

THE BROKEN SMRTI

When the colonial mindset creates a modern-day cataclysm

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Preface

Ancient times in *Bhāratavarṣa* were turbulent. Valiant men fought for kingdoms, family honor, women, and above everything, righteousness or moral duties. *Dharma* was revered and protected with one's life. Those who protected it were considered noble ones. *Āryās* ruled large parts of the ancient world, *Āryāvarta*. Those were also Vedic times when the Gods came down from the heavens to earth as humans. *Avatāras* lived alongside these *Āryās* to uphold the *Dharma* and protect the ancient wisdoms known as the *Vedas*.

The *Vedas* evolved over time, space, and people. A simple classification emerged: *Śrutis*, that which is heard, and *Smṛti*, that which is remembered. *Smṛtis* included works like the *Dharmaśāstras*, *Itihasa*, *Purāṇas*, *Kāvya*, *Bhasya*, *Nibandhas*, and *Vedāṅgas*. Over time, history became a branch of *Smṛtis* known as *Itihasa*, it thus happened, such as the *Mahābhārata* and *Rāmāyaṇa*. These *Itihasas* and the crown jewel of *Purāṇas* - *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahā Purāṇa*, grew in popularity through *Sutas*, who provide discourses on the meaning of the various *Smṛtis* with stories.

Śrutis, compiled as *Vedas*, were believed to be divine revelations to *Rṣis* who heard them through their severe penances. They were kept alive by teacher and student lineage, a *Guru-Siśya Parampara*, practiced in strict ambiances, such as in a *Guru's* house known as *Gurukulas*. *Vedas*, the soul of *Sanāthana Dharma*, were taught by the

R̥ṣis to their students to conduct their way of living righteously. This Dharma was prevalent universally.

Originally, Vedic literature was written in Sanskrit. This language was perfected over time, so much so that it was considered the divine language of the Gods. However, today, only a few individuals understand the true import of the literature. In the last 200 years, Vedic literatures, both Sm̥rtis and Śrutis, have been translated into English and other Indian languages, but, as in any translation, their original import has been morphed to the convenience of the translator.

Today, a new breed of storytellers or authors is rising. In my view, these Sutas fall into four groups on a spectrum whose ends have opposing points of view - Bhakti or Devotion on one end (let us call this the right end) and Modern-day fiction storytelling on the other (let us call this the left end).

The right end of the spectrum interprets the Vedas (in Sanskrit) with religious devotion retaining the original import and divinity, and without any personal interpretations or deviations.

Moving left, the second group interprets the Vedic times with a human lens, thereby helping readers appreciate the miracles performed by valiant men, yet narrating the tales as mere historical events without distorting the religious intent or devotion. Also, they do not introduce any fictional bias or characters, or stories.

Moving further left, the third group uses Vedic and medieval Indian history as supporting references to draw parallels with fictional bias, characters, or storylines they create, without distorting the original Vedic character, events, ancient wisdom, or divinity. This book falls in this group, where the

characters are fictional and make references to Vedic texts and verses to weave a storyline.

On the far-left end of the spectrum, the fourth group uses their full creative license to interpret Vedic references and timelines, weaving a fictional story that drifts from the original. However, in doing so, many try to ensure they do not dishonor the divinity, yet a few take their creative license to extremes.

The story is set along the 88 ghats of Vārāṇasī. This ancient, culturally rich, holy city is at the cusp of transforming into a modern-day megacity while preserving its history, diversity, and beliefs. As the story unfolds, a description of each ghat is provided to help the reader appreciate its history. The ambitious Kāśī Viśwanath Corridor project is taking Vārāṇasī back to its glorious days by cleaning up the Gaṅges, upgrading its infrastructure, and rehabilitating it as new temples and historical sites are discovered.

It delves into the relevant annals of history surrounding the colonial mindset of English education, caste division, and the present-day reservation system. The subject of Varṇa, Castes, Jāti, and the present-day reservation system is a very difficult and emotional subject to discuss, depending on one's experience. However, the reader will appreciate - how ancient Bhārat and medieval India viewed Varṇa, how the colonial-era rulers created the present-day caste system, how caste is constitutionally identified through articles that have been modified over the last 70 years, and lastly, the potential problems the reservation system has created in a country that wants to become Viksit Bhārat, developed country, by 2047.

The story follows an intransigent zealot who wants the Indian polity to accept his demands or face the consequences of dead kidnapped victims. The twists and turns emerge as the protagonist and a secret society attempt to solve the riddles posed by this madman. It becomes complicated when he is willing to exchange the victims for an ancient treasure called The Seal of Manu, whose very existence is in question.

The story unfolds a time-sensitive, nail-biting chase across four days in Muhūrtas.

The author hopes to inspire young minds and readers to develop a passion for the rich cultural traditions of Bhārat, the history of its valiant people and dynasties, and the Dharmaśāstras, Itihāsa, and Purāṇas through this book.

Acknowledgements

I express my humble pranams to the numerous Gurus, Mahāns, Saints, and Avatāras, who were born, who are born, and who will be born to uphold the eternal order and to preserve the sanctity of the Vedas - the soul of Sanāthana Dharma.

I would like to thank my dear friend Prasanna Uppaladadium and nieces Harini and Janani, who shared their honest feedback to help improve the book.

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Day 1 - Murder or Mokṣa!

Saturday Śanivāsarāḥ (शनिवासरः)

Day 1 18:48 - 19:36 | Ajapāda (अजपाद) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

The sun had already set at 18:51. It seemed like yet another normal day. The city of light sprang to life at the Dashaśvamedhā Ghat with the Gaṅgā āraṭi performance, a ritualistic flame shown to the deity Gaṅgā by seven young paṇḍits. The crowd had taken their seats, eagerly watching this evening's holy act.

All tourist boats were lined up next to each other, close to the ghat, in a manner where the passengers could observe the Gaṅgā āraṭi. The boats were tied together to limit movement. An old boat started roaring to life and made its way towards the ghat. Unlike other boats carrying pilgrims and tourists, this boat carried only one passenger. The passenger, covered with a white cloth from shoulder down, was lying flat on a platform at the center of the boat. He could not move, as he was securely tied to the platform. The boat reeked of kerosene.

Everyone was firmly engrossed in the holy performance. A couple seated at the stern side of a boat, away from the rest of the crowd, was observing the āraṭi. The young lady considered it to be the most blissful period of her life. He held her close. It was Buddha Purnima, and the full moon was glowing, providing a romantic backdrop. Their eyes

were locked. The young lady closed her eyes as he started to kiss her passionately.

As the old boat drew closer to the ghat, small flames began to flicker slowly around the rim of the boat. The young lady's senses picked up the kerosene smell as she opened one eyelid. She suddenly pulled back and let out a scream. The small flames in the boat covered the entire rim before bursting into bigger flames. The sound of the āratī bhajans was deafening. As the couple started pushing everyone before them to move, and others saw the burning boat, they started to panic. The boats were rocking as people began hopping from one boat to another.

On the banks, a small girl, who was busy taking a selfie with the āratī behind her, noticed either people jumping off boats into the river or pushing everyone forward towards the riverfront. She immediately turned around, dropped the phone, and screamed 'Aaaag!' as she pointed towards the fire burning on the boats. Slowly, the crowd saw the menacing event unfold. It looked as if Mother Gaṅgā was burning with rage at the way the humans had treated her over the years. Everyone now started pointing their phones towards the biggest āratī of the evening - the burning boats. The Gods were sleeping!

स होवाच पितरं तत कस्मै मां दास्यसीति ।

द्वितीयं तृतीयं तँ होवाच मृत्यवे त्वा ददामीति ॥

Dear father, to whom will you give me away?
He said it a second time, and then a third. The
father, seized by anger, replied: To Death, I give
you away.

— Nachiketa, Katho Upaniṣad

Day 0 - Gaṅgā ārati at Dashaśvamedhā Ghat

Friday Śukravāsaraḥ (शुक्रवासरः)

**Day 0 17:12 - 18:00 | Bhag (भग) Muhūrta | Quality of time
- Inauspicious ||**

Twenty-nine Muhūrtas earlier....

Vārāṇasī, known by many names such as Banāras, Kāśī, and Mokṣapuri, is an ancient city that has been nestled on the western banks of the mighty Gaṅges from time immemorial. As Mark Twain describes, Benares is older than history, older than tradition, older even than legend, and looks twice as old as all of them put together. It is the primordial home of Mahādev, known by many names: Kāśī Viśwanath, Śiva, Viśveśwarā, or the Ruler of the Universe. In ancient times, Kasipura, the ancient name of Vārāṇasī, was the capital of the Kingdom of Kāśī. Although recent excavations place the city's existence at 1800 BCE, the Rāmāyaṇa refers to the Kingdom of Kāśī during the Treta Yuga, where Sumitra, mother of Lakshmana and Shatrughna, resided. Vārāṇasī was also the capital of the Kingdom of Kāśī during the 4th century BCE when the Buddha gave his first sermon at Sarnath.

Today, this sacred city in Uttar Pradesh is one of the oldest inhabited cities in the world. It is revered by the followers of Sanāthana Dharma and is considered one of the seven sacred Sthawar Tirtha. People come to this holy city to seek the blessings of Lord Śiva, to wash away their sins with a dip in the holy Gaṅges, to purify their souls, or to seek liberation from mokṣa, the cycle of death and rebirth, by getting cremated here. As a city of many temples and ghats, festivals, lights, learning, and philosophy, it has stubbornly maintained its identity and adapted through ages of murderous pillaging and religious torment from ancient and medieval to modern times.

Lord Kāśī Viśwanath temple is considered one of the twelve holiest Jyotirlinga shrines in India. This temple is mentioned in the Vedas and Skanda Purāṇa. The fourth khanda in the Skanda Purāṇa is the Kāśī khanda, which has 11,000 verses in praise of Lord Śiva. An Avimukteśwara seal from 1000 BCE was discovered during recent archeological excavations at the Rajghat area, indicating the age of the structure. It has been rebuilt several times throughout history. It was first destroyed by Qutub-ud-din Aibak in 1194 CE and was rebuilt fifty years later by a Gujarati merchant. It was destroyed for the second time by Ibrahim Lodhi in 1450 CE, and was rebuilt 100 years later by Raja Todar Mal. The third time was when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb issued a decree ordering the demolition of the Lord Kāśī Viśwanath temple on 18 April 1669 and constructed the

Gyanvapi Mosque in September 1669. It took almost another one hundred years before a valiant Queen, Ahilyabai Holkar, Queen of Indore to rebuild the most recent temple structure next to the Gyanvapi Mosque in 1776 CE.

In 1835, Mahārāja Ranjit Singh donated more than 1 ton of gold for plating the Kāśī Viśwanath temple's dome. Three hundred years later, in 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Kāśī Viśwanath Dham Corridor on December 13, 2021, connecting the temple with the River Gaṅgā.

Vārāṇasī is famous for its riverfront steps along Mother Gaṅges. There are roughly 100 ghats, and most were rebuilt after 1700 CE by the Maratha empire. However, of the 88 popularly known ghats, some of the prominent ghats are Dashaśvamedhá, Manikarnika, Assi, Panchgaṅgā, and Adi Keshav.

Every day, Gaṅgā āratī is performed at Dashaśvamedhá Ghat around 19:00. Gowdolia Chauraha is at the intersection of four roads - Godowlia, Jangamwadi, Bansphatak, and Dashaśvamedhá. From this intersection, it is about 0.4 km to the Dashaśvamedhá Ghat where the Gaṅgā āratī takes place. This intersection is also known as Nandi Circle or Nandi Chauraha, where a huge pillar stands. A statue of a bull, Nandi, is perched on top of this pillar, facing the Śrī Kāśī Viśwanath temple. This pillar is quite similar in design to the Ashoka Stambh. From 16:00 to 21:00, vehicle restrictions are in place along Godowlia or Jangamwadi road leading to this intersection. Only

two-wheelers are allowed to enter Bansphatak road or Dashaśvamedhá road leading to the Dashaśvamedhá Ghat. Crowds walk across this intersection from one road to another, especially between 17:00 and 21:00, as they go to witness the Gaṅgā ārati. Between 16:00 and 21:00, lots of policemen usually stand at this intersection and along the local marketplace on Dashaśvamedhá road leading to the ghat.

17:12. Viṣṇu Kali, dressed in a white cotton shirt and a five-fold dhoti, *panchakacham*, came in an auto along Jangamwadi road and got off 50 m from Godowlia Chauraha. The auto sped away into one of the many narrow roads to avoid any policemen. He noticed a few police constables standing near the Dashaśvamedhá Police Commissionerate at the corner of Jangamwadi and Dashaśvamedhá road. He turned right onto Dashaśvamedhá Ghat Road and walked through the busy crowd, observing the saree shops, restaurants, clothing sellers, and juice shops on either side. It looked as though the street hawkers had besieged the road with their wares. He stopped at one of the street hawkers' platforms selling religious articles, looked at a small Linga and a Rudraksha chain.

