

As Krishna lay under the peepal tree with his eyes closed, myriad thoughts flooded his mind... the palace of Dwarka, the battle of Kurukshetra, Draupadi's swayamvar ceremony, the abduction of Rukmini and the look in Satyabhama's eyes on the way to Prabhaskshetra...

The pendulum of time swung back and forth as random thoughts flowed back and forth in his mind. The peepal tree, below which he lay, appeared like the mythical seven-headed serpent, Sheshnag, spreading its hood and sheltering Krishna. The three rivers—Hiranya, Kapila and Saraswati—flowed serenely from multiple directions and formed the sacred confluence near the temple at Somnath. The place, known as Prabhaskshetra, was famous for appreciation of art, literature and culture.

Krishna had completed the renovation of the Somnath temple recently, embellishing it with silver and gold.

Krishna, with eyes shut, reminisced every moment of his life with happiness and satisfaction. His body shook with waves of pain intermittently, as if a thousand scorpions were stinging him. The hunter Jara sat near him with folded hands; a small puddle of blood had formed on the ground where the arrow had pierced Krishna's foot. Reaching the confluence of the rivers from the jungles of Prabhaskshetra had felt like ages for Krishna.

Gandhari's curse...

Durvasa's curse...

How could they ever fail!

One by one, his brothers, uncles, sons, grandsons, nephews, friends and loved ones had perished in the flames of time, and he too was headed in the same direction. Despite being aware of the situation, Krishna watched everything dispassionately. Even now, the last screams of the Yadavs echoed in his mind. How could they kill each other so barbarously and push the Yadav race to the brink of extinction?

It was true that Krishna hadn't picked up weapons and killed anyone during the battle of Kurukshetra but the bloodshed and devastation he had witnessed continued to torture his mind.

Had Arjun spoken the truth? Was the kingdom won by killing one's own brothers, friends, uncles and other relatives really worth it? If it was so, why couldn't the Pandavs or any of the other victors sleep in peace after the war? Righteousness and good had won over evil in the battle of Kurukshetra, but had sin and immorality been truly vanquished?

Millions of such questions rose like waves in Krishna's mind. Why was he plagued by these unending questions? Why was his mind unable to calm down?

Yet another thought arose in Krishna's mind. Is this how the last moments of one's life are? Innumerable words, thousands of moments and countless emotions did not allow even for a moment's peace.

All he wanted to do was to contemplate and go into deep meditation. He desired to concentrate his soul on the universal One and facilitate his final journey, but every thought that arose distracted him and shook his very being. Even before one thought subsided, another one sprang up, creating chaos.

Why was this soul, which constantly focused only on purity, meditation and acceptance, so disturbed and distracted today? What was troubling him so much? He, who was revered as Ishwar or God and recognised as the supreme being or Poorna Purushottam, was struggling to achieve his own state of completeness.

How could Krishna save himself?

Even gods, born on this earth as incarnations in human form, become powerless in the face of their destiny. What could be said of ordinary human beings then?

The Yadav race had been wiped out just a while ago and the mangled bodies of his friends, brothers, sons and grandsons still lay scattered in the jungles of Prabhaskshetra. In the distance, the sun was getting ready to rise at the confluence of the Hiranya, Kapila and Saraswati. The sky was a deep red and the leaves of the peepal tree swayed in the sweet breeze that carried the message of Krishna's pain in all ten directions. The melting darkness and blazing red hues in the sky looked like flaming pyres. It seemed as though thousands of priests were chanting the Vedas and their chords echoed everywhere.

*Mamaivamso jiva-loke jiva-bhutah sanatanah*

*Manah-sasthanindriyani prakrti-sthani karsati*

The living entities in this conditioned world are my eternal, fragmental parts. Due to this conditioned life, they are struggling very hard with the six senses, which include the mind.

A life full of death or a death full of life—a dilemma that the common man could never fathom. Krishna too, waiting to dissolve into the absolute, was faced with the same tussle. During the great battle of Kurukshetra, he had revealed to the world his immortal self sans beginning or end. The same

supreme being that had sent him to the world as a mortal was now beckoning him. Krishna was reminded of Draupadi's words:

*Twadiyam vastu govindam tubhyamev samarpaye*

Whatever I have belongs to you and I surrender all of it to you

Krishna lay with his eyes closed, reliving his life. He still couldn't fathom why Draupadi had said those words.

