

CHAPTER 12

THE KALI AGE DAWNS

Bhima said, “When Krishna was questioned in the court of Dhritharashtra by Duryodhana, Dussasana and others as to why He should intercede in the family disputes of the Kauravas and Pandavas and favour one section more than another, as if the Pandavas were nearer kin to Him than the Kauravas, what did the Lord reply? Remind yourselves of that reply now. Picture that scene before your eyes: pacing up and down, like a lion cub, He roared, ‘What did you say? Are the Kauravas as near to Me as the Pandavas? No, they can never be on the same level. Listen, I shall tell you of the kinship that binds Me to the Pandavas: For this Body of Mine, Dharmaraja is as the Head; Arjuna is as the Shoulder and Arms; Bhima is as the Trunk; Nakula and Sahadeva are as the two Feet. For the Body

constituted like this Krishna is the Heart. The limbs act on the strength of the Heart; without it, they are lifeless.’

“What does that declaration mean to us? It means we Pandavas will be lifeless since the Heart has gone out of action. We are to meet dissolution. The Lord who is Time Incarnate is striving to merge us into Himself. We have to be ready to answer His call.

“This is proof enough that the Kali Age has come. The day Krishna left this world, that day the doors of Dwapara have been closed and the gates of Kali opened. Or else, can these evil forces and wicked minds roam about unchecked? Can this Arjuna who never forgets the ritual formulae for each Divine arrow sent from his bow, even when the battle is raging most ferociously and fast; can he ever forget them in the direst crisis of the barbarian attack on that convoy of women and children? It is certainly the Time-spirit of the Kali Age that has caused this dire calamity.”

Nakula too joined at this stage. He said, “Brothers, the eastern sky reveals approaching dawn. Let us inform the queens and our revered mother of these developments. Let us decide without delay the next step we have to take. The body will not be dissolved immediately the breath leaves, isn’t it? Of course, life has gone out of us the moment Krishna left; the limbs will be warm a little while. We too have to reach the Presence of Krishna today or tomorrow. Let us not waste time in grief and anguish. Let us rather think of the path we have to tread next and prepare for that

journey.” Everyone agreed with this suggestion, so full of wise detachment.

There was some anxiety about how the news would affect Draupadi, Subhadra and the aged Mother; but they ignored that anxiety and decided to communicate the news. For, when the Lord Himself has left, why should anyone be anxious about what might happen to anyone else? The brothers resolved that the eldest among them, Dharmaraja, should go to the Mother. That was the proper course, they thought.

Joy consumes time more quickly, not so grief. When men are in joy, time passes fast. When they are in grief, it moves slow. Grief is heavy like a mountain range; it is as the Final Flood. Though the capital city of Dharmaraja was Indraprastha, the ancestral throne was still at Hasthinapura, because that place had lost its other glories when the Mahabaratha Battle carried away the princes of the Royal Line and all senior scions. Therefore, Dharmaraja was spending some months at Indraprastha and the remaining part of the year at Hasthinapura. Unaware of this, Arjuna went to Indraprastha and finding that Dharmaraja was not there, he left those few women of Dwaraka whom he could retrieve from the barbarian hordes there and reached Hasthinapura alone. There was with him one solitary Yadava, a grandson of Krishna, Vajra by name; the only survivor among the male population of Dwaraka. Poor Vajra had no mind to show his face to others. He was so ashamed of himself for having survived. He was so miserable at the

death of all the rest that he hid himself in a dark room and sulked all the time, gloomy and alone.

The Queen Mother, Kunthi Devi, learnt from a maid that Arjuna had arrived within a short time after his arrival. She kept vigil the entire night, expecting that Arjuna would rush to her and tell her some news from Dwaraka. She kept the lamps burning. She refused to go to sleep. She rose in joy that Arjuna had come, whenever the slightest noise of footsteps reached her ears, uttering the words: “Oh Son! I am glad you came. What is the news?” When no answer came, she called her maid by name to the room and interjected, “What is the meaning of this? You told me, didn’t you, that Arjuna arrived from Dwaraka? Why has he not come to me yet? You must have been mistaken; you must have seen someone else arriving and taken him to be Arjuna. If he had come, surely, he would have been here immediately.” Thus Kunthi spent a sleepless night between expectation and disappointment.