17:18. He then continued his walk. At about 250 m from Godowlia Chauraha, he came across the original entrance, Śrī Kāśī Viśwanath Dwar. This entrance led to the Śrī Kāśī Viśwanath temple through a smaller, narrower road, Viśwanath gali, flanked with several small shops on either side. He observed the three Shikara-styled spires on the top of this structure, and at the golden statue of Śrī Ādi Śankara

in front of the center spire. He closed his eyes and, with a bow, folded the palms of his hands for Lord Kāśī Viśwanath.

Om Namah Śivaya!

The noise of the crowd, two-wheelers, and nearby Kichuribaba temple bells was ringing loudly. He felt agitated, opened his eyes, and continued his walk towards the ghat.

17:24. At about 25 m, he stopped in front of the Guru Brihaspathi temple and again closed his eyes for a few seconds.

Om Śri Gurubhyo Namah!

17:30. He walked further. At about 75 m, he saw a Tourist Police Booth where the road forked. The road to the right was narrower and led to a portion of Dashaśvamedhá Ghat separated by Prayag Ghat on the left and Ahilyabhai Holkar Ghat on the right. He continued his walk down the left fork and noticed a large tree and the bust of Chittaranjan Das behind it. Behind this bust, he also noticed two more large trees. On the right side of these two large trees, a well-laid square, with Dashaśvamedhá Bhavan on one side and a wall artwork on the other, marked the entrance to the ghat. To the left of these two large trees was another small road that led to Dr. Rajendra Prasad Ghat. Ignoring this left road, he continued his walk towards the ghat.

17:36. Closer to the ghat, he noticed the Gaṅges river, and various types of boats sailing on the river. He stopped in front of the large steps leading down towards the riverbank. It was almost dark. He looked around and wondered if Lord Brahmā would reconsider receiving Lord Śiva at this ghat today.

Dashaśvamedhá Ghat has two legends associated with it. One was that Lord Brahmā created the ghat to welcome Lord Śiva. Another was that Lord Brahmā performed the Aśvamedhá Yagna here by sacrificial offering of Dasha, ten, horses. Aśvamedhá Yagna is a horse-sacrificial Vedic ritual practiced by ancient Indian Kings to command their imperial sovereignty over land that the sacrificial horse travelled freely, without any Kṣatriya, warrior, challenging, for a year. Hence, the name - Dashaśvamedhá. Until a few years back, the whole city was filled with filth, trash on the roads, and dead bodies floating in the river. Uncontrolled construction and population had taken a toll on this ancient city.

He walked down a few steps and noticed a few Aghoris smoking a hukkah. He then stopped in front of Śrī Śrī Maa Gaṅgā Mandir temple. He looked at the deity in silence and sought forgiveness for the act he planned to commit in the next few days. Instantly, he heard a bell ringing, symbolizing Her divine approval to destroy evil, and smiled. He again bowed to Her and turned around and noticed the River Police Commissionerate booth.

17:42. He then started walking down towards the riverbanks, searched for and found a quiet spot closer to Prayag Ghat, and sat down, folding his legs in a lotus yoga pose. While in the padmasana position, he looked to his sides and let his mind calm.

17:48. He then began to meditate and started to recite the Gaṅgā Stotra—hymn of praise. After mentally reciting the Stotra, he began to contemplate...

O! Mother Gaṅgā! You reside on the head of Lord Kāśī Viśwanath. The glory of your water is mentioned in the scriptures. With your compassion, please help me cross the saṃsāra! Today, no human can drink your water to go to the highest abode and avoid Yamalok, the world of Lord Yama. We have burnt our dead bodies and allowed them to float on your pure waters to purify ourselves from diseases, sorrow, affliction and sins. In the process, we have contaminated you. O! Mother of Bheeshma, and daughter of Sage Jahnu, may thy give me the blessings to protect you from the wretched humans! O! Bhuvēśwari, please remove the burden from my mind once I commit the evil deed for which I have come to Vārāṇasī.

17:54. Then, he looked around and noticed the River Police Commissionerate Booth to the left. There was a large screen showing the Gaṅgā āraṭi in front of this booth, and a surveillance camera below it. The camera was pointed toward the riverbank. He looked around again and noticed a second surveillance camera hanging from a floodlight pole that was focused on the direction of the entrance at the top, where the steps began.

Then he continued his meditation.

Day 0 18:00 - 18:48 | Girīśa (गिरीश) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

18:18. Viṣṇu Kali's meditation was disturbed when he heard a person reciting a few ślokaś on a mike. He opened his blood-red eyes in anger and saw a huge crowd gathering

around the platforms where the seven paṇḍits were going to perform the Gaṅgā āraṭi that evening. These priests were dressed in gold colored silk shirts and dhotis. They wore two cotton *angavastras*; one was neatly folded and spread from the left shoulder to the right, and the other was tied around the waist to hold the shoulder angavastra and the dhoti. In preparation for the āraṭi, they were busy setting up their paraphernalia on the rectangular wooden platform, which stood on a few stones, about 2 ft high from the ground.

18:24. The paṇḍits placed a straw mat in the middle of the platform and a short, rectangular, red-colored rug at the end of the platform. Then, they placed a small rectangular table at the head of the platform, facing the river, covered it with a saffron-colored silk cloth, and began to assemble the ritual items required for the evening prayer on the table. There were about 7 items related to tonight's performance. A small conch with a holder, a large bronze antique ghanta, a copper Pañchapātra containing water from the river Gaṅgā, with a copper udrani, a big conch, a utensil containing water from the river Gaṅgā, and a plate with flower petals.

There were two types of large metal āraṭi holders.

One type was a seven-step pyramid-shaped holder with sixty-four small one-inch cups. The top had one small cup, the second step had three small cups, the third step had five small cups, and so on. These small cups would be filled with oil and contain a protruding cotton wick for lighting.

Another type of holder was one large bowl, around 10 inches in diameter, with a five-headed serpent covering it, symbolizing Vaikunta with Ādi Śeṣa as the serpent and Lord

Viṣṇu as the light that emanated from the bowl when lit. This bowl rested on a flower petal-shaped stand.

Both types of holders sat on a single rod that connected to a large circular base. From the base of the pyramid or the bowl, two rods extended behind to a smaller circular base. The upper rod was S-shaped while the lower rod was straight. The paṇḍits placed thick cotton wicks into the small cups, poured oil into them, and lit them. Finally, on either side of the platforms, several small diyas were lit. Then, they worked on the large ārati holder.

18:30. The crowd started to gather slowly along the ghat. The boats with pilgrims and tourists lined up along the banks to watch the spectacular Gaṅgā ārati event at sunset. Viṣṇu Kali, an opacarophile, eagerly awaited the transition to sunset. He decided to move to a corner to observe the hustle and bustle of the place until Gaṅgā ārati was over.

Day 0 18:48 – 19:36 | Ajapāda (अजपाद) Muhūrta |
Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

18:48. After a few minutes, he checked his watch. The sun was beginning to set slowly. Today was the day before the beginning of the *Dakṣiṇāyana* period. Hindus believe that during these six months between the summer solstice and the winter solstice, the deities are in their celestial sleep.

The paṇḍits climbed onto their platforms. They ensured that their table was ready with the pyramid-shaped ārati holders. The priest in the center adjusted the flower garland around a metallic one-foot-tall Lord Śiva idol. The pilgrims and tourists on the ghat were seated on white plastic chairs, right behind the paṇḍits, holding their cellphones, ready to take selfies and videos of the whole event. There were two to four

large speakers on either side playing the devotional songs and music. These loud bhajans heightened the crowd's religious fervor.

The seven young paṇḍits now prepared for their most important act for the evening - showing the Gaṅgā ārati in four directions!

18:54. They showed the ārati first facing the river. With their right hand, they slowly moved the ārati top-down in a clockwise circular motion, completing a full circle, then back in an anticlockwise circular motion, completing another circle. When they reached the top of the circle, they stopped for thirty seconds. With their left hands, they were ringing the ghantas. They performed this act in unison until they completed three full circles in both directions. Having completed this, they turned around clockwise 90 degrees and showed the ārati in the same manner. Then, they faced the crowd and showed the ārati. Everyone was busy recording the act. They turned around one more time and showed the ārati. Finally, they faced the river and performed the ārati with a single circular motion before placing it on the platform next to the small table. The incense sticks let off a sweet fragrance in the air. People were ecstatic in the holy ambience. They felt deeply blessed to witness this magical, divine experience.

19:00. Viṣṇu Kali did a full-body prostration. While in a sāṣṭāṅga daṇḍavat namaskāra position facing Mother Gaṅgā, he prayed. Then, he disappeared into the crowd away from the riverfront.

Day 0 22:00 - 22:48 | Yama (यम) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

22:00. In a dimly lit hut, not too far from Dashaśvamedhá Ghat, a man sat on the floor with his hands tied behind a post. The hut was quite primitive, with no other dwelling nearby for a distance. A strong stench from a nearby graveyard filled the air. There was no furniture in the hut except a broken table. His hair was disheveled, his head drooping, his mouth was muffled with a cloth, and he struggled to open his eyes. His blood-stained shirt was ripped in different places.

The sound of locks being turned came from outside, and a rusty door was pushed open. Viṣṇu Kali walked in with a sack on his back and placed it on the table. Then, he went back to close the door, locked it from the inside, and looked at his victim from a distance. There seemed to be no movement.

22:06. Viṣṇu Kali came close to him and observed him. The victim was still breathing heavily. He then lifted the victim's head slowly and removed the stuffed cloth slowly. The victim started to cough and spit saliva mixed with blood. He asked the victim in a low voice, "Do you know why you are here?" There was a struggle on the victim's face. He moved his fingers away, allowing the victim's head to fall. He then turned to walk away from the victim.

The victim, Arumugam, was born to a poor farmer from Salem. His father worked on the farms for the local zamindar, who was from a higher caste. His early childhood years were not memorable. His father would come home drunk and beat his mother, sister, and him. His early education was in government schools, which had fewer

amenities. His luck turned a new leaf when the zamindar, who had no children, took a keen interest in his development. The local zamindar's wife always wanted a son and approached the farmer's wife to seek her approval for the adoption of her son. The mother, with a heavy heart, felt this was a divine intervention for her son and readily accepted.

Arumugam's caste, luck, and destiny suddenly changed overnight. But he never forgot his roots! He never forgave his father for his drunken behavior or the community for the treatment of his family. He had deep love for his mother, who sacrificed her love for her son's well-being. He made sure she was taken care of until her last days.

The farmer's wife took an interest in *Arumugam's* education and moved him to the city's best convent school. From then on, he decided to never look back. His circle of friends was from higher castes. But he ensured they never knew his past or caste. He worked hard and always remained among the top rank holders of his class. He knew he was at a disadvantage because of his caste when he started applying for admission to four-year engineering college degree programs at state institutions. He also knew that his adopted parents would be willing to pay any amount of a bribe to secure his admission. Instead, he decided to use his birth caste to his advantage in securing admission. After his college education, he joined the university staff as a teaching assistant and gradually climbed the ranks to the Vice Chancellor of a leading deemed-to-be private institution, due to his proximity with the politician who owned the private institution and hailed from the same caste of his adopted parents. Moreover, the politician's daughter fell in love with him. The politician had promised *Arumugam* that

one day he would own the institution if he married his daughter and took good care of her. He had no reason to decline this opportunity!

To move from a tier 3 to a tier 2 institution, he realized he needed substantial funds to upgrade facilities that would attract top talent. However, the students who were applying for admission were largely from lower castes or poorer communities. So, through his father-in-law's connection with the local banks and his adopted father, he secured farming loans. The prevailing economic conditions were unfavorable for loan repayment. So, he decided to follow other leading state institutions in fleecing incoming students in return for admission to his institution. In the early years, it was a small proportion of the total admission allotment. Arumugam became greedy over time, as he realized that many, regardless of caste, were willing to donate to the institution's advancement. Over time, a portion of these donations was directed towards his personal comfort and use as well.

The victim tried lifting his head slowly and said, "What did I do? Who are you? Please let me go." Viṣṇu Kali turned around to look at him. He then, in an angry tone, said, "You have committed a maha-pāpā. You had the most important role in society. The role of an educator...a Guru! Instead, you commit a grave sin by using an educational institution to satisfy your Lobha. But your greed did not stop with that! Not only did you use the institution, but you used your Jāti to grease your greed!" The victim started whimpering.

22:12. He came close to the victim's face and growled, "Do you recall Sumitra?" The victim struggled to recollect the name. He laughed and said, "No wonder you cannot

remember her. I am sure you must have destroyed the lives of many children like her. She came to you two years back seeking admission for Computer Science engineering at your esteemed university.”