It was all of a sudden, while travelling from Dwarka to Hastinapur, that she had uttered them. She was choked with emotions but her voice was firm, and despite her dry eyes, Krishna could sense their moistness.

'You yourself had said, *sanshayatma vinashyati*—indecisiveness leads to destruction—didn't you?' she had asked.

'My dear Sakha, it is true that knowledge creates doubt, and my whole life has been full of questions, each one piercing me like an arrow. My questions impaled and hurt my loved ones... my doubts and my indecisiveness led my soul towards destruction... they traumatised my near and dear ones... Please liberate me from indecision, questions, doubts and this anguish...'

Like a high tide, a surge of thoughts crashed into Krishna's mind, foaming. But why were these memories tormenting him now, in these circumstances? Why was he reminded of his bondage in the countdown to his liberation?

When Draupadi came to him seeking liberation, was Krishna himself free?

There were so many questions to be answered...

One by one, everyone who mattered would come seeking their rights... each one just waiting to bind him and he would have to seek liberation from each one of them.

Had the process of emancipating everyone before he could liberate himself possibly begun?



‘You will suffer a beastly death—lonely, helpless and aggrieved,’ Mata Gandhari had cursed him after the battle of Kurukshetra. The heart-wrenching pain and anguish in her voice haunted him. Gandhari’s cries had reminded him of his own mother Yashoda’s wails when he was leaving Gokul. The pain of separating from one’s children is felt the same way by mothers of every age and era.

Gandhari had said, ‘I have lost ninety-nine sons. My feet are still stained with the blood from Duryodhan’s bleeding thighs... I am tired of washing my feet time and again... Dushasan’s severed hand still calls out to me in the middle of the night... Krishna, you failed to do justice.’

Despite knowing everything, Kunti too chose to blame Krishna for the carnage. ‘Krishna, my sons might have emerged victorious, but you have rendered so many mothers of Hastinapur childless and ruined so many families. How can I rejoice amidst so much grief? Krishna, you will never understand the agony of Gandhari bahen, because you yourself are not a mother...’

It wasn’t that Krishna couldn’t understand Gandhari’s grief, but all this was predestined; it had to happen. Having taken the trouble to come this far, how could Krishna leave without completing the task? He had always known that he would have to witness such devastating slaughter. Not only did he have to count the bloodstained and ravaged bodies of his kinsfolk, but he also had to face the situation with courage and equanimity.

*abhyyutthanam adharmasya tadatmanam srjamyaham*

For the preservation of the good, I manifest myself.

How could this vow be rendered futile?

It is true that even God, born as a human being, has to follow the moral codes of the mortal world. He has to experience all the emotions born of love, attachment and relationships that bind him. The mind, concealed by the body, gets enslaved and, as a result, every human suffers its travails.

That is why Krishna was distraught on witnessing the misery his own siblings, friends, nephews, grandchildren and great grandchildren had inflicted on each other.

Draupadi's words still echoed in his mind... *'twadiyam vastu govindam tubhyamev samarpaye'*.

'I cannot continue carrying the burden of this knowledge any longer... Where am I going? I am not sure. I don't even know if I am even going anywhere; yet, I would like to return everything you have given me and become free of debt.'

What freedom or liberation was she referring to?

Both Krishna and Draupadi understood the meaning of the words bondage and liberation.

It was time. Though the exact moment was still unclear, it was certain and fast approaching. Draupadi and Krishna were preparing each other for that moment.

While he was the one who was bestowed with the prowess of understanding people and reading their thoughts, Krishna wondered whether Draupadi too could read his mind...

'Was my relationship with Draupadi so deep that she could decipher even my innermost thoughts? Had she probably decided to free me before she liberated herself? Did she know that until she liberated me, she wouldn't be able to free her own mind that so intensely identifies with mine?' Krishna asked these questions of himself.

‘While men are incapable of understanding the difference between the mind and the intellect, women understand the mind much better!’ she had said.

