most brilliant operatives Bāṇa had. All of them not only failed, but also perished in the operations. He was now left with only the more thickheaded variety.

'Pralambāsura promised Bāṇakanṭaka that he would get him the head of Krishṇa within the week. He set off and made a base near Vrindāvan with great fanfare. Sharp Vrishṇis smelt it within a few minutes, and word reached Naṅda and UpaNaṅda within the next hour. Gopas travelled frequently to Mathurā, not only for selling their milk and butter, but also to watch events. Wrestling events were very popular, so every fourth Vrindāvan resident knew Pralambāsura.

'Pralambāsura waited outside the limits of Vrindāvan, and sent his spies to get news for the boys. A few spies disappeared, and a few got replaced. The trap was being set from the other side.

'One day, a Vrindāvan spy who had sneaked into Pralambāsura's entourage to act as a double agent, informed Pralambāsura that the boys were coming to a pasture close to his base. He suggested that that they could abduct Krishṇa and take him to Mathurā and hand him over to Kaṃsa. "That would make Mahārāj so happy with you that he would gift you anything that you would be even able to ask". The idea went into the thick head of Pralambasura.

'Pralambāsura and the spy hid in the tall elephant grass on the periphery of the pasture. A section of guards came and took positions around the pasture. Pralambāsura was worried.

"Don't worry, sir," the mole told Pralambāsura. I will give you a signal to go and mingle among the boys. You look very young and just like them. Today they are going to play a new game in which each boy has to carry another on his back." The foolish Pralambāsura, a well-built wrestler took the word of the mole.

'Once the boys came, they split into two teams. Each team would carry the members of the other team on their back, and count time. Each round carried three sub-rounds. Full game consisted of five rounds.

'After the game had commenced and a few rounds had been won and lost, the spy pushed Pralambāsura into the group and showed him Balarāma. "That big boy, sir; he is Krishṇa".

"But Bāṇa told me that he is just ten years of age. He also told me that he is dark," Pralambāsura wondered loudly.

"Who told you that, sir? He was named Krishna only to ward off evil eye".

'That was a satisfactory explanation for a fool like Pralambāsura. In a move that he thought was very clever, he got into the group. He was immediately recognized. Krishṇa and Balarāma winked to each other, but carried on playing as if they had not detected anything amiss.

'Pralambāsura was in a tearing hurry. He muscled into the middle of the group, and offered to carry Balarāma on his back on behalf of Krishņa's team. Balarāma gladly jumped onto his back. The mole had kept Balarāma's mace and Krishņa's bow and arrow hidden with a guard.

'Pralambāsura took Balarāma on his back. Like the fool that he was, instead of following the course of the race, he immediately started running towards the forest. Boys got panicky at the sight of a big, well built man, carrying Balarāma off on his back at great speed. Balarāma was laughing away. He struck a full fisted blow on the head of Pralambāsura with such force that he started wobbling, feeling a bit giddy. Another blow and Pralambāsura found his head swimming. He staggered and Balarāma got off his back. He motioned to the guard to bring his mace to him. One blow of Balarāma's mace to the head was enough to send Pralambāsura's ātmā into the cosmic infinity. Just to make sure that he had finished the big monster off, Balarāma crushed his neck with another blow of his big mace.

'The guards attacked the base camp of Pralambāsura with flaming torches and arrows. The camp guards were taken by such surprise that they fled leaving everything behind.

'Bāṇakanṭaka was devastated by this turn of events. He had only half expected Pralambāsura to do any wonders, but he never expected this kind of a rout. As far as Mathurā was concerned, here was more evidence of godly powers of Krishṇa.

'Bāṇakanṭaka lost his sleep. He did not dare to go to Kaṃsa and break the news. He also knew that the news would reach Kaṃsa through street gossip. So he decided to take the bull by the horn himself.

'Bāṇa expected a mouthful from Kaṃsa. To his utter surprise, Kaṃsa just heard him out, giving no reaction whatsoever. He waved Bāṇa off within a few minutes. Bāṇa was shaken. This was unusual behaviour from Kaṃsa. Patience was not a virtue that was expected out of his King. Bāṇakanṭaka became disoriented. He went and sat on the banks of Yamunā, at the Royal Ghāṭ, reflecting.

'Out of despair come bright ideas. He had tried everything; poison, snakes, deceit, decoy, and musclemen. Even bows and arrows would have been tried had the Gopalas not shifted to forest shielded Vrindāvan. He had to try some divyāstras from some distance. Nothing else was working. He had a few bowmen who could shoot arrows dipped in fat oil and lit manually. He left in a huff and took the bowmen, their quivers, cans of ghee, bales of cotton, and set off on his big boat towards Vrindāvan. Before dusk, he had arrived across Vrindāvan. He ordered his bowmen to fire arrows into the dry woods around Mathurā. His idea was to mimic a forest fire, which could not be directly ascribed to him. Unknown to him, he had been spotted by the elaborate spy ring of Nanda as he was getting his boat loaded and word was already out in Vrindāvan that Bāṇakanṭaka was coming to light up Vrindāvan.

'Krishṇa had already tackled a small forest fire earlier. He had rigged up an inventive process of filling up water in small pouches of cotton bags, fixing it up on the tips of arrows and then sending them across in wave after wave of arrows. By the time, Bāṇakanṭaka reached across Vrindāvan, Krishṇa's Dhanush Sena had placed more than a thousand bows and arrows and organized a water supply. The bows and arrows ringed the whole of Vrindāvan, and faced the skies. In addition, he had some of his own flaming arrows placed tactically.

'There was a gap of nearly two hours between the time information was received in Vrindāvan, and Bāṇakanṭaka's frustrated adventure. As soon as the boat came in the range of the arrows of Vrindāvan's bow defence, they fired their water pouches at the boat. The cotton bales were kept in the open on the boat. All except one got wet. They were able to pull one back in the built up structures of the boat once they realised that Vrindāvan was greeting them with water cannons.

'Bāṇakanṭaka was flummoxed. There had obviously been a leak. But what could they do? He had the option to back off, or to try his original tactic with whatever ammunition he was left with. He decided to persist. Cotton balls were made, placed on the arrows; bowmen came out in the open amid a shower of water bearing arrows, and took their chance by firing flaming arrows. All that it succeeded in was putting a small forest area on fire on the right side of Vrindāvan that faced the boat. The cowherds put out the fire by showering that area with a saturation of water bearing arrows. The next disaster to strike Bāṇakanṭaka was that a flaming arrow fired at the boat found its way to the ghee²¹¹ cans, and the boat got consumed in a blaze. Bāṇakanṭaka and bowmen had to abandon the boat and swim ashore to the other bank. They trudged back to Mathurā, only to be met by Pradyot on the gates of Mathurā and be arrested.

'Bāṇakanṭaka was produced before Kaṃsa late at night. Kaṃsa was beside himself with rage. "Idiot, cretin; who asked you to take my bowmen? Don't you need authorization before taking my army men to your stupid adventures". He had a whip ready. Bāṇa was shaking with fear, even as Kaṃsa was shaking with rage.

"Fool, you will now rot in jail from now on. You have reduced my stock to zero in the eyes of the people of Mathurā. I am a laughing stock, and Krishṇa is now God. If I knew that you were such a fool, I would have sent a full Maagadh contingent to conquer those gwālās. Off you go to jail".

'Kaṃsa was pacing up and down his sleeping quarters the whole night, only dreaming of his death. Krishṇa was already ten years old. Kroorasena had predicted that twelfth year of Krishna's birth would be fatal for him. If that were the case, he had only a year and a little more to go.'





<u>- 37 -</u> GOVARDHANA

chārya Chanḍakaushika resumed after a brief pause.

'Shrawani Pūrṇimā was approaching, the Rakshābandhan day. For as long as one could remember, Vrishṇis had celebrated the day after Rakshābandhan as Indrārohaṇa. The Vrishṇis gave a big homage to the god of rains, Indra. The young Krishṇa was developing into some kind of a rebel. He had become a very rational personality after his experiences of Yogic and cosmic insights. Aangiras School taught a very pragmatic philosophy. Enquiry and experience was the cornerstone of their teaching. They encouraged the students to question, interrogate and debate the teachers and teachings. They taught them all schools of thought, and asked them to have deep experience of all of them. All paths lead to the Supreme, they said. Paths of Bhakti, Karma, and Gyāna were taught through the medium of Hiranyagarbha's yogic methodologies. Right philosophy through the right tools was the credo.

'Nobody imbibed this spirit better than Krishna. He would examine all rituals and traditions on the principles of either Bhakti, or karma, or gyāna, and would start a campaign against a ritual or practice if it did not conform to these templates. Krishna started a debate over the custom of Indrārohaṇa after he established a clear

correlation between clouds getting obstructed by Govardhana Parvat and bringing rains to Vrindavan. He established it by examining the rainfall patterns on the other side of Govardhana and proving it. For several months, he campaigned for doing away with prayer and oblations to Indra. He also undertook many exploratory expeditions up the Govardhana, and marked out every inch of the hill. He was aware of every cranny, every cave, and every ridge of the hill. Aware of the threat from Kamsa's Magadha Army, he had even marked out places to hide, to build defences, and even the right boulders to roll down with the help of levers and pulleys to be operated by bullocks. His fertile brain churned out so many ideas that the elders found it impossible to cope up with. The only person who could keep up was Āchārya Swarupa, but he was finding it more and more difficult every day. His skills with inventions, instruments and equipments were phenomenal. The bow and arrow ring that he had built around Vrindāvan, and the logistics he built up to support it was a battle invention of the highest order in the history of Āryāvarta. Kamsa was so terrified of the incident narrated to him by his spies that he abandoned all thoughts of directly attacking Vrindavan. He was just grateful that Vrishnis of Vrindavan and Vrishabhanpur continued paying their taxes to Mathurā. If Vrindāvan stopped paying their taxes, he did not know how he would enforce it. He never felt so helpless.

'Kaṃsa was furious with Vasudeva as well. He had cheated him. There was no doubt at all that this troublesome boy in Vrindāvan was the eighth son of Devaki. Except for his complexion, many spies vouched for his stark resemblance with Vasudeva. His curly hair had gone on Devaki, and his phenomenal intellect was a hallmark of the Vrishṇis. Kukurs always resented the high percentage of intelligent men and women among the Vrishṇis. Shūrasena, the brightest jewel among the Yādavas, was himself a Vrishṇi. He summoned Vasudeva again.

'Vasudeva and Devaki were privy to all the street gossip about the divine being born to Nanda and Yashodā. Devaki got so thrilled every time she heard about Krishna's exaggerated exploits that she nearly gave it all away a number of times. Nanda would come and meet Vasudeva often, taking care to talk only when Kamsa's spies and the

maid Vatsalā could be avoided. Yet he would give Vasudeva an accurate account of Krishna's progress, shorn of the exaggerations.

'Vasudeva half guessed the reason for his summoning. He followed his Rāj Dharma and presented himself before the King nevertheless.

'Kamsa was pacing up and down in his inner chambers. He received Vasudeva in his inner chambers, unusually.

"Shūrasenaputra, tell me in the name of your noble father. Is Krishṇa Devaki's eighth son"?

'Vasudeva was correct in his posture. "Mahārāj, you killed Devaki's eighth child with your own hands. What more evidence do you need"?

"Vasudeva, you better come straight with me", Kamsa shouted at the top of his voice. Blood rose to his face. His veins in the neck came close to bursting. He was blabbering with rage. Vasudeva remained cool as ever.

'In that fit of rage, He ordered Vasudeva and Devaki arrested. He also ordered Ugrasena to be placed under rigorous imprisonment, from being a lightly held political prisoner.

'Vasudeva and Devaki once again found themselves in their familiar prison after eleven years.

'In Vrindāvan, one more event was shaping up that would enhance the halo around Krishṇa even further. The Bhādrapada pratipadā, for the first time in living memory, was not celebrated as Indrārohaṇa. Instead, Kārtik Shukla pratipadā, the day after Deepāvali was designated as a day of offering to Govardhana. Krishṇa spearheaded the campaign. Āchārya Swarupa gave the campaign his go ahead, persuading Naṅda and his brothers, UpaNaṅda and AbhiNaṅda to drop Indra's worship in favour of worship of Govardhana.

'On the Bhādrapada ashṭami, the eleventh birthday of Krishṇa, the skies came pouring down. Naṅda would remember that fateful night eleven years back that changed the course of his life. Yashodā also found the coincidence propitious, but the rest of Vrindāvan considered the portents quite ominous. Krishṇa and his friends enjoyed the rains. Cattle also enjoyed the rains for some time, and

were then herded into their shelters. More than the rains, the community discovered that Yamunā was rising alarmingly.

'By mid-day, Yamunā had already broken its banks. Krishṇa herded the cattle together and told Subala to move to the base of Govardhana. He sketched out the path to a huge cave that he had discovered during his explorations of the hills. He then went to Naṅda bābā and offered him his plan. Naṅda was initially reluctant to move, but when he found Yamunā rising alarmingly, and nearly level with the foundation of his own house. He ordered all the carts prepared, use of umbrellas and shields, and moved out behind Krishṇa's pilot cart. In about an hour, they were climbing up the Govardhana. After climbing for around two hundred feet, they came across a huge boulder. Krishṇa clapped his hands. He showed Naṅda a passage by the side of that boulder leading to a cavernous cave of the size of half of Vrindāvan. The entire human population and the cattle took shelter in that cave.

'It rained for many days. Even after the rain subsided, they found the floodwaters reaching almost the base of Govardhana hills. They spent nine days and nine nights in that huge cave. They survived on milk of cows. After three days, the boys were able to take the cows out to graze on the other side of the hill. So the milk supply continued. A great carnival of communal living was celebrated. Rādhikā and her friends joined in. A spur-of-the-moment Rāsa was celebrated on day seven. As the water receded, the Vrindāvan community trudged back.

'The tale was quickly carried to Mathurā. Mathurā had been completely devastated by the floods. Looking at the severity of the Yamunā's fury, Kaṃsa was also reminded of that fateful night eleven years back. He found this flood to be even more severe than the one of eleven years back.

'Kaṃsa desperately hoped that Krishṇa and the cowherds would have been swept away. Even before the floods subsided, he sent out his spies to Vrindāvan. The spies found Vrindāvan deserted. That was an intriguing situation. They carried on further till they found Vrindāvan and Vrishbhānpur celebrating Rāsa together at the Govardhana Hills.

'It was faithfully reported back to Kamsa. As the spies could not fully fathom the cause-effect relationship, they themselves wove up a fantastic theory ascribing divine powers to Krishna, and told him that his adversary was holding the hill captive and celebrating dance and music there.

'In the streets of Mathurā, the tale got further exaggerated. Spin-doctors of anti-Kaṃsa variety projected the saving of Vrindāvan as an act of Ishwara. Krishṇa, according to them, grew into a massive form, and then lifted the Govardhana Hill on his little finger'.





<u>- 38 -</u> FOUR MORE

A chārya Chanḍakaushika was now narrating the tale with a breathless haste.

'Kaṃsa was now getting totally paranoid. He asked Prabala to mount attacks on Vrindāvan. "Go do whatever. Bring them down to their knees and make them give up that boy to me. I will pardon them. I will give them unheard of riches. Just that boy, just that boy; Krishna, Krishna, Krishna...

"Mahārāj, you are chanting your enemy's name," interjected Prabala.

'Kamsa squirmed in embarrassment.

'Prabala bowed to Kaṃsa and requested that he be allowed to take the help of incarcerated Bāṇakanṭaka. "Even better than that Mahārāj. You could think of reconciliation with Vasudeva and Gargāchārya, Mahārāj. Public of Mathurā is not with you. Shiva forbid, if we get into trouble, people will not stand by us. They are scared of the Magadha Army, but only as long as we keep a distance. You are asking us to get involved in attacking Vrindāvan. There is no clear pathway to success there. If we also fail, you would lose your most credible deterrent".

"I did not know that Maagadh were such cowards," thundered Kaṃsa. "You are trying to teach me how to fight a slimy enemy, one who doesn't fight in the open, but slithers around like a snake. How does one fight snakes with swords and arrows? It has to be a covert operation. Use any method. Take help of any brigand, any criminal, any desperado, any robber or any dacoit. I just want him killed. You know who I am talking about".

'Prabala meekly acquiesced. He was permitted by Jarāsandha to take limited responsibility. Under extreme situation, he could always take permission from the Magadha princesses. This was one such situation. As he left Kaṃsa, he was thinking about the snake part of Kaṃsa's hysterics. His thought went to the Kāliyamardan story of Krishṇa. "Isn't that the way to fight snakes?" He thought.

'Prabala apprised Prāpti of the demands of the King. Both the queens were worried at the condition of the King. He had not slept for days. He had lost his appetite. He had even lost his libido. No ladies of night had been brought in for months. His behaviour was most erratic. Sudharmā Sabhā was practically disbanded, as its meeting had not been convened for over a year. This had alienated even the loyal Yādava satraps. Rumour mongering was at its peak. Public whispers had it that the King was planning to adopt Kutil Dharma as his official religion and policy. Public already had an idea of how Kutil Dharmis operated. Many clashes had already taken place. If the King also patronized them and fortified his cruel and erratic nature with a totalitarian narrative, public would have the option of either submitting or resisting. Mathura had been quietly planning for resistance. All it needed was a charismatic leader. They adumbrated the contours of this emerging leadership in Vrindāvan – in Krishna and Balarāma.

'The Yādava Army was largely with the public, though their main grouse was with the Magadha Army, not with Kaṃsa. The interests of the Yādava Army and Mathurā public were in total convergence, even though the motivations were different.

'Prabala was given the go ahead by the queens. He went and met Bāṇakanṭaka in the prison, offering him amnesty for his help. He was taken out of the prison cell and placed under house arrest in the

Magadha army camp. They selected the last few remaining options available to them.

'Sudarshan was the first one to be launched. He was not particularly intelligent, but he was an expert in handling snakes. Under the shelter of the Magadha Army, he went and hid in the forests near Vrindāvan. He had been given a description of Krishna. He was carrying a huge python. After a few days, he spotted some men sleeping in the pasture near the forest. He was thrilled. He looked at the grown up men, one of whom matched the description he was given. In his haste, he had forgotten whether he was sent to hunt for a grown up man or a young boy of eleven. He launched the snake on the man, who happened to be Nanda. His companions fled to Vrindāvan, sought out Krishņa and Āchārya Swarup at the Āshrama, and told them that a snake was constricting Nanda, and crushing him to death. Krishna and Balarāma rushed to the spot; Krishna with his magic snake potion, and Balarāma with his mace. Just as he had done with the water snake nest, his magic solution of oils did the trick with this snake as well. He let go of Nanda as soon as Krishna threw the solution at his nostrils. Nanda managed to wriggle out as the grip of the snake was loosened. Balarāma crushed its head with its mace. Nanda had seen Sudarshan setting the snake on him. Vrindavan guards surrounded the forest with deadly weapons, found out Sudarshan and killed him. His escorts found themselves outnumbered and fled.

'After the failure of the first venture, Prabala sent Shankhachūḍ, a massive hulk of a man, to kill Krishṇa. The man was a complete debauch. He found Krishṇa dancing away with Gopis one night. Instead of swooping on Krishṇa, he thought of having a good time with the Gopis first. So he ran and caught hold of Ratnalekhā, and ran away. Krishṇa and Balarāma ran after him. Krishṇa overtook him in no time, and tripped him with an expert tackle. Balarāma did the rest. He stood tall over the fallen Shankhachūḍa, and looked him in the eyes. The hulk joined his hands in supplication, begging for forgivance in the name of Shiva. Krishṇa came up to Balarāma and told him to kill him. "Dāu, don't hesitate. Shaṭhe shāṭhyam samācharet²¹². Come on, now," Krishṇa pushed Balarāma with his

right hand. Balarāma was out of his quandary. He killed Shankhachūda by crushing his skull with his mace.