Day dawned; everyone was getting busy with his own assignment. Meanwhile, her mind had undergone many questionings. What was the reason for Arjuna not coming to her? Had he really returned? Was he kept away by some urgent political problem which had to be discussed among the brothers until the small hours of the night? Or is he so tired by travel that he resolved to see his mother early next day, instead of the same night? Or has some crisis developed in Dwaraka for which Krishna directed him to consult Dharmaraja urgently and bring him his reaction and solution?

Has he forgotten his duty to his mother in the confusion of these crises? Of course, he will come when the day has dawned, she finally told herself.

So, she rose even when darkness still enveloped the earth. She bathed and put on new clothes and got ready to receive her son. Just then, another doubt arose in her mind and agitated her. Every night, all her sons would invariably come to her presence, one behind the other and fall at her feet, craving permission to go to bed, seeking her blessings. But she wondered why not even one had turned up that night. This made her anxiety worse. She sent maids to the apartments of Draupadi and Subhadra and found that none of the brothers had even partaken of dinner! Kunthi sank deeper into anxiety.

When her mind was thus torn with travail, an old female attendant came in and informed her that Dharmaraja, accompanied by Arjuna, was on the way to her apartments. Kunthi was agitated by fear at what they might tell her, joy that she was meeting Arjuna after a long absence, and eagerness to hear the news of the Yadavas. It made an amalgam of expectancy. She was shivering because she was unable to contain this anxiety.

Dharmaraja came in and fell at her feet; he stood silent. Arjuna could not raise himself from her feet, for a long time. It was Kunthi who spoke to him, words of consolation. "Poor fellow! How did you manage to be away from me for such a long time?" She caressed him lovingly, but even

before she spoke words of blessing or questioned about his health and welfare, she asked, "Arjuna! I heard you arrived last night; is it true? Why did you not come to me during the night? How can a mother who knows that her son has returned from a long absence sleep in peace without seeing him? Well, I am glad you have come at least now, with the break of dawn. Tell me the news. Are your father-in-law, mother-in-law and grandfather quite well? My brother, Vasudeva, is very old now; how is he? Is he moving about? Or is he bedridden as I am? Is he being nursed as I am, dependent for everything on others?" She was holding the hands of Arjuna and her eyes were fixed on his face. Suddenly she asked, "What is this I see, my son? How did you grow so dark? Why have your eyes bloated and reddened like this?"

"I understand! Dwaraka is far away and the long jungle journey has told upon you. The dust and the sun have affected you. The exhaustion of the road is written on your face. Let it go. Tell me what my Shyamasundar, my Krishna has asked you to tell me. When is He coming here? Or has He no desire to see me? Did he say anything? Of course, He is Vaasudeva, He can see all from wherever He is. When am I to see Him again? Will this ripe fruit be on the tree until He comes?"

She asked questions many times and answered them herself many times. She provided no opening for either Arjuna or Dharmaraja to say what they wanted. From Arjuna's eyes tears flowed without hindrance. Kunthi observed this strange phenomenon. She drew Arjuna closer

to herself and had his head on her shoulder. “Son, Arjuna, what has happened? Tell me. I have never seen tears in your eyes. Did Gopala find fault with you and send you away, because you are unfit to be with Him? Did any such terrible calamity happen to you?” She was overwhelmed with grief but she was trying her best to console her son.

Just then, Dharmaraja hid his own face with both hands and groaned amidst sobs, “Mother! You speak of our Vaasudeva still? It is ten days since He left us. He has gone to His own place. All the Yadavas have died.” Even as he was speaking thus, Kunthi opened her eyes wide, asking, “What? My Gopala...my Nandananda...the Treasure of my heart...heart...has He widowed the earth? Oh Krishna...Krishna...,” and as if going to seek Him, that very moment, she passed away.