

Chapter 10. The Krishna Mystery

Arjuna brings bad news of Krishna's demise

Bhima managed to muster up courage. “Brother! Grant me leave, and I’ll go to Dwaraka and return quickly, bringing full information of all that happened to remove your fear.” Even while Bhima was praying on bended knees for permission, the sun set and the lamps started emitting feeble light, from every place.

A guard from the main entrance rushed in, announcing that Arjuna had come and was approaching the royal apartment. Everyone rose as if they had suddenly come to life; they hurried forward to meet Arjuna, thirsty for news from Dwaraka. Arjuna came in, depressed and despondent, devoid of any sign of joy. Without looking the brothers in the face, he rolled over Dharmaraja’s feet.

The signs confirmed Dharmaraja’s fear, and he became eager to inquire further. He asked about the welfare of friends and kinsmen at Dwaraka. Arjuna couldn’t rise or turn his head. The brothers, seeing Dharmaraja’s feet streaming with the tears shed by Arjuna, were shocked into immobility. Dharmaraja lost all hold on his mind. He tried to lift Arjuna. Shaking him by the shoulders, he shouted in agony into his ear, “Brother! What happened? What happened? What happened to the Yadavas? Tell us! Our hearts are about to burst. Save us from terrible anguish.”

But Arjuna didn’t reply. He couldn’t rise or even spell out words. Dharmaraja continued raining questions on him, asking about the welfare of the Yadavas and others, mentioning them by name and asking about each one separately. Arjuna didn’t react even to this desperate fusillade. He showed no response. He didn’t raise his face and look on his brothers.

“You needn’t tell us the rest, but this you must tell us: what has Vaasudeva directed you to tell us, what is his message to us; tell us that,” Dharmaraja appealed. Arjuna could bear it no longer. The grief that he had held back so long gushed out in full flood. “We have Vaasudeva no more. Oh, we are orphaned. We couldn’t keep Him. We have no more luck,” he said and fell on his face, sobbing on the floor.

Sahadeva grasped the situation and its possibilities and closed all doors that led into the hall; he engaged himself in trying to soothe Arjuna’s distress.

“Alas, that we lived to hear this. What fate! O, destiny, how could you treat the world so cruelly?” the brothers lamented together. “Lord, why have you deserted the Pandavas? Why this breach of trust? We survived to hear this news; this is the result of the accumulation of sin during many generations.” Each one was submerged in his own grief, in his own despair, and the hall was filled with gloomy silence.

Dharmaraja braved the silence first. Wiping the tears from his eyes, he asked Arjuna in pathetic tones. “Do you have news of the parents’ condition and of Nanda, Yasoda, and other Yadavas? Tell us about them. They must be broken with the grief of separation from the Lord. When we have been reduced to this helpless depth, what can we say of them? They must be sunk in unfathomable despair. How can they keep body and breath together? Why refer to individuals? The entire city of Dwaraka must have sunk in the sea of inconsolable grief. Dharmaraja sobbed with sorrow as he pictured these scenes.

The Yadavas go berserk due to a curse

Seeing him in this condition, Arjuna said, “Brother! The people of Dwaraka are far more lucky than ourselves. We are the least fortunate. We are the only hardened beings that have withstood the shock of the news of the departure of Vaasudeva from this world. The rest left the world even before news came of His departure.”

Dharmaraja exclaimed, “Hari, Hari, O God! What did you say? What is this catastrophe? I don’t understand anything. Did the sea rise and engulf Dwaraka? Or did a wild barbarian horde invade and overwhelm the city and slaughter the population? Arjuna, tell us what happened. Put an end to our frightful surmises, which raise up awful pictures.” Dharmaraja held Arjuna’s hand and turned his face up in an attempt to make him answer his queries.

Arjuna replied, “No, no sea got furious and swallowed Dwaraka; no ruler led his army against that city. Wickedness and vileness grew madly wild among the Yadavas themselves and excited their strife and hate to such an extent that they slaughtered each other with their own weapons.”

Dharmaraja asked him, “Arjuna, some overpowering force must have urged the Yadava clan, young and old, to sacrifice themselves in this holocaust. No effect can happen without a cause, can it?” He waited for the details of what had led to the slaughter.

Arjuna paused a little to overcome the grief surging within him and then began his account of the events. The other three brothers drew near and heard the tragic tale. “I learned that day that not even the tiniest event can happen unless willed by Vaasudeva. I got fully convinced of this. He is the puppeteer (*sutradhari*), the holder of the strings that move the puppets and make them act their roles, but He seats Himself among the spectators and pretends to be unaware of the plot or story or cast. The characters cannot deviate a dot from His directions; His Will guides and determines every single movement and gesture. The varying emotions and events on the stage by which the drama unrolls itself affect the hearts of those who witness the play, but they don’t cause a ruffle in the heart of the puppeteer.