'When the news of Shankhachuḍa's misadventure reached Prabala, he became quite dispirited. He was also getting anxious by the Mathurā rumour mills finding out about every botched attempt, and fuelling the imagination of the Mathurā public about Krishṇa. The public had virtually nominated him as the leader of the resistance. As a Vrishṇi, the army also found him to be quite a legitimate claimant. They would fondly remember Shūrasena, and long for his times. Unwittingly, even Prabala became destiny's tool to establish Krishṇa's power in the imagination of Mathurā. Kaṃsa, meanwhile, was hardly sleeping.

'Next, Prabala sent Keshi to seek out Krishna and kill him. He was supposedly a specialist of disguises. He bore no comparison with the masters like Baka, and Vatsa. Yet Prabala and Bāṇa did not have any better options. Kaṃsa had ruled out the option of a full-fledged attack on Vrindāvan, as he feared a mutiny in the Yādava Army.

'Keshi went to the pastures and waited in the disguise of a horse. The tactic was a non-starter. He waited for over a month, but the grazing herders did not appear. He came back.

'Bāṇa threatened Keshi with beheading before he could be sent again. A separate team of spies was sent with him to locate their targets. The spies finally located Krishṇa one day near Govardhana, and they forced Keshi to that location.

'Keshi reluctantly disguised himself in his horse attire, and mixed himself among the cattle.

"How much time do you think it took Krishna to spot him?" enquired Āchārya Chanḍakaushika. "Exactly one nimisha, which means blink of an eye". He answered himself.

'Krishna indicated him to Balarāma. Balarāma made a face as if he did not even enjoy the stupidity of his adversaries. He just picked up his mace and hurled at the monster. It hit him on the junction of the cranium with the forehead. His prāṇa escaped him without the delay of even a second.

'Nothing seemed to be going right for Prabala. He racked his brains to find one last man who could do a task, which seemed so easy but appeared increasingly impossible.

'Bāṇa tried the last throw of his dice. He called on Arishṭa, another disguise professional. He was not very competent, but beggars could not be choosers. The man needed nearly a month of training. He was ready only near Māgha Pūrṇimā. A rank drunkard, it was always a difficult task to keep him sober. Three persons kept guard on him to make sure that he did not drink excessively. He was given the bull disguise to suit his massive frame. He was finally launched in Vrindāvan one day. He went and mingled among the cattle. This was a tactic that was bound to end in detection. All the other bulls started bellowing loudly and surrounded him. They started goring him, and chasing him. His cover was blown in no time. After that, it was only a matter of time. Krishṇa fired a few arrows at him and dispatched him to his cosmic journey.

'Prabala gave up. He went to Kaṃsa and informed him of his failures. He took Bāṇakanṭaka and Gaṇanāyaka Pralamba (no relation of Pralambāsura) along.

'Kaṃsa was on the verge of exhaustion. He was in a state of semi delirium. He remembered Vasudeva telling him that he would die of his own fears of Devaki's eighth child. His Kaal seemed to be playing games with him. He heard Prabala, Pralamba and Bāṇakanṭaka in an absent-minded sort of way, almost in a reverie.

'He only vaguely heard Prabala pleading his failure. His mind was exploring the depths of his own consciousness. Visions appeared in his mind. He remembered the teachings of Gargāchārya, his own imprisonment by Sudharmā Sabhā, his coup, the lessons by Anantagupta, the dark night of Devaki's eighth delivery. Everything passed before the eye of his mind. He just passed out into the night.





<u>- 39 -</u> AKROOR

A chārya Chanḍakaushika was getting immersed in the story in a way that was affecting the listeners as well, albeit in different ways. Jarāsandha was struck with a mixture of rage and uncertainty, but he dared not show it for fear of annoying the Āchārya. Saudamini became imbued with a deep sense of devotion. Asti was feeling a sense of detachment with the world, and Prāpti was overwhelmed with a deep sense of regret and repentance. Prāpti felt that if she had even the least inkling of what Krishṇa was, she would probably have taken the matters into her own hands, thrown out Bāṇakanṭaka and Kuṭil Muni, and saved her husband from perdition.

The discourse resumed.

'Kaṃsa went into a stupor of sorts. It mimicked itself as sleep. In semi delirium, he was uttering the name of Anantagupta again and again. Prāpti had now taken the matters into her own hands. She sent Prabala to Kampilya with a letter to Pānchala king Drupad with a request to spare the services of Anantagupta for a few days. Drupad happlily agreed, but it took some persuasion to get Anantagupta to agree. He had to be reminded of Vaidya Dharma to agree to go to his former king. Prabala brought him by the second prahara of the day. Kaṃsa had just started coming through.

'When Kaṃsa opened his eyes, he found Anantagupta looking over him. His soothing presence lifted Kaṃsa's spirit instantly. He accepted nourishment after a week. Anantagupta administered some Kāyash²¹³ to him, and had him talking within another prahara.

'Kaṃsa opened up to Anantagupta. "Vaidyaraj, I remember your words so well. It is not as if I do not know the difference between dharma and adharma, but I cannot get the better of my nature. That", he sighed, "Seems to be the fruit of my past and present karma. Is it even possible to get the better of one's nature?"

'Anantagupta had a sardonic smile playing on his lips. "Now this man is talking," he thought. He remained skeptical, though. "Mahārāj, as long as you are bound to your nature, nothing can change. The inexorable march of time and space fuses with your karma and buries you in the cosmic scheme. Either you become a prisoner of your nature, or follow the Dharmic principles that you might have learnt from Guru Gargāchārya. Transcending your nature does not seem possible for you in the present state of your mind. Your intellect is buried under the weight of the viparyaya²¹⁴ in your mind".

'Kaṃsa reflected for a while, and requested Anantagupta to stay on in Mathurā for some more time.

'Anantagupta smiled, and said, "Maharaj, there is no use of my staying on in Mathurā. You are a prisoner of your nature. If I tell you that the only way for you to find redemption is to leave the kingship of Mathurā and go live with Gargāchārya, will you accept it?"

'Kamsa winced at the thought of leaving his throne. He snarled, "What kind of a suggestion is that?"

"Maharaj, it is exactly the kind of suggestion that a Rāṣhṭradharmi would gladly accept, but not you. I know that you are under the influence of Kuṭil Muni. If I tell you again that that his flat earth theories are nonsense, you will not agree. If I tell you that you are but a manifestation of your nature in the present space and time, only to be dissolved and manifested again and again unless you you realise your true nature as being one with the Supreme, you will think I am talking filth. So, I don't think you need me here. I am leaving".

'Kaṃsa felt dejected, but called for a meeting of all his trusted lieutenants. Prabala, Pradyot, Pralamba, Bānakantaka and Viprathu

were called. He also called Akroor, a Vrishni member of the Sudharmā Sabhā who was not very favourably disposed towards Vasudeva. He even called Kanka along with his musclemen, Head of Personal Guards Chāṇūra and his assistant, Mushṭika. An unplanned meeting began in the inner chambers of Kaṃsa.

'Kaṃsa informed them of his failure to kill his adversary in spite of his unremitting efforts over eleven years and a half. Kaṃsa spoke in a pensive, reminiscent sort of way, "friends," he began. The gathering was so stunned that they had to rub their eyes in disbelief. Kaṃsa addressing them as friends? This was the form of address Mahārāj Ugrasena used to employ in the Sudharmā Sabhā.

"Friends, we have to fight this menace together," began Kaṃsa. "I made a mistake some time back by sending spies to Mathurā to kill one of Mathurā's enemies. These spies have failed badly. Not only have they failed; they have created a halo round the adversary to such an extent that the public of Mathurā now considers him to be the leader of resistance to Kaṃsa. He is the eleven-year-old son of Naṅda and Yashodā, who may in reality be Devaki's eighth son. In the interest of the kingdom of Mathurā, in the interest of the federation of Yādavas, and in the name of Sudharmā Sabhā, it is the bounden Rāshṭradharma of all of us to secure our kingdom by eliminating all the threats that arise.

'Akroor interjected in his well-known acerbic manner. "Mahārāj, why is this being told to us now? We keep hearing rumours about the operations your allies and spies undertake. You never took Sudharmā Sabhā into confidence all these years. This fine Institution of Yādava federalism was undermined. What do you want from us now?"

'Chāṇūra chimed in, "What is this dispirited talk going on here. We will take our army and conquer those cowherds. I will smother that boy under my left armpit", he made an obscene motion.

'Akroor grimaced at this impertinent behaviour. "What is this uncouth wrestler doing in a strategy session," he thought. Even Prabala and others were quite amused. Mushțika giggled like a little boy, though.

'Even Kaṃsa ignored Chāṇūra's bravado. "I cannot take the risk of alienating the biggest and the bravest Yādava clan. Moreover, they have built a powerful militia with strong fortifications. More than

that, they have some of the sharpest brains working for them, led by that young boy. I cannot take the risk of tying up my mixed army of Maagadh and Maathur at Vrindāvan in a long siege and having an insurgency back at Mathurā. My intelligence input tells me that even a mutiny could not be ruled out if the Magadha forces are not here to protect Mathurā and the palace.

'Kaṃsa looked at Akroor purposefully. "I was just thinking that if we could somehow get these boys to Mathurā, it would be easy to finish them here. Akroor, can you go to Vrindāvan and invite Naṅda and Yashodā, along with Rohiṇi and their extended families for a Dhanuryagya²¹⁵, along with Chāpapūja²¹⁶. This would be followed by a wrestling competition. We would invite the boys to a wrestling match after Dhanuryagya and finish them off there. They would be completely accessible, isolated, and at our mercy. I require a Vrishṇi that Naṅda and his sons would trust. Can you accomplish this task for me, Akroor?"

'Akroor felt trapped. He knew Kaṃsa well. If he refused, he would earn his wrath. He knew that sooner or later the refusal would lead to jail. On the other hand, if he acquiesced, he would have a chance to bring deliverance to Mathurā. Unlike Kaṃsa and his cabal, he lived among the people of Mathurā. He was aware of the effusion of public sentiments that would engulf Mathurā's public and its Army if Krishṇa and Balarāma set foot in Mathurā. Mathurā already identified with him as the superhuman leader of resistance to the tormentor Kaṃsa.

'Akroor made a feeble attempt at play-acting, and then said, "Mahārāj, it is my great honour that you consider me as worthy of your attention. What greater fortune can one have than serving one's king in the performance of his Rājdharma". Even as Akroor uttered these words, he felt a dread within him. The terror and tyranny of Rājdharma could exact terrible cost from the ruling class. In Kaṃsa's case, the Rājdharma is involved in only exacting costs from others.

'Kamsa became very happy. He had always found Akroor an irritating personality. His quibbling always put him off. He considered it a great act of diplomacy on his part to bring Akroor around.

'Akroor set off for Vrindāvan three days before Mahāshivarātri. Considering the importance of the wrestling jamboree, Chāṇūra had asked for Mahāshivarātri day. Being a Shiva Bhaktaa, he considered the day auspicious, and also thought his powers to be at its peak on that day. Mushṭika and Kaṅka had no particular opinion on it. They just played along.

'Akroor was given Kamsa's Royal Chariot to go to Vrindāvan along with three detachments of the Magadha contingent.

'Akroor sent a message of his visit to Vrindāvan to Nanda, his cousin. He also sent advance intimation that he was coming to give him a personal invitation from Kamsa.

'Nanda met Akroor at the border of Vrindāvan with his brothers, UpaNanda and AbhiNanda. Akroor was received with great pomp and show, as due to a Royal Envoy.

'Akroor was housed in Nanda's front quarters. Yashodā came and took his blessings. Krishna and Balarāma were in the Āshrama when Akroor came. After they came back from the Āshrama, they were led into the presence of the royal guest. Akroor was sitting on a platform. As Krishna paid his respects by touching his feet, Akroor got up and hugged him. He whispered onto his ears, "You are the one who lifted Govardhana?"

'Krishna, ever the playful boy, was ever so quick in his response. "Bābā, I did nothing. Govardhana parvat itself is so powerful".

'Akroor held Krishna by hand and kept him close. He was so captivated by the sheer charm, beauty and radiance of the boy that he was ready to believe all the talk about him in Mathurā. He also asked for Rohini and Balarāma, and the whole family.

'After all had assembled, Akroor stated the purpose of his visit. "Mahārāj Kaṃsa has invited the whole Naṅda family, his brothers and sisters, and Krishṇa and Balarāma to Mathurā to watch and take part in a Dhanuryagya on Mahāshivarātri, and a wrestling exhibition. Mahārāj Kaṃsa has invited all his Yādava chieftains, and clan members. I have been sent to invite you and I have also sent for Vrishabhānu ji. We will go tomorrow to Mathurā in the afternoon, and you could come back the day after Mahāshivarātri, or immediately after the exhibitions finish on Mahāshivarātri.

'The invitation was received with different emotions by all present. Yashodā and Rohiņi were apprehensive. They knew that Vasudeva was once again confined to a prison cell. More than that, they were extremely apprehensive of what Kaṃsa would do to their children.

'Nanda was phlegmatic. He was aware of the twelfth year prediction. He got a sense that the prediction that was made probably as a fluke was becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy. He realized that the time had come for Krishna to find his real parents. He felt for Yashodā, but he kept an air of equanimity about it.

'Krishna and Balarāma were very excited about it. They were beyond fear, beyond worries. Their combat training, Balarāma's wrestling skills and Krishna's yoga training had made them supremely confident of their abilities. Krishna was excited by the dhanuryagya more, and Balarāma was more excited about the wrestling.

'The word got around that the group would leave for Mathurā the next afternoon. Apprehensions of Yashodā and Rohiņi also leaked out. So, information went around the whole of Brij that Krishņa and Balarāma were leaving Vrindāvan forever.

'When the Gopas and Gopis came to know about it, there was commotion all around. They started collecting near Nanda's house. A Prophet took the news to Vrishbhānpur also. By nightfall, Rādhikā and her entire troupè landed at Vrindāvan.

'There was a spontaneous gathering of the youngsters of Brij with Krishna and Balarāma, with Rādhā and Lalitā – as events would show later – for the last time'.





<u>- 40 -</u> VIYOGA

A chārya Chanḍakaushika smiled expansively at his audience. 'Now it is not very long. Have a little more patience.'

'Nanda Bhavan in Vrindāvan was practically surrounded by Krishṇa's friends, both boys and girls. Mansukhā went in and pulled Krishṇa out. Balarāma also came with him. Lalitā was very agitated. Phullakalikā started crying, and Mansukhā started fighting with Krishṇa. Krishṇa's attempts at pacifying them failed abjectly. He took them to the Āshrama grounds a little away from the village for discussions. Rādhikā was a picture of calm all through the commotion.

'Mansukhā asked Krishņa point blank. "Kānhāiyā, tell me what is all this going on. How can you leave Vrindāvan without telling us?"

"Even I have come to know about it just now," remonstrated Krishṇa, "Ask Dāu²¹⁷". Balarāma supported Krishṇa. "Yes, we were told only just now. Bābā Naṅda has accepted an invitation to go to Mathurā for some events being hosted by Mahārāj Kaṃsa. He would be the special guest there".

"Let him go," shouted Lalitā, "Why do both of you have to go?

'Balarāma tried to calm matters. "We are just going there as the whole family has been invited. Mātā Yashodā and Maiya Rohiņi will also go".

'Rādhā joined in. "Dāu, I know that you both are going to take part in wrestling and arrow shooting bouts there. Have you factored in the risk? Don't you know that Mahārāj Kaṃsa has been after the life of the kid Krishṇa? Is it that simple that Akroor bābā comes to invite your family to the event and you say yes without much enquiry? Why has Kaṃsa invited only your family? If it is an event involving the Yādava clans of Brij, then why Vrishabhānu ji and his putri²¹⁸ are not invited? My expertise with weapons is also well known. I smell a rat in all this. This is a bait".

'Tungā Devi came running and started wailing right in front of Krishṇa. She threatened the Gopis. "Look, I saved your modesty at the risk of my own modesty. If you do not stop Krishṇa from going to Mathurā, I will consider my modesty lost. After that, what I will do even I do not know. What use is modesty if the ātmā is taken away? I will cast away my clothes and become a dikvasini²¹⁹ forever".

'All the Gopis created a frightful scene. Some were sobbing, some others were wailing loudly, yet others were howling like crazy.

'Boys were fighting furiously with Krishna. Some were pummeling him, some others were just holding him tight as if they would not let him go, and yet others had simply slid into depression and were looking into the beyond with lost and misty eyes.

'Balarāma tried to take the matters into his hands. Calling for patience, and silence, he addressed the gathering. "Friends, let us not go overboard. We are simply going to Madhupuri²²⁰ for just a few days. I think there are some rumours going on. Please do not believe rumours. There is no truth in the rumours that we are going to Madhupuri forever. We will just take part in the festivities for which we have been invited and then we will come back. My father is in jail in Madhupuri. I will have an opportunity to visit him for the first time with my mother. Not just that, I would invite all of you also to come along with us and witness the events there".

'This seemed to pacify the boys somewhat. Mansukhā was the first one to jump in. All of Krishņa's cousins - Subhadra, Kunḍala,

Danḍī, Manḍala, Sunaṅdana, Naṅdai, and Ānaṅda got ready to accompany him. Many of the others also felt relieved. Some of them rushed off to their parents to obtain permission to accompany Krishṇa-Balarāma.

'Gopis were still disconsolate. They strongly believed that what they were hearing was true. Rādhā keeping quiet raised their suspicions even more. Vishakhā pushed Rādhā in front of Krishṇa. "You ask this pupil of yours whether he is going to come back or not".

'Rādhā had an inkling of what was in the store. She was aware of Kaṃsa's plan. With her advanced intellect, she could sense that this was no ordinary invitation. She had a hunch that this was a make or break move. If Kaṃsa succeeds, the boys will be killed and would not come back; and if they are able to defeat Kaṃsa with the help of the Mathurā public, they would be absorbed into the power structure of Mathurā and they would not come back. Either way, she could sense that the separation would not be temporary. Emotions were overwhelming her, but she had the yogic powers to rise above her emotions. She knew that if she let her manas loose from the control of her intellect, the other Gopis would become uncontrollable as other Gopis were totally in the thrall of their emotions. A collective wail went up when Rādhā caught hold of Krishṇa's hand, looked him squarely in the eyes, and asked, "Tell me, Krishṇa, what's the plan?"

'It was already light in the east. Gopis had been wrangling all night. Their parents had checked on them multiple times. Mothers were even grumbling for this unnatural affection for Krishna. Krishna was dear to all. His affection was all encompassing. To mothers, he was their little child; to fathers he was the little genius who could accomplish impossible tasks; to the Guru, he was a worthy disciple who would further the Guru's name; to the downtrodden, he was a benefactor; to the animals, he was a loving master; to the environment, he was a great nurturer. In his physical form, he was a captivating personality. He was described as the charming young man with a hue like blue Atasi²²¹ flower, with a taste for garlands, anklets and ornaments, with pitāmbara and murali; and accomplished in control of his senses, jitendriya.

'With a young man of such sterling qualities, it was no surprise that there was so much outpouring of love and anguish, specially from the young gopis, many of whom loved him as an object of human love. To Rādhā, he was an embodiment of extra-sensory unity of jeeva and atman. To Yashodā he was the quintessential ideal son, naughty, playful but exceptionally intelligent – a mother's headache, but the apple of her eye. Nanda was the only one who knew who Krishna really was, yet he was extremely satisfied to note that his development was in the direction of fulfilling an important mission. The Abhiras, the Garjaras, and the Bahishthas were the vocational people of Vrindāvan, who were always patronized by young Krishna, and were given so many new ideas of innovation and improvisation that enabled them to increase their productivity.