Unlike Arumugam, Sumitra had a happy childhood. Although her parents belonged to a forward caste, they were from below-average-income families. Her parents owned a small 500 sq. ft. house and worked at the state electricity board. They were God-fearing, honest, and treated everyone fairly regardless of caste. Sumitra was performing well in academics. She secured the 350th rank among lakhs of students who appeared in government-sponsored written tests. She was elated at the results and was confident of getting admission in a top state-owned institution. As state-owned institutions began releasing admission results, she slowly realized the politics behind the education system. She deeply regretted that she was born as a forward caste! Her schoolmates who had lower marks and rank than her secured admission because of their lower caste. They decided to meet the vice-chancellor of a private institution to discuss their circumstances.

After a month of reaching out to various brokers, they finally got a fifteen-minute time slot with the vice-chancellor. Sumitra ensured she had all the necessary certificates of accomplishment with her for this meeting. When the day finally arrived, they were kept waiting outside the vice-chancellor's office for an hour. When they went in, they were asked to take a seat. The vice-chancellor took the certificates and asked the attendant to open her admission file for review. He kept the certificates to the side and first began reviewing the admission form. He went slowly down the list

of items... name... address... parents' name... address... programs seeking admission... and finally stopped at the caste information. He smirked when he saw the forward caste on the form. He immediately said, "Her admission can be arranged!" and paused to see the reaction from the family. The parents were gleaming with happiness as soon as they heard this. Sumitra's dreams suddenly started appearing before her. He continued, "Please pay Rs 15 Lakhs, this attendant will take you to the person to whom you will provide your cash, and you will get your admission acceptance slip immediately!" Sumitra's dreams immediately turned off like a light switch. Her father pleaded, "Sir, we are from a middle-class family. We cannot afford such an amount! Please show us some consideration!" Arumugam was used to listening to such pleas. In fact, the institution's management team, which included him, his father-in-law, and a few other cronies, had decided not to fill all seats through merit in certain in-demand degree programs. He retorted immediately, "Sir, I understand your situation. There are many students who come here daily seeking admission. They do not have the marks that your daughter has. But we do satisfy the state requirements by filling up a few of our seats for top-ranked holders. Unfortunately, they are all filled up for this year. Why don't you ask her to apply to the local B.Sc. colleges? She does not have to do Computer Science engineering necessarily. After all, she is only a girl and will get married off to someone one day!"

Sumitra and her parents left dejected that day. Days passed, and the family went through an introspective period. Her father was ready to mortgage the house. Sumitra's mother was ready to pledge her jewels. But, as luck would have it,

in a week, her father had a massive heart attack and was admitted to the hospital. They had to pledge the jewels and mortgage the house for his treatment. Her father never survived the stroke. Sumitra's dreams vanished that night. She felt as if the universe had conspired against her! She cursed her caste and wished she were born into a lower caste. In stupid haste and without any reasoning, she decided to end her life! She died by suicide by drinking rat poison available in the market.

He continued, “She was not in the top 10, or 50, or 100 rank holders, but her academic performance was higher than most students applying that year. She came with her family to meet you at your institution and pleaded with you about her situation. Instead of validating her credentials based on her performance, you dwelled on her Varṇa and took advantage of it. To her misery, she was a forward caste. You then determined a price for her admission. You idiot! She was the topper in her school. She had ambitions. She had dreams! Instead, you killed her that day. She finally committed suicide!” He paused and stood up.

Kaṭhopaniṣad is one of the important or mukhya Upaniṣads. This Upaniṣad is about the legendary story of a little boy, Nachiketa, the son of Sage Vajasravasa, who meets Lord Yama and discusses the nature of man, knowledge, Ātman, and Mokṣa.

22:18. His eyes were now red with anger. He said with a harsher tone, “To death I give you away! But I will not give you mokṣa tomorrow. Mother Gaṅgā wouldn't either! That would taint the true seekers from following *Puruṣārtha*!

Lord Yama will not let you escape this saṃsāra. Rather, you will be reborn again as an insect or even worse, as you have not earned the respect of being a human! I will let the whole world know what a wretched man you were! Tomorrow, Dakṣiṇāyana begins for wretched souls like you.”

22:24. As soon as he said this, he turned around and went back to the smaller side table to offload items from the sack. Then, he spread a white cotton cloth across the table, turned around, walked towards the victim, and started untying him. The victim slumped as soon as he was untied and fell to the side. He carried the victim back and placed him on the large table.

22:30. He then removed the victim’s clothes, straightened his legs, folded his hands, and placed them palm facing down on his chest, and then tied his feet with a thin white cloth.

22:36. He opened a bottle of sesame oil and started applying it to his body from head to toe. He then took a roll of wide cotton cloth from the sack, drenched it in a bucket full of kerosene, and started mummifying his victim.

Tears were trickling down from the victim’s eyes as he knew his death was imminent.

कालः पचति भूतानि कालः संहरते प्रजाः।

कालः सुप्तेषु जागर्ति कालो हि दुरतिक्रमः॥

Time devours all things, Time kills all that are born.

Time is awake while all else sleeps, Time is insurmountable.

— Vidura in Mahābhārata

Day 0 - Kālah

Friday Śukravāsaraḥ (शुक्रवासरः)

**Day 0 17:12 - 18:00 | Bhag (भग) Muhūrta | Quality of time
- Inauspicious ||**

17:12. Meanwhile, another story was unfolding about 2900 km away in the UAE. Dr. Hari, a visiting scholar at the Department of Religious Studies, Dedman College of Humanities and Sciences of Southern Methodist University, was wiping the whiteboard when students started trickling into the large hall.

Professor Hari was a Mathematician and an Indologist who had a deep desire to explore the concepts of time embedded in the ancient Sanāthana Dharma, its modern identity in Hinduism, its sacred beliefs and learnings, and its interpretations by the modern world. He had several publications to his credit. At 40, he was never interested in getting married or raising a family. He had met several ladies in the past, but their relationship would end soon.

He turned around and started observing the students. He checked his watch.

After a few minutes, he moved to the front of the large rectangular table in the center and looked at his audience. The big screen rolled down, and the projector was turned on. A chart depicting the Earth's timeline was displayed. He rechecked his watch.

17:18. “Welcome to today’s topic. Vedic Concept of Time - Kālāḥ!

Western researchers, through advances in science and technology, have determined Earth's history. Today, we understand that Earth's history is based on the geologic time scale, as determined by an international commission known as the ICS. ICS stands for the International Commission of Stratigraphy, if you are unfamiliar with it. The history of Earth, broken into large periods, epochs, and ages, is represented in an International Chronostratigraphic Chart. From the Precambrian period to the current Phanerozoic period... from the Hadean geologic eon to the Holocene geologic epoch... the age of Earth is around 4.6 billion years! This discovery and understanding are improving with the advancement of science and technology. And it is getting close to one of the oldest civilizations’ explanations of time.”

Hari, moving around the desk, walked towards the audience and looked around. “Any guess?”

A person in the audience said, “Mayan?”

17:24. Hari shook his finger and pulled his coat back. He walked back again behind the desk. “Well, not a bad start! The problem is that this Mesoamerican civilization is not very old. Historians believe that advanced Mayan cities emerged only around 750 BCE. Their pyramid-temple architectures have been impressive.” Then, Hari quizzically asked, “Heard of Chichén Itza?” and looked around the hall. He saw a few of them nodding their heads, and continued, “Coming to their calendar...does everyone remember the Mayan calendar that was in the news in 2012. They believed the world would end at 11:11 UTC on December 21, 2012. We are still alive, aren’t we? Their calendar did not scale!”

“Ok. Moving forward, does anyone know what type of calendar is in use today?”

Someone in the back row of seats said, “Gregorian?”

Hari said, “Good! The widely used Gregorian calendar is named after Pope Gregory XIII and was introduced in 1582. That is just in the last 500 years! Bummer! So, which is this mystery civilization that is beyond the timescale of the Mayans and Gregorian?”

Hari looked around again. After waiting in silence for thirty seconds, “Ok...Today, we are here to understand a perspective from an eastern civilization: that of ancient India! Not Native Indians in the US! But the ancestors of those who live in modern India today. How could these people, ancient Indians, without the use of advanced technology, determine the history of the earth, or even better, the Cycle of the Sun, more than 5000 years ago...,” Hari paused, and continued with an emphasis, “Or maybe even earlier? And, by their Rṣis who were transmitters of Vedic wisdom. They were the real scientists or time-travelers!”

17:30. Hari clicked the slide ticker and projected the slides on the screen

MANVANTARA - The age of Manu—Man.

He said slowly and loudly, “MAN-U-VAN-TARA. It literally means the age of Manu or Man. Maybe even the duration of his lifespan. Manu is a Proto-Indo-European construction for the modern-day word, Man. He was the first Manava—man according to the ancient Indians. Similar in principle to who...Christians refer to him as Adam. This Manu was considered the son of Lord Brahmā, who, according to the Indians, is the creator of the universe! For

those who are unfamiliar with Lord Brahmā, from ancient times to this day, followers of Sanāthana Dharma...or Hindus...as we know them today, believe in the Holy Trinity - Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. All three have a role to play in the creation, protection, and destruction, respectively, of the universe.”

Hari clicked the next slide and displayed a quote from Carl Sagan.

*It is the only religion in which the **time scales** correspond to those of modern scientific cosmology. Its cycles run from our ordinary day and night to a day and night of Brahma, 8.64 billion years long. Longer than the age of the Earth or the Sun and about half the time since the Big Bang.*

— Carl Sagan, Cosmos

17:36. “I am shifting gears now.” The picture of the Life Cycle of a Star appeared on the screen.

Hari continued, “The credit for this picture goes to NASA. It depicts the life cycle of a star. For this, we need to understand our Sun a little better. The Sun is an average star.” Muted laughter could be heard in pockets across the class.

“Astronomers place the age of our Sun at around 4.5 billion years. And they estimate that our Sun should shine for another 4.5-5.5 billion years. The Sun, like most other stars in the universe, is in its most stable form now. It is in the main sequence of its life, scientifically speaking. But we are not here to learn what science or astrophysics tells us, are

we? We want to understand what these Hindus knew... for several thousands, if not millions, of years ago, right?!”

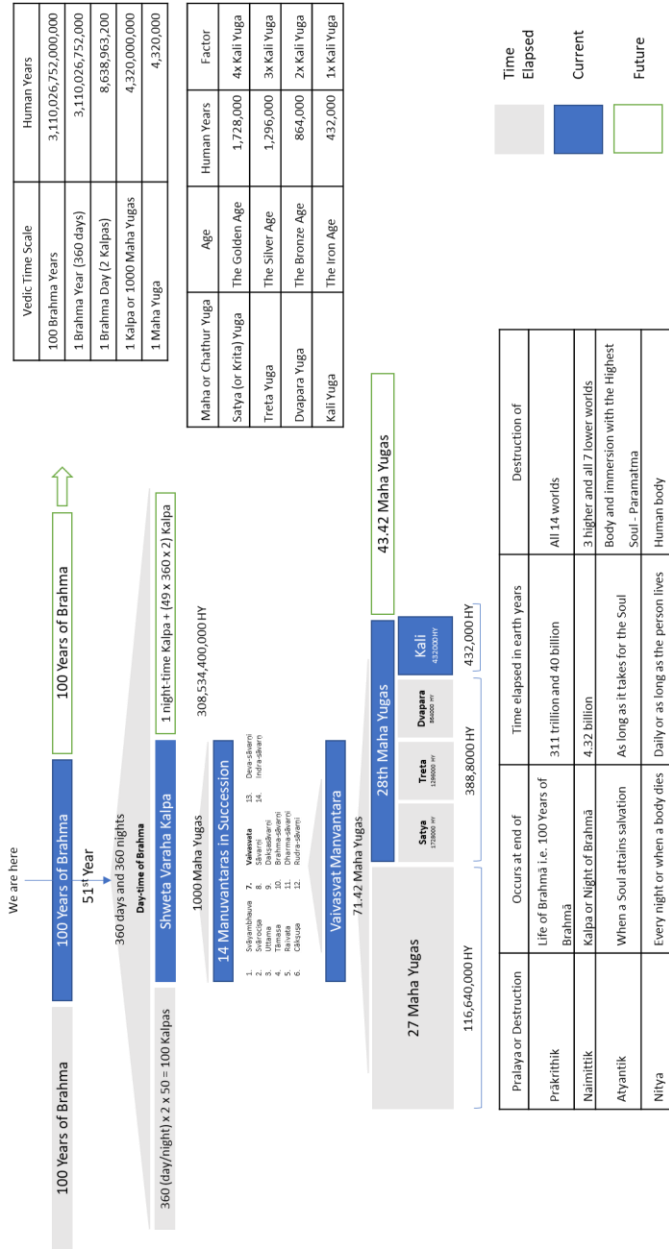
17:42. Just as he was about to move to the next slide, he noticed a person entering the hall and taking the center seat of the last row. The hall was dark at the back. He was wearing a dark colored suit. Hari thought he knew him from somewhere.

“To the Hindus, the ancient seers through their yogic powers broke time into Kalpas, Yugas, & Manvantaras. You will hear many Sanskrit words for the rest of the session. So, please bear with me! Sanskrit is an ancient language like Latin, that is spoken...sadly...by a relatively very...very small group of Indians today.” Hari paused for a few seconds and looked around again.