“He decides what this person should say or that person should do, and He prompts the appropriate words and deeds (*karma*) in them. And, the consequence of the deeds performed and inherited by each individual from previous lives also adds its quota to this destiny. The Yadavas, who are our own kith and kin, were spiritual personages, full of devotion to God, as you all know well. Perhaps, some day some sage had cast a curse on them, or else some day some dire sin was committed by them. For how else can we explain this sudden upset in their history, this unexpected tragedy?

“For seven full days, they performed a magnificent sacrifice (*yajna*) at Prabhasa-kshetra. It was celebrated in unprecedented pomp and style. The valedictory offering was poured in the sacred fire in true *Vedic* grandeur in the presence of Lord Krishna Himself. The participants and priests later performed the ceremonial bath in holy waters. The *brahmins* then received their share of the sacrificial offerings and distributed it to the Yadavas also. Everything went off in an atmosphere of perfect calm, contentment, and joy.

“Toward noon, *brahmins* were served with food; afterward, the Yadavas seated themselves in long lines to partake of the feast. During the feast, as ill luck would have it, some of the Yadavas filled themselves with drink and lost self control so much that they mistook their own kinsmen as their foes. They started quarrels, which raged into fights of severe fierceness. It must have been in the plan of God, for however unruly and vile a man might be, he would not slaughter his own children and parents with his own hands. O, the horror of it! In the general melee that ensued, son killed father, father killed son, brother slew brother, son-in-law killed father-in-law, father-in-law

killed son-in-law, in one insane orgy of blind hate, until no one was left alive!” Arjuna couldn’t speak further; he leaned against the wall and held his head, bursting with pain and grief, between his pressing palms.

Dharmaraja listened with anguish and amazement. He placed his hand on Arjuna’s back and said, “What are you saying? It’s unbelievable. Since your tongue would never speak untruth, I’m forced to put faith in its correctness, or else how can we ever imagine such a sudden transformation of character and such a lightning massacre? I have never seen or heard anywhere such intensity of mutual friendship as marked the Yadava clan. Besides, they don’t deviate in the least from the path marked out for them by Krishna. They wouldn’t deflect from it even on the most frantically furious occasions. That they would beat one another to death in Krishna’s very presence, regardless of all canons of good behaviour, is strange indeed. Such a turn of events comes only when the end of the world is near.

“Well, Arjuna! Couldn’t Krishna stop the fight and advise them to desist? Did He try to bring about some compromise between the factions and send them back to their places? Krishna is the greatest adept in the art of war and peace, isn’t he? That He didn’t try to stop this tragedy makes me wonder more at this awful tale of destruction.” Dharmaraja was lost in sorrow. He sat with his head resting on his clenched fist, his hand placed on his knee, and his eyes so full of tears that they rolled down his cheeks continuously.

Krishna is the Master Director

Arjuna tried to speak some words of consolation. “*Maharaja!* You are aware of Krishna’s glory and grace, and yet you ask questions and entertain doubts whether He did this or that. How can I reply? The Yadavas’ fate is the same as the fate of our own clan. Weren’t we and the Kauravas brothers? We had kinsmen who were well-wishers on both sides, and we had this same Shyamasundar (Krishna) in our midst, but we had to go through the *Kurukshetra* battle. Can’t we see that this war wouldn’t have happened had He not willed it so? The forty lakhs of warriors who died on the battlefield wouldn’t have been lost then, right? Did we ever wish to rule over this land after slaughtering all these? Nothing can ever happen without His express command. No one can cross His will or act against His command.

“This world is the stage on which each one acts the role He allotted him, on which each one struts about for the time given by Him, and each one has to obey His instructions without fail or falter. We may think in pride that we have done this or that by ourselves, but the truth is that everything happens as He wills.”

When Arjuna concluded, Dharmaraja thought aloud. “Arjuna! Many motives dragged us into the *Mahabharatha* War. We tried our best through diplomacy and peaceful means to regain our kingdom, our status, and what was legitimately our due. We bore patiently many insults and discomfitures. We had to wander in the jungle as exiles. Through divine grace, we escaped many a plot laid to kill us. They tried arson and poison on us. They heaped public ignominy on our queen. They broke our hearts by systematic ill-treatment.

“There are only three reasons for the final fight everywhere: wealth, dominion, and woman. But consider the Yadavas —they had no such reason to fall out among themselves in mortal combat. It appears as if destiny was the only overpowering reason for this cataclysm.