'The outpouring of love, affection and anguish had reached a crescendo. Rādhā challenged Krishņa to come clean. "I do not believe what you are saying. Tell us what we want to believe".

"Rādhā, belief is for the less endowed. Truth is to be sought, not to be believed. So let us be seekers, not believers". With this enigmatic statement, Krishṇa solemnly lifted his murali and dropped it in Rādhā's hands and asked her to play it. Rādhā started playing a tune in Raag Bihag. As the tune progressed, a quiet descended on the gathering. Eyes began to moisten. Rādhā played on with total calm and composure.

'Krishna added, "Look, I am leaving this murali here with Rādhā. I am also leaving the art of playing the murali with her. You know that this murali is dearer to me than my life. I will come back the day after tomorrow, after the event in Mathurā is over. Rādhā should return my murali to me at that time. Now all of you should go to your houses and sleep".

'With great reluctance, the gopis left the place, promising to come back to see them off and to wish them luck. Rādhā looked at the murali, and then looked up at Krishṇa. She was the only one who understood the significance of this gesture.

'Yashodā had remonstrated long and hard with Nanda against the idea of the boys going with him to Mathurā. Nanda took her aside. "Yashodā, I am going to tell you the biggest secret that is weighing

me down like a huge boulder on my heart. But you have to promise that you will not react".

'Yashodā's heart sank with great apprehension. All of a sudden, she remembered that innocent question by Krishṇa, "Ma, why am I not fair like you and bābā"? Was her world about to come crashing down?

'She promised to keep herself under control. Nanda became thoughtful. He looked at Yashodā again and again, not summoning the courage to come out with the secret. Yashodā continued to gaze at him. Finally she took Nanda's hand in her hand, "Āryaputra, I am a Vrishni daughter and grihaswāmini²²². Do not underestimate me".

'Nanda let out a long breath. "Yashodā, Krishna is not our son. He is the eighth son of Devaki and Vasudeva".

'Yashodā's ears started ringing. Her head was swimming. She had heard all the rumours floating around Gokul and Vrindāvan. She had never taken them seriously. After all, her mother's love for her Krishna was beyond any taint or colour.

'She collected herself and held Nanda's hand tight for a few minutes. Nanda just stared into the empty space. "Yashodā, he has come into this world with a sacred mission for the earth, for this universe. Do you remember what Āchārya keeps telling us about him? It seems that day has arrived.

'Yashodā hid her face in Nanda's chest and cried softly.

'Yashodā let Rohiņi know that she would stay back as both of them should not be leaving Gokul at the same time.

'Krishna came to bid good-bye after he learnt that maiya was not going. He was unlike his playful self; a bit somber, a bit into his inner self. "Maiya, does your Kānhā belong only to your lap or to your house?" A pregnant question with a definite hint.

"No, Kānhā, you belong to the world. Maiya will be in your mind, she doesn't have to be physically with you all the time. Maiya has done her duty, now you perform your duty to this earth." She did a tilak on his forehead, called Balarāma and did a tilak on his forehead as well. She kept her demeanour as a warrior's mother seeing her children off to battle.

'Next afternoon, Akroor left Vrindāvan with Nanda Bābā, Krishna and Balarāma in his chariot and Rohini in another. Whole of Vrindāvan came to bid them good-bye. Nearly three dozen gopas accompanied them in their carts, as also the other brothers of Nanda and their family members. All of the Vrindāvan Guards formation accompanied them, much to annoyance of Akroor.

'On the way, Akroor got talking to Nanda and the boys. He enquired about their education in weapons and combat. The quick intellect of Krishna impressed him the most. He told Nanda that Kamsa had made special arrangements for them to stay in Mathurā. Then he whispered. "Nanda, do not accept Kamsa's hospitality. He does not mean well".

'Krishna was quick to understand the meaning of this information. He asked, "Bābā, is it correct that Kamsa wants to kill me and Dāu"?

'Akroor kept quiet and averted his eyes. Krishna got the meaning in an instant.

'Krishna smiled. 'Do you know bābā? I am carrying my entire stock of astra and shastras in a cart. I think the time has come for me and Dāu to redeem the prediction that Maathur keep making for us. Akroor looked into the distance.

'In about half a prahara, they were entering Mathurā. Naṅda bābā redirected his entourage to the Vrindāvan people living in Mathurā. They were thrilled at the prospect of hosting their chieftain in their adopted home. In no time, a makeshift camp was set up within Mathurā's Vrindāvan quarters.

'In another half a prahara, Mathurā was abuzz with the news that the Krishṇa had come to Mathurā. The vaunted leader of the resistance had come to Mathurā. Their imagined Ishwara had come to Mathurā. Their saviour had come to Mathurā. The would-be slayer of Kaṃsa had come to Mathurā. A wave of excitement surged through Mathurā'.





<u>- 41 -</u> WELCOME

c rowds swept through the Vrindāvan quarter of Mathurā. Every person was just coming for a glimpse of the boy who was predicted to be the slayer of Kaṃsa. Temple bells started ringing in the whole of Mathurā. Kaṃsa was just wondering at this strange universal ringing of temple bells when Akroor was announced to him.

'He called Akroor in immediately, anxious to confirm that he had housed them in the camp he had specially built for Nanda and his entourage. The camp was built of incendiary material, by an expert from Hastināpur, Purochana. He had intended to throw a few burning torches in the camp in the night and be done with the Vrishnis of Vrindāvan.

'Akroor brought him the good news that he had successfully inveigled Nanda and his family to come to Mathurā. He also brought the disappointing news that they had made their own arrangements for stay. Vasudeva's Vrishni militia had secured them on the banks of Yamunā within Mathurā.

"Hell, how do I take care of these bastards in the night? I think we can burn the Vrindāvan quarters in the night", Kaṃsa said.

"Mahārāj, it is a good idea, but somehow the whole of Mathurā is awake. They are thronging the Vrindāvan quarters, and anyone who

attempts such a thing at this point would definitely get lynched. Moreover, there is no guarantee that he would even be able to reach their place of stay, so full it is with the thronging crowds".

"Oh, no", Kamsa struck his forehead with great dismay.

'Krishṇa and Balarāma went on a brief tour around the Vrindāvan quarters they were staying in. A number of Mathurā residents came and took them around in a protective ring. Nobody could come anywhere near them. After a brief round, they came and relaxed for the night. In the night, they sat down with Naṅda, and prepared for the next day. It was clear to both of them that they were there to do battle. The public of Mathurā had already lifted their morale. It was clear that there was no love lost between the public of Mathurā, and Kaṃsa. Naṅda disclosed to Balarāma and Krishṇa that they were both sons of Vasudeva, and that Vasudeva was lying manacled in a dirty prison cell of Mathurā, only because he kept up the struggle of keeping his sons safe. Resolve of both Krishṇa and Balarāma got a huge fillip.

'Next morning, Krishna and Balarāma got up early. They gathered their youth brigade. Nanda sent his small detachment along, as the Vrindāvan boys got in with the crowds through the main City Gate and roamed the streets of Mathurā.

'Krishna and Balarāma were surprised to find welcoming crowds at every street corner. Women were hanging from balconies of their house, looking at them and waving at them. It seemed to them that every living human in Mathurā was aware that Kaṃsa had invited Krishna and Balarāma to Mathurā to kill them. They were equally hopeful that the denouement would be exactly the opposite.

'As they went along, they came across a Pralayālaya, where an imperious caretaker operated a clothing and dyeing shop. A music procession was leading them on the street. It abruptly stopped playing the music as soon as it approached the Pralayālaya. Krishṇa had already indicated to Balarāma that they needed to spread their message. "We will meet Kaṃsa tomorrow. Mathurā people already regard us highly. Now we should rid Mathurā of the terror Kaṃsa wields on their mind. If that happens, we will defeat him without straining a nerve".

'Krishna approached the shop. He took the dholak from the music group, and deliberately played it mischievously, then asked the shopkeeper that he wanted to have a look at clothes. The caretaker cum shopkeeper was incensed at this impertinence.

'He shouted at Krishna. "Foolish boy, why the hell you are playing this music here? This is treason. I will have you beheaded right here".

Krishna mocked him. "Why on earth? Why is it treason to play music? Music is the harmony of 'shabda', which is the property of Ākāsha. What do you have against music? Why don't you gift me some nice clothes to wear for the festive occasion in Mathurā'"?

"You village rustic; this is a shop only for the royalty. I am the personal clothier of Mahārāj Kaṃsa. You are standing in front of a Pralayālaya. This is the holy place of worship for Kuṭil Dharma. Mahārāj himself patronizes this place and our Holy Book, the Pralaya Shāstra. We are bound by rules. Everyone must follow our rules in this area or be killed. Either you ask forgiveness in front of our Jhaṅkāl or you will have to be punished for this act".

'Krishṇa laughed with a derisive guffaw. "Are you gifting me some clothes or not? As far as your Pralaya Shāstra is concerned, I will dissolve it in pralaya storms. Everyone who cannot understand the intricacies of Dharma, Karma and Yoga just resorts to binding people up in rules, and blinding them with imaginary physical heaven and hell. Kuṭil Muni is a con man in search of fools. Religion of this kind is founded when the first con man meets the first fool. What is the validity of these rules? Just that your Guru uttered it in his reverie? Give me these clothes. What a real country buffoon you are that you cannot even respect your guests. I cannot stand such effrontery". Krishṇa was being deliberately provocative.

'The caretaker lost his temper. He shouted Jai Jhankāl and threw a fist at Krishna, who expertly moved out of the way. The caretaker started shaking with anger. He had never experienced such resistance in Mathurā. Most people just avoided getting into a tangle with a Kuṭil Dharmi. He tried throwing a few more punches and Krishna just kept laughing and ducking his punches. After playing with him like a cat does with mouse, Krishna landed an expert punch flush on his face, and he fell on his haunches. He got up shouting expletives

and ran to the back of his shop to take out a sword. He was a poor swordsman. Krishna avoided his strike easily, struck him with his foot, loosening the sword from his grasp. Then took the fallen sword, and gored him in the stomach, moved the blade around in the cavity, and removed it with force. His intestines came out with sword, and made for a gory scene. The crowds shouted like possessed. They wanted even more action. The caretaker doubled up and shrieked in tremendous pain. Krishna showed mercy and beheaded him with one swift swish of the sword, setting off fountains of blood into the street, and relieving the caretaker of his misery.

'The crowd around the duo went berserk. They danced and reveled. They chanted in unison, and loudly – 'Mar Jhaṅkāl'²²³. They entered the Pralayālaya and broke the Vilom Swastika. Someone brought a Shiva Linga and an unplanned prāṇapratiṣhthā²²⁴ took place.

'Balarāma was uncomfortable with Krishṇa's act. He chided Krishṇa, "why did you kill him? He was unarmed after losing his sword. This is not Dharma".

'Krishṇa did not back down. He defended his action. "Dāu, this was not a fight between Krishṇa and the caretaker of Pralayālaya. This was between an evil cult propagating an authoritarian philosophy and Sanātana Dharma. When one is fighting for the cause of Rāshṭra, the self necessarily has to take a back seat. Rāshṭra Dharma, for me, will always have precedence over Svadharma. Moreover, authoritarian philosophies always exploit your weakness in honouring your Svadharma. If Rishi Paṇini's warrior had finished off the Kuṭil Muni army in Pushkalavati, this totalitarian cult would not have sprung up in Āryāvarta. It has taken roots among Nāgas, in Mathurā and even in Kuru Empire. Authoritarian philosophies should be dealt with the same ruthless violence that they teach their followers. Ideas have consequences, narratives have effect. Evil ideas and evil narratives have to be destroyed, both by competing ideas and narratives, and by competing violence if inevitable".

"Moreover," Krishna continued to Balarāma, "This slaying and taking over of Pralayālaya has had a magnetic effect on the Mathurā public. We have taken the life of a soldier of enemy, not of a civilian.

This man was one of the instruments of savagery wrought by Kuṭil Muni and his men. Do you realize that the people of Mathurā are now ready to fight and die for you? Dāu, I am not going to apologise for killing that man. It was the Right Dharma, and it is the Right Dharma. There is no absolute Dharma, unlike Absolute Truth. Mortals do try and codify Dharma, but Dharma is relative to a cause, not relative to an effect. That is why it requires the highest degree of consciousness to be able to decipher it and act on it. I cannot countenance Svadharma of a Bhishma, who followed his Svadharma to his father to such an extent, that the Kuru Empire has landed in a crisis".

'Krishṇa kept quiet for a moment, and then averred, "A kul²²⁵ can be built by a person of character by following his Svadharma, a Rajya²²⁶ can be built by a King by following his Rajya Dharma, but a Rāshṭra²²⁷ is built over many generations by a philosophy, a narrative, forged by Rishis and Yogis of the highest consciousness".

'Balarāma patted Krishņa, indicating agreement.

'Public had seen resistance to this evil cult after a long time. They lifted the two boys up and took out a victory procession of sorts.

"Jai Shri Krishna, Mar Jhankāl," the crowd was chanting.

'They had a difficult time getting down. Someone shouted from the crowd that there was another Kaṃsa henchman next doors. They piloted him to Sudāmā the garden keeper.

'The public made a frightful racket; started banging on the door of his house till Sudāmā came out. He was a very pleasant personality.

"What is this going on? Is there a riot going on here? Has Mathurā's law and order collapsed?" He asked Krishṇa and Balarāma who were the first to be spotted by him.

'Krishna asked pleasantly, "Are you tormenting these people?"

'Sudāmā the garden keeper smiled, "Do I look like one?"

'Someone from the crowd shouted, "He is a man of Kamsa".

"That I am," Sudāmā smiled. Isn't this huge palace, and the attached estate an evidence of this? But my job is confined to supplying flowers and fruits to the palace. I have nothing to do with the King beyond this. Is that a crime?"

'Krishna could sense that the crowd was against him due to Mātsarya²²⁸. He introduced himself and Balarāma. The garden keeper

fell at Krishna's feet. "O deliverer, Mathurā has been waiting for you for twelve years. I am so blessed to have you visit my poor home. Please come inside. Please bring all your followers in as well. He disarmed Krishna-Balarāma and the accompanying public in minutes.

'The garden keeper quickly arranged for a meal of fruits and milk. The brothers asked for a direction to the display site of the dhanusha that was to be used for the dhanuryagya the next day. Sudāmā the garden keeper provided it most readily.

'The brothers proceeded towards the display with a virtual army of public in tow. On the way, they came across a very pretty hunched woman. She loudly objected to what she thought was lumpen behaviour by villagers from outside.

'The woman was Trivakrā. She was personal masseuse of Kaṃsa. She had a hunch and another deformity in her legs, giving her the appearance of being divided into three distinct parts. Hence, the name Trivakrā²²⁹. She shouted at the crowd, "Give way. If the King comes to know of your impudence, not one would have his head remaining attached to their torso. Move away".

'Krishna found something unusual about her gait. It did not look the natural way of someone having the kind of deformities she was supposed to be having. It looked rather laboured.

'With a minute of observation, Krishna could see that she was faking the deformities. As he neared her, he put his leg on Trivakrā's legs to hold her down, and then put his arms under her armpits and jerked her up. In a fraction, her deformities were gone and a beautiful young maiden appeared.

'Trivakrā was shrieking all the while and spewing profanities. As her natural form appeared before everyone, a gasp went out. Everyone in the crowd thought Krishṇa had wrought another miracle. Trivakrā looked crestfallen. "What have you done, O Gopala? I was using this deformity as a shield to protect my chastity. Now I have to either give up my job, or be dragged to Kaṃsa's bed. It could a Bed Reward, or Bed Punishment. Either way, I am doomed. Everyone has seen this; I cannot even fake it any more".

'Krishna gave his captivating smile. "Fake it for one more day, lady. Go to Kamsa and find out. We will get in touch with you in the evening".

'Trivakrā looked thrilled. "Will you come to my modest house? I would be blessed, Kānhā. This poor woman cannot believe her good fortune. I will wait. For now, let me run to my job".

'Trivakrā showed them the way to the Dhanush Bhumi, and went off to her job.

'In another minute and a half, the duo, accompanied by a massive crowd and their own friends were walking into the display of Dhanush kept for the Dhanuryagya the next day'.





<u>- 42 -</u> DHANUSH BHUMI

Asti and Prāpti. He sensed their unease as the end of his narration approached. He comforted them by a few words of solace, and moved on.

'Krishna and Balarāma entered the Dhanush Bhumi without a challenge. Since the bow was placed for display, the public was freely allowed. The entire crowd and Krishna-Balarāma's friends from Vrindāvan got into the arena where the bow was on display. The crowd swelled to unmanageable proportions.

'There was a circumambulatory around the bow, at a distance of about ten feet. Guards were placed at a gap of five feet to watch over the crowds. The bow was on a platform, ringed by a low chain. The awestruck crowds looked at the massive bow. They were wondering as to who would be the powerful warrior who would be able to string the bow the next day. On first look, the bow looked just too massive for anyone except a monster to even pick up.

'The guards posted at the arena saw the crowds swell suddenly. They were a little alarmed at this. The display had opened in the morning and in the preceding three or four hours it was just normal sedate crowds, rarely exceeding fifty to one hundred at the side of the

platform. Suddenly they had a crowd of nearly five hundred milling around. This crowd was restless. It tried to move closer to the bow. The guards tried to first shout instructions. It was useless. Then they tried pushing the burgeoning crowd. It was mostly the Vrindāvan crowd mixed with the newfound admirers of Krishna.

'The chief of the guards came running to the platform where the bow was kept. He tried, unsuccessfully, to keep the crowd away from the circumambulatory. Even as he was trying to do that, Krishna simply scaled the ringed chain, and using his famed speed, moved very quickly to lift the bow with the momentum of his darting speed, placed it against the platform, and gave it a massive superhuman jerk, breaking it from the middle.

'The shattering of the bow created a huge noise, shaking up everyone in the crowd, and produced a reverberation that went round the palace.

'Kamsa was engaged in a discussion with his trusted courtiers. The roar of the bow shattering jolted everyone from their sitting and standing positions. It produced reverberations that caused the earth to shake. Kamsa had his heart in his sleeve. He jumped as if stung by a wasp. He shouted at Pradyot to go have a look and tell him what was going on.

'Pradyot came back running to inform Kamsa that the bow had been broken by Krishna, and there was complete bedlam in the arena where the bow was kept.

'Deathly silence followed. This was a catastrophe of the worst kind. In Mathurā, destruction of the divine bow was the worst omen possible.

'Kaṃsa went into a reverie. He remembered that night of Bhādrapada ashṭami twelve years back.

'Kaṃsa's tortured mind went over that action of his. He wondered whether befriending Vasudeva and remaining consistent with his fondness for his sister Devaki would have created a far better defence shield for him. After all, they would have exercised better leverage on their son than his intelligence service, or the cult of Kuṭil Muni to which he outsourced the ideology of his State.

'Kamsa could see his entire life being played back before him; the haughty youth, the imprisonment, Kuṭil Muni, the coup, Devaki and

Vasudeva, the dark rainy night, and his sleeplessness thereafter. He had lived his life as he wanted, but he was not sure which part of him wanted his life to be as debauched, as cruel, and as full of vendetta as it had been. He sighed at his small size in the firmament of cosmic scheme.

'He had always thought that he made his own destiny. It was only after six years of attempting to kill Krishna and failing that doubts had started creeping in. He had started losing sleep after Vasudeva and Devaki laughed at him when he killed that infant girl in his prison. By the time, his trusted Bāṇakanṭaka had failed in all his initial attempts at Gokul, and Krishṇa's family had shifted to Vrindāvan, his mind had been virtually captured by the young imp. He had heard of the Turiya state of exaltation when he was in the Gargāchārya Āshrama, but he was in a state where he was always awake, and never in control. He often felt that the spirit of a young boy had captured him. Why?

