

## CHAPTER 9

### THE ASCENT OF KRISHNA

**D**harmaraja who was reeling in agony at the departure of his uncle and aunt—Dhritharashtra and Gandhari—had another bout of unbearable pain which was like a needle thrust underneath the nails. Wherever he turned, he began seeing bad omens in his kingdom. He noted in every act around him the taint of falsehood, cruelty and injustice. It met him at every step and confused his vision.

As a result, an inexplicable anguish possessed him anew. His face became pale with apprehension. It was marked by constant agitation and anxiety. Seeing this and becoming agitated themselves, the brothers—Bhima, Nakula and Sahadeva—approached their eldest and expressed their eagerness to delve into the reasons for his strange sadness.

They stood before him with folded hands and inquired, “Lord and Master! Day by day we find your countenance rendered dimmer and dimmer; you seem sunk in unfathomable agony, sinking deeper and deeper with every passing hour. You have become too weak to stand firm. If any of us has caused you pain, please tell us. We shall guard ourselves against repetition, and we pray we may be pardoned. If all this is due to something else, you have only to tell us about it, we shall at the cost of our very lives set it right and restore your mind. When you have such heroes obedient as we are, to correct anyone, however high and mighty, it is not proper for you to give vent to grief. Inform us the reason and command us what to do,” they prayed.

Dharmaraja replied: “What can I tell you, dear brothers? I see ominous things all round. From the homes of ordinary citizens to the hermitages of the saints and sages, wherever my eye falls, I see only inauspiciousness, ill-fortune, and the negation of joy. I argued within myself that this was only the result of my warped imagination and I tried my best to muster up courage and confidence. I did not like to fall a prey to my fears. But I could not succeed. Recollecting the scenes made my fear even more fearsome.

“To aggravate the sadness, I saw some scenes that are contrary to established morals and Dharma. Not only did they come to my actual notice, the Courts of Justice in this kingdom have been receiving petitions and pleas regarding wrongs, injustices, iniquities and misdeeds, which make me grieve deeply.

“I saw some situations which were even worse. Last evening, when I was returning after a tour of the kingdom, I saw a mother cow refusing to nurse and feed her new-born calf! This is quite strange and contrary to nature. I saw some women wantonly loitering in the bazaar. I hope that they would rush into their homes when they saw me; but no. It did not happen so. They had no reverence for authority. They went on as if I was not in the picture. They continued to talk without restraint to the men folk. I saw all this with my own eyes. I simply proceeded further from that horrid place.

“Very near the Rajabhavan, when I was about to enter it, I perceived a Brahmin selling milk and curds! I saw people emerging out of their houses and closing the doors behind them. I found them fixing some iron lump to them, so that they may not be opened! (The reference is, evidently, to locks which were strange things in Dharmaraja’s kingdom for no one had any fear of thieves). My mind was very much concerned with all these tragic transformations.

“I tried to forget this state of affairs and so started doing the Evening Rituals, the sacred rite of offering oblations to the consecrated Fire and shall I tell you what happened? The fire could not be lit, however hard I tried? Oh, what a calamity it was. My fears that these events foreboded some great catastrophe is fed by other happenings too. They are confirming my premonitions every minute. I find myself too weak to overcome them. Perhaps the *Kali*

(Iron age, present age) era has begun or is about to begin, I believe.

“For, how else are we to explain such facts as this: a wife has quarrelled with her husband and is arguing before the judge in court that she should be permitted to go to her parents, leaving him to himself. How am I to face such a plea in court that she should be permitted to dissolve the marriage and leave for her parents’ home, deserting her husband? A petition from such a wife was admitted yesterday in the Court of Justice! How am I to ignore such abominations?

“Why go on recounting these occurrences? Yesterday, the horses in the royal stables started weeping, did you hear? They were shedding copious tears, the syces reported. Sahadeva tried to investigate the causes of their deep sorrow; but he could not discover why and he was struck with wonder and consternation. These are indications of wholesale destruction, not of any minor danger, or small evil.” Dharmaraja placed his chin on his upright arm and rested a while in deep thought.