He continued (pointing to the screen), “The Vedic Time Scale in one word is...Grand! The human mind can't conceive of billions and trillions, and here is a scale—that provides a good view of the time elapsed, where we currently are, and the time remaining.

Let me start with this... as you see at the bottom of the scale, we are in the 28th Maha Yuga and within that Maha Yuga, specifically Kali Yuga. 5000 years have transpired in this Kali Yuga, and we have about 428,000 human years left to complete it. Four Yugas make up a Maha Yuga...about 4.32 million human years.

(On Screen)



17:48. He paused for a minute to see everyone's reaction and said, "Isn't this astounding? Is your head spinning? How could these ancient Hindus have fathomed such large numbers several thousand years ago? No evidence of advanced technologies!"

Hari paused and said with a smile, "Must be the aliens or Lemurians!"

Everyone started laughing.

"Ancient Indians attribute this to their treasure, the Vedas. Let us rehash some constructs differently. Going up this scale, about 71 Maha Yugas make up our current Manvantara called Vaivasvat.

According to science, this is nothing but one phase in the Sun's evolution into a Red Giant. The Hindus believed that each Kalpa comprises 14 successive Manus. Each reign of a Manu in general is referred to as a Manvantara. The 14 Manvantaras are shown at the bottom of the screen."

17:54. Hari paused and emphasized, "This is around 4.3 billion years. Isn't this close to what the scientists have been saying, the Sun will last around 4.5 billion years!"

Now, nothing is permanent, right? We do know that a star dies. Likewise, according to the Vedas, there are 4 types of destructions—*Prākṛithik Pralaya*, *Naimittik Pralaya*, *Atyantik Pralaya*, and *Nitya Pralaya*. At the end of the daytime of Brahmā...that is. 4.3 billion years... there would be the destruction of the 10 worlds. We will not be discussing the worlds in our lecture tonight. However, during this destruction, the Hindus believe the Earth will be destroyed. They refer to this destruction as Naimittika Pralaya."

Hari paused again to check everyone's face.

“Are you folks with me so far? This is where it gets interesting. What if I told you that we are in the...51st year of the life of the current Brahmā? Within that Brahmā year, we are in the first Brahmā day called Shweta Varaha Kalpa. Within that Brahmā day or Kalpa, we are in the 7th Manvantara...that is...Vaivasvata Manvantara. Within that Vaivasvata Manvantara, we are in the 28th Maha Yuga. Which all means...,” and Hari paused to make them think. He then said, “We are at the 454th Maha Yuga of the 1,000 Maha Yugas that make up the day of Brahmā!” Hari looked across the audience to gauge their perplexed faces. He continued, “Within this Maha Yuga, we are in Kali Yuga. More than 5000 human years have transpired since the Kali Yuga began. We have about 427,000 more years to go before this Yuga ends!”

Day 0 18:00 - 18:48 | Giriśa (गिरीश) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

18:00. Hari continued his presentation. “Hindus did not stop here. What we have discussed so far is a macro view of the timescale. They have the time calendar, known as the Panchang, broken down for a human day and night as well. The Panchang is a multi-dimensional calendar system that is developed based on lunar days and months, solar days and months and other stellar constellations.” Hari came around the table to the front, clasped his hands, and asked, “Does anyone know who created the telescope and when?”

A young man raised his hands. Hari went down the steps and walked towards the man. When he came closer, he said, “Please go ahead!”. The young man said, “Hans Lippershey,

generally speaking. Some charge that he stole the idea from Zacharias Jansen. A third person, Jacob Metius applied for a patent within weeks of Hans' application. So, the Netherlands decided to turn down the patent award requests from both Hans and Metius. But popular belief is that Galileo invented the telescope that could magnify 20 times better than the Dutch perspective glasses at that time."

Hari turned around and walked back to the stage, stopped in front of the table, turned around, and said, "Well, somebody has been paying attention in their history classes. Very good, young man." He looked up at the larger audience and asked loudly, gesturing with his hand, "So, tell me, how could a civilization before the invention of the telescope understand how many planets or constellations existed?" He looked around to check if they were still paying attention.

18:06. Hari turned back, pointing to the screen, lectured, "The Hindu calendar week, as it is known today...and how it is known after the 6 or so planets. Uranus and Pluto are missing from this list. Do you now think this civilization was ahead of its time?"

(On Screen)

Monday	Somavāsaraḥ	(सोमवासरः)	Moon
Tuesday	Maṅgalavāsaraḥ	(मङ्गलवासरः)	Mars
Wednesday	Budhavāsaraḥ	(बुधवासरः)	Mercury
Thursday	Guruvāsaraḥ	(गुरुवासरः)	Jupiter
Friday	Śukravāsaraḥ	(शुक्रवासरः)	Venus
Saturday	Śanivāsaraḥ	(शनिवासरः)	Saturn
Sunday	Ravivāsaraḥ	(रविवासरः)	Sun

“Now, here is where it gets incredulous. Their units of time were so advanced that a day of 24 hours was broken down further into thirty Muhūrtas, each lasting approximately forty-eight minutes. The first two Muhūrtas are reserved for spiritual awakening.

(On Screen)

60 Ghatis or 30 Muhūrta	(~24 hrs.)
1 Muhūrta = 2 Ghatis	(~48 mins)
1 Ghati or Nādī or Danda = 60 Vighati	(~24 mins)
1 Pala or Vighati or Vinādī = 60 Lipta	(~24.1056 s)
1 Lipta or Vipala = 60 Līkṣakas	(~0.401 s)
1 Līkṣaka = 60 Lava	(~6.696 ms)
1 Lava = 60 Renu	(~0.11 ms)
1 Renu = 60 Truti	(~1.86 μs)
1 Truti = 0.031 μs	

Hari faced the audience and observed their reaction. Most were still baffled by the depth of the measurements. He then spoke, “Today, the official calendar of India is the Saka Era Calendar and Chaitra 1, 1879 as the initial date of the newly reformed calendar system since 1957. But please remember, *Panchang* has been in existence since time immemorial.”

18:12. Hari checked his watch.

He wrapped up the evening’s presentation. “Ok...That should be enough to intrigue y’all today. We will meet next time to discuss coins and treasures of ancient India.”

A thunderous sound of claps followed the presentation. The person in the black suit slowly got up and walked out the door with the rest of the students! Hari noticed his departure with a sidelong glance as he shut down his laptop and projector.

Day 0 19:36 - 20:24 | Ahir-Budhnya (अहिर्बुध्न्य) Muhūrta
| Quality of time - Auspicious ||

20:18. Hari was scheduled to take the late evening Etihad flight back to Chennai at 21:30. He sat in the Etihad Lounge sipping A.D. Four Grain Straight Bourbon neat, while reading about Manvantaras and creation from Chapter 8 of the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam.

He was unaware of what Kālaḥ had in store for him, as he would chase an intransigent zealot across the labyrinthine ghats of Vārāṇasī.

Day 1 – The Keepers of Sanāthana Dharma

Saturday Śanivāsaraḥ (शनिवासरः)

Day 1 02:48 - 03:36 | Viṣṇu (विष्णु) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

02:48. Early that morning, Hari came out of the arrival lounge, after clearing airport customs and collecting his luggage, and saw his trusted driver waiting for him...He handed his bags to Ravi and followed him to his Mercedes S-class.

As soon as Hari got in, he removed his coat, felt relieved, and said to Ravi, “Chennai eppedi irke? Eppedi pa irke?” (*How is Chennai? How are you?*)

“Naan nalla irken, Saar! Chennai le onnum special illa. Vaiyil thaana athigum!” (*I am doing well, Sir! Nothing special is happening in Chennai. It’s very hot though!*) Ravi had kept a customary Bisleri water bottle and a copy of *The Times of India* on the back pouch of the passenger seat. Hari pulled out the newspaper and looked at the front page.

The ride to the house at Akkarai, East Coast Road (ECR) was quick and smooth at 3:15 in the morning. There was no traffic to worry about.

As a part of his daily routine, Viṣṇu Kali got up in the Viṣṇu Muhūrta and tried to complete his Ashtanga Yoga by 4:00.

Day 1 03:36 - 04:24 | Dyumadgadyuti (द्युमद्गति) Muhūrta

| Quality of time - Auspicious ||

03:36. The voices in Viṣṇu Kali's head did not stop and were getting louder by the day. He could hear...*Aano bhadra krtavo yantu vishwatah! (Let noble thoughts flow into me from every side, O Lord! Rgvedā, 1-89-i).*

The righteous King Viṣṇurata protected Dharma (the bull) from the clutches of Kali, who was about to cut off the last leg of the bull...the Satya (Truth). King Viṣṇurata is also known as King Parikshit, the one who questions the Lord's form before he is born. The other three legs of Dharma represented Tapas (penance), Saucha (cleanliness), and Daya (compassion).

I will restore King Parikshit's honor and King Yudhishtra's legacy! I will honor Brāhmaṇas and will speak Satya always, like Lord Rama, the son of mighty Suryavanshi King Dasharatha! Like Shibi I will give to lots of charities. May my glory and fame spread throughout Bhārat (present-day India) like that of King Bhārata, the son of Dushyanta. In archery, I will master archery and be like King Arjuna, the dearest friend of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. I will continue to build my courage to that of King Bali. May my devotion be like Prahlad for You O! Lord Narayana!

04:00. Viṣṇu Kali opened his eyes from deep thoughts. *I need to stop the medications. Focus!* He looked at the bull standing in front of him. He focused on the legs of the bull.

Don't worry! I will protect you. I only have seven days to restore the glory of King Viṣṇurata. Man no longer studies the Dharmaśāstras, Purāṇas, or the Vedas. Why does he not understand that, in Kali Yuga, he is no longer assured of a long life? His mind is clouded by his six arch enemies, Kama—desire, Krodha—anger, Lobha—greed, Moha—attachment, Mada—arrogance, and Matsarya—jealousy. But what I am about to do will shake every section of society, every political party, wake up every common man from slumber, and help them realize their old glory! The glory of King Manu!

Viṣṇu Kali began preparing himself for meditation, including cleansing, around 4:24, the Brahmā Muhūrta, the most auspicious time of the day. Before that, he had to make an important call.

As Hari reached his house, the wooden gate started to slide open slowly. The watchman immediately woke up from his sleep and quickly huddled by the gate side to welcome his master. It was always nostalgic for Hari whenever he returned to his ECR beach house. He remembered the years he spent with his dad diligently designing and constructing this state-of-the-art house!

04:12. As soon as Hari entered his house, the phone rang. He looked at his watch. *Who calls at this hour?*

Hari picked up the receiver and said, “Hello...Hari speaking!”

“Namaste Hari! I know who you are. So, please listen to what I am about to tell you for the next few minutes!”

“Excuse me! Who are you?” Hari yelled.

“It doesn't matter who I am! All that matters is you have limited Muhūrtas....” Hari could hear light laughter at the other end. “You need to find the Seal of Manu!”

Hari stood frozen with the receiver close to his ears, listening intently. *Seal of Manu...How could this person know about the seal? It has been missing for over 5000 years since Śrī Kṛṣṇa's period...a mark of the beginning of the Kali Yuga!*

“I will call you again to provide you with clear instructions to secure this Seal of Manu from the wrong hands. You are not ready now.”

Hari could hear a few clicks at the other end, and the caller hung up.

04:18. Viṣṇu Kali's eyes meditated on the *Gāyatrī Mantra*. After a few minutes, he fell into deep thought. *Now, it is the Brahmā Muhūrta...the most auspicious time in the morning! I must begin my prayers for the Savitr.*

— ψ —

04:18. Meanwhile, Hari wondered...*That was the weirdest call I have ever received!*

He could not sleep. He took the stairs to the upper level where his bedroom was located. Two electronic panels were located by the door. The left electronic touchscreen panel controlled the room and balcony lights, the room curtains, and the glass door separating the bedroom from the balcony. The right electronic touch screen panel displayed the inside and outside temperature, with a five-day weather forecast. It controlled the temperature inside the bedroom, the music that could be played inside the bedroom, and music on the balcony separately. He touched the curtain's button and

watched it slide open slowly to one side. It was still dark, with a shade of moonlight penetrating the room slowly. He then touched another button and watched the glass door to the balcony slide open. The relaxing sound of the waves could be heard distinctly. He threw his coat on the bed, slipped out of his jeans, put on shorts, removed his shirt, and remained bare-chested.

Day 1 04:24 - 05:12 | Brahmā (ब्रह्म) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Very Auspicious ||

04:24. Stepping out onto the balcony, he began to feel the wind hit his face gently. He sat on the chair and picked up the flask, containing hot *chai*, next to him. His housemaid knew about his return and prepared it for him. He poured the hot *chai* into a green cup next to the flask. *The green cup was given to their Dad by his sister when she was in Grade 6. Memories!* He tried to relax and forget the bizarre call. He picked up his iPad, initiated the smart room app, played the Purusha Sukta, followed by Aditya Hridayam, at a low volume. He was preparing himself to witness Mother Nature's remarkable feat - Sunrise! Sipping hot *chai*, he closed his eyes for a few seconds to appreciate the gentle breeze and sound of the waves hitting the east coast shoreline.