'He went over his life slowly. He had enjoyed the sense of power and command. He had also enjoyed the women he always had access to. He had enjoyed torturing men, women and the holy men. He had enjoyed the life and indulged all the senses God had gifted the men. He never sat back and thought why he enjoyed these things. He had not even imagined when raping a hapless woman sentenced to shayya dand in his bed that she would be in a living hell. For him, the moment of enjoyment was everything. If stamina and energy permitted him, he would never come out of coitus, and intoxication. Combination of power, intoxicants and coitus was the apotheosis of life's fulfillment, he thought.

'He now regretted outsourcing the ideological underpinning of his empire to Kuṭil Dharmis. If they had spent half the time in building up Kaṃsa instead of their Jhaṅkāl, public may have found a modus vivendi with him. Not only did they foul up the atmosphere advocating an unintelligent cult, they annoyed his benefactor Jarāsandha, and made the public totally hostile to him. Had he indulged Gargāchārya even half as much, his stern discipline would probably have made his kingship more satisfying. Kuṭil Dharmis did just the opposite. They fouled up the public by creating continuous

friction. Public was able to put up with his cruelty, but they became his enemy once their way of life was attacked by Kuţil.

'Kamsa suddenly realised that he was sitting in front of his courtiers. He tried to collect himself. He shouted, "Go and arrest those trouble makers".

'Pradyot stood up with his head bowed, "Mahārāj, those urchins have beaten back our guards. Guards have run away. I had sent some Magadha guards. They are being beaten back with the pieces of the Dhanush".

'Krishṇa, Balarāma and their friends fought skillfully with the guards. They broke the bow into pieces and wielded it in various ways. Krishṇa used it like a sword, Balarāma like a mace, Mansukhā like a javelin, some others like a chakra. Their combat training turned out to be vastly superior to the slothful and unfit Mathurā soldiery. To cap their effort, the Mathurā public brought up the rear and added its own mite to the beating the Mathurā soldiery received. Mathurā soldiers were anyway half-hearted. They simply melted away. Gopas did not even let the Magadha Battalions enter the arena. They used sticks, rods or whatever implement they could lay their hands upon, and chased them away. Mathurā seemed to in the grip of a full-scale insurgency. Things came under control only after the Vrindāvan party left the arena and went back to their station near the Yamunā in the Vrindāvan settlement.

'Kaṃsa learnt about the debacle and began planning for the next event. He asked Akroor to go back to Naṅda and ensure that the Vrindāvan party came to the wrestling bouts. He had become very anxious. He conferred with Bāṇakanṭaka and told him that he wanted to be declared Jhaṅkālputra once the task of eliminating Krishṇa and Balarāma was over. He had finally become convinced that he could not do politics without becoming a religious head. Authoritarianism, he told Bāṇakanṭaka, involved unity of politics and religion. "Spiritualism of the Sanātana kind must go", he said. Tell Kuṭil Muni to accept me as Jhaṅkālputra and announce that all the messages that he said he was receiving from Jhaṅkāl were actually for me. "He had better do that, or be killed", Kaṃsa said.

'Bāṇakanṭaka was thrilled. He was never comfortable with the averments of Kuṭil Muni about his direct communion with Jhaṅkāl. He thought that a royal Jhaṅkālputra would be a better idea. He did not care what Kuṭil Muni would say about it. He had his Jhaṅkāl. Kuṭil Muni would have to give way if it came to that. Bāṇa had his totalitarian narrative with its leader. Kuṭil Muni could either continue as Kaṃsa's Prophet or a Regent, or be killed and Bāṇa could then assume the mantle of Prophet. Before that, he had to ensure that the Mahāshivarātri events went off as planned.

'Kamsa discussed next day's plan. They decided to fortify the route and use the feared elephant Kuvalyapida. They planned to kill the youngsters even before they reached the wrestling arena. They put Chāṇūra and Mushțik in the first round to fight the challengers, whom they expected to be Krishna and Balarāma. They had no doubt that the Vrishnis were overconfident. Prabala was told to take over the guard duties as Mathurā soldiery had largely failed. Prabala did not want to dilute the strength of his troops by putting them on crowd control duties. He would be left with an effective strength of not even one twentieth of his troops. It was totally inadequate if the situation turned bad, like it had done today. He could clearly foresee the Mathurā forces mutinying the next day. Public was in an ecstatic mood. The only way to control them would be to indulge in largescale killing to overawe the public. However, it would require Mathurā army to support Kamsa. He was loath to tell this to Kamsa, but in his own assessment, that army had already deserted. Kamsa did not realise that. Banakantaka and Pradyot were leading him up the garden path by acquiescing to each and everything Kamsa said.

'Krishna and Balarāma came out on the liberated streets in the evening. They were feted and celebrated wherever the public recognized them. That was very frequent. They slipped out into a lane quietly. They found their way to Trivakrā's place.

'Trivakrā was not of much help. She said that Kaṃsa was busy all the time with his courtiers making plans for the next day. She said she could only inveigle Pradyot a little bit. She could learn that they would be putting their best animals as their first line of defence. That was a good input for the duo. They thanked her, and came back to prepare for Mahāshivarātri wrestling bouts. As they came out of Trivikra's house, Trivakra's jealous neighbor, Chaturā, spotted them and tailed them. She was caught near the Vrindāvan quarters by a small Magadh detachment, which took Chaturā away and produced her before Kaṃsa.'





<u>- 43 -</u> TURMOIL

chārya Chandakaushika looked around with a pregnant pause. He addressed Jarāsandha directly, 'Magadha Naresh, I am now coming to the end of my narration. It has been my good great fortune that I have lived to narrate this tale of a great human being. We call him avatār. Whenever a great human being rises that values spread of Dharmic values in the land more than his personal liberation, he becomes an avatār²³¹. We saints and sages also do a lot for the humanity and its orientation towards Dharma, but we are constrained by our own espousal of our personal liberation. An avatar is one who cares for the humanity, for the Rāshtra, for the Rajya and for his Kul in that order. We sanyasis care most for our liberation, which is why no Brahmin except the notable exception of Parashurām could achieve the status of an avatār. Parshurām achieved that status as he rid this earth of evil forces without caring for his Brāhmana Dharma. You have to transcend your limitations to become an avatār. Here is a young man being hailed as an avatār because he has transcended his limitations as a cowherd and a Vrishni warrior to take upon himself the task of benefiting the humanity and the Rāshtra. Uprooting evil by a combination of sāma, dāma, danda and bheda is the greatest service to humanity that one can perform. Quite

often, we get distracted because our own selfish and narrow constructs of svadharma or kuldharma and fail to take the larger picture into account.'

Āchārya continued with his peroration. 'I am sure Magadha Naresh that you would have at least got a fleeting glimpse of what true Dharma is. Dharma is not merely a code of ethics - different for different class of people. Dharma is surplus of yuga²³²-neutral positive values over negative values of our existence. We sages have intuitively experienced that the limitations of space and time exist only for the finite existence of this earth. There is an infinite world beyond what your senses can perceive and the intellect can measure. That is the reality. In our meditations, we are able to reach the greatest depths of consciousness. Yet there is something that remains beyond that. That is perhaps the reality! There are tmes we can experience that state. When we do, we achieve our liberation. In that world, space and time dissolves, curves and goes backwards and forwards. You have to be in the samadhic state to be able to experience that. Just as I cannot teach philosophy to a child who does not yet know how to read and write, you will not understand the state of evolution that Krishna exists in. An avatār can live in that state to serve the humanity. It is called the Turīya state. If you had progressed beyond your blind recitation of devotional incantations to Shiva, you could have understood. Unfortunately, your self-serving Bhakti has now become a shackle around your legs, so you will not understand Krishna. Saudamini may better understand him, as she is more evolved than you. Krishna has the capacity to help you find the divine within, whereas Kamsa was looking to embrace an authoritarian philosophy that would lay down prescriptive norms of morality, of right and wrong written in stone.'

'You have listened to this Pūrvapaksha with a definite objective, Jarāsandha', Āchārya came down to addressing the King by first name. 'You have listened to this account with the purpose of finding a chink in the armour of an adversary who has killed your son-in-law, so that you can kill him and advance your objective of becoming a Chakravarti²³³. Saudamini, on the other hand, has listened to this story with detachment, and has evolved organically in her stage of consciousness. She is now in a state of Dharaṇā, where she exists

with her identity and Krishna as the object. She has an infinitely better chance of ascending to the level of transcendence than you will ever have. Your daughters are also in the observational state, as they are looking at themselves in the context of what they experienced. You Jarāsandha, on the other hand, are still grappling with the conundrum of identity problems. You will go into a battle with Krishna, and there is every chance that you will meet the same fate as your son-in-law.'

Asti was sobbing, and Saudamini was listening with a detached nonchalance. Āchārya told Asti and Prāpti that he was now going to tell both of them where they failed in their Karma, and suffered the consequence as widowhood.

'Kamsa finished his meeting with his confidantes. He thought he had a foolproof plan. Yet his mind was not at peace. He wanted to somehow achieve peace of mind. He had called Anantagupta again and had a brief meeting with him. Anantagupta knew that Kamsa had crossed the tipping point. He advised him to approach his trials and tribulations with a mind at peace.

'Kamsa called his wives, Queens Asti and Prāpti

Āchārya paused and looked at the two princesses of Magadha. They averted their eyes.

'Kaṃsa tried to act normal, but would become distant every few minutes. Asti was quiet, but Prāpti tried to cheer him up.

'Kaṃsa broached the subject of converting to Kuṭil Dharma. He said that after killing Krishṇa the next day, he intended to declare himself as God's son – Supreme of the Universe – and take the name of Jhaṅkālputra. He said that his religion would be run on prescribed standards and there would be no room for awakening what the Sanātanis call "the divine within". He solemnly affirmed that he would not let the keepers of Dharma –the saints and sages and the Āshramas to control the King any more. Dharma would be religion thenceforth. Whatever the King decreed would be Dharma. It would be an authoritarian rule, with political and religious power flowing from him. He would cause a formal conversion ceremony to be held. Before that, he needed his queens to be on board. Kuṭil Muni had always insisted that the entire family should convert.

'Asti said nothing, but Prāpti insisted on getting Jarāsandha into the mix. Kaṃsa was very upset. He declared in a most grandiose manner — "I am launching my religion tomorrow. I am subsuming Kuṭil Dharma into myself. As soon as Krishṇa is killed, I will declare Mathurā free from Sanātana Dharma. These fools say that Raja builds only the Rajya, but Rāshṭra is built by the wise men. My Rāshṭra will not be built by learned sages, but by me, the Jhaṅkālputra. Even if you do not come along, I will force you to convert. Non-believers would be killed. I shall command every soul. I am going to be the Eternal. I am the God's son".

'Prāpti refused to tow the line. She made fun of him, "O my revered God's son. You are not even able to sleep from the fear of a mere cowherd boy. So who is God; you or him"?

'Kaṃsa threw a fit. He walked off from the room in a huff, chattering loudly that he would drag the two queens to the Pralayālaya to make them accept Kutil Dharma.

'Kaṃsa went back to his Darbar room where he was waiting for a final report of an effort at the lives of the two Vrishṇi boys. Bāṇakanṭaka was there with the disappointing report. His spies had not been able to infiltrate the grid thrown in by the Vrishṇis in the Vrindāvan settlement.

'Pradyot came in with the news that there were large-scale desertions in the Mathurā Army. He expressed his inability to mount any attack on the Vrishni visitors.

'Prabala informed him that he had had to dilute his forces by over ninety percent and put them on guard duty in sections of four to five. They were going to work in total isolation. All he had was strength of twenty Magadha warriors for protection of the King and the inner quarters. "In my professional assessment, this is not a viable situation". He wanted the royal quarters evacuated. "I cannot defend the King and the inner quarters at the same time. I had one thousand troops. Mathurā army of ten thousand has disappeared. Most likely they have joined the public and the Vrishnis. There would be a public insurgency tomorrow. Even if we are able to kill the two boys, it would come to no good. We must evacuate," said Prabala.

'Kamsa looked at Pradyot. He just kept quiet.

'Bāṇakanṭaka walked in. He had more bad news. "Praharis have quit their posts in the prison. Only locks are keeping the prisoners inside. As soon as public comes to know of this, they would go and free every prisoner, including Ugrasena, and Vasudeva-Devaki. I need at least one hundred from Magadha forces immediately".

'Kamsa lost his mind. "Kill all the prisoners. If there are no prisoners, we will not need to guard anyone".

'Bāṇakanṭaka heard Kaṃsa but stayed put. "Even for killing all the prisoners, I need a force that would be loyal to me".

'Prabala refused point blank. "Forget fifty, I won't dilute even one. I am beholden to Mahārāj Jarāsandha for protection of his son-in-law and his daughters. Beyond that, I will not let Magadha forces be involved. If Mahārāj Jarāsandha comes to know that I have diluted my troop strength to replace Mathurā's policing duties, he would impale me in Girivraja Main Square. You may not order me around. I am not here to take care of Mathurā's internal problem. My mandate is plain and simple. I will not do anything beyond what I have done.

'For the first time after he threw out Ugrasena, Kamsa felt a sense of helplessness over his State. He wondered whether this is what people called a collapse of State's legitimacy.

'It was at this time, that guards suddenly produced Chaturā before him. "This woman was helping the two boys, Mahāraj," said the head of guards.

'Kamsa looked at the reasonably charming figure of Chaturā.

'Kaṃsa went into a paroxysm of rage. He ran forward, grabbed Chaturā by the hair and pulled her on the floor. He caught one end of her robe, and pulled it so hard that it tore. He disrobed her, and told Baṇakanṭka to give her shayya-danḍa in front of him. He watched as ferocious guards took turns to rape her. One of the guards bit her nipple off. She lay there bleeding from her breasts and vagina.

'Bāṇakanṭaka poured more fat into the fire. "Mahārāj, this slut has given all the plans of the palace to those two stupid cowherds".

'Kamsa totally lost his mind. He picked up a straight sword and pierced it through her genitals. He twisted the blade around as the sword went through her stomach and came out through her neck. She was dead in an instant. Kamsa's fury had still not subsided. "Throw

her into the streets of Mathurā. Those bastard cowherds must see the result of betrayal. They have to be similarly killed tomorrow".

'Pradyot was dismissive. "Mahārāj, a King possessed by anger cannot win a battle, let alone a war. I am again reminding you that Mathurā's forces have deserted, and the Magadha commander is refusing to take orders. We are on our own, and I am leaving now. I will come in the morning".

'Kamsa put his head in his hands and started banging his head against the wall. He had started having doubt about the next day's plans.

'Kamsa stayed wide-awake through the night'.





<u>- 44 -</u> <u>RISING</u>

Chandakaushika chārva got up from his āsana. circumambulated it, took out an image of young Krishna from his collections and installed it with proper ceremony and incantations. He announced that this was going to be his Purnāhuti²³⁴ for the present anushthan. 'We have nearly come to the end of the anushthān. I will end this without offering my analyses. It is for Jarāsandha to understand the strength and weaknesses of his future adversary. My conclusion is that no one should antagonize a person who is as blessed with battle and life acumen as Krishna, more so because he is walking the path of Dharma. A person well endowed in arms, tactics, strategy and forces, becomes ten times more powerful when working in tandem with Dharma.' Āchārya paused, lowered his voice and stated in a very pregnant manner, 'And the reverse is also true.'

With this, he chanted 'Krishnam vande jagadgurum' 108 times to the utter discomfiture of Jarasanadha, and resumed his narration for one final time.

'As the morning dawned on the Mahāshivarātri day, the thirteenth day of waning moon in Phālguna, Kaṃsa lay awake. He was totally

shaken up by the incidents of the day gone-by. Prabala was not even responding properly to his calls. Prabala had always had a little niggle with Pradyot, whom he considered unworthy of being a Senāpati. He was using the occasion to undermine Pradyot. Pradyot was the one who judged the public mood best. He could see that Mathurā saw a redeemer in Krishṇa. So he was just being ambivalent, playing both sides. He had even gone to Vasudeva and briefed him about Krishṇa's arrival. He had given his sense to Vasudeva that he thought Kaṃsa was on the brink of a mental breakdown. Pradyot had gone to Vasudeva after all the guards had deserted, but he was totally nonchalant. He even removed the handcuffs and manacles from Vasudeva, Devaki and Ugrasena. Vasudeva had a wry smile about his conduct, but indulged him nevertheless. Devaki was very excited to know about the exploits of her two children, but also apprehensive.

'Kamsa got ready quickly.

'On the banks of Yamunā, Krishṇa and Balarāma got up before sunrise, exactly as they would in Vrindāvan. They had a quick confabulation and it was decided that Naṅda would go to the venue of wrestling separately. The Vrindāvan soldiery would go with him and be seated in the spectators' gallery. The check posts had mostly disappeared. If you said you were from Vrindāvan, nobody would check you. Vasudeva had sent his private Army along with his confidante, Commander Veerbhadra. They were to stay close to Kaṃsa's guards and soldiers. The news in the camp was that most of the Mathurā local Army had deserted and the Magadha soldiers were performing the guard duty. They were the most hated in Mathurā. The public was keeping them busy. For the first time, the public had found the Magadha soldiers in isolated sub-sections or less, and they were enjoying harassing them.

'Krishna and Balarāma wrapped themselves up and went to Trivakrā's house just to check whether she had any more intelligence to share. She confirmed that Kaṃsa had deployed his feared elephant, Kuvalyapiḍa the monster to crush the two brothers. Beyond that, she did not have anything new. She narrated the unfortunate death of Chaturā, her neighbor, by Kaṃsa, on a mere suspicion of helping them "She was just jealous. She wanted to be near both of you, but fate had its own scheme for her".

'She helped the boys dress like princes of Vrindāvan. Krishṇa indulged in his favourite shringar – atasi flowers, garland of parijat, peacock feather in his hair, yellow dress as for a pious occasion. They also hid small darts, knives and daggers in their dress. They dressed tight as for a combat. Trivakrā bade them good luck. He needed a pole, but Trivakrā told him that a rope slung on big poles, nearly 5 to 7 feet, ringed the large arena.

'Nanda reached the arena first. Palace Square had been chosen to hold the arena. King was already seated on a dais with a throne on top, on the side of the arena. He was furious when Nanda offered his obeisance, as was customary for a nobleman of the Yādava kingdom.

'Kamsa spoke rudely to Nanda. "Come, Yādavashreshtha, where are your princelings". The sarcasm was too obvious to miss.

'Nanda was very submissive. "Mahārāj, It was Akroor who brought the two to Mathurā on your instruction. He did not even let Rohiņi on to the chariot in which the two were there. I am only staying with my community on Yamunā bank. I think this question should rightly be addressed to Akroor".

'Kaṃsa looked at Naṅda full in the eye. He knew that Naṅda was playacting. He wanted to say something rude to him, but he saw some commotion in the gallery to his right where lay spectators were seated. "What is happening there? Where is Bāṇakanṭaka"? Akroor told Kaṃsa that Bāṇakanṭaka had left Mathurā. Nobody exactly knew where, leaving Kutil Muni to fend for himself.

'Pradyot told him that there was some fracas between Magadha guards and Mathurā public. Pradyot told him that public was getting agitated at the sight of Magadha guards.

'Prabala came to Kaṃsa, very agitated. He informed him that he was withdrawing his guards from crowd control and putting them in a ring around the arena. Kaṃsa was cross, "Are you seeking my permission or you are informing me, Prabala?"

'Prabala was equally rude, "I am informing you, Mahārāj. I need all my soldiers close to me. My first responsibility is protection of the Magadha princesses, and the second is to protect you. I will do what I am mandated to do. Presence of my guards in small strength is an open offer to lynching. I will not countenance that".

'Kamsa swallowed his pride and kept quiet.

'He saw two young boys entering the arena from the main gate, in full royal regalia. Instead of going towards the spectators' gallery, they continued walking towards the arena. Everyone spotted the swagger.