He recalled Draupadi saying, ‘Is there actually something called the mind, Sakha? Where in the body does it lie? Can you tell me what colour and shape it is? We don’t know so many things about it; nevertheless, the mind rules over this huge body, the past, present and the future... As women, we have a strange comradeship with our mind. Not only are we able to hide a lot of things in it, we also understand it better than men do. The mind controls the body as per its will. While women dance to its tunes, men are slaves to intellect, they measure and weigh everything by it and behave accordingly. A man’s intellect and a woman’s mind never think in the same direction, and that, my dear friend, is the root of all complications.’

Krishna had asked, ‘But how do you segregate and manage the variety of thoughts that arise?’

‘O Sakha! Doesn’t a mother manage five sons who are all different? Each one’s behaviour, thoughts, words, likes and dislikes, expectations of affection and expressions of love are different. Yet, doesn’t she handle them? When we spin thread from cotton, sometimes, the threads do get entwined and tangled; similarly, our thoughts too can sometimes get tangled...’

‘I have always seen you behave with restraint and express yourself clearly. Of course, I wouldn’t say you were always balanced, as I have seen you lose equanimity at times. Yet, your clarity constantly keeps your tone, behaviour and thoughts tied together. How are you able to achieve this, Sakhi?’

‘Well, I don’t know how, but you do exactly as you say; is it any surprise that I too behave in a similar manner?’

‘Sakhi, sometimes I am bewildered by the way you became five different women while relating with your five husbands...’

‘All those five women have become one and are surrendering to you—the man who holds the most exalted and singular place in my mind. The one who is my friend, my brother, my companion... and...’

‘And what else, Sakhi?’

She added hesitatingly, ‘You are my all—my honour, my identity, my femininity... I have truly run out of words, my dear... I dedicate to this man, whom I hold in the highest esteem, everything that he has bestowed upon me and even all that he did not...’

Draupadi’s eyes seemed vacant and forlorn. Those flaming and ever-vibrant fiery orbs were unusually listless.

Was this the final moment of parting? Who was going away? And from whom...?

Had Draupadi realised that her life purpose was over?

Krishna wondered, Is that why she had come to me? To seek liberation... or to grant me mine? Is that why she had said: *‘Twadiyam vastu govindam tubhyamev samarpaye’*?



When Draupadi and the five Pandav brothers came to Dwarka, little did they realise that it was the last time they were seeing Krishna there.

Just before leaving, Draupadi came to Krishna’s chamber early in the morning. Even his wives and his brother Balaram hesitated to visit at this hour because this was his time for daily prayers and meditation. Krishna loved his solitude in the morning, but Draupadi couldn’t help meeting him because what she had to say to him could be said only in utmost privacy.

Draupadi feared that he would get busy later with his rajya sabha. She had to meet him first thing in the morning!

Krishna looked resplendent in his silk dhoti. His face was radiant with a sandalwood paste tilak on his forehead. Bare-chested, slender-waisted, broad-shouldered and devoid of any jewels except the sacred thread, his sinewy body looked arresting. His hair was freshly washed and combed back, with a few strands of grey peeping from behind his ears. His eyes were full of compassion and tenderness.

Draupadi wondered as she stood looking at him, 'Is this the human form of God?'

Krishna wasn't surprised to see Draupadi. Welcoming her with a sweet smile, he said, 'Yagyaseni! The arrival of the Goddess herself immediately after my pooja is an auspicious sign indeed!'

Draupadi softly said, 'Sakha...'

She stayed silent for a long time. She had come fresh from her bath, water dripping down her wet hair, her face soft and aglow. Even though age had caught up with Draupadi, she was so beautiful, statuesque and slender still, that she could make a lot of young women envious. She wore a beige bodice and a saree to match. Yet her face gave away signs of having spent a sleepless night. She opened her mouth to say something several times, but hesitated. She didn't know where to begin. Sitting in awkward silence, she looked intermittently at Krishna and the sky visible through the window opposite her. She seemed to be struggling to gather her thoughts and feelings and kept playing with the end of her saree.

Krishna asked her gently, 'Do you want to say something? Is there a problem?'

'Yes, I want to tell you something, but I am not sure how.'

Krishna said, 'Just start speaking; everything will flow on its own.'

'I have never been at a loss for words with you, Krishna. You come to know of my thoughts and words even if I don't express them, but today...'

'Come now... tell me without hesitation. Don't be shy.'