04:30. *A new day begins, a ray of hope or the beginning of chaos*, he wondered. After a few minutes, his tiredness got the better of him. He fell asleep.

Day 1 06:00 - 06:48 | Rudra (रुद्र) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

06:00. When the fresh rays of sunlight hit his face, Hari woke up and stretched out to reach for his red Oakley shades. He

then checked his watch and slowly walked into the bathroom to brush his teeth. After brushing his teeth, he went closer to the electronic touch screen panel in the bathroom. It had 6 spray modes for the shower - full body, pulsating rain, power spray, trickle, rotating, and standard. He chose the pulsating rain mode and played light morning jazz music in the background. He stepped into the shower slowly, allowing his hands to get wet first, followed by his legs and finally his entire body. The bizarre call was still playing in his head repeatedly. The steam from the hot water was soothing and relaxing for him.

— ψ —

06:00. Meanwhile, about a thousand km away in Mumbai, a clandestine meeting was about to happen in the Presidential Suite at The Oberoi hotel. The 2,056 sq ft suite was located on one of the top floors and tiled in flawless, white Thassos marble. The suite opened to a life-size bronze statue next to the door and a beautiful black piano in the living room. The living space, workspace, and dining room had ocean views. The suite had a 24-hour butler service, with a separate entrance, to provide an exquisite in-room dining experience. In the dining room, a brass telescope looked out at the ocean.

There were two consecutive loud knocks on the suite door. A soft female voice from inside the suite said, “If one desires clear sight...One cannot place one’s trust in reflections.” A six-foot-tall man, in mid-forties, was waiting outside wearing an expensive William Westmancott Ultimate Bespoke 3-piece suit and Stefano Bemer formal shoes. He was one of the leading industrialists in the country, with a net worth of \$20 billion!

He replied, “The way in is...The only way out.” The protocol had been satisfied. The door opened, and the industrialist was ushered into the Presidential Suite by a tall, slim lady, clad in an orange saree. He sat on the L-shaped sofa next to the long window, which displayed an ocean view and a beautiful Marine Drive, a 3.6 km boulevard in south Mumbai, popularly known as the Queen’s Necklace.

06:06. As soon as he sat down, another knock was heard. The suite doors opened, and a man wearing a black bandi, sleeveless half-jacket, and cotton kurta-pajama was ushered in. His bodyguards did not enter the suite with him. As soon as he stepped in, as a mark of respect, the industrialist, unbuttoning his suit, stood up from his seat and with folded hands, greeted him. “Namaste, Honorable Minister!”

The minister, a little over 5 ft 10 inches tall, was probably in the mid-to-late sixties. He sported salt-and-pepper hair on the head and was clean-shaven. He wore comfortable rimless metal-frame Oakley glasses. Despite being the most charismatic leader in the world, he came to power with his share of scandals and controversies. Nevertheless, the country felt rejuvenated with a party that had infused new, young, dynamic blood, having no political or rich family background, a sharp contrast to the dynasty politics.

06:12. The next knock was heard within a few minutes. Protocol was duly followed, and a young man was ushered in. Both men, the industrialist and the minister, stood up from their seats and, with folded hands, greeted the young man. “Namaste Paṇḍitji!”

The Paṇḍitji was neatly dressed in a well-tucked long-sleeve sky-blue formal shirt, khaki cotton pants, a black leather belt, and shiny black leather shoes. He wore a stubble beard with

a chic hairstyle, and his clothes fit perfectly on a well-toned, lean body. He had undergone extensive studies in the four Vedas, along with traditional schooling. He was a Sanskrit Scholar and a PhD. in Religion, with a focus on Hinduism.

06:18. This time, there was a loud knock on the door. Again, the protocol was duly followed. A group of seven men was slowly ushered in. The three men who were already inside the suite, in reverence, lowered their heads with folded hands as the men walked in.

“Our humble Praṇāms to the *Saptarṣis*!” The minister greeted the seven *Rṣis* - Kashyapa, Atri, Vasistha, Viśvāmitra, Gautama, Jamadagni, and Bharadvaja as they walked in. That was not their public name, though!

These *Saptarṣis* were considered eternal—no one knew their real age—although it is believed that they have been around since the beginning of the current *Manvantara*...around 120.5 million years! They all still look young, defying their age! Followers of *Sanāthana Dharma* believe in reincarnation, in which a soul re-enters a new body, known as *Punarjanma*, after the existing body perishes. This process is cyclic, an endless *saṃsāra* or wandering in the human world, unless one attains liberation. The *Saptarṣis* were enlightened souls who could realize who they were in their previous births and their purpose for existence. After all, they were *Manasaputras* from *Brahmā*, the creator, himself. Every *Manvantara* has a different set of *Saptarṣis* to protect the welfare of humans.

Now, the ten men were waiting eagerly for their host. They belonged to a secret society dating back several million years, much older than popular secret societies such as *The*

Knights Templar, The Freemasons, The Illuminati, The Skull and Bones, The Rosicrucian, Bilderberg, and The Elders of Zion. Their date of origin is unclear. In the past, they have met only under extraordinary circumstances—that had a significant impact on Sanāthana Dharma, as followed since the first man, Manu.

06:24. There was another knock on the door. The lady ushered in the final guest for the morning and left the room through the private butler entrance. All stood up with folded hands.

The Saptarṣis started chanting a Vedic hymn from the Taittiriya Aranyakam of the Yajurveda, loudly,

Rajadhi Rajaya Prasahya Sahine	(O! King of Kings, we praise Thee)
Namo Vayam Vai Sravanaya Kurmahe	(Who is the giver of all victories)
Samekaman Kama Kamaya Mahyam	(Who is the fulfiller of all desires)
Kamesvaro Vai Sravano Dadatu	(Please bless me with wealth)
Kuberaya Vai Sravanaya	(To fulfill all our desires, Oh, Kubhera, we praise Thee)
Maha Rajaya Namah!	(Salutations to the King of Kings)

He was their leader, the Mahārāja! He moved forward towards the single vacant chair facing the other men. The venerable Viśvāmitra said, “Praṇāms, Mahārāja! Descendant of Arka—The Sun! Descendant of Vaivasvat Manu! Progenitor of Manavas for the seventh Manvantara! Savior of Saptarṣis! Descendant of the great King Ikshvaku, of the Suryavanshi clan!”

— ψ —

06:24. After showering and getting ready, Hari stepped outside onto the balcony and pressed the intercom.

“Good morning, Saar!” said Sita.

“Sita! Breakfast office-ike anpu! Ennike toast, butter, and strawberry jam with hot chai vennum!” (*Send breakfast to my office. I want toast, butter, and strawberry jam with some hot Chai!*)

Today’s call was bizarre. The inception of an adventure was planted in his mind. The only problem was that he was searching for a needle in a haystack—a haystack full of Dharmaśāstras such as the Śrīmad Bhāgavatam or any other sacred texts.

— ψ —

06:36. Looking at everyone, the Mahārāja said, “Namaste! Glory to Śrī Kṛṣṇa! Glory to Lord Rāma!”

He then looked at the seven men, beginning with Rishi Viśvāmitra. Lowering his head and with folded hands, he said, “Praṇāms to the venerable Viśvāmitra! Descendant of the Chandravanshi clan. Son of the great King Kusha! Blessed by Brahmā, our creator! O! Venerable Sage who gave us the Gāyatrī, the greatest mantra to protect humanity, dedicated to the Sāvitr, Our Sun! Seer of the third mandala of Ṛgvedā! It is an honor to see you!” The rishi was pleased. He smiled and raised his right palm, blessing the Mahārāja. Then, he moved over to each rishi, one at a time, and greeted them.

“Praṇāms to the venerable Vasiṣṭha! Guru to Śrī Rāma! Praṇāms to one who shines brightly in Saptarṣis Mandal or Ursa Major constellation! It is an honor to see you!” The rishi

was pleased. He smiled and raised his right palm, blessing the Mahāraja.

“Praṇāms to the venerable Kaśyapa, son of Marīci, who is the Manasaputra of Brahmā! O! Venerable father of Devās, Asuras, Yakṣas, Rākṣasas, Gandharvas, Varuṇa, Garuda, Piśācas! It is an honor to see you!” The rishi was pleased. He came forward and hugged his great...great...great... grandson! He smiled and raised his right palm, blessing the Mahāraja.

06:42. “Praṇāms to the venerable Atri! O! Manasaputra of Brahmā! Venerable father of Chandra, Dattātreya, Durvasa! Seer of the fifth mandala of Ṛgvedā! O! Venerable Sage with Mother Anusūyā, blessed Lord Rāma and Mother Sita! It is an honor to see you!” The rishi was pleased. He smiled and raised his right palm, blessing the Mahāraja.

“Praṇāms to the venerable Gautama! Descendant of Rishi Angiras! Lord Śiva’s Trimbakeshwar, descended for you! It is an honor to see you!” The rishi was pleased. He smiled and raised his right palm, blessing the Mahāraja.

After greeting the Saptarṣis, the Mahāraja addressed the group, “I, descendant of the great, Vaivasvat Manu, the always truthful, *Satyavrata*, who was son of the eternal Vivasvāna, son of Sage Kashyapa, and descendant of our creator and father, Lord Brahmā, am honored to be here tonight.

We are in Varaha Kalpa, the first day of the 51st year of Brahmā. And, within that Kalpa, we are currently in the 28th Chaturyuga of the 7th Manvantara. At the end of the Caksusa Manvantara, when all the three worlds were being deluged by water, Lord Narayana took the form of a fish (as his tenth

Avatāra) to rescue my ancestor, Vaivasvat Manu, several millions of years ago.

Day 1 06:48 – 07:36 | Āhi (आहि) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

06:48. Traditionally, many Hindus believe that there are ten avatars of Lord Viṣṇu, the protector. However, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam states that Lord Viṣṇu had innumerable avatars. Śrī Balarāma and Śrī Kṛṣṇa were born among the Vrsnis as avatars. The last avatar, Kalki, will be born towards the end of Kali Yuga, before the Chaturyuga will be dissolved and the 29th Chaturyuga will commence in the current Manvantara.”

He then looked at the Saptarṣis and lowered his head and, with folded hands as a gesture of gratitude, said, “Then, my great ancestor, with the help of the Saptarṣis, created humanity. He then laid down simple codes or laws for humans to live in harmonious and peaceful coexistence. He laid down laws for Ashrama, Varṇa, Purushartha, and other duties. We know these laws as Manusmṛti. Shishyas lived with their Gurus at their ashrams, or Gurukulas. The Smṛtis were remembered and passed from one generation to another, from one yuga to another, from one Manvantara to another, through verbal teaching at these Gurukulas. Manusmṛti was never written down!”

Everyone nodded in agreement. He continued.

06:54. Since the beginning of this Kalpa, about 120 million human years have transpired. As time elapsed, as Manvantaras and Yugas progressed, humans forgot their original goals in life. The Varṇas have decayed in value since then and have started attacking one another. The Kṣatriyas

became wicked, and injustice was prevalent everywhere. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was born to usher in the next Yuga, Kali Yuga! We had the great war, the Mahābhārata, around 3137 BCE. At the end of the war, billions perished. Kingdoms were immediately thrown into chaos without strong leaders. Evil was rampant. The knowledge of the Vedas and Dharma almost died. Dharmaraja was deeply saddened by the situation. So, the Pandavas met with several Rsis and elders to discuss the fate of the kingdom and Dharmaśāstras. After several deliberations, with the blessings of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, it was agreed that Sage Veda Vyāsa would shoulder the biggest responsibility for the welfare of humans, of condensing the Vedas into four branches. Another concern for Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the elders was that the shades of Kali were slowly becoming apparent in every walk of life and anticipated its full strength in a few decades after the war. The original Laws of Manu could no longer be remembered in their old glory, and the societal framework was being broken. These laws were distorted as they passed on from one generation to another within the Kali Yuga. Every Jāti within and across Varṇa started treating each other with disrespect. Every Jāti became protective of their customs, culture and passed it on through birth lineage. Since Kali filled everyone’s heart and mind with money, gold, and lust, every Varṇa tried to move away from their karmas and claimed superiority based on their birth into a Varṇa. Do we not see all this today?”

The Mahārāja looked at everyone slowly. Some nodded, while others had grim faces.

07:00. “Many felt that it was Śrī Kṛṣṇa who should guide them during the Kali Yuga. He had assured them that several

saints would be born throughout the Kali Yuga to protect the Vedas and spread bhakti!

Before the Pandavas left for the heavens, they ruled the kingdom wisely. They ensured that the people of Bhārata, understood their Varṇa clearly, appreciated other Jāti, and respected each other regardless of their birth or Jāti. Since Kali Yuga's birth on 18th February 3102 BCE, humanity began its final decay.