'Kaṃsa felt a sudden dread. A chill went through his spine. He felt powerless for a while. He gathered himself and asked in a loud voice. "Are these two the ones who indulged in rioting yesterday in the Dhanuryagyashala. Are they Krishṇa and Balarāma?"

"Yes, Mahārāj," said Akroor, who had been specially deputed to be by his side.

'Kamsa got up from his throne in excitement. He shouted, "These boys are traitors. They have to be killed. Bring Kuvalyapiḍa to the arena. Catch them. They should not run away".

'That appeared like a joke, because the boys ran towards the arena, not away from it. Soldiers were supposed to have ringed the arena. They simply melted away. Instructions had to be shouted by Prabala himself for them to regroup and ring the huge arena. The arena was large, with a radius of at least thirty-forty metres. Kuvalyapiḍa was led into this arena. It was a trained beast, used specially for killing Kaṃsa's political opponent.

'Kuvalyapiḍa was a fearsome sight. It towered over twelve feet, dwarfing everything in the vicinity. Its mahout needed a long ladder to climb up to the seat. It had a ferocious trumpeting that sank the heart of anyone watching. Its tusks were over five feet long. Nearly a foot in girth at their base, the tusks had been sharpened like the point of a knife by careful filing. Its legs were like huge tree trunks. The only problem with this ten-tonne killing beast was that all this mass made its movement a bit slow. In front of this gigantic beast stood a five feet tall Krishna, of a lean build and tender age.

'Even as the Mahout manoeuvred the animal towards Krishṇa, he was at his swiftest. The brothers winked at each other. They had taken on swifter animals and men in Vrindāvan. This beast was languorous in comparison. Krishṇa told Balarāma to watch his back even as he ran circles around the beast. Balarāma was anxious that Krishṇa was trying a trick too many. He drew the beast forward, and then slipped in between his two massive legs and came out from his right side. The crowd was shouting, "Jai Jai Krishṇa" with excitement and

anticipation. Kuvalyapida was furious. He changed direction and charged to the right. Even as the beast charged, Krishna was already at the centre, mocking the Mahout by giving the pose of a flute player - one leg crossing the other, and hands on his lips. Mahout had great difficulty in stopping Kuvalyapida's momentum. He shouted furious commands. He goaded the animal using all his strength. He just about stopped the elephant from crashing into the arena ropes and tripping over. It took him nearly five minutes to turn the monster elephant around. The mammoth animal spotted Krishna in the centre point of the arena. As its colossal frame charged at Krishna again, he had slipped behind and was standing below Kamsa. Kamsa thought it was an opportune time. He picked up his bow to shoot an arrow at Krishna, but Balarāma shouted at the top of his voice, distracting Kamsa and alerting Krishna. The crowd saw Kamsa's action and started going out of control. Pradyot whispered to Kamsa, "Mahārāj, please do not provoke the crowd. If they jump the arena, we just don't have the force to keep them away".

'Krishna shouted back at Kamsa, "Lowlife, save your arrows, you will need them very soon".

'In about thirty minutes of this cat and mouse game, the beast was getting tired and losing speed. Krishna jumped on to Kuvalyapida's trunk, manoeuvred himself to the top, avoided the blow of Mahout's ankush²³⁵, jumped on top of him and pushed him off from the elephant's back. He then poked the beast with a few darts he was carrying to drive the beast mad. Kuvalyapida's trumpeting had now turned into fearsome roars. Very mischievously, Krishna jumped off the beast's back and stood directly in front of him. Kuvalyapida charged to gore him with his tusks. Krishna baited him and slipped to the side at the last possible second. The elephant's tusks hit the hardrolled ground with a fearsome thud. The momentum was so huge that it shook his tusks up completely. The left tusk came unhinged and started dangling from its base. The right one broke into two. Krishna uprooted a pole from the ringed arena and used it to vault on the animal's back and then hung from its tail, twisting himself around. The animal was in terrible pain. There was blood gushing from the base of his left side tusk. He had trampled on the ankush that had

fallen from the Mahout's hands when he fell, and had a big gash in its right leg. Kuvalyapīḍa was losing blood from both sides.

'Krishna suddenly let go of the tail, and jumped back into the ground. He had just spotted the mahout creeping in from the backside with a sword. All other soldiers had fled due to the fear of being trampled by the animal. Evading the blow from the Mahout and kicking him to disarm was the simplest of the task for this combat trained, fearless young boy. He picked up the loosened sword, and decapitated the Mahout with one swift blow. He then turned his attention back to the beast and cut off its tail. He threw the sword to Balarāma, and with a crunch, removed the dangling right tusk. Using the big tusk, he gored the animal in such a way that a dozen streams of blood were soaking the arena. The animal stood still for a while, and then weakened with the loss of blood, collapsed in the arena. Kuvalyapida was breathing his last'.





<u>- 45 -</u> TRIUMPH

A chārya took a brief pause, and resumed.

'Kaṃsa was dumbfounded by the action. His generals had all become transfixed in their places. Nobody was moving. The crowd was going delirious. Every guard of the arena had fled. No Magadha soldier was to be seen except his bodyguard retinue. Even they were trembling with fear. Prabala had receded and was protecting the entrance to the inner quarter as if the Magadha princesses were the only ones that mattered to him. Kaṃsa spat in disgust, "If I get through this, I will send these Maagadh packing, he thought".

'Kaṃsa shouted for Chāṇūra to come out. The massive hulk came out to the arena with Mushṭika in tow. The boys had melted into the crowd and were being carried aloft around the gallery in a victory procession when Kaṃsa shouted for his guards to pull the boys into the arena forcibly.

'There was none to obey Kamsa's command.

'A deathly silence fell on Kamsa's entourage. Even half of his Magadha bodyguards went missing. Kamsa was becoming delirious.

'Then the unthinkable happened. The boys jumped into the arena without being compelled. They had, believe it or not, accepted the

challenge of battling men twice and thrice their size. That was so because they were confident of their ability to beat anyone in combat. Krishna joked to Balarāma, "Dāu, the elephant is gone and now we have two baby elephants".

'Even Chāṇūra was petrified at the sight of Kuvalyapiḍa lying dead in the middle of the arena. His fat brain was giving him confused signals. He had mostly defeated other wrestlers with his sheer mass. Most of the time, he had only conquered weak damsels and raped them. Here was an enemy who was fleet of foot and clever of brain. As Krishṇa and Balarāma both headed towards Chāṇūra, Mushṭika intercepted Balarāma. "Hey fatso, you come here and tangle with me." Balarāma jumped on top of him with such force that he lost his balance and fell. Balarāma used his strength to strangle the fallen Mushṭika. He got him off his neck using every bit of his strength and straining every one of his sinews. He did manage to get him off, but was totally exhausted in the effort.

'Krishna, on the other hand, was teasing Chānūra. He wove circles around him. Chānūra had not watched how Kuvalyapida was conquered. Every time Krishna came close to him, and baited him, Chānūra made a lunge and missed him. This went on for nearly ten minutes. Chānūra was completely exhausted. He had never encountered such a swift and slippery opponent in his life. He shuffled back, panting. He lost sight of his quarry for a second. That was enough for Krishna to pedal back and launch himself, legs first onto the chest of Chānūra. Chānūra fell back with the blow. Krishna also fell back, but he regained his balance in a jiffy. Chānūra the collossus could not get up. He just lay there huffing and puffing. Krishna sensed his moment. He made a big high leap and landed with full force on the left side of Chānūra's chest, crushing his ribs. Chānūra started coughing blood. Krishna simply stood on top of Chānūra and jumped on his right side with force, crushing the right side ribs as well.

'Chāṇūra lay there helplessly. As the blood from the broken ribs filled his lungs, he started choking. He coughed blood, but the blood was filling his lungs faster than he could cough it out. He started

suffocating, lost his breath. Chāṇūra started flailing like a huge beast. In about a minute, he was silent. Chānūra was dead.

'Mushṭika just could not get up. He was massive, but was more fat than muscle. Balarāma stood on his neck and choked him to death.

'Speed and brains had killed two of the biggest human beasts and Kamsa just stood there watching helplessly.

'As the two fell, Kūṭa came rushing in. Balarāma was thrown a wheel of Kaṃsa's chariot by the Gopas. He simply swung it at Kūṭa and he was gone.

'Another wrestler, Tushāla also jumped into the arena. Krishņa tripped him with a leg tackle. As he fell, Krishņa held his left leg down and jerked his right leg with such swiftness that his base came apart. As he lay there writhing in pain, Krishņa kicked him in his crotch with such force, that he was gone.

'Kaṃsa got up from his throne. The throne was built on the side of the middle part of arena on a high platform. It was about ten feet high. Kaṃsa sat on a high throne on the platform. He lost his equanimity completely. He not only got up but terrified as he was, he got up and stood on top of his throne, subconsciously increasing the distance from the boys who were increasingly looking like one hundred feet tall to him in his hallucinatory state.

'Kaṃsa was shouting at the top of his voice, "Kill them, kill them, kill them..." His voice grew increasingly feeble. He looked around for his guards. Not one of them was to be seen. He did spot Prabala standing in the distance watching from the entrance of the inner quarters. He had never felt so alone. He had a sense of reality. "Am I the mighty Kaṃsa, alone with my fears today? All my carefully nurtured armies, assistants, and tyrants are all gone. My wrestlers killed. Where is my Bāṇa? Where are my Kuṭil Dharmis? Where are all those who had thrived on my largesse?"

'Kamsa was trying very hard to figure out where the boys were. He had taken out his sword; he was flailing his hands about, but finding only air.

'Krishna sensed the confusion in the mind of Kamsa from the distance. He was amused to see him clashing with the air.

'Krishna picked up the vaulting pole he had used against Kuvalyapida. Balarāma interjected, "What do you want to do with him. I think we can easily arrest him. His soldiers have fled.

'Krishṇa did not agree. "Dāu, we need not be sentimental in these matters. I am very clear. Our personal Dharma should never come in the way of Rāshṭra Dharma. He declared war on us. If you let him out alive, you will give hope to those who have earned their fortunes under him. His Karma has already condemned him. Look at his behaviour. He has lost the grip over his mind. He is a confirmed scoundrel. Just put yourself in his place. Would he leave you alive if you give him another chance? Would the Yadu Kingdom be safer with Kaṃsa in jail or with Kaṃsa killed?"

'Balarāma went quiet. He had no answer for Krishņa's reasoning.

'In the meanwhile, Kamsa was swinging his sword and talking to ghosts.

'Krishna took a few steps back, held the pole in his hands, ran with it towards the platform where Kamsa stood swinging his sword. A little before the platform, he placed the pole into the arena, and expertly vaulted over, going head first into the body of Kamsa.

'The momentum of Krishna crashing into Kamsa was frightful. As Kamsa fell down from the throne, his hair running loose as he lost his crown, he tried one more time to get up.

'Krishna kicked him in the scrotum. Kamsa's shrieks were loud and painful to hear. Entire arena shook as if an earthquake had struck Mathurā.

'Krishna kicked him again, this time in the small of his neck. The force was so great that Kamsa's frame started shaking uncontrollably.

'Krishna dragged him from the platform with his hair. "This lowlife had dragged my mother with her hair. Now I will serve him the soup".

'All hell broke lose as the crowds broke the barriers and attacked anyone from the Kaṃsa stable they could find. Even as Krishṇa was dragging Kaṃsa out from the platform, the crowd killed eight of Kaṃsa's brothers – Kaṅka, Nyagrodh, Sunama, Shanku, Suhu, Rāshṭrapala, Srishti, and Tushṭimāna.

'Krishna dragged a half faint Kamsa with his hair into the arena. He stood with his leg on his chest, and invoked the crowd. "Shall we arrest him and put him on trial"?

"Nooooooooooo...," the entire palace, virtually the entire city of Mathurā shook with the force of that no. The bizarre scene was that every member of Kaṃsa's Sudharmā Sabhā was standing up and shouting no. Women were crying and imploring Krishṇa. Kanhaiya, Kanhaiya, Kanhā, Govindā, Keshava...please, please, please. Your mother is still locked up. On her honour, don't spare him. Kill him, kill him, kill, kill, kill...

'Krishna bowed to the people in every direction. He then gave an expert blow to Kamsa's carotid artery, and another on his jugular vein. Kamsa was dead.

'Prabala ran into the inner quarters.

Everyone except Jarāsandha was sobbing. Āchārya asked King and Queen to do the Purṇāhuti. After the Anuṣhṭhana was over, King and Queen served food to Āchārya Chanḍakaushika. Saudamini said loudly, 'I don't think Magadha should make an enemy of Krishṇa.'

Jarāsandha swore revenge. Asti and Prāpti kept distant. Prabala looked mortified. He did not know whether he would be rewarded for saving the princesses or killed for deserting Kaṃsa. Prāpti placed a hand on his shoulders and comforted him.

'Karma, Prabala, karma. Mahārāj was killed by his bad Karma. Your kriyā was wrong, but your karma was right.'

'Karma,' smiled Āchārya. 'You are right, Prāpti. Kriyā is not Karma. In Kaṃsa's case both were wrong. His kriyā was so full of depravity that his karma had to be bad. If only the queens had not got into the vice of akarma, he might have not left the righteous path.'

Āchārya announced before leaving. 'I am going straight to Gargāchārya's Āshrama from here. I will do a darshan and satsang of this great ātmā. If you do come attacking, I will be in Mathurā', he paused, 'And I would be advising the side that would have Dharma on its side.'



PART VI EPILOGUE





<u>- 46 -</u> Liberation

amsa lay dead. The crowds went berserk. Indescribable emotions flowed. Emotions were a mixture of relief, ecstasy, jubilation, and triumph. Every Magadha soldier had disappeared. Most had fled, and the Mathurā crowds had taken down a few. Soldiers of the Yadu Army had appeared on the side of the public, and were adding their bit to the mayhem. The upheaval was uncontrollable.

Krishna realised that if the crowds were not brought under control soon, its fury would consume many innocent lives. Public was letting go of steam pent up over a period of fifteen years and more. Fifteen years of unspeakable horrors, untrammelled tyranny, rape, plunder and cultural assault on their dearest values. Krishna took a conch from one of Veerbhadra's commanders and blew it loudly and repeatedly. Once he had the attention of the crowd, he appealed to them to stay calm.

Krishna was up at the high platform along with Balarāma, where Kamsa was seated minutes earlier. He appealed to the crowd to go to their nearest place of worship and pray in thanksgiving to whichever deity they revered. He announced in a very lofty manner, 'this deed of deliverance is the handiwork of Maheshwara. I am only a medium of

transmission of his will. Go and thank him. Go and pray to him. Go and express your gratitude. You are free from tyranny, you are free from cruelty, and our sisters and mothers can once again walk the streets without fear. Hold your head high, but do not use your hand to harm any innocent persons. I will take care of all the evildoers. You take care of all the good people. Let us divide our tasks.

The massive crowd erupted with the chants of Krishna, Krishna, Jai Gopeshwara Krishna, Jai Haldhar Balarāma, Jai Bhagawan Krishna, Jai Shri Krishna, Jai Jai Jai Jai Jai...

The Vrindāvan contingent held Nanda aloft and kept chanting 'Krishnam vande jagadgurum' at the goading of Āchārya Swarup who had joined them a day before.

A group of women dancing with kalash and spraying gulal²³⁶ joined the celebrations under the leadership of Trivakrā. They were singing odes to Krishņa.

With some sense of order and calm restored. Balarāma said, 'Krishṇa, we need to free our parents first.'

Both left the arena to go to the prison in which Devaki and Vasudeva were languishing along with Ugrasena. A huge crowd followed in their wake.

Prison guards had deserted their posts the previous evening. The Mathurā soldiery had decided unilaterally on the day before Mahā Mahāshivarātri that Kaṃsa was no longer their King. They deserted in favour of the popularly accepted leader of the resistance, Krishṇa.

Krishna entered the prison from the front gate, which was open. The gate opened into a massive courtyard that had two rows of cells on either side. These were the regular cells, including special cells for political prisoners with relaxed norms. Another gate at the end of this courtyard square opened into another courtyard. It was separated from the front courtyard with a double door. In between the two doors, a strong detachment of guards was supposed to control the access to the high security portion of the prison. This detachment had deserted.

There was nobody in the front courtyard cells. Krishna and Balarāma went into the high security area. On all four sides, the walls were lined with dormitories, large cells and solitary confinement

cells. In two solitary cells on the right side, the most prized prisoners of Mathurā could be seen standing clutching the bars of their cells, and watching the spectacle of Kaṃsa's dreaded prison being run over. Other cells of the high security compound also contained political prisoners of various types, those who had had the misfortune of running afoul of Kaṃsa or even of his cronies. A loud cheer went up among them. Throughout the previous evening, they had been talking about the events in Mathurā. The word had reached them that the saviours had landed in Mathurā.

Devaki was lying down with exhaustion in her cell while Vasudeva was sitting with his back resting against the back wall of the cell. They had not been fed anything for more than a day as the staff, including guards, had vanished. Through small talk among the prisoners, they were aware that Kaṃsa had lost his hold on the Mathurā army and the public. They were suddenly jolted by some big noise coming from the main gate. They heard loud clangs, the creaky noise of the inner courtyard gate getting opened, and then a big crowd entered the compound. A huge cheer went up. Devaki dragged herself up and came to the door of the cell.

What Devaki saw was surreal. She saw a dark boy approaching her, with a captivating smile that reminded her of something. Behind him was a much larger boy, fair and strong. Devaki's heart started racing. She went into a reverie.

There was the same cell. There was the dark night. There was the heavy downpour outside. Devaki was into labour.

A muffled cry of a newborn went up in the cell. Devaki was exhausted with the labour. Ugrasena was preparing to take the newborn out. She was aware of all the arrangements made with the help of Gargāchārya and Veerbhadra. As Ugrasena had got ready to go, she had made a superhuman effort to call Ugrasena and ask him to show the face of the boy to her. She had that memory intact. She saw that face every day in her mind. She cuddled that face, hugged that little thing and showered her mother's love in every way she could. The face leading the pack of the crowd amidst heavy cheers and sloganeering bore great resemblance to that little face.

Most of all, that smile...that bewitching, enigmatic smile she had seen that night in a flash of lightning...as if telling her that he knew

everything. That same smile was lit up in front of her. Krishna had come.

Krishṇa's friends broke the lock open. They cut through the manacles and handcuffs with the swords and implements they carried. As soon as Devaki was free, the boy Krishṇa touched her feet. Devaki had suddenly acquired the strength of ten tigresses. She pulled the boy up, clasped him to her bosom, and showered him with her tears. She had lost all sense of time and space. Vasudeva, in the meanwhile, hugged Balarāma tight and kissed his face a hundred times. He was a very sober man, but even he was displaying high emotion.

Minutes just flew by. The noise was deafening. Vasudeva collected himself. He gently patted Devaki. Devaki had been transported to another world. She came to the world again. 'We must free Mahārāj Ugrasena now,' said Vasudeva softly.

Everyone moved to the next cell, Vasudeva leading now. They freed Ugrasena in no time. After that they went around freeing all the prisoners. Almost each one of them was a political prisoner. Vasudeva made an announcement. 'Anyone who has been imprisoned here after being charged with a crime should volunteer information. If such a person obtains his freedom by misleading us, he would get double the punishment. In the end, only seven prisoners remained. Sixty-seven political prisoners were rescued.

Vasudeva wanted to leave Devaki at their palace, which was close to the prison, but Devaki refused.

Having conquered the prison, the caravan moved to the Royal Palace, where an unplanned gathering of Sudharmā Sabhā seemed to have convened as if by divine intervention.

Much merrymaking was witnessed. All the great warriors who had kept quiet at the humiliation of Vasudeva, and even at the dethroning of Ugrasena were seen denouncing Kaṃsa most vehemently. Kritavarma, Sātyaka, Pradyot, Pralamba, Devaka, Shatdhanvā – all were there. Each person took turns to denounce Kaṃsa in as flowery a language as he could manage.

