

Chapter 12. The Kali Age Dawns

Krishna's leaving marks the beginning of the Kali age

Sahadeva, who had been silent so long, approached Bhima and said, "Calm yourself, don't get excited. Remember the reply Krishna gave Dhritharashtra that day in the open assembly, when He proceeded there to negotiate peace between us?"

Bhima said, "When Krishna was questioned in Dhritharashtra's court 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 trunk, and 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 because 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, the doors of the Dwapara age closed and the gates of *Kali* opened. Otherwise, how could these evil forces and wicked minds roam about unchecked? Can 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? Certainly, the time-spirit of the *Kali* Age caused this dire calamity."

Nakula also joined at this stage. "Brothers, the eastern sky reveals approaching dawn. Let's inform the queens and our revered mother of these developments; let's decide our the next step without delay. The body won't be dissolved immediately after the breath leaves, right? Of course, life went out of us the moment Krishna left, but the limbs will be warm for a little while. We have to reach Krishna's presence today or tomorrow. Let's not waste time in grief and anguish. Instead, let's 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 Droupadi, 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 Dharmaraja, the eldest, should go to the mother. That was the proper course, they thought.

Kunthi worries and waits for Arjuna's visit

Joy consumes time more quickly than grief does. When men are in joy, time passes fast; when in grief, it moves slowly. Grief is heavy, like a mountain range; it is like 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 *Mahabharatha* 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 had gone to Indraprastha. Not finding Dharmaraja there, he had left the few women of Dwaraka whom he could retrieve from the barbarian hordes there and went to Hasthinapura alone. One solitary Yadava was there, a grandson of Krishna, named Vajra, the only survivor of the male population of Dwaraka. Poor Vajra had no mind to show his face to others, for he was so ashamed at 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, learned from a maid that Arjuna had arrived within a short time after his arrival. She kept vigil the entire night, expecting Arjuna to rush to her and tell her the news from Dwaraka. She kept the lamps burning and refused to go to sleep. Whenever the slightest noise of footsteps reached her ears, she rose in joy that Arjuna had come, uttering the words: “O Son! I’m glad you came. What’s the news?” When no answer came, she called her maid and asked, “What’s the matter? Didn’t you tell me that Arjuna had arrived from Dwaraka? Why hasn’t he come to me yet? You must have been mistaken; you must have seen someone else arriving and mistaken him for 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 their assignment. Meanwhile, her mind had undergone many questionings. Why hadn’t Arjuna come to her? Had he really returned? Was he kept away by some urgent political problem that had to be discussed among the brothers until the small hours of the night? Or was he so tired by travel that he resolved to see his mother early next day instead of the same night? Or had some crisis developed in Dwaraka for which Krishna directed him to consult Dharmaraja urgently and bring him his reaction and solution? Had he forgotten his duty to his mother in the confusion of these crises? Of course, he would 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. She wondered why not even one had come that night. This made her anxiety worse. She sent maids to Droupadi’s and Subhadra’s apartments and found that none of the brothers had even eaten dinner! Kunthi sank deeper into anxiety.

Kunthi dies on hearing news of Krishna’s demise

When her mind was thus torn with travail, an old female attendant entered and informed her that Dharmaraja, accompanied by Arjuna, was coming to see her. Kunthi was agitated by fear at what they might tell her, by joy that she was meeting Arjuna after a long absence, and by 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, fell at her feet, and stood silent. Arjuna couldn’t 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 asked about his health and welfare, she asked, “Arjuna! I heard you arrived last night; is it true? Why didn’t you 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’m 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 Arjuna's hands, 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 are 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 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 and answered them herself many times. She provided no opening for either Arjuna or Dharmaraja to say what they wanted. Tears flowed without hindrance from Arjuna's eyes tears. 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 was trying her best to console her son.

Dharmaraja hid his own face with both hands, groaning 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, Kunthi opened her eyes wide, asking, "What? My Gopala ... my Nandananda ... the Treasure of my heart ... has He widowed the earth? O Krishna ... Krishna..." and, as if going to seek Him that very moment, she passed away.