Several centuries into Kali Yuga, a dharmic King decided to inscribe the Manusmṛti on a copper plate. Many advisors vehemently opposed the idea of inscription, more so out of fear of falling into the wrong hands. Finally, they agreed that there would be a clandestine group of men and women from each Varṇa to recognize and protect the copper plates. Thus, the Seal of Manu was created.

With the assistance of the Saptarṣis, four leaders, one from each of the Varṇa, were identified to preserve and protect the Seal of Manu. The Keepers, then, identified one hundred and seven people from their Varṇa, thus totaling one hundred and eight in each Varṇa. A Kṣatriya was identified from their clan to lead the Keepers.

07:06. Nobody knows who created The Keepers or when it came into existence. The Keepers have protected the Seal, other secrets, and treasures of Sanāthana Dharma for the last five thousand years. During this time, the social order was led by people with false ideologies, beliefs, or for personal gain. Numerous Saints were born during this time, yet the powers of Kali kept the people in the dark.

All Jātis oppressed one another. Some Jātis were ill-treated so much that they started hating the Manusmṛti. To make it

worse, the continuous onslaught by the Mlecchás—foreigners destroyed the societal fabric that was re-created during the rule of the Pandavas. Our women were forced to convert to the beliefs or ideologies of the Mlecchás. Our temples were destroyed. Our scriptures were burnt. Mlecchás built their temples over ours. Our identity was slowly being erased.”

Then, the Mahārāja choked, “Our Smṛtis were broken!”

“We have gathered tonight as the guardians...to discuss a grave situation...The Seal of Manu is missing! We need to find it.”

Suddenly, the silence in the room was broken with sounds of concern and whispers.

— ψ —

07:06. Meanwhile, Hari dialed a number to an old friend at the Archeological Survey of India.

“Good morning, Sharma! Hope I have not woken you up? How is everything going?” said Hari.

“Hey Hari! What a surprise! I am doing well. I am wide awake! In fact, I was planning to call you. How was your trip?” replied Sharma.

“Well, I had an awesome trip. This time around, it was a lecture on our concept of time, or the Hindu Time Scale. I got back this morning. Anyways, let me keep this quick! I did not want to bother you until later this week. But I got a weird anonymous call this morning. The caller was rambling about a Seal of Manu,” said Hari and paused.

Raj replied, “Hmm...Seal of Manu? Seems like we have a religious fanatic running loose every day. You know, I have

been quite intrigued with ancient wisdom and treasures. But I have never heard of any such seal.”

Hari replied, “I, too, have never heard of any Seal of Manu. But the caller was quite convincing. Anyway, I wanted to check with you as you are a collector of archaic and ancient treasures. I have to go now. Let’s plan to catch up soon, buddy. I should be flying to Delhi for a conference in 2 weeks.”

Sharma replied, “Sure, take care, buddy!” and ended the call.

07:12. Hari walked over to his office on the lower floor and gently touched the electronic touch screen panel. The curtains slid open to the side and allowed the sunlight to enter the room. The tea and toast were kept on his desk. He glanced at the sacred book. Śrīmad Bhāgavatam was resting on a rosewood foldable wooden bookstand by the wall. There were no pictures of Gods or Gurus as he considered Śrīmad Bhāgavatam as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Himself. He lit an incense stick and rotated his arms, holding the fragrant incense stick, three times around the book. The caller’s words resonated again in his head. He then prayed for the next fifteen minutes by repeating the *Japa—Dwadasakshari Mantra*, silently with closed eyes.

Taking a cup and pouring tea into it, he wondered, Śrīmad Bhāgavatam references Manu several times on the creation of the universe. But, not once, does it discuss anything about a seal or handing something over for eternity. This must be somebody’s wildest imagination.

He then walked towards a tall white shelf that contained all types of books. His index finger ran through the book titles until he reached a section that contained books on Sanāthana

Dharma, Dharmaśāstras, and commentaries by various Saints.

— ψ —

07:12. Meanwhile, Sharma stared at the mysterious small cube-shaped object on his table. Like Hari, he had a deep interest in Vedic scriptures and ancient wisdom. He was a public figure and well-known in elite circles. Over time, his interest led him to make some acquaintances, which gradually evolved into a membership of a clandestine group that maintained and protected divine archaic artifacts. Sharma was also a collector. His secret desire to possess specific divine artifacts placed him in direct conflict with this group.

Today, he had a treasure—an object that could change the beliefs of Hindus. He picked it up to feel how much it weighed. He concluded that it must have weighed less than one hundred grams. It was black in color. He conducted a few tests earlier and noticed that it had some copper, nickel, and maybe zinc. The creator of this object must have intended to protect it from corrosion. It was a type of bronze alloy and must have dated around 3300-2800 BCE.

Indus Valley Civilization is generally perceived to have flourished around 3300-1200 BCE in the Northwestern parts of South Asia or stretching from present-day north-east Afghanistan to much of Pakistan and north-western parts of India, such as Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Haryana.

07:18. There were many conflicts in the commonly perceived historical references of societies and classes. He pondered over Manvantaras and the presiding Manus.

If Vaivasvat Manu lived several million years ago, Manusmṛti could have been much older. If this object is the Seal of Manu, then it should have been made of a material that was from a different period. How could it be made of a metallurgical alloy...Bronze? Bronze Civilizations do not appear until 3300 BCE. So, was the Indus Valley Civilization older? Was Bronze discovered much...much earlier?

It did not make any sense.

The object had a protrusion on each face. Each protrusion seemed more like a stamp and had a different shape. Sharma pressed a paper against the protrusion slowly and used a black lead pencil to etch the shape. He did this for all protrusions, looked at the paper, and observed the six etched images. He was able to figure out their shapes but was unsure of their significance. He then folded the paper and placed it in a shoe box. Next, he carefully bubble-wrapped the object before placing it in the same shoebox.

Then, he got up and walked over to the coffee table and kept the shoebox below it.

As soon as he kept the shoebox, Sharma felt uneasy about Hari's call. *How would anyone know about the object?* Instinctively, he texted to a number—*The fate of humanity rests in a shoebox under the coffee table*—and deleted it after the message was sent.

07:24. He then went to the kitchen to make some black tea. He came back to his home office and faced the bookshelf,

thinking about the object and the call he was about to make, while sipping his tea.

Sharma finished his tea and kept the cup on the desk to make a call.

When the person at the other end picked up the phone, Sharma said, “Hari Om! Śrī Gurubhyo Namah! Namaste Guruji! I got a call from a friend inquiring about the Seal of Manu. Somebody called him about it, and he thinks it was a prank call. I just want to inform you that I have everything under control, Guruji!” He heard a few words from the other end and disconnected the call.

He did not realize that there was an imminent danger outside his home office. A man had furtively entered his flat when Sharma was about to make the call and walked close to his office. He then stood quietly listening to this call. While Sharma’s back was towards the glass door to his home office, he felt a pinprick around his neck. He then, holding his palm over his neck, turned around to look at his murderer. As he slipped down, holding onto the desk behind him, he muttered the divine name of Ram several times. The murderer then took Sharma’s phone and searched the room for a few minutes. He then left the apartment with nothing.

— ψ —

07:24. Meanwhile, Mahārāja’s speech was interrupted by a call. “If you will excuse me, I must take this call.” He listened to it intently for a minute. Then, as quickly as he had received the call, he whispered a few words.

“Only the wise cherish what is good, while the fools cherish what is dear...to his heart! Hari Om!” A click was heard at the other end.

Day 1 - The Demand

Saturday Śanivāsaraḥ (शनिवासरः)

**Day 1 09:12–10:00 | Vasu (वसु) Muhūrta | Quality of time
- Auspicious |**

09:12. A group of high-ranked intelligence officers from the R&AW and other intelligence agencies in the country were in an emergency meeting discussing a letter. The projector played the contents of the letter while printed copies were being handed over to the officers. “Take a few minutes to read the contents of the letter,” said the presiding R&AW Secretary loudly.

Om Gurubhyo Namah!

Dear Prime Minister,

At the time of our independence, our country had a total population of 361.08 million. Today, it stands at 1.21 billion, out of which more than 600 million young people are below the age of 25, and more than 30 babies are born every minute. Our young people could be a powerful engine of economic growth and development, provided we manage to modernize our education system, raise the educational attainment levels, and provide adequate job opportunities to our younger generation. However, after 70 years of independence, based on the health of our people, the level of educational attainment, and their standard of living, we are ranked 134 in the Human Development Index.

I have three demands –

First, *make the word Caste illegal and remove it completely from the Constitution*. We must embrace all Hindus, Jātis, and their culture equally.

Second, *abolish the identification, classification, grouping, or ranking of Jātis* as Scheduled Castes, OBCs, forward, upper, backward, lower, or depressed. All citizens of Bhārat belonging to any religion or Jāti should be equal in the eyes of the law and Constitution.

Finally, the most important demand, *abolish the reservation system*! Implement a process to identify, protect, uplift, or advance specific individuals, children, women, or families who are economically weaker based on income or wealth. Do not identify by Jātis! Implement a law that will make it illegal, with the highest jail sentence, for any type of institution - schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, government entities, or corporations to ask or use an applicant's caste as a qualification criterion or take bribes to influence the admission process and seek access into any institution.

There is anger among our children today. Our Varṇa system is broken. Some of our leaders who wrote the Constitution were vehemently opposed to the Varṇa system being included. Yet, another group of leaders preferred a reservation system, a system that provides access to seats in various legislatures, to jobs in government, and enrollment in higher educational institutions, to the underprivileged sections of society. The original intentions of the reservation system may have been noble in uplifting sections of society, but over time, it has been abused. It is a big thorn for our great country. Our future generation, our children, are the

biggest sufferers. This reservation system plants seeds of hatred or division in them based on caste. Many escape the system by paying bribes, falsifying their caste, or going abroad. The seed of hatred is implanted in them when their dreams are shattered because of their caste!

Nobody's Varṇa or Jāti is superior or inferior! Everyone should be treated equitably and fairly in the eyes of the law! Not everyone will be pleased, but at least everyone will be judged by their capabilities and not by their Varṇa or Jāti! For economically weaker sections of society, institute a fair process of evaluating a person's background based on economic capacity. Not their Varṇa or Jāti!

You must take my request seriously, or you will soon see the mayhem I create across the country!

A Citizen of Bhārat!

...

The members deliberated for thirty minutes. The meeting was adjourned until later that evening.

Day 1 18:48 - 19:36 | Ajapāda (अजपाद) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious |

18:48. Everyone now started pointing their phones towards the biggest āratī of the evening - the burning boat. The Gods were sleeping!

— ψ —

19:06. The members who met in the morning to review the letter were invited virtually for an emergency meeting. While the discussions were in progress, the Secretary requested everyone to switch on their TV. The scenes at Vārāṇasī were

being played on the TV. These were video recordings from phones of some people who were at the ghat. Every news channel had some exclusive phone video recording. All of them showed a burning boat heading towards the ghat, and then people screaming and jumping off. The recording stopped, and the news anchor started speaking, “There has been a bizarre case of kidnappings across the country. Six...I repeat, six unrelated people and no one or no group has claimed responsibility so far!” Then the six photos appeared on the screen. There were four men and two women. The images and photos were displayed repeatedly.

— ψ —

19:24. Meanwhile, Hari was busy preparing presentation contents for his next class when he was interrupted by his watchman. “Sir! Someone by the name of Arjun is here, and he wants to meet you urgently.” Hari wondered why his friend was here this late in the evening. “Let him in!”

Arjun’s grandfather was considered a Kaoboy. He was one of the few hand-picked by R. N. Kao when the R&AW was created on 21 September 1968. His father was also an R&AW agent. There was never a hesitation in Arjun’s mind from a young age to become a spy. But he never appreciated his father’s long absence from home. His inspiration to join R&AW could be attributed to his mother, who held the fort in his father’s absence. She would tell him stories of his father’s adventures in neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh during the 1971 war. Slowly, this became an inspiration for him to join R&AW. Arjun and Hari were school buddies. While Hari developed an interest in Mathematics and Vedic heritage, Arjun was now a highly ranked Senior Field Officer in the R&AW and was widely recognized for his

accomplishments across intelligence agencies in the country.

19:30. Hari walked over to receive his friend, “Hey buddy! It has been a long time since we met. What brings you to Chennai?”

“Can you offer me some tea before you interrogate me?”

Hari shouted, “Sita, can you bring me a pot of green tea?”

“Anje Nimisham Saaaaar!” (*In 5 mins, Sir!*)

Hari pointed upwards and said, “Let’s go upstairs and sit by the pool.” Arjun and Hari walked upstairs to the infinity pool.

Day 1 19:36 - 20:24 | Ahir-Budhnya (अहिर्बुध्न्य) Muhūrta
| Quality of time - Auspicious ||

19:36. Arjun lowered his coolers on the table. “Hari, we have a national crisis!”

“What are you saying?”

“Have you not watched the TV?”

“I just came back from Abu Dhabi today morning.”

