

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.