Vasudeva was not impressed. He had seen them make fun of him at the instance of Kaṃsa. They did not utter a word when Kaṃsa placed the Sudharmā Sabhā under his thumb. They kept quiet and

protected their perks when Mahārāj Ugrasena was dethroned by Kaṃsa. In those times, Vasudeva used to be the only one who would defend Dharma. Even when he was removed as Dharmādhikāri, not one member of royalty spoke. Vasudeva muttered to himself, 'How weak is a people's republic under a weak King.'

Kaṅsā jumped in from somewhere. She was the favourite sister of Kaṃsa. She was also friendly to Devaki, though she misused that friendship to spy for Kaṃsa when she was bearing her children. Brihadbal was trailing her. She greeted Vasudeva with all the sister-in-law's charm that she could manage.

The massive Sabhā hall filled up with the Sabhāsads²³⁷. Without a prior notice, without an announcement, almost every member of the Sudharmā Sabhā had gathered there. As soon as Krishṇa and Balarāma entered with Vasudeva, Devaki and Ugrasena, the hall was rent with a huge jayaghosh²³⁸ for Krishṇa. Jai Vāsudev, Jai Mādhav, Jai Govinda, Jai Shri Krishṇa, Jai Keshava...every known appellation for Krishṇa was being used.

Krishṇa, however, did not go towards the platform on which the throne was placed for the King. The Sabhā members had been witness to the sorry spectacle when Kaṃsa had forcibly removed Ugrasena from the throne, and had occupied it by force. Now they were watching with even greater surprise that the slayer of the evil Kaṃsa made no move to claim the throne. Instead, the family of Vasudeva along with Ugrasena went and stood at the place reserved for ordinary Sabhāsads. Pradyot went forward, and tried to escort them to the place reserved for royal Sabhāsads. Even then, Krishṇa and Balarāma stayed back at the place reserved for ordinary Sabhāsads. Many minds started working overtime.





<u>- 47 -</u> SUDHARMĀ SABHĀ

To everyone's surprise, Kansa, the favourite sister of Kansa was the first to get off the mark. The Sudharma Sabha had not been formally convened, but almost every member was there. Kansa and his brothers had been slain, and were therefore missing.

Kańsā chirped like a bird that had not a care in the world, addressing Vasudeva, 'Jeejaji, you are one hell of a lucky person. You have "pancho ungli ghee mein" 239. You have got both your sons, got your enemy killed, and now you will be the King of this land.'

Vasudeva remained calm and collected. 'Devi Kańsā, according to the rules of our republic, the King is chosen by the Sudharmā Sabhā. I am nobody to claim it for myself.'

This statement of Vasudeva set the cat among the pigeons. All members started looking at Krishna and Balarāma who were standing some distance away among the non-royal members. Most of them had expected Krishna to claim the throne. Had he done so, not one person in the Sabhā would have stirred. All would have joined in the chorus of slogans that would have followed. The plan was thrown into doldrums because Krishna had neither claimed the throne for himself, nor for his father.

Many sensed an opportunity for themselves. Kańsā was again first off the mark. 'Look, Mathurā is facing many dangers. Jarāsandha would definitely attack us. Asti and Prāpti have already left. You should have a king who is on friendly terms with Jarāsandha.' Her reference was obvious. She was pitching for Brihadbal, who was close to Jarāsandha.

Veerbhadra countered her. 'Who is scared of Jarāsandha? With such unity between the Mathurā residents and all Yādava chieftains, why should we be afraid?'

Pradyot jumped in. He was extremely apprehensive of losing his job to Veerbhadra. 'I don't think we should discount the threat of Maagadh. We Vidarbha and Chedi kingdoms of Yādava would go with Jarāsandha in case of a conflict. We need a fair bit of diplomacy.'

Akroor sensed his chance. He sought to philosophise Kaṃsa's killing as divine retribution. He claimed credit for having brought Krishṇa from Vrindāvan to Mathurā for accomplishing the task of Kaṃsa's destruction. He sang paeans of praise for the young Krishṇa and Balarāma. 'I think no one can handle diplomacy better than me.'

Balarāma laughed loudly. Uddhava, son of Kaṅsā, who was the same age as Krishṇa, had just joined them. Uddhava was the favourite disciple of Gargāchārya. He was renowned as an accomplished student, who was destined to be a great scholar of future. He was in the crowd when Krishṇa had slain his uncle. Uddhava was never fond of his uncle. He had to move around with Gargāchārya because Kaṃsa hounded him. Now he wanted to make a friend of this cowherd, and teach him the wisdom of shāstras. He joined Balarāma in laughing aloud, even as Krishṇa stood calm and smiling.

Vasudeva spoke in measured terms. 'Residents and royals of Mathurā, Sudharmā Sabhā was a great experiment in Āryāvarta. It set a standard for Dharma. King of Mathurā was responsible to Dharma through Sudharmā Sabhā, but the Sabhā let Mathurā down when Kaṃsa dethroned King Ugrasena. Except me, not one person spoke. The Senāpatis who had sworn loyalty to the Sabhā stood and watched even as Kuṭil Dharmi accomplices of Kaṃsa wrought mayhem and

brought the appointed King down. Do we really think that such people have the best interests of this ganatantra in mind?'

Vasudeva continued, 'It was clear to me that the officers of the King had only their interests in the mind. The Rāshṭra was the last in their priorities. Not one person protested when I was thrown into prison along with my wife at the caprice of Kaṃsa. A Rāṣhṭra is destroyed more by the silence of its good persons, who are in majority, than the injustices wrought by the evil deeds of an oppressive minority.' Vasudeva looked around to see if the Sabhā was with him. Everyone nodded. Vasudeva continued.

'This Kaṅsā, who is lobbying for her kin to become king, was spying for her brother to determine her friend and sister Devaki's pregnancy status. When I was released and allowed to attend the Sabhā, Akroor, Satyaka and Pradyot were the foremost in jeering my suggestions down. Even my father-in-law Devaka kept quiet. Pradyot was smart in deserting Kaṃsa in the nick of time. His skill in warfare is limited to deserting his masters. He has already displayed it twice. Two Vrishṇis have won this war against evil. They have won it with the objective of restoring Mathurā to its old ways, for restoring the sanctity of Sudharmā Sabhā, not for duplicating the bad precedents set by Kaṃsa.'

Pradyot, Sātyaka and Shatadhanvā sensed the tide turn. They immediately resorted to sycophancy and started clapping.

The crowd of the spectators in the distance started parting to give way. Rishi Gargāchārya, the Kulaguru of Mathurā kingdom was approaching. Pradyot, the Senāpati, escorted him in the absence of an appointed Dharmādhikāri. He was taken to his place beside the throne. He took his seat on a bench next to the throne, sitting in padmāsana, with his hand on his danḍa²⁴⁰.

Vasudeva welcomed Gargāchārya formally, signaling his preeminence. Rishi smiled. 'What is the issue? Can I help?'

Vasudeva submitted with folded hands, 'Āchārya, I am sure you know the turn of events.'

Āchārya Gargāchārya smiled, 'that is why I am here. Otherwise I have been away from this hall for over twenty-five years.'

'Rishivar²⁴¹, we are discussing the succession to Mathurā's throne.'

The Rishi smiled even more. 'Who is the cause of this debate? The person who caused this throne to be vacated is the only one who should speak on this. Did you kill Kaṃsa, or did you cause him to be killed?'

Vasudeva stood still. 'Rishivar, Krishna is the cause of this debate.'

'Then ask him,' the Rishi went on smiling.

The entire Sabhā turned to Krishņa.

Krishna had to come forward near the royal area to make himself heard. He bowed to the Rishi, then to Mahārāj Ugrasena, then to his parents, then to elders. When he spoke, he sounded sober and thoughtful.

'Rishivar, Yādavas created a unique system of administration based on equality of clans. It is the most egalitarian system ever devised in Bhāratavarsha. This Sabhā has always had the right to choose the pratinidhi²⁴² who would lead the Yādavas. King of Yādavas has always been a Leader on behalf of the Sudharmā Sabhā, never the Ruler on them. This was disrupted by mātul²⁴³ Kamsa. The clan succession has never been followed among Yādavas of Mathurā. Otherwise Mahraj Ugrasena, who is a Kukura, would never have succeeded Mahraj Shūrasena, a Vrishni. His son, and my father, would have been the natural successor. The Sabhā chose Mahārāj Ugrasena, so that should have been the end of the matter. He is still living. He was removed unjustly, by force. As far as I can see the logic, the Kamsa era was just a bad interlude. We have to face Jarāsandha in a battle very soon. There is no doubt that Jarāsandha would be very cross with the Vrishnis. I think Mahārāj Ugrasena should be given back the throne that was taken away from him without the consent of this Sabhā.'

The Sabhā was struck by the sober and sagacious nature of the words Krishṇa spoke.

Mahārāj Ugrasena dithered and protested.

Ugasena said, 'See, I am in old age. If you listen to my counsel, then Vasudeva is the right person to be the King. As Dharmādhikāri,

he has also had experience of statecraft. I have no doubt that Krishna would one day be the King, but I would want him to first complete his education. My vote is for Vasudeva.'

Āchārya Gargāchārya interjected. 'I quite appreciate Ārya Ugrasena's point of view. But Krishṇa's point has greater merit. When a vote is taken, my opinion may be kept in mind'.'

Vasudeva got up. He also supported Krishna. After his speech was over, Vasudeva asked for an informal vote. Ugrasena was elected the leader unanimously.

The Prime Minister, Viprathu, formally announced the result, 'I, Viprathu, Prime Minister of Mathurā on behalf of the Yadava Sudharmā Sabhā, do declare that Ārya Ugrasena has been chosen to lead the Sudharmā Sabhā and is thereby conferred with the title of King of Mathurā.'

Vasudeva, Krishna and Balarāma led Ugrasena to the throne. He took blessings from Āchārya Gargāchārya. There were a few murmurs about a regular anointment, but Krishna silenced everyone by declaring Kamsa's reign as null and void, and calling the event as restoration of the throne to the rightful heir, not a fresh anointment.

Jai Mahārāj Ugrasena, the cry went up in the hall, but without the enthusiasm that had greeted Krishna and Balarāma.

Ugrasena made his first appointment by restoring Vasudeva to his post of Dharmādhikāri. With his recommendation, Veerbhadra and Pradyot were appointed joint chiefs of the Mathurā army. Vrindāvan's Narayani army was amalgamated in the Mathurā army.

The Sabhā dispersed, and Krishṇa and Balarāma found time to go to Naṅda bābā at the Vrindāvan quarters of Mathurā on the Yamunā banks.

Nanda bābā was ready to depart. He was emotional at leaving the two boys back, especially Krishna. Krishna reminded him of the Yoga teachings they had discussed when Akroor was bringing them from Vrindāvan. 'Bābā, where do we place ourselves in the continuum of space and time? Are we in the linear form of space and time, or we are the multi-dimensional universal beings?'

Nanda understood. 'I understand, Krishna. I was just a trustee for an extraordinary personality like you. But what do I tell your mother, Yashodā?'

'Don't worry, bābā. I had told her while leaving that I would be with her forever. She had understood. Rādhā is a yogini. She will also understand. You will have to do some explaining to my gopa friends and the gopikās. They are too fond of me in a physical sort of way, even though they are more accomplished in their understanding of the cosmic reality than most common people. I have to get Mathurā ready to face Jarāsandha and his friends.'

'I will manage that. I leave you here to fulfill your destiny for yourself and the world.'

Both of them touched his feet, and Nanda departed for Vrindavan with his entourage, leaving the soldiers behind.

There were many wet eyes among the departing. Mansukhā reminded Krishṇa that he had promised to come back to Vrindāvan the day after Mahāshivarātri. What would they tell the Gopis and Ma Yashodā, who would be waiting.

Krishna and Balarāma were calm. Krishna told Mansukhā that he would probably come himself very soon. Mansukhā smiled. He knew Krishna was only humouring him.





<u>- 48 -</u> PRALAYĀLAYA

I t was now the third prahara of the day. Mahāshivarātri was being celebrated with great gusto. As Krishņa and Balarāma came back and were led to Vasudeva's palace by the guide accompanying them, they heard a big commotion in the distance. About half a kilometre away, a house had been set on fire.

Dāruk, the charioteer was accompanying the two brothers. They were moving on foot, but Dāruk had been officially attached to Krishṇa with a fine chariot. Balarāma had his own chariot.

'What is happening, Dāruk kākā?' Asked Krishņa.

Dāruk shrugged his shoulders. 'Looks like public is taking the matter of Pralayālayas into their hands,' said Dāruk.

'What is that?' asked Balarāma.

Dāruk narrated to them a brief history of Kuṭil Dharma, Kuṭil Muni, Pralaya Shāstra, Vilom Swastika, and Pralayālayas. 'Public is simply reclaiming their places, their spaces, Mādhav. There are seventeen Pralayālayas in Mathurā. Each of them was built after demolishing a temple, and killing its priests. There wasn't even a Dharmādhikāri to prosecute, punish, and sentence these people, who called themselves Kuṭil Dharmis.'

Balarāma was perturbed at this open display of violence, 'It seems the machinery to enforce Smritis has collapsed in Mathurā. How can people take law into their own hands?'

Krishna was more sanguine. 'Let us bring this to the notice of Pitāshree.' They went inside the palace and told Vasudeva what they had seen. Vasudeva immediately sent a detachment. The two brothers went with Dāruk on a chariot. What they saw was nothing short of cataclysmic. A Pralayālaya was broken open. The doors and the wooden Vilom Swastika from inside were taken out on the street. A pyre had been made and it was burning with the crackling sound of dry wood. A caretaker Kuṭil Dharmi, along with his assistants had been tied with a rope next to the pyre. Public was preparing to throw them into the burning pyre. Krishṇa blew his conch, and asked for restraint. 'You cannot do mob justice here. Dharma has been restored in Mathurā.'

An elderly woman laughed at him with scorn.

'Where was your Dharma when these vermin broke the Murti in this Shivālaya, under instructions of Kuṭil Muni and Bāṇakanṭaka. They took away my young daughter to Kaṃsa's shayan-kaksha²⁴⁴. She came back mutilated and scarred forever. What do you want us to do with them? Rules of war will apply. Why did you kill Kaṃsa? You should have arrested him and then asked your impotent Sabhā to punish them, as they did once.' She was full of scorn for the Sudharmā Sabhā.

Krishna took the situation in quickly. He got down and touched the feet of the lady. This simple gesture of the Hero of Mathurā mollified the crowd. The woman started crying. Her daughter came rushing out.

'Don't spare these beasts. They have been violating girls everywhere, they have been insulting our deities, they have been looting shops, and you have come to save them?'

Krishna flashed his disarming smile. 'No, sister; I have come to take them to justice on behalf of the Dharmādhikāri. Haven't I killed your main tormentor? Your statements are valid. I personally promise to prosecute them in the Sabhā in exactly three days. Do you have faith in me?'

That was a question by Krishna nobody could say no to on a day they had seen their most despised enemy being killed. So Krishna had them rounded up, and put in the back of the chariot. Even as they were beginning to leave, they saw flames erupting to their right, then to their left, and to the right and it seemed the whole of Mathurā was celebrating Mahāshivarātri with a riot of flames, instead of water and milk. As they went around, there were hordes of Mathurā residents rejoicing on the streets, shouting 'Mar Jhankāl' or 'death to Jhankāl'.

It took them the best part of next two hours to rescue caretakers of Pralayālayas. 'Mar Jhaṅkāl' was reverberating from every direction. Even though Krishṇa was fully aware of the savagery inflicted by Kuṭil Dharmis, even he was taken aback by the outburst of spontaneous reaction againdt Kuṭil Dharmis.

Kuṭil Muni himself torched two Pralayālayas, with the object of creating an off-putting scent. It did not work. Kuṭil Muni was also arrested. Balarāma protested at the arrest of Kuṭil Dharmis. In his opinion, the Kuṭil Dharmis were the victims. Krishṇa assuaged him by telling him that he was taking them in to save their lives. All of them were lodged in the prison. Vasudeva and Ugrasena themselves went around the town assuaging the public. While it was true that public sentiments were at a high, the state had already taken over, and law could not be allowed to be violated with impunity.

Rājya acted with swiftness under Vasudeva's guidance. The situation was brought under control. Under the Dharmic code of punishment, those who had indulged in arson were liable for punishment. However, the circumstances leading to the situation could not be ignored either. It seemed as if the entire public of Mathurā would have to be indicted if the law was to be interpreted in its letter, if not in spirit.

Mahārāj Ugrasena called Viprathu in early hours of morning. Vasudeva was present in the meeting. Looking at the sharpness of the twelve-year old Krishṇa, Ugrasena called him in as well. Veerbhadra was called, along with Pradyot. Ugrasena was clear in his mind that justice would have to be done as per the established Dharmic principles.

Krishna intervened, 'Mahārāj, what is Dharma is not clear even to the most accomplished Yogis. Dharma is for our guidance, not for our enslavement. Dharma is relative to the situation. Sāpeksha²⁴⁵ Dharma is the norm when the situation is not straightforward. Otherwise, you cannot justify killing your opponent in a war.'

Ugrasena was taken aback. He had not expected such a profound statement from one so young.

He looked at Krishna quizzically.

'Mahārāj, from what I have gathered, public of Mathurā has been victimized every day since Bāṇakanṭaka was given the freedom to establish his savage cult in Mathurā. Kuṭil Muni came in later, and they started expanding. I have come to know that there has already been a big clash, in which Kuṭil Muni's people killed nearly one hundred Mathurā residents. They even got suspended sentences. In fact, Bāṇa was even put into prison. Bāṇa has apparently fled to Nāga territory. Kuṭil Muni is the progenitor of this savage Swastika wearing cult. Luckily we have caught him. When the Rāshṭra faces an emergency, you have to apply the principles that would save Rāshṭra. Kuṭil Dharma was a civilization-threatening event in Mathurā. You cannot apply the regular laws in such a situation. There has to be a mitigating factor.'

Ugrasena was set thinking. This youngster had elevated his thinking to another level.

Ugrasena made another concession. He instructed the Prime Minister, 'Ārya Viprathu, Please call an emergency meeting of the Sudharmā Sabhā in three days. I think that time would be sufficient for Dharmādhikāri Vasudeva to bring charges against all, the Kuṭil Dharmis as well as the arsonists.'

The meeting was adjourned. Dāruk took both Vasudeva and Krishņa to their palace where Devaki was waiting. This was her first day with her sons. Balarāma was still sleeping when the father-son duo came back.

The next two days were spent in meetings with Veerbhadra and Pradyot. Both of them expected Jarāsandha to attack. They expected Chedi and Vidarbha to join them. That exposed the entire eastern flank of Mathurā. It was important that Nāgas, Pānchālas and Kurus stayed neutral, or supported them. Krishṇa came up with the idea of using Rishi Gargāchārya. He was a guest of Drupada even on this

day, after having shifted from Mathurā. Drupada had good relations with Kuru kingdom, particularly with Bhishma. Āchārya should be able to accomplish this diplomatic task. Everyone agreed. Vasudeva would himself go and secure Rishi's acquiescence.

That left the difficult task of keeping Nāgas neutral. They were under the influence of Kuṭil Dharmis. Bāṇakanṭaka was missing. His most likely place of refuge was Khānḍavaprastha. In all likelihood, his aide Kashṭakāraka was also with him. If Kurus could become even a passive ally, a small deployment by them near Drishādvati between Rakshāgriha and Khānḍavaprastha would keep Nāgas alert to the possibility of an attack from the west, not allowing them to mobilise to their east in support of Jarāsandha. Matsya and Virātnagar were too small to matter, and were in any case tributaries of Mathurā.