Hari switched on the poolside TV. Headlines kept flashing *Murder at Vārāṇasī!* Photographs and video images of the burning boat at Vārāṇasī appeared on TV. Hari was shocked to see the images.

“What’s going on, dude?”

Sita walked by with the teapot and two cups and kept the tray on the table. Arjun patiently waited until Sita left them.

19:42. “The nation is on the highest alert. I just came from a meeting. We were shown a bizarre letter from some lunatic who wants the Prime Minister to enact a law to abolish the reservation system. Apparently, that letter came about 10 days ago and was not taken seriously by the PMO. Typically, PMO receives a lot of threats. They are reviewed for genuineness and criticality. Somehow, this letter skipped the usual protocol. You are watching the lunatic’s works!”

“Damn! Tell me a little more about the letter if it is not confidential.”

Arjun smirked. “R&AW believes you can help us.”

“How is that?”

Arjun pulled out an envelope and handed it over to him. Hari poured himself a fresh cup of tea and carefully analyzed the envelope. It had orange and red smudges on the back. Hari opened the envelope, started reading the contents, and said, “Arjun, how do you know if the person is a lunatic or if this is one person’s work. It could be any religious group or a political party, or a country creating the mayhem. In fact, we have neighbors who want to destabilize us.”

Arjun had a quick reply, “To me, he or they are a lunatic!”

“Wait! How do you say the person is a—he? To me, this person seems to have a clear objective in mind. The introduction seems carefully drafted without implicating anyone. I only get the feeling that this may not be his agenda but that of some master mind,” said Hari.

Arjun said, “Agreed. This Ashok Kumar could be he or she or them. I used he for convenience, Hari. We are now waiting for further instructions.”

19:48. Hari was puzzled now and said, “Hmm...so, why did you come to me? How can I help?”

“I have been tasked with forming a team to investigate this. This is a matter of National Security due to the nature of the demands made by the person. The letter discusses the caste and reservation system. You have done some progressive work around Sanāthana Dharma. Your addition to the team could be an asset during the investigations! Moreover, it was my recommendation!” said Arjun with a smile.

Hari was not convinced and said, “Arjun, I am just a professor of Mathematics. I do have a few works to my credit that may touch upon Sanāthana Dharma. But those are my observations and interpretations. Give me some time to think about your offer!”

Arjun said, “First, we do not have enough time. Second, it is not an offer, my friend. It is a service to this great country.”

19:54. The phone rang. Hari did not recognize the number. He picked up his mobile and walked over to a side to talk.

“This is Dr Hari... Yes, I know Sharma...I spoke to him this morning.” After listening to the caller, his face became grim. He started screaming, “How did it happen?” There was a pause as he listened to the caller. “Ok, I will be there by the first available flight.”

Arjun was concerned. “What happened?” Hari explained that the caller was an inspector from the New Delhi police. His friend Sharma had been murdered. “Arjun, I need to take the next available flight to New Delhi.”

Arjun was happy and said, “That’s convenient. That’s where I was going to take you! I will wait. Get dressed and packed up.” Hari stared at him.

20:00. Then he started walking back inside. He suddenly stopped and turned around, and said, “I am more than happy to help, considering the strange situation we are in. But, on one condition, there will be no public announcement about my identity or involvement.”

Arjun felt it was an easy condition to fulfill, and said, “Fair enough! So, what are your initial thoughts about the letter?”

Hari was quick to reply, “Do what he says! It’s high time we did it,” and walked inside to get ready.

20:18. About twenty minutes later, Hari and Arjun walked out of the house and got into a Black Mahindra SUV. As soon as they both were seated, the SUV sped towards a desolate area of Tambaram Air Force base.

Day 1 20:24 - 21:12 | Puṣya (पुष्य) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious

20:24. Arjun and Hari were seated comfortably.

Arjun broke the silence, “You do understand what kind of chaos it can create. Don’t you?”

“What!”

“You said do what he says.”

Hari looked out the window and started, “Hmm. We have three hours in the flight together. Let me start with a historical context. The existence of our current problem could be traced back to 1772, when our British Colonial Masters felt that the European common law system could not

be implemented in colonial India. From their perspective, during the colonial period, there were two major population groups. One group comprised followers of Sanāthana Dharma, including Sikhs, Jains, Parsis, and Buddhists. The other group was the Muslims, even though there were several denominations within them. Now, the Muslims had a version of Sharia law, Fatawa-e-Alamgiri. This was a pre-colonial law enacted by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, based on Sunni Hanafi Islam's Sharia Law. Our colonial masters codified this into Islamic Law. They also felt that Hindus needed a law and decided to derive the substance of the Hindu Law from an ancient manuscript, a Dharmaśāstra, called the Manusmṛti. This Manusmṛti is written in a poetry style that describes the ashrama, Varṇa, Purushartha, among other topics.

20:30. Now, our colonial masters were adept at divide and conquer for the last 200 years. I hope you remember Lord Macaulay's infamous address to the British Parliament on 2nd February 1835. We are, unfortunately, children of Macaulay's mindset. They decided to incorporate the Manusmṛti based on their translation, which may also have been corrupted over time by various interpretations and beliefs before it got to Macaulay, as the core substance in drafting the Hindu Law.

They implemented a legal pluralism where people of different religions could coexist in the same region but were subjected to different civil and criminal laws based on the religion of the plaintiff and defendant. This was when Pandora's Box was opened.”

Arjun nodded. He was a history major at college. He decided to play along. “Why should there be only one single uniform

law across the country? Why does everyone have to follow a Hindu Law?” There are Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians, and, among others, atheists!”

Hari was even more excited to discuss this further. “Arjun, what is your religion?”

Arjun angrily retorted, “We have only one religion...We are Indian! In our line of belief and work, our names may differ, our food habits may differ, our festivals may differ, but we bow down to *Bhārat Mata* only.”

“Sorry, buddy! I wasn’t expecting anything less from you. And, by no means, did I question your loyalty or integrity based on your name or belief.”

20:36. Arjun got the gist and remarked, “Get to the point!”

He continued, “Our neighbors, Pakistan & Bangladesh. Their laws are based on Sharia Law and are uniform across their population. We do not agree with their treatment of minorities. However, our minorities get the same treatment or even better than the majority. Our first problem is uniformity.”

Arjun asked, “Are we not secular?”

Hari laughed loudly and said, “In the post-independence era, secular is the most abused word in the political dictionary. When India became independent in 1947, and the constitution was written in 1950, most of the legal code was inherited from the colonial era, personal laws of Anglo-Hindu and Anglo-Muslim laws. Article 44 of the Constitution mandates a uniform civil code, eliminating all religion-based civil laws of Hindu Law, Muslim Law, and Christian Law. But after the tyrannical rule of the Mughals

and the British, our third dark age in history emerged during the Emergency. I am referring to the twenty-one months from 25 June 1975 to 21 March 1977, during which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of Emergency across the country. In 1976, the 42nd Amendment to the Constitution formally inserted the word ‘Secular’ as a feature of the Indian Republic.”

Arjun quickly remarked, “Hari, are you voicing your support for any specific party? Your strong views can be construed as favoring a political agenda.”

20:42. “No, Arjun, my friend! I have nothing for or against any party, leader, or political ideology. In fact, I am proud of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi when she did the Pokhran test boldly. I am apolitical for the most part. I only believe in Sanāthana Dharma, which was, has been, and will be uniform, fair, and humane. We have been secular from time immemorial. Inserting Secular in the Constitution is a mockery of Sanāthana Dharma. Leaving aside Sanāthana Dharma for a minute, in the most recent times, in the 1994 case—S. R. Bommai v. Union of India—the Supreme Court of India established the fact that India was secular since the formation of the republic in 1950. In fact, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar himself felt that the social organization of the State should be decided by the people and not the Constitution. Also, please do not mix secularism with the uniform rule of law. Today, while diversity is our strength, it is also our weakness.”

Hari paused, took a deep breath, and then looked at Arjun, “There are three thorns that are destroying the fabric of our great nation - language, religion, and caste. To this day, religion and caste are opium for the masses and play a vital

role as vote banks for political parties. Political parties use these thorns to their advantage. They play with it and destroy the future, our children's future. I think the States Reorganization Act, passed in 1965, led to the balkanization of the states based on similar linguistic populations. Our laws are not uniform for all religions. Reservations are driven by caste-based politics and, unfortunately, not by economic capacity.” Hari was getting tired.

Day 1 21:12–22:00 | Aśvinī (अश्विनी) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

21:48. The drive was about an hour and thirty minutes. The SUV came to a stop in front of a hangar. About 10 Military uniformed personnel carrying AK-47s were stationed in front of the Bombardier Global 5000. This business jet, equipped with state-of-the-art air surveillance systems, was a gem in R&AW's collection of spy planes.

Day 1 22:00–22:48 | Yama (यम) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

22:06. After getting the necessary clearance, the aircraft took off.

The airhostess stopped by and asked Hari, “Would you like anything to drink?”

Hari asked, “What Bourbon do you have?”

The air hostess checked her cart and said, “We have Jim Beam, Eagle Rare, Woodford Reserve, and Jack Daniels. What would you like to have?”

Hari said, “Can I get a glass of Eagle Rare, neat, please?” The air hostess poured a drink into a glass and gave it to him. Arjun requested the same.

Hari winked and smiled, “Nice taste.”

22:12. Hari looked at this watch and murmured Yama Muhūrta.

Arjun asked, “What did you say?”

Hari sipped the drink, relishing the fluid flowing down his throat while creating a burning sensation, and replied, “Nothing. Can I take a short nap before we reach Delhi? I am feeling tired.”

Arjun said, “Absolutely, buddy. I will wake you up.” The air hostess collected their glasses.

22:18. The Bombardier cruised at 41000 ft, where it faced minimal air turbulence and maintained a stealthy course towards Hindon Air Force Station, the biggest and largest air base in Asia, under the Western Air Command.

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

क्षुरस्य धारा निशिता दुरत्यया

दुर्ग पथस्तत्क्ववयो वदन्ति ॥

Rise, awake!

Having obtained these boons, understand them!

Like the Razor's sharp edge is difficult to
traverse,

The path to oneself is difficult.

— Katha Upaniṣad

Day 2 – The Riddle of Pashi

Sunday Ravivāsaraḥ (रविवारः)

Day 2 00:24 - 01:12 | Kaṇḍa (कण्ड) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

00:36. Hari must have slept for two hours straight. He was suddenly woken up by mid-flight turbulence.

He rubbed his eyes, drank a glass of water, and looked at the dark horizon. Turning to face Arjun, Hari noticed he was awake, cleared his voice, and said, “Coming back to my opinion about doing what he says. Let us say that the Prime Minister is genuine and attempts to enact such a law, his party would never agree to it. Moreover, the law would never get the support it requires for passage in the parliament. The opposition will have a field day and use this to spread misinformation to the public. The media will run amok with it. The ingredients for a perfect civil unrest will be sown across the nation, don’t you think? In the end, the Prime Minister may declare a national emergency and may also lose the next election!”

He then looked out the window and said, “There are two ways to handle this situation: one, ignore the problem, pass it on, hoping the next government has the right intention and the balls to fix it, or two, go down trying to fix it.” Then turned towards Arjun, and continued, “Do you know the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in the US, which ended segregation in public places, and employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, was first

proposed by President John F. Kennedy. One of the many reasons that made him enemies may have cost him his life, possibly. So, anyone thinking about abolishing the reservation system will need to be prepared to end their party's future, their political career or even perhaps their life. However, if we can remotely enact this, in the long run, our children's, children's, children will have a lot to thank us for it."

01:06. The aircraft landed at its new top-secret Aviation Research Center (ARC) hangar at Delhi. Another black Mahindra SUV was waiting to take them to a hotel. Hari and Arjun rested for a few hours at the hotel.

Day 2 02:48 - 03:36 | Viṣṇu (विष्णु) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

03:30. Viṣṇu Kali got up in the Viṣṇu Muhūrta and worked on his Ashtanga Yoga. Today was an important day for him as he had to locate an ideal location for his second victim. And he had a good idea where it could be! So, he decided to stay overnight at a lodge close to Gate No. 4 of Kāśī Viśwanath mandir and enter from Manikarnika Dwar.

Day 2 03:36 - 04:24 | Dyumadgadyuti (द्युमद्द्युति) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

03:36. He prepared himself for his meditation in the Brahmā Muhūrta time.

Day 2 04:24 - 05:12 | Brahmā (ब्रह्म) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Very Auspicious ||

04:24. Viṣṇu Kali meditated on the Gāyatrī Mantra, and after a few minutes, he fell into a deep meditative state.

04:42. When he opened his eyes, he felt blessed for a new day. He decided to get ready to check out the location and wore his customary white cotton shirt and panchakacham.