“The Yadavas were rolling in plenty. They had no lack of grain or gold. And their wives? They were models of virtue —faithful and devoted. They never deviated from the wishes or commands of their husbands. They couldn’t bring insult or discomfiture to their lords from any quarter. How then could faction and internecine strife

raise their heads so suddenly among them?”

Arjuna replied, “My dear brother! We see the outer circumstances, the processes that result in the final event, and in our ignorance we judge that this set of causes produced these effects. We guess the nature of emotions and feelings from what we gauge from events. But circumstances, events, emotions, and feelings are all simply ‘instruments’ in His hands, serving His will and His purpose. When the moment comes, He uses them for His plan and brings about the fight He has willed. He is the embodiment of time (*kala*); He comes as the Master of Time and, through some denouement of the plot, He finishes the drama. That which brought about birth brings about death, too. He finds reason for both in the same degree. Do we seek to know why there was a birth? No. Then, why seek to know why death occurs? It occurs; that’s enough. Reason-finding is a superfluous occupation.

“He causes beings to create beings, and He causes beings to end beings. Bodies get born, bodies die; nothing more serious happens at birth or death. This was taught us often by Vaasudeva. Why then should we doubt or deviate from the steady courage He sought to give us?

“You might say that it is not just, that He who caused us to be born should be the person who kills us. Between birth and death, man does have some capacity to earn merit and demerit, and this has some influence on the course of events. Within these limits, the Lord plays the game of football with birth, death, and life.

“Birth and death are two high cliffs between which the river of life flows. The force of *Atmic* faith is the bridge that spans the chasm, and for those who have developed that force and faith, floods are of no concern. With *Atmic* faith as their safe support, they can reach the other bank, braving all dangers. O, King! All this is but a grand puppet show by that Master Director. The Yadavas today, like the Kauravas yesterday, had no individuality of their own; there is no use blaming either.

“Can this material body composed of the five elements —earth, water, fire, air and ether— move or act without His prompting? No. It is His amusement to cause one to be born through another and to cause one to die through another. How else can you explain the fact of the snake laying eggs, warming them to bring out the young, and then eating the very children thus born? Even among them, it eats up only those whose term is ended, so to say, not every one of the snakelings. The fish that live in the waters get caught in nets when their term ends; why, the small fish get eaten by the big ones and they in their turn get swallowed by even bigger ones. This is His law. The snake eats the frog, the peacock eats the snake; this is His game. Who can probe into the reasons for this? The truth is: ‘Every single event is the decision of this Balagopala.’

The deep mystery of the Lord’s play

“We can’t sense the mystery of His play. We have failed to understand it. There is no profit in worrying over that failure now. With that deluding human form, He moved with us, mixed with us, dined with us, behaved as if He was our kinsman and well-wisher, friend, and guide, and saved us from many a calamity that threatened to overwhelm us. He showered divine mercy on us and solved for us the toughest problems that defied solution, in remarkably simple ways. During all this time that He was near and dear to us, we were carried away by pride that we had His grace; we did not try to fill ourselves with that supreme joy, to dive deep into the flood of His grace. We sought from Him mere external victory and temporal benefits; we ignored the vast treasure with which we could have filled our hearts. We never contemplated on His real reality.

“He guarded us as if we five were the five vital airs (*pancha-prana*) for Him. He came forward to help us and

lead us in every undertaking, however small, and He fulfilled it for us. Brothers! What shall I say? We might be born many times over, but we can never have again such a friend and kinsman. I received love much more intense than that of a mother from Him, a love that no mother can confer.

“On many occasions, He bore the burdens of the Pandavas as His own, and to relieve us of the bother, He used to plan measures within minutes and carry them on to final success. It is due to the gift of His grace that we Pandavas have survived in this world to this day.

“Why repeat a thousand things separately? Every drop of blood coursing through these veins is but a drop from the shower of His grace. Every muscle is but a lump of His love. Every bone and cartilage is but a piece of His mercy. Unable to understand this secret, we strutted about, boasting ‘I achieved this’ and ‘I accomplished this’. Now it has become clear to us that without Him we are but bags of skin.

“Of course, all men have the same fate. They forget that the All-ruling, All-knowing Almighty plays with them as puppets; they assume they are the actual doers and enjoyers; like me, they are plunged in ignorance of the basic truth. When we who are far-famed heroes and warriors are in this sad plight, what can we say of ordinary folk who have no chance of awakening into this spiritual wisdom (*jnana*)? For this, the sad experience I had on my way is the ‘direct proof’.”

Thus spoke Arjuna. He fell back, leaning against the chair that was behind him; for he couldn’t bear separation from his life-long support and guide, Krishna.