'Oh, Sakha! Why would I feel shy? I hesitate because once I tell you, there will be nothing of mine left with me.'

'I am completely yours. I am always with you. So how will you lose anything by telling me?'

'That is all I came to tell you, Sakha...' Draupadi said, looking into Krishna's eyes.

Krishna had perceived an unseen torrent in Draupadi's eyes, for the first time in the time that he had known her. Her eyes welled up and tears streamed down her cheeks, her voice choked as she quietly turned her face and walked away.

Her unsaid words seemed to echo in the room, long after she had left:

*Twadiyam vastu govindam tubhyamev samarpaye*



Not just Draupadi, everyone says, 'Accept whatever Govind gives you and offer it back to him; that is what life is all about. If you accept him wholeheartedly, how can he ever abandon you?'

Uddhav, Arjun, Balaram and everyone else was aware that non-acceptance was never a part of Krishna's character. He had never learnt to despise, disregard or abandon anyone. He had always said, 'Truth and untruth, evil and virtue—they are two sides of the same coin. If you accept one side, the other is naturally accepted. Sunset is inevitable once the sun rises. One is the harbinger of the other. Accepting every person, thing or

idea wholeheartedly and absolutely is what makes our existence complete because it is only our acceptance that can lead us to completeness.’

That which is unpleasant and false becomes beautiful and true by Krishna’s mere touch. The one who had lived his life experiencing joy in every moment and making it meaningful was now accepting and welcoming death with open arms. Though he had accepted death naturally and was peaceful, the pain in his heart was far more excruciating than the wound in his foot. Maybe that is why he was being reminded of Draupadi’s words.

‘Madhav, it is not in your nature to reject or abandon anything, and you have always unconditionally accepted me with all my happiness and sadness, my pride, anger and my hatred. I am certain about this because you are complete and there is no place for any inadequacies and misgivings. But Govind, I do feel like asking you this question. When you accepted me completely, hadn’t you wished for your own acceptance? Didn’t we accept you with all your happiness and sadness, deprivations and abundance, truths and untruths? I have lived my life taking everything you offered me. Today, I surrender everything to you... and I believe with all my heart that you will not reject me either...’

Krishna accepted all situations, pleasant and unpleasant, with equanimity and looked at questions and answers objectively. His give and take was fair. No one had ever embraced life with an intensity as fierce as Krishna’s. His unconditional acceptance of everyone unshackled the chains that bound their hearts. His completeness was truly multifaceted. That is why he was bestowed with the title of Poorna Purushottam or the complete being. He had never looked at life with sorrow, seriousness or leniency. To him, it was a celebration with all its music, dance and love.

Life isn't just a source of entertainment, a procession or a carnival that can be merely witnessed by looking out of a window, or standing on the street side; it is a celebration one needs to participate in. The steps in the journey from Aham or I to Param or Absolute have to be taken by individuals themselves. The attitude of identifying the self and surrendering to it was Krishna's life ethic. If one is focused on the Atman—the inner self—life inevitably becomes a celebration. In the true sense, a life of karma yoga, detachment and stoicism is Krishna.

He belonged to everyone; he had accepted everyone.



But he was all alone today.

The wound in his foot throbbed excruciatingly.

He was in a state of complete acceptance, at peace with himself, as he approached his last moments.

Yet, Draupadi's words, rising and falling like waves inside him, created a whirlpool, leaving residues of moistness and salinity behind.

The moistness and the salinity—were they Draupadi's tears?

Were they the tears she had swallowed all her life, the tears she had brought along from the sacrificial fire she was born of?

They had been singeing and choking her right from the swayamvar, from when she was disrobed in the rajya sabha, since the battle of Kurukshetra, but they had never found their way out.

Today, those tears were struggling to flow; instead, all that came out was a stream of words.

'Govind, I surrender to you everything that you have blessed me with. Yet, I am unaware of the meaning of surrender even today. In all these years that I have spent with you, I have often

wondered what I would be left with if I placed all my happiness and woes at your lotus feet. I feel the need to let go of all my positive and negative experiences for my own good... but despite letting go, nothing ever leaves me. Every human being's fate and their circumstances in life are predetermined and hence our accepting them or otherwise cannot change our destiny in any way.'