Vasudev travelled to Gargāchārya's old Āshrama located on the outskirts of Mathurā on the route to Agrasenapur²⁴⁶.

Activity had returned to the Āshrama. Āchārya was in his meditation schedule. The disciples told him that he was in a Pratyāhāra session, and could be disturbed if so required. Vasudeva waited till the Rishi came out of this spell. He saw Vasudeva, Krishņa and Balarāma waiting for him outside the kuti²⁴⁷ and came out. All of them sat under a banyan tree.

Vasudeva described his plan and made a request for the good offices of the Rishi for exercising his influence with Pāṅchālas and Kurus. To their surprise, Āchārya agreed immediately. He said he would leave immediately. 'On one condition though. Krishṇa and Balarāma will come and stay with me in the Āshrama after I am back. They have had some basic education. It is now time for their advanced education. I will have them under my wings and direct their education and learning. Krishṇa has the potential to be a yugpurush, and Balarāma has the potential to be the foremost Malla of this age. I will have them under me and place them wherever I think they will acquire their best knowledge and wisdom.'

Vasudeva agreed immediately. He left both the boys at the Āshrama even as he came back to organise the criminal charges against the Kutil Dharmis.

Gargāchārya had a chat with Krishna to confirm their learning level and potential. He realised very soon that Krishna carried a potential far beyond even his capacity. He sent them back in the evening.

While Vasudeva planned for the next day's Sudharmā Sabhā, Krishṇa toured around Mathurā, checking defences and weak points. Balarāma slept and relaxed, and did some physical workouts in the evening.





<u>- 49 -</u> <u>UPASAMHĀRA²⁴⁸</u>

Sudharmā Sabhā was convened in the palace square. This unprecedented step was taken only for the second time in the history of Mathurā. Mahārāj Ugrasena's initial anointment was held in this palace square. An event with high public interest could be held in the open in order to accommodate public. This was the same arena where Kaṃsa held his wrestling challenge.

The galleries filled up quickly. A buzz of excitement was running through Mathurā. Almost every resident had suffered at the hands of the cruel Kuṭil Dharmis, who were unbelievably arrogant and cruel. They held the Sanātana way of life in utter contempt. Dharma for them meant what was written in their Pralaya Shāstra, and it did contain some unbelievably diabolical ideas against human values. Jhaṅkāl did not even consider non-Kuṭil Dharmis as human beings. All their piety, social justice, and equality were reserved for their cult members; everyone else was just cattle fodder for them. So it was natural that the feelings ran strong against them. That fire in the human heart that consumes the brain, called revenge, was burning ferociously in almost every Mathurā heart. Women outnumbered men

in these feelings. Many of them had direct experience of their savagery.

The Sudharmā Sabhā assembled exactly at the end of first prahara day. Mahārāj Ugrasena was occupying the throne. Dharmādhikāri Vasudeva sat to his left. The ceremonial bench of Kulaguru was placed to the right of the throne. Beyond them sat the Prime Minister, Viprathu. Veerbhadra the joint Senāpati sat next. Pradyot, also a joint Senāpati now, sat next to him - clearly downgraded. Next to Vasudeva sat the Dandādhikari, ready with his list of charges, and his prisoners. Krishna, Balarāma and Uddhava sat together in the second row of the royal members' row. Sabhā had fifty-one members; half of these came from the public, and the other half from the royals. King was the 51st member. Under the system, Dharmādhikāri had full power to impose a sentence of up to seven years. Beyond that, matters had to be brought to the Sabhā. King and Dharmādhikāri could impose a sentence of up to 10 years. For life imprisonment and death sentence, sentence could be imposed only by a majority of the Sabhā. Members had a right to express opinion after Dharmādhikāri proposed a sentence. King could add his opinion if he so wished. Dharmādhikāri had an option of either recommending guilty or not guilty, or even leaving that to the Sabhā. Today, Vasudeva had left even the job of conviction to the Sabhā, given the complexity of the crimes.

First, fifty-seven prisoners charged with arson and destruction of seventeen Pralayālaya were brought forth. Danḍādhikari read the charge.

Dharmādhikāri Vasudeva addressed the Sabhā. 'In my opinion, Dharma Samhita does not permit any resident to render justice by oneself. If this were condoned, the scheme of justice would go into total disarray. Statements of lay public prove the oppression by Kuṭil Dharmis. We also have the instance of suspended sentence of Kuṭil Muni and Bāṇakanṭaka for killing one hundred and two people, fifty-three of them women and children. They should have been sentenced to death for that offence, but Kaṃsa imposed his will. I had cross-examined the accused that day. The public of Mathurā has every reason to be extremely angry with the Sabhā for that lapse. Yet, I cannot allow the Dharmic code to be violated at will. The right course

would have been to lodge a complaint with the Danḍādhikari for him to take action. It is true that all Pralayālayas were an encroachment on the old temples, and were illegal. However, demolition of illegal structures is the job of the Rajya. I, therefore, recommend a punishment for all of them. The quantum may be decided by the Sabhā.'

Vasudeva's recommendation was opposed by almost everyone. The general contention was that extreme provocation is a mitigating factor.

Krishna got up to intervene. Uddhava tried to stop him. He whispered, 'Children do not speak in this Sabhā.'

'If we are allowed to sit here, we have every right to speak,' countered Krishna and went on to speak.

'In my opinion, conviction and sentencing are two different aspects. We should clearly differentiate between the two', Krishna said this short sentence and sat down.

The fog lifted. Everyone got the clue. In a matter of minutes, they were convicted and let off with a sentence of imprisonment of three days already undergone. Public heaved a sigh of relief, and developed even more faith in Krishna's powers. The young boy had settled a fractious argument by just one short intervention.

Kuṭil Muni and his fifty-seven followers were produced next. They were divided into two categories. The first group was charged with occupying temple properties and trespassing Rājya bhumi, as temples were regarded as part of Rājya and Rājya Dharma. All of them were swiftly convicted, sentenced to seven years, and deportation after serving their seven years.

Now came Kuṭil Muni and his band of twenty-three hard core Kuṭil Dharmis. Charges were read for each of them. All of them except Kuṭil Muni had been involved in murders, rapes, destruction of temples, and occupation of temples, disturbing public peace, and disseminating a hate narrative. Conviction was easy. All those directly involved in the dastardly crimes were sentenced to death.

As for Kuṭil Muni, Vasudeva informed the gathering that he had not been found directly involved in any crime. His indirect role was, however, quite clear. Vasudev expressed his opinion that because of the mitigating circumstances, Dharma Shāstra mandated a mitigated

sentence. He also spoke of the magnanimity of Kshatriya Dharma, and suggested deportation out of Mathurā.

There was a general murmur of acquiescence to this proposition by Vasudeva Dharmādhikāri. Ugrasena looked around, and signaled to Viprathu to bring the Dharmadanḍa down to indicate finality of sentence.

There was a little commotion at the back. Krishna was standing up again. Ugrasena saw it, and paused. He had great regard for the genius of this young boy. 'Yes, Keshava, you want to add something to it.'

'Mahārāj, I beg to completely differ with the Dharmādhikāri,' said Krishna.

Stunned silence followed. A twelve year old was opposing his father. Even Ugrasena was nonplussed. He looked quizzically at Vasudeva.

Vasudeva got up. 'Mahārāj, every member of the Sabhā has an equal right to put forth his point of view. Do not treat Krishṇa's view as being a son versus father duel. It is a member of the Sudharmā Sabhā putting forth his point of view as a rejoinder to Dharmādhikari of the Rājya.'

Ugrasena looked at Krishna, indicating to him to begin.

Krishna looked around the Square. There was pin drop silence, a pregnant and expectant silence.

'Mahārāj, we cannot ignore the fact that all those sentenced to death were inspired by the ideology purveyed by Kuṭil Muni. It is a dangerous and anti-human ideology. It disaggregates people, divides them into followers and non-followers. When have we preached violence in this land for mere belief? This ideology neatly vivisects rewards and punishments on the basis of blind belief. This is an evil narrative. Dasyus used to do this. Lord Parashurāma killed these evil narratives many times over and restored the cosmic equilibrium,' Krishna took a deep breath.

There was pin-drop silence in the gathering.

'Killing or not killing a person is not as important as killing a narrative. Let us first have an opinion from the Sabhā whether Kuṭil Dharma, with its authoritarian ideology of salvation by killing for Jhaṅkāl, prescribing One Jhaṅkāl, One Book, One Messenger, One

symbol, and One Leader – to be imposed by force; seeking afterlife by disparaging this beautiful life; and destroying anyone else who does not convert to their ways for just being an unbeliever, is an evil ideology.' Krishna looked at Ugrasena who motioned to him to continue.

'No Sanātani ever had any problem with the One God principle. It could be Brahman, The Supreme, or the Cosmic Purusha, or any other name; but he honours every form as a form of that One God. So we cannot allow killing people if they believe in, or practise something different.' Krishṇa paused and asked for a vote on his proposition.

The Sabhā was unanimous that Kuṭil Muni's ideology was an evil ideology. It was unanimously accepted that it sought to destroy Murtis that gave purpose to consciousness, by creating Book-Murtis that disregarded consciousness as a valid means to sublimation.

Krishna resumed. 'In that case, how can the Dharmic code of Rajya Dharma not take the Rāshṭra Dharma into account? There is nothing absolute in Dharma. Relative morality and relative Dharma is a reality in times like these. Kshatriya Dharma is your svadharma. Your svadharma has to be subordinated to Rāshṭra Dharma, Mahārāj. Rāshṭra Dharma requires that we smash this evil narrative.'

'What about Mānav Dharma, Krishņa,' Sātyaki son of Sātyaka intervened.

Krishṇa met the intervention. 'Some of us encourage leniency on the ground of Mānav²⁴⁹ Dharma. That appears to me to be an oxymoron. Mānav Dharma means maximizing human qualities among the people. How can it be achieved if you let humanity-threatening narratives be spared? Can this be done by sentencing the followers to death and sparing Kuṭil Muni, the fount? Can you bridge the river without drying the source, or diverting the flow? Kuṭil Muni is the progenitor of this evil ideology. If you let him go, he will produce another set of a few thousand followers who would kill a few thousand more. The blood of those thousands to be killed in future would be on this Sudhrmā Sabhā, Mahārāj. You have to kill this mother of all evil first. All others can wait.'

As Krishna finished speaking, a huge cheer went up from the public. The issue was clinched. Father was overruled; son's contention was accepted.

The prisoners were given the choice of means of death, per accepted customs. Twenty-three accepted death by poison. Kuṭil Muni asked for a death that would not affect his sense of consciousness for even a second.

The twenty-three were poisoned to death; Kuṭil Muni was brought to the Main Square the next day. An expectant crowd assembled with percussion and wind musical instruments, and worked up a big frenzy. The Danḍādhikāri called out the executioner.

The executioner brandished his sword. Kuṭil Muni's hands were tied behind his back. He was made to kneel with the executioner standing on the side. He was wearing an orange overall as per his choice.

'Are you ready,' asked the executioner to Kuţil Muni.

Kuṭil Muni saw death in front of him. He started screaming and begging for mercy. 'I will become a Sanātani,' he shouted.

'Too late for that,' growled the executioner.

The crowd started shouting and howling.

The executioner brought his sword down on the neck of Kuṭil Muni, smiting it with tremendous force. The head went rolling forward even as the torso fell back, sending out streams of blood and soaking up the hard rolled ground.

Kuṭil Muni's saga was over, but his narrative was not yet over.

Bāṇakanṭaka woke up with sweat all over his body the next day. He had been expecting Kuṭil Muni to join him. He had made a plan. The detachment had come back and was waiting outside.

They brought the bad news. 'Kuṭil Muni has been sentenced to death and beheaded.' No core group member survives.

That evening an elaborate ceremony took place in Khānḍavaprastha. Baṇakantaka was appointed the new Jhaṅkālputra, and leader of Kuṭil Dharma. He took the name Jaṭil Muni. His disciples chanted, Jai Kuṭil Dharma, Jai Jaṭil Muni.





<u>- 50 -</u> JARĀSAŅDHA

Jarāsandha ordered his Army to move on Chaitra Pūrṇimā, 6 days after Ram Navami. Queen Saudamini resisted her husband as best as she could, but Jarāsandha was simply too confident of his forces, and his Shiva Bhakti. Confidence, which Prāpti thought was pure arrogance, was good, but overconfidence could be ruinous. Balance was important. She told her father point blank that she had seen hubris cloud the judgment of her husband. She told her father that extreme hubris leads to extreme anger, anger clouds judgment, makes you commit errors, and leads to destruction.

'Pitāshri, I have lost my husband. My loss is the greatest loss a person can have in our society. Yet, I have forgiven Krishna. Did you learn nothing from Āchārya Chandakaushika?'

Jarāsandha shouted Prāpti down. 'Shut up, you girl! How dare you question your father?'

'Father is one who fathers the land, the people, and the family. You have no right to call yourself as father. You are simply leading the land, the people, and the family to perdition. My husband would have been alive if he had not got too drunk on the support of Magadha army. That same Magadha army fled at the first hint of trouble from a cowherd boy of barely twelve years of age. I kept

informing you of the poison that was being injected into him by Kuṭil Muni and his followers. You did not bother. What did your army achieve for him? They were great in fleeing the field, and bringing us over to Girivraja. If Prabala kākā had told me that Mathurā naresh (Kaṃsa) was in danger, I would probably have fared better in combat than your fatso export Chāṇūra did.' Asti was trying to hush her up, while Saudamini sat passively.

Asti announced that she was pregnant. Jarāsandha wished her well and swore that he would put Asti's son as the King of Mathurā. Even this news failed to dissuade him.

No amount of persuasion, argument, or entreaties could deflect Jarāsandha from his resolve. He had a vision of becoming the King of the known world. From Pragjyotisha to Pārshva, he was destined to be the undisputed emperor. If he did not crush the puny Mathurā cowherds, how would he take on Kuru, Pānchāla and Gāndhāra?

He had got Bhomāntara from Surlankā²⁵⁰ and his father, Kālayavana from Prabhāsakshetra²⁵¹ on the coast of Āryāvarta, pledging their support. Kālayavana was reputed to be from Yavana kshetra, his ancestors having migrated from Arvasthan. He did not subscribe to Sanātana Dharma, but to a cult of Arvasthān.

Bhomāntara and Kālayavana moved in from the west, Bāṇakanṭaka linked up with Jarāsandha as the new Leader of Kuṭil Dharma, even as Jarāsandha took the river route to Dhavalpuri.

Vasudeva's diplomacy was bearing fruit. Bhishma started making extra deployment around Rakshāgriha, threatening the Nāgas. Nāgas shifted their entire deployment to the west, asking Bāṇakanṭaka to desist from any activity that would create problem for them. Jarāsandha told Magadhamādan to secure the support of Vidarbha and Chedi.

Krishṇa and Balarāma were part of every strategy session that discussed the defence of Mathurā. Krishṇa's ideas were so striking, that he was elevated as the de facto advisor to the Security Council of Mathurā that comprised the King, Dharmādhikāri, Prādhān Mantri, and the two Senāpatis. Balarāma had little interest in the microdetails, and he would prefer to sleep and meditate than attend these meetings.

On the advice of Krishṇa, Matsya and Virātnagar were befriended. Envoys were sent to Chedi and Vidarbha. Kuru and Pānchāla had already been taken care of by Gargāchārya. With the permission of Matsya kingdom, Krishṇa prepared an ambush in and around Dhavalpuri, and another one at Ekchakrapur²⁵² in Pānchāla. With his efforts, a good spy network was created within a month. Each day, they would receive inputs from nearly a hundred locations around Āryāvarta.

As soon as Jarāsandha sailed from Pāṭaliputra with his massive army, Krishṇa had the information within three days.

Magadhamādan brought the bad news to Jarāsandha that Chedi had announced their intention to stay neutral, but had allowed martial passage. Pānchāla had even refused passage.

Veerbhadra was asked to send an advance detachment with flamethrowers to the border of Sāket (Koshala) and Pānchāla. Similar detachments occupied Ekchakrapur, and Dhavalpuri. Even though the intelligence was that the entire Army was river borne, Mathurā council took no chance. They deployed Vrindāvan's guerilla force at the Matsya kingdom's border with Chedi along Chārmaṇyavati.

Then the Mathurā army waited. Jarāsandha had assembled a large army of nearly fifty thousand foot soldiers and twenty thousand cavalry. It required a huge logistical support. Against the advice of Senāpati Magadhamādan, fifteen large river ships were sailing against the Ganga current, and against the wind, purely on the strength of rowing men. They needed to finish the campaign within two months before the snowmelt in the Ganga and Yamunā would make the current dangerous.

The fleet stopped in Kāshi, who had been tasked to provide logistics in advance. Then they stopped in Prayāg for prayers and refills, before branching off into Yamunā.

As the flotilla progressed up the Yamunā, the current became stronger. Unlike Ganga, Yamunā traversed narrow gorges along the way. Beyond Kendravati, the going became difficult. Fifteen thousand rowing men sweated round the clock to keep the ships moving.

On the ninth morning, the ships entered a stretch of wilderness with high badlands, with deep gullies and scarred mud-hills. No population lived in the area. The ships had a protective detachment following it on both the banks. The detachment on the left bank was stopped and turned back as soon as Pānchāla kingdom began. Right bank had the friendly Chedi kingdom, so the protective cover secured that flank. Jarāsandha was deeply worried at this unfriendly act of Pānchāla. Ships were usually allowed to sail through with protective cover on the banks, even commercial river ships.

Kalayavan's army was nowhere to be seen. They had just started their march, when the unthinkable happened to the main army.

It was a bright Chaitra day, with sun shining strong. Jarāsandha had worried a bit when his left bank protection was taken away. Pānchāla was not a hostile, so he did not unduly worry. He had not contended with another factor, the Krishna factor.

At about the middle of third prahara, they encountered a strange sight. Some 200 cows were trying to cross Yamunā. The river was wide at this part, and the current was slow. The ships were keeping to the centre, avoiding sand bars. They had to be stopped as the cows showed no sense of urgency. Lead ship dropped anchor, all others followed suit.

Jarāsandha, the experienced military commander that he was, realised the danger. On the left bank, there were big mud-hills, some nearly two hundred feet high. They were scarred with gullies and crevices. He had a gut feeling that things were not quite right. He had never thought that Mathurā had anyone capable of thinking what he was thinking.

The fleet had stopped. They were stuck to the place. Jarāsandha had an inkling. He shouted instructions to the trailing boats. 'Secure your rear,' Jarāsandha shouted.

It was too late. A flamethrower had already hit the trailing boat.

What followed was an absolute carnage. From the protection of the mud hills and gullies, flamethrowers wreaked havoc on the ships. Hundreds of flames hit the stalled ships. The soldiers were found to be sitting ducks.

Complete panic ensued. This was one emergency the soldiers had not been trained for. They did not know how to react. Most of them jumped into the river, trying to swim ashore. Arrows fired from the left bank caught them. Jarāsandha jumped off his ship. His ship had a

small rowing boat. He used it to move towards the right bank. He shouted to every commander to take people off to the right bank.

The carnage lasted nearly one hour. At the end of it, Jarāsandha was left with a few thousand troops. His entire cavalry stood destroyed. Jarāsandha retreated to Jalanandikāpur²⁵³ in the Chedi kingdom. A message was sent to Chedi capital Suktimati on Kendravati River. After a week, King Damaghosha of Chedi salvaged Jarāsandha through his son Shishupala.

Thus ended the first attack by Jarāsandha. His mighty Army of fifty thousand foot soldiers, and twenty thousand cavalry was reduced to around ten thousand foot soldiers. Quite formidable a challenge remained.

Jarāsandha launched three more attacks with the rump of his army, each time through an infantry march. His second attack was checked at Chārmaṇyawati. Half of his army perished trying to cross a swollen river in the month of Jyeshtha.