Bhima did not give way to despair. He laughed a scornful laugh and began: “The incidents and events you mention might have happened. I do not deny them. But how can they bring disaster to us? Why should we give up all hope? All these abnormalities can be set right by administrative measures and their enforcement. It is really surprising that you are so worried about these small matters

that can be corrected by us. Or, is it the imminent breaking out of another war, that you fear? Perhaps you are anxious to avoid the ravages that the revival of war might bring about. That contingency is impossible. For, all our foes have been exterminated, with their kith and kin. Only we five are left, and we have to seek for friends and foes only among ourselves. Rivalry will not break out among us, even in our dreams. Then, what agitates you? I cannot understand why you are afflicted. People will laugh at you when you take these little things to heart and lose peace of mind.” Bhima said this, and changing his mighty mace from the right hand to the left, he laughed a laugh which was half a jeer.

For this Dharmaraja replied: “I have the same discrimination and intelligence that you have, in these matters. Nor have I an iota of dread that enemies will overpower us. Have we not defeated the renowned warriors, Bhishma, Drona and the rest who could singly and with but one arrow destroy the three worlds? What can any foe do to us? And, what can agitate us who were bearing even the direst calamities with fortitude. How can any difference arise between us now, who stood so firm in the days of distress?

“Perhaps you suspect that I am afraid of anything happening to me, personally. No, I shall never be agitated by anything that might happen to me, for, this body is a bubble upon the waters, it is a composite of the five elements waiting to be dissolved back into its components. The dissolution must happen some day; it is bound to fail, to

fall, to fester, to be reduced to ash or mud. I do not pay heed to its fate.

“My only worry is of one particular matter. I shall disclose it to you, without any attempt to conceal the seriousness. Listen. It is now more or less seven months since our brother Arjuna left for Dwaraka. Yet, we have not heard anything about the welfare and well-being of the Lord of Dwaraka. He has not sent any messenger or message regarding, at least, his reaching Dwaraka. Of course I am not worried in the least about Arjuna and his reaching or not reaching Dwaraka. I know that no foe can stand up against him. Moreover, if anything untoward had happened to him, certainly, Sri Krishna would have sent the information to us; of this there is no doubt. So, I am confident that there is no reason to be nervous about him.

“Let me confess that it is about the Lord Himself that I am feeling worried. With every passing minute, anxiety is increasing. My heart is suffering unbearable agony. I am overwhelmed by the fear that He may leave this world and resume his permanent abode. What greater reason can there be for sorrow?

“If this catastrophe has actually come about, I shall not continue to rule over this land, widowed by the disappearance of the Master. For us Pandavas, this Vaasudeva was all our five vital airs put together, when He departs, we are but corpses, devoid of vitality. If the Lord is upon the earth, such ominous signs dare not reveal

themselves. Injustice and iniquity can have free play only when He is absent. I have no doubt about this. My conscience is clear about it; something tells me that this is the truth.”

When Dharmaraja asserted thus, the brothers fell into the depth of grief. They lost all trace of courage. Bhima was the first who recovered sufficiently to speak! He mustered some courage, in spite of the wave of sadness that smothered him. He said, “For the reason that Arjuna has not returned or that we have not heard from him, you should not picture such a dire calamity and start imagining catastrophe. There must be some other reason for Arjuna’s silence; or else, Krishna Himself might have neglected to inform us. Let us wait, seek further light; let us not yield to the fantasies that a nervous mind might weave. Let us not clothe them with the vesture of truth. I am encouraged to speak like this, for, one’s nervousness is often capable of shaping such fears.”

But Dharmaraja was in no mood to accept this. He replied: “Whatever you say, however skilfully you argue, I feel that my interpretation is correct. Or else, how can such an idea arise in my mind? My left shoulder is registering a shiver, see. This is a sign confirming my fear that this has actually happened. You know it is a bad omen, if the left shoulder shivers for men and the right, for women. Now, this thing has taken place in my body, and it is a bad omen. Not merely the shoulder, the entire being—mind, body, intelligence—all are in a shiver. My eyes grow dim and I am

fast losing vision. I see the world as an orphan, having been deprived of its Guardian and Lord. I have lost the faculty of hearing. My legs are shaking helplessly. My limbs have been petrified. They have no life in them.

“What greater proof do you need to assert that the Lord has left? Believe me, dear brothers. Even if you do not, facts will not change. The earth is shaking under our feet. Do you not hear the eerie noises emanating from the agonised heart of the earth? Tanks and lakes are shaken into waves. The sky, air, fire, and waters and the earth all moaning their fate, for they have lost their Master.

“How many more evidences do you need to get convinced? News came some days back of showers of blood that rained in some parts of our kingdom.”

Hearing these words, streams of tears coursed down the cheeks of Nakula and Sahadeva, even as they stood before their brother. Their hearts were struck with pain; they could not stand, for their legs failed them.