When the buoyant and cheerful Yadavs left Dwarka on their golden chariots, little did they imagine that not one of them would return alive. Once they reached the shores of Dwarka, the Yadavs sailed towards Somnath. Blissfully unaware of their impending annihilation, they bathed in the sea before praying at the temple.

It was Krishna's desire that the Yadavs worship at the Somnath temple, before proceeding on their last journeys, and get liberated from the cycle of births and rebirths. Somnath was considered the most significant Shivling among the twelve holy Jyotirlingas. According to legend, Chandradev had performed a penance there to free himself from the curse of Daksh Prajapati. Lord Shiv had revealed himself to Chandradev and freed him from the curse.

When Krishna reached Prabhaskshetra with his brother Balaram and the Yadavs, he knew that none of them would return to Dwarka. The Yadavs, after a dip in the sea and prayers at the Somnath temple, went to the jungles of Prabhaskshetra for celebrations. A serious argument broke out among them, and soon, the situation worsened. They came to blows. Since they weren't carrying any weapons, they began using sharp-tipped grass blades called erka, which grew there, as weapons. Most of the Yadavs died in the fight that ensued while all Krishna could do was sit and watch their doom with a heavy heart. A few

Yadavs who were still alive started hitting each other with pots and pans... It was a pathetic end to the Yadav race, a race which held pride of place in the annals of the history of Bharatvarsh.

Krishna, who despised weapons completely, was forced to take control of the situation, just to ensure that his kinsmen stopped fighting, and put an end to their misery and pain. He was deeply saddened to see the Yadavs spewing venom against each other and destroying their own brothers.

Krishna and Balaram tried their best to stop the Yadavs from self-destruction, but in vain! The erka grass, the very fate that the Yadavs had tried to run away from, became an instrument of their death.

The Yadav land had perished.

Durvasa's curse had come true.



It was now turn for Gandhari's curse.

Krishna walked determinedly but with a laden heart towards the forest along the river Hiranya and sat under a peepal tree.

The Hiranya glistened like silver in the distance. There wasn't a soul for miles. The sun was about to rise. The confluence of the three rivers was where his elder brother had breathed his last.

Balaram had sought farewell from Krishna soon after the Yadavsthal episode. With a stricken heart, Krishna had consented that his brother take the path of nirvana. Balaram sat there in meditation near the confluence of the three rivers. Later, a cowherd was heard telling his friend, 'A man transformed into a seven-hooded serpent and disappeared into the river...' It was Sheshnag, having done his duty on earth, going back to his lord.



Before Krishna made his way to the bare and unadorned forests of Prabhaskshetra, he had ensured that all his kinsmen were given an appropriate funeral. His head was devoid of the peacock-feather crown and his neck was without his vajrayanti flower garland. His handsome and captivating face was as before but his eyes reflected the immense pain he was going through. They were moist in expectation of the impending moment. He sat motionless under the tree with his left foot crossed over his right knee and went into a state of meditation. Though his eyes were open, they were unmoving, like stones. Those twinkling, mischievous and smiling eyes had now transcended far into infinity, crossing the endless skies.

In a fit of rage, Rishi Durvasa had cursed the Yadavs. Now the curse was coming true, and it seemed to be boasting of its victory to the rising sun. While the Yadav race had met its end at Yadavsthal, their crown jewel, Krishna, lay waiting for his last breath. There was an unexpressed pain in his heart. The rising sun looked lacklustre and seemed tormented by the fact that the lord, born in human avatar, was bidding his farewell to earth. In the meanwhile, a hunter named Jara had reached the bank of the river on the other side in search of prey. In the darkness, the way Krishna was seated, it appeared to him as though a deer was sitting there.



‘You will suffer a beastly death—lonely, helpless and aggrieved, the same way my sons died. You too will be a witness to the collapse of your race—your sons, grandsons, friends and family members will all die a miserable death!’ Gandhari’s anguished voice had seemed to echo all over the palace in Hastinapur and reverberate across the universe.

‘You will suffer a beastly death—lonely, helpless and aggrieved...’

Gandhari had repeated her curse several times and had articulated her words in such a way that they seemed to have got etched on the walls of the palace forever. Yet Krishna had greeted her with folded hands, accepting her curse with humility. Who other than Gandhari had the power to curse Krishna.