Jarāsandha managed to link up with Kālayavana and mounted his third attack from the Vrishabhānpur side in Ashāḍha. He encountered heavy rainfall near Govardhana. Krishṇa's defences were strong around Govardhana. They simply rolled down boulders to kill half the combined army.

The fourth and last attack of the year took place in a desperate charge made by Jarāsandha through Khānḍavaprastha. That was even easier for Mathurā forces. They had built a diversion near the Kaliya Duh. As the forces tried to skirt it through the shallows near the Duh, snakes, threatened with assault on their habitat, bit them and nobody except Jarāsandha, Kālayavana and about one hundred commanders and soldiers were left to mourn them.

Jarāsandha retreated to Magadha at the end of Shrāvaṇa, badly defeated but swearing to avenge his defeat. He entered Girivraja on Bhādrapada Ashṭami to find the city bedecked with flowers and lamps.

When he entered his personal quarters, he was greeted with Saudamini, Asti and Prāpti leading a chorus of hundreds of palace residents.

They were singing 'Krishnam Vande Jagadgurum'.





<u>- 51 -</u> GARGĀCHĀRYA

A sthe immediate threat receded, Mathurā celebrated Krishṇa Janma in a never heard of celebration. The public, with no goading, celebrated Krishṇa Janmāshṭami as a spontaneous event. Women came out in the streets and showed public affection to Krishṇa; some as a son, others as paramour. Men revered him as the incarnation of Vishṇu, saving Mathurā with his tremendous commonsense and tactical skill. Boys went ecstatic singing of him as their playmate.

In Vrindāvan, it was a day of sadness. A day they had celebrated for twelve years with such gusto and fun had no meaning this year. They had been treated to unbelievable music and dancing steps. Yashodā and Naṅda sat alone, forlorn, reminiscing the tumultuous but fun time they had with Krishna.

Vasudeva and Devaki were overwhelmed with the bliss they were experiencing today. The twelve years were being played and replayed before their mental playback screen. Devaki was experiencing a deep jealousy towards Yashodā. 'Such an extraordinary boy. Such stories of miraculous events. How my fate kept me from maternal anxieties, worries, and emotional cries.'

Krishna, as usual, woke up early. Devaki had to pull Balarāma out of his bed, as usual again. Vasudeva had arranged for them to travel to Gargāchārya's Āshrama. Uddhava joined in to escort them. Vasudeva and Devaki would follow them after another prahara.

Rishi Gargāchārya welcomed the trio. He had longed to have Krishna under his wings. He was having his life's wish fulfilled. He performed a varshagantha anushthana for the twelfth birthday of Kānhāivā. He introduced them to two guests, Āchārya Chandakaushika from Magadha, and Āchārya Pānini from Suvastu. The boys paid their respects to the enlightened ātmās. Āchārya Chandakaushika, in particular, was in a high state of rapture. He was muttering the 'Krishnam vande' shloka under his breath, not wanting it to be heard by Krishna. After consecrating the birthday boy suitably, they sat down to confer with them. Uddhava was feeling a little inferior at the special adulation being shown to Krishna. Uddhava had prided himself at being the most acclaimed current disciple of Gargāchārya. Here was an upstart being feted by three of the highest gurus. Chandakaushika was even muttering prayers to him. He could not rationalize this. Then he thought that maybe this was because Krishna had killed Kamsa who in turn had been a tormentor to all the saints and rishis. His mind was disturbed.

Gargāchārya tried to indulge the little child. 'Govinda, what all have you learnt in your small Āshrama in Vrindāvan. I know Swarup. He is a fine young man. I hope he taught you all the basics well.'

Uddhava butted in, trying to show how well he had been taught the sciences and the scriptures. 'Āchārya, villages have only limited facilities.'

Krishna smiled, 'Āchārya Shri would pardon me. Indeed, villages have small Āshramas, with lesser teachers. But a lump of clay needs a potter to shape it. I had tried using a sledgehammer once, it did not work. Can you teach Yoga and Sānkhya to someone who cannot tell his mind from his viveka, and his viveka from his chitta?'

Gargāchārya's indulgence vanished in a jiffy. The answer struck him like a thunderbolt. 'Krishṇa, do you know the ātma and parmātma?'

'The day I know the ātma, I will know the parmātma, Āchārya. I have seen fleeting glimpses of mine while meditating, fighting,

playing my flute and dancing in Rāsa. Transcending identity of Self is not easy, Āchārya? Prakriti and Purusha of Sāṅkhya, and Vedāṅta sound different to the tark shāstra of Nyāya, but can you measure the speed of a kaṇa in a shaft of light travelling from Sun to earth, or measure the droplet's contribution to a mighty wave of an ocean? I cannot disaggregate them yet in the waves that rise within my mind. I long to be in Turīya state. If I can get the right guidance from the Gurus.' Krishṇa took a deep breath and looked at the Gurus, who nodded their heads in approval.

Krishṇa continued, 'Sentience and insentience, kriyā and karma, matter and consciousness, free will and necessity, are taught to a common person as opposite properties. To me, they must exist in harmony if we have to discover the divine within us. We cannot let the seeking and enquiry be suppressed by the dogma of belief. The divine within must correspond to the manifestations of the Supreme that our senses can decipher without. I do not yet know whether anything in this universe exists without an observer. Kaṃsa is dead for us, but he could live on for many years for someone in another universe, or even in some other griha, isn't it?'

Gargāchārya's ego had fallen on the ground with a thud. This boy was quite something. They had all seen his tactical brilliance, and his ability in combat, but this...

Chandakaushika had become even more overwhelmed with devotion. He had started crying with tears falling copiously from his eyes. Uddhava was unable to understand a thing of what Krishna had said. He just clung to his knowledge of Vedas and felt secure.

Rishi Pāṇini was very happy. He had not seen such precocity for a long time.

Even as they were talking to little Krishna, Vasudeva entered into their presence. After suitable obeisance and salutations, Vasudeva sat down. Gargāchārya had realised that he had fallen to dvesha²⁵⁴ state at the reflection of comparison with the young genius. He repeatedly castigated himself, and tried to get into an observational state.

'Vasudeva, I must congratulate you on your good fortune. If I were promised a fruit like Krishna at the end of an imprisonment, I would not mind even 50 years for a trade off. You got it in barely 20,

out of which you spent cell time for only 2 years or so,' said Gargāchārya.

Vasudeva was taken aback, but his chest filled up with pride. 'It's all your blessings, Āchārya.'

'I am the Kulaguru of Mathurā, Vasudeva. I have educated all of you, but this boy is vilakshan $\frac{255}{}$. He has the capacity of learning wide variety of Āgamas, Kalās, and vidyās. I know all of them, but I would recommend that he go to Sāndipani Āshrama. At the beginning of Ashvin, Sāndipani Āshrama is going to have a congregation of experts of all kinds. I will be there. Lord Parashurāma will be there. There is no equal of him in shastra-vidyā²⁵⁶. Hiranygaarbha²⁵⁷ Prathamāchārya would be there. He is the last word in Yoga. Kapil Muni, Vāchaspati, and Kanāda rishis will be there, the greatest in the darshana of Samkhya, Nyāya and Vaisheshika. Pānini himself is travelling to Avantipur. Pāṇini and I will go together, along with Chandakaushika. All of us will meet under the umbrella of Sāndipani. Sāndipani is the senior most and the most learned, especially in Purva-mimāmsā²⁵⁸ and Uttara-mimāmsā²⁵⁹. Krishna needs to be taught by a galaxy. After receiving instructions from this galaxy, he will be a complete gyāni²⁶⁰ and yogi. Start preparations for sending the boys to Avantipur Sāndipani Āshrama.'

The departure was set for seven days later. Devaki was heart broken. Her dreams of having Krishna to herself were shattered. Vasudeva comforted her, 'Devaki, Krishna is not for us only. Rishis think that he is for the whole world. Let him go.'

Uddhava was also tasked to go with Krishna. As they were getting ready, Uddhava found Krishna getting more and more distant, pensive and even lost. Uddhava did not understand this. He thought Krishna had mastered his senses. Here he was displaying normal emotions. He enquired.

Krishna sighed, 'you know, Uddhava, I had promised the people of Vrindāvan, specially the Gopis that I would be back the day after Mahāshivarātri. I am nearly six months over the limit. I am being proved a liar. However, I cannot go there myself, as they would not be able to reconcile with my new form as a Mathurā prince. They have come to associate my memory with their naughty, impish,

murali playing gopāla. Only Mā Yashodā and yogini Rādhā would understand, but the ordinary gopa-gopis would be totally broken with this new image that has been forced upon me today. This is the reason I have taken a vow never to return to Vrindāvan. But my friends must be considering me to be a liar. I am feeling quite sad at this handicap of mine.'

'What's the big deal, I will go and make them understand. Don't you worry? I will go tomorrow, and make them comfortable. They are under delusional attachment. I will dispel the cloud hanging over their heads. They need to be taught nirguṇa yoga. Just don't worry. I have learnt kriyā-yoga and manas-yoga both. I will make them conquer the weaknesses of their mind. Yoga, after all, is the control of the functions of the mind - yogashchittavrittinirodhah²⁶¹. Did you learn this in your Āshrama?'

Krishṇa was smiling. Balarāma was about to guffaw, but Krishṇa winked at him to keep quiet. 'I know, Uddhava. We were in a small village Āshrama. How would we know this wisdom? Please, Uddhava, do me this favour. You are my age, you also look like me. Please go and give some wisdom to those village belles in particular. Please do this to me as a favour before all three of us leave for Sāndipani Āshrama. Will you?'

Uddhava puffed up with pride. 'Most certainly, bhrātā²⁶² Krishṇa. This sort of thing comes naturally to me.'

Two days before the slated departure to Avantipur, Uddhava made a trip to Vrindāvan.

Krishṇa was leaving his body in Mathurā. People were surrounding his body, and he was smiling. The prāṇa leaving his body was visible, with a flute to the lips. The music was audible. It was a mesmerizing lilt. It surrounded the mind, with an anaesthetic aestheticism of a rapturous flavour. The ethereal shape lingered, and touched the lips.

Rādhikā woke up with a shudder.

It was not yet early dawn. Rādhā looked around. What was that dream? She had transcended the weakness brought about by uncontrolled desire, and unbridled senses. There was a hint of chill in the air. Rādhā threw a shawl over her shoulders and moved out. She woke up Lalitā and Vishakha.

'I saw Krishna in my dreams. It was a strange dream, both frightening and lovely. Get all the sakhis ready. We are leaving for Vrindāvan - now.'



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1 There is no code of conduct in an emergency
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- 21 Yojana = 4 Kosh = approx. 12-14 kms
- $\underline{3}$ One quarter of a day = 3 hours
- 41 ghați = 24 minutes; 60 ghațis = 24 hours
- <u>5</u>Mahārathi a warrior capable of simultaneously fighting 720,000 warriors
- 6Great Maternal uncle'
- 7The elder queen
- 8 Present day Chambal
- 9Elder sister
- 10 Present day Dholpur
- 11demon
- 12Wrestlers
- 13Gold coins
- 14Present day Etawah
- 15Present Sindh
- 16Betwa
- <u>17</u>Ken
- 18 Present day Rajapur
- 19Extra month of the lunar calendar
- 20 Menstruating
- 21 ghați = 24 minutes = 60 vighațis =24 seconds; 1 Muhurta = 2 ghațis = 48 minutes
- 221 muhurta = 2 ghatis = 48 minutes
- 23Mystic
- 24King of Kāshi
- 25King of Mathurā, Kaṃsa
- 26Cowherd
- 27Followers of Sanātana Dharma
- 28 Sanyasins from the school of Rishi Angiras at Prayāg
- 29Make-up
- 308 praharas = 1 day, 1 prahara is approx. 3 hours long
- 31Epoch
- 32 special knowledge

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33Present day Rājgir
34Present Phalgu
35intellect
36wisdom
<u>37</u>ego
38Result of karma
39Study of the adversary's point of view
40Company of the wise
41 Transition time in morning and evening
42Ritual
43 This is whole, that is whole, the whole comes out of the whole; even
    if you take out the whole from the whole, still the whole remains –
    Prayer to the infinite cosmos
44Warrior
<u>45</u>Ego
46Co-students – literally, brothers at guru's place
47Knowledge streams
48 Subjects of fine studies
49Discriminatory wisdom
50 Higher the status, higher the responsibility
51Arabia
52Power of muscles
53Power of missiles
<u>54</u>Power of combat weapons
55 Earth is enjoyed by the brave
56The great hermit
<u>57</u>Verifiable through direct perception
58Proof
59Inference
60Devotee
61 Adversary
62Human Sacrifice ritual
63Minister
64Full moon
65Attendants
66 Completion ritual with last offering
67guards
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<u>68</u>The big stick of dharma <u>69</u>Common public
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70warriors

71Republic

72Female friend

73Send-off of bride

74The superficial mind, often referred to as heart in modern expression

75Death

76Knowledge

77Wisdom

78Chief Justice

79Magistrate

80Companion

81 Darling

82Nātya Shastra – woman enraged with her lover

83 Dharma of a Kshatriya

84Dharma of a Vaishya

85 Royal elite

86 Insignia

871 muhurta = 1 ghați = 48 minutes

88 Modern Swat

89Debate

<u>90</u>Ego

91 graduation

92Near modern Charsadda

93 Modern Kabul

94 Modern Sutlej

95 Modern Ghaggar-Hakra

96Saam, daam, danda, bheda

97 Modern Attock

98Present Mingora

99 Fire ritual (cremation)

100Philosophy

101 Devotion

102Present Rakhigarhi

103 Present Bhiranna

- 104Phallus
- 105Vulva
- 106debate
- 107Day of great flood, end of world
- 108 Anger
- 109Proof
- 110 Direct evidence of sensory perceptions
- 111Inference
- 112 Scriptural evidence
- 113Distorted scriptural evidence
- 114Obvious to senses
- 115Present Indraprastha or Delhi
- 116 Sanctum sanctorum
- 117Snake Pit
- 118Province
- 119Bhiranna
- 120Book written on leaves
- 121Residents of Mathurā
- 122Leader of the Household
- 123 Karma without a purpose
- 124Karma without attachment
- <u>125</u>3 hours
- 126Death
- 127Small round gong, struck by holding it in hand
- 128 Indian percussion instrument
- <u>129</u>A small percussion instrument used by monkey-trainers
- 130 Death
- 131 Air, fire and water elements of the body in Ayurveda
- 132Lack of sleep
- 133 Excessive drinking
- 134 Too much worrying
- 135 Eight-fold Yoga
- 136 Most famous Vaidya in Indian lore
- 137Lunar sign
- 138 Constellation
- 139 Affectionate address to a daughter
- 140 Examination of pulse

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141Counter clockwise Swastika
142Tornado
143recitation
144 The five elements: earth, water, air, sky, fire
145Birthday
146Intellect
147Consciousness
148 Large flat metal utensil with raised rim perimeter
149 Sensse of identity
150 Sense of perception - mind
151 particle
152knowledge
153dance
154theatre
155 music
156a wind instrument
157Where there is Gopeshvara Krishna, and there is the yogini Rādhā;
    that is where there is liberation and bliss, and a steady blissful
    love, in my opinion.
158father
159mother
160 A girl-friend
161 Apparent action
162Conscious action
163 A boy-friend
164gods
165detached
166Residents of Mathurā
167Residents of Magadha
168 bed punishment or rape
169bed reward or intercourse
170Prostitute
171Reverse
172 public
173 republic
174Greater Indian sub-continent
175Role Model
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176Chosen among sages
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- 177Sāma, dāma, danda, bhed
- 178 Son of Jhankāl
- 179Grandson of Jhankāl
- 180 Handbook of penitence
- 181 body hunting, another term for rape
- 182 foreigner
- 183wrestlers
- 184Refers to the Hitopadesha story of Chitrāngada the deer, subuddhi the crow, and Kshudrabuddhi the jackal, where magnanimity of the deer nearly costs him his life
- 185bearers of near combat arms
- 186 bearers of long distance arms (arrows, flames, etc.)
- 187Resident of Magadha
- 188Resident of Mathurā
- <u>189</u>Different from a gaṇikā, singing prostitute an expert in providing carnal pleasures only
- 190 province
- 191 Jamshed in Persian language
- 192 With physical form
- 193 full moon day
- 194new moon day
- 195Repayment to the Guru
- 196 One God philosophy
- <u>197</u>Die, Jhaṅkāl
- 198Barsānā
- 199Elder brother
- 2002nd step of the higher Yoga practice Pratyāhāra, Dhāraṇā, Dhyāna, Samādhi, beyond the four steps of lower Yoga practice of yama, niyama, āsana, and prāṇāyāma
- 201mind
- 202 triple speeds
- 203 half speeds
- 204 quadruple speed
- 205Oneness
- <u>206</u>void
- 207human ātmā

- 208cosmic ātmā
- 209Son of Vasudeva
- **210**Pit
- 211 clarified butter
- 212Be a rascal to a rascal
- 213 distillate herbal medicine
- 214Confusion
- 215 Sacrifice involving a bow
- 216 Worship of the bow
- 217Elder brother
- 218 daughter
- <u>219</u>Literally, living in ether, or dishas meaning living without clothes
- 220Mathurā
- 221Flax
- 222Boss of the house
- 223 May Jhankāl die, or death to Jhankāl
- 224 Putting prana (life energy) into an Murti
- 225clan
- 226State
- 227Nation
- 228 A kind of deep jealousy and miserliness
- 229Three deformities
- 230 Bed punishment
- 231 reincarnation
- 232 epoch
- 233Emperor
- 234 Final and full offering in fire ritual
- 235goading hook
- 236 dry colour
- 237 Members
- 238 Slogans of victory
- 239 All five fingers in the fat
- 240The lotus asana
- 241A form of address great rishi
- 242 Representative Leader
- 243Maternal uncle –mama in Hindi
- 244Bed-room

- 245Relative
- 246Present day Agra
- **247**hut
- 248 Conclusion
- **249**Human
- **250**Surat
- 251 Prabhās Pattan in Gujarat
- 252 Etawah presently
- 253 Present Jalaun
- 254 jealousy
- 255Non-pareil
- 256 weapons' training
- 257 In the line of Hiranyagarbh
- 258 Vedas
- 259 Vedāntas
- 260man of knowledge and wisdom
- 261 Patanjali Sūtra(1:2)
- 262 brother



AUTHOR PROFILE: SANJAY DIXIT

S anjay Dixit is a person of variegated hues. He graduated as a marine engineer, and sailed the high seas for a few years before changing course to civil services. His interests range from economics, agriculture and technology to cricket, music and spirituality.

Though he is an IAS officer with the Govt. of Rajasthan as an Additional Chief Secretary, more people know him as a cricket administrator, who once defeated Lalit Modi in a famous election for the post of President of Rajasthan Cricket Association. He considers Rajasthan's first Ranji Trophy title triumph as one of the crowning achievements of his life. He is also credited with bringing a revolutionary new technology for production of date palms on a large scale in Western Rajasthan.

In spite of his busy schedule with the government, Dixit is a prolific columnist who spares no punches in his hard-hitting pieces on contemporary topics. He has deep interest in Indian languages, culture, history and philosophy. He has also done deep studies on comparative religions and strategic affairs. He also runs 'The Jaipur

Dialogues' as its Chairman, creating an India-centric think tank in the process.

Krishna Gopeshvara is Dixit's first book. The book is written as a story in the Puranic style, reimagining the popular events around Krishna in a rational manner; and weaving a plausible story around them. Dixit considers Krishna to be the highest embodiment of human consciousness. According to Dixit, India and the World need to look very closely at Krishna's teachings and implement his model of conscious purposeful action. Dixit advocates resistance to evil narratives, using all means, as the most important pathway to world peace.