Gandhari, who had spent all her life with her eyes covered, was blinded by love for her sons. Though her sacrifice for her blind husband had given her the exalted status of a sati, she never found any solace in the greatness thrust upon her. She, who was incapable of seeing the flaws in her sons, had declared Krishna guilty of being responsible for the destruction of her family. As an aggrieved mother, she had inadvertently wished for Krishna's liberation through her curse.

Krishna himself had never desired war or destruction. He had always preached acceptance and reconciliation. Enlightenment or samadhi was the pinnacle of complete acceptance. He had spent every moment of his life in a state of samadhi and that is why he was called Yogeshwar and Sthitapragya, one untouched by external circumstances. Despite this, it appeared as if he was destined to bear witness to terrible devastation and carnage.

Was this necessary for the destruction of evil or was Krishna himself in search of a reason to abandon his mortal form?

Something had to be done to deliver him of the burden in the aftermath of such carnage.

Maybe that is why he had himself created the situation for Gandhari's curse.

After listening to Gandhari, he had stood with folded hands and said, 'Tathastu... so be it.'

Who else but Krishna could accept his own death so willingly and placidly.



It seemed as if death had finally arrived! It was Krishna's wish that when he left his body, the Yadavs too should leave the earth. It would be best if the Yadavs didn't have to witness the immorality and impropriety of Kaliyug, and Durvasa's curse on the Yadavs was the first step in that direction.

Sage Durvasa used to perform penance at the Pindara shrine, near Dwarka. The Yadavs were infamous for their debauched and frenzied behaviour, drunk on youth and power. They lost good sense and sobriety under the intoxicating influence of wine, women, wealth, and gambling, and indulged in all kinds of sins.

Samba was Krishna and Jambavati's son and known to be naughty and frivolous. One day, Samba and some of his Yadav friends decided to test the powers of the sage. Samba was dressed up as a pregnant woman. They went to the sage and without so much as a greeting, laughed aloud and said, 'This is Babhru Yadav's wife and she is pregnant. She wishes to have a son. Will her wish come true?' The sage saw through the prank and, riled by the audacity of the Yadavs, cursed them, 'Whatever Samba gives birth to will end not just his existence but the entire Yadav race.'

The Yadavs were so petrified that they chose not to tell Krishna about what had transpired. Samba gave birth to a pestle. In order to destroy the evidence, the Yadavs ground it into a fine powder and scattered it over the sea. The powder washed upon the shore at Prabhaskshetra and grew as the erka grass. With time, it turned into sharp, strong and ramrod-straight blades. Weapons were being readied for the Yadavs.

The Yadavs continued to live their lives drunk on power, blissfully unaware of what was happening far away from Dwarka.

A small piece of that pestle which had remained uncrushed was swallowed up by a fish that got trapped in a fisherman's net. The fisherman gave the metal piece to a hunter named Jara.

Jara fixed the same piece to his arrow.

Who but Krishna would know that the same arrow was set to become the reason for the end of his life on earth.

Jara aimed that arrow at a deer.

A sharp whizz pierced through the air. The toe which had been bathed by Uddhav's tears, caressed by Rukmini's hair and anointed daily with sandalwood paste, was now bathed in blood. It seemed as if a spark of fire had entered Krishna's body through the toe and left it at lightning speed through the sole.

Jara's arrow hit Krishna like a deadly weapon.

Gandhari's and sage Durvasa's curses had come true and led Krishna towards his last moments.

Elated at having hit a deer, Jara emerged out of the chest-deep waters and waded towards the bank of the river. Instead of a wounded deer, he was astounded to see the lord himself.

Jara was terrified. All the poor hunter desired was prey, but there lay in front of him the life-giver himself, wounded by his arrow. He hurried and tried to pull the arrow out of Krishna's toe.

'Let it be, my friend,' said a feeble voice. The same voice which had echoed loud and clear on the battlefield of Kurukshetra.

*'Niyatam kuru karm tvam karm jayohya karmanah  
Shareera yatrapi cha te n prasiddhayed karmanah'*

'Performing your prescribed duty for action is better than inaction. A man cannot even maintain his physical body without work.'

The hunter, Jara, had performed his prescribed karma. He could perceive a great pain and a deep silence setting in, in that voice.