05:06. When he came in front of the dwar, he felt totally disgusted. There were electric poles with wires hanging loosely beside the dwar. There were commercial posters on the poles, several old houses, and structures around the dwar. There were several chewed betelnut spitting on the ground. He thought to himself...*Humans have lost their basic sense of hygiene. We should ban pān spitting! This is Kali Yuga!* Then, he noticed Mother Gaṅgā sitting on a crocodile, *Makara*, on top of the entrance to *mokṣa*. He closed his eyes, folded the palms of his hands, and prayed to the golden statue of Goddess Gaṅgā. *Om Gaṅge Namaḥ!*

The Gaṅges river is the fourth longest running river in India that originates from the Gangotri glacier and flows through five different Indian states covering 2525 km. At Vārāṇasī, she flows South to North in a half-circular shape resembling the beautiful half-crescent moon over the Lord of this holy city. More than 35% of the Indian population lives around the Gaṅgā basin. Bhāgīrathī and Alaknanda are the two headstreams of the Gaṅges river and join at Devprayag in Garhwal. From this place, it takes its name as the Gaṅges river, and it finally empties into the Bay of Bengal at Gaṅgā Sagar. In June 2014, Namāmi Gaṅge, an integrated conservation and rejuvenation program, was initiated with a budget outlay of Rs 22,500 crore from 2023-26. The

program aims to ensure effective abatement of pollution and conservation of the river Gaṅgā by adopting a comprehensive river basin approach. In the last nine years, more than 147 projects out of 341 projects have been completed.

Mother Gaṅgā is the most sacred river worshipped by all Hindus. She is personified as a beautiful woman who has a divine makara as her vehicle. She is mentioned in the Ṛgveda as one of the holiest rivers. Her stories are depicted in Purāṇas and Itihasas such as the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. She has been around for more than 5000 years.

In Rāmāyaṇa, Mother Gaṅgā is referred to as the first-born daughter of Himavat and the sister of Mother Pārvatī. While the original date of the composition of Rāmāyaṇa is still unknown, some scholars suggest it may have been composed around the 8th to 4th centuries BCE.

There are many stories around the descent of Gaṅges known as Avatarana. However, the most widely known version is that of the legend of King Bhagīratha, who brings Mother Gaṅgā from heaven to earth. This story begins with King Sagara of the Suryavanshi (Solar or Surya Dynasty) performing an Aśvamedhá, where a horse is left to wander for a year. Lord Indira steals this horse to prevent the Aśvamedhá from being successful. King Sagara's sixty thousand sons go in search of the horse and finally end up finding it at Sage Kapila's ashram. These sons disturb the intense meditation of the sage, thinking that he had stolen the horse. In

anger, Sage Kapila reduces all the sons to ashes and sends them to the nether world. King Sagara sends his grandson, Anshuman, to ask the sage what could be done to liberate their souls. Sage Kapila advises him that Mother Gaṅgā, who flows through the heavens, could only liberate them. Anshuman's grandson, King Bhagīratha, undertook severe ascetic practice and won the favor of Brahma and Śiva. Brahma allows Mother Gaṅgā to flow down to earth, while Śiva breaks the fall in his coils of tangled hair. She is then led by the waiting Bhagīratha down into the plains at Haridwar to Vārāṇasī, and eventually to Gaṅgā Sagar, where she meets the Bay of Bengal Ocean and finally liberates the sons of Sagara.

Day 2 05:12 - 06:00 | Samudra (समुद्र) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

05:12. He decided to measure the time of his walk from this dwar to the ghat. He looked at Google Maps for the distance and time. Seven minutes by walk! He was not convinced it could be this quick. So, he started the stopwatch and began to walk at a normal pace through the dwar into a narrow gali. Some of these narrow galis were a complex multicourse labyrinth that centered around the Lord Kāśī Viśwanath temple. The gali was seemingly quiet at this hour before the daily saṃsāra woke up. He felt claustrophobic. There were long saffron dhotis hanging along with ad posters of shops. Several old houses and shops flanked on either side. Some were just opening the shutters of their shops for the day. Many shop names were in Hindi. A mesh of electric wires

was hanging loosely in some areas of the gali. People walked normally under these wires without any concern for safety hazards. Graffiti of Gods and saints was seen on some old walls along the gali. Some stretches of the gali were anywhere from seven to ten feet wide and paved with rectangular stones instead of concrete. No vehicle larger than an auto could operate in these galis, as several bicycles, scooters, and bikes were parked on the side, making the galis even narrower.

When he crossed the famous Śrī Rajbandhu Sweets shop on his right, he made a quick left and a right turn from across the Banāras Saree Factory shop towards the local delight, Blue Lassi shop. Small rectangular directional old dirty blue, yellow, or white signboards in Hindi for Manikarnika Ghat hung at several turns. He walked about 6 m before making a right turn into a zig-zag road that twists almost every 3 m, with a left, a right at Kṛṣṇa Dairy, and finally another left before entering a longer straight road. A four-story old house caught his attention close to Kṛṣṇa Dairy. He wondered if these homes were built legally and if they followed city guidelines.

05:18. He kept looking at his stopwatch after each turn and turned behind to check if anyone was following him. As he continued his walk, he noticed a man smiling at him while hitting an old rusty hand pump for water on the left, followed by a small vegetable market next to big dirty metal pipes on the right. A few of the platforms to sell vegetables were being set up for the morning customer. Half-covered tarp coverings protected this patch of the gali from sun's heat. While most houses were single-floored, some houses were extending vertically with additional floors. While the higher floors had

a modern architecture, the lower floors were of seventeenth-century Maratha, Rajput, or Mughal architectural style. Front doors were made from wood with metal grills. There was no color coordination, yet predominant paint colors on the front or side walls included red, green, or blue.

He keenly observed the people around him and those walking past him. A weary old, bearded man in a white shirt and a dhoti carrying milk cans on his bicycle walked past him. There were a couple of foreigners in shorts, backpacks, and baseball caps walking past him. They seem to be more spiritual than the people of this land who were aping the westerners! A young man in an orange t-shirt and jeans led a white cow with red marks on its forehead past him at this hour. A small flower garland around its neck depicted how revered the cow was in this part of the world. Stray dogs walked across the gali without any regard for bikes or people. It felt as though time had stood still in this part of the world. They had not seen development for a long time, except maybe for cell phones.

A foul smell emanated from the open drains on either side of the gali. He came to a spot where the road he was took looked like a T-road and was confused. He was unsure if he wanted to make a right turn. There were no signboards here. He looked at his stopwatch, quickly glanced at the road on the right to see if it led anywhere. Then he decided to continue straight as Google Maps did not work well in these small galis. He crossed a small pān shop on the right. He realized this city was famous for Banāras sweet pān, but wished people's callous attitude to spit anywhere would change. He wondered if pān could be banned at least ten km around the ghats, and people would carry their own spitting pot to see

how they felt! After a few steps, he was relieved to find a signboard to turn right.

05:24. He checked his stopwatch. It was close to twelve minutes so far! He turned right and continued his walk. Anyone could get lost easily if they do not have an idea about the galis in Vārāṇasī. They were complex, and no digital maps could provide a street view with ease; maybe a bird's eye view is possible. He now crossed under the signboard for Śrī Hanuman Bhandar Bhojanalya. Looking at the signboard, he felt hungry. After a minute, he noticed clear skies ahead at a distance with no structures on either side. He picked up the pace to reach this point.

He checked the stopwatch and continued his walk. At this point, he looked left and noticed a new construction. He also noticed two small temples built in the Nagara style of architecture. Then he checked Google Maps. This long building was between him and the Gaṅges gate entrance leading to Lord Kāśī Viśwanath temple. He checked the stopwatch and immediately increased pace. He had been delayed by thirty seconds checking the map.

05:30. The galis were about 2.4 to 3 m wide with a proper protective fence on the right. He stopped for a few seconds in front of the Kumbha Mahādev mandir to bow and take a picture. He observed the sculptural carvings on the temple, which had a lot of pot, *Kumbha*, carvings on the dome above the pillars, *Mandapa*.

Since Vārāṇasī is so ancient, nobody has a clear estimate of the total number of temples in the city. The estimates have ranged from 23,000 to 72,000.

However, as a part of the Kāśī Viśwanath Corridor project, more than forty ancient temples were discovered. They were interestingly safe and intact due to encroachments. Some questions remain about whether these encroachments were illegal or a deliberate attempt to protect them from the Mughals. These temples have references in the Kāśī Khand of the Skanda Purāṇas. Some of the forty temples are Kumbha Mahādev, Gangeśwar Mahādev, Manokameśwar Mahādev, Tarakeśwar Mahādev, and the Jauvinayak temple.

He then continued. There were a lot of older houses on the left. He then came across another temple, Śrī Upśateśwar Mahādev mandir, built in Nagara architectural style, on the left. The dome was a beautiful gold color. He again stopped for a few seconds, bowed, took a picture, and continued his walk. He must have seen at least a couple of temples from the Dwar until now.

The Kāśī Viśwanath Corridor project is one of the most ambitious efforts at cleansing and rejuvenating Gaṅges river and its surrounding ghats. It is aimed at connecting Lord Kāśī Viśwanath mandir with the ghats, providing clean, decongested access between ghats and mandirs, and transforming the pilgrims experience at Vārāṇasī. Of the total estimated cost of ₹800 crore launched in March 2019, the first phase of the project cost was around ₹399 crore, the acquisition of about 300 properties around the Lord Kāśī

Viśwanath mandir, and the rehabilitation of more than 1400 shop tenants and homeowners. Seven gates were constructed to provide access to the Lord Kāśī Viśwanath mandir. Twenty-three new facilities were constructed for the convenience of tourists and devotees.

05:36. As he reached the riverfront at Manikarnika Ghat, he noticed shops on either side with stacks of woods of various sizes, twigs, logs, short ones, long ones, thin and thick. Some stacks reached the ceilings. As he continued his walk, he noticed a two-story building on the right side. As black smoke came out, people kept walking in and out of the crematorium. He shifted his gaze straight and noticed another mandir built on Nagara style architecture. It was not surrounded by any other building.

He checked his stopwatch. Twenty-five minutes! There were more people at this location in the morning. Either they must have finished a cremation or be preparing for one. Either way, he wondered if this was how fragile life was! He noticed a large red colored dome shaped building as he walked closer to the riverfront. More wood was stacked at multiple places for cremation. He walked on the left side of a north-facing temple, Tarakeśwar Mahādev mandir. He again stopped for a few seconds in front of this Mahādev and wondered if he was now behaving like Tarakasura, who sought forgiveness from Lord Śiva and then became Tarakeśwar Mahādev.

There are three temples for Tarakeśwar Mahādev. One is on the Manikarnika Ghat, another near Lord

Kāśī Viśwanath temple, and the third one is on the way to Manikarnika Ghat. As per the Śiva Purāṇa, Tarakasura, a demon, does austere penance to seek Lord Śiva's boon of immortality and to be killed only by His son, Lord Karthikeya. Before Lord Karthikeya kills Tarakasura, Tarakasura seeks Lord Śiva's forgiveness.

05:42. As he came close to the riverfront, he saw three terraced step-style platforms of four pyres on either side, burning. The crimson red sky was seen in the distance. He sat down on the steps to absorb the sight.

He started contemplating...*One day, we all will be reduced to ashes. A man works hard all throughout his life protecting his loved ones. He chases his deepest desires and dreams, and yet the day comes when he is buried between these logs. What is my destiny? What happens to me when I die? Do I move onto another lifeform?*

His train of thought was disturbed when he heard a dog barking in the distance.

05:48. He moved his head slowly to the left end of the riverfront, walked down the steps towards the riverfront. He then turned around, faced the ghat, and observed the burning pyres and the people moving around. People were busy burying their dead. He found a quiet spot to sit down facing the river, closed his eyes, and folded his palms. He prayed to Mother Sati to forgive him for the sinful acts he had committed yesterday and for the next one he was going to commit in a few hours. He continued his meditation on Mother Gaṅgā for the next ten minutes.

After ten minutes, he got up, walked up the stairs and away from the riverfront. He seemed quite happy as his mind became clear about the next location.

Day 2 06:00–06:48 | Rudra (रुद्र) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

06:00. Hari’s phone started ringing. He reached out for the phone, checked the time, and number. It was an unknown call. *Who would call at this hour?*

Viṣṇu Kali said, “Uthishta Jagrath Hari!” (*Rise, awake Hari!*).

Hari immediately recognized the voice.

“Have I woken you up? Should you not be awake already and doing your *Nithya Karma* by now?”

“Why are you calling me at this hour?” Hari asked.

“Having been born a Manu with intelligence that is far superior to other species, learn to know your purpose in life! I had asked you to locate the Seal of Manu for me. Do you have any updates to share?”

“Are you crazy? Why do you call me at this hour to discuss the Seal of Manu?”, Hari replied in anger.

“I see. You have not taken me seriously yet! Seems like you have not caught up with the national news yet. Are you good with riddles, Hari? I hope so. So, let me leave you with a riddle to solve.”

06:06. Hari forced himself to get up and pick up the pen and scratch pad on the nightstand next to his bed.

*“As is his desire, so is his will,
As is his will, so is his deed,
As is his deed, so he reaps!
Muhūrta waits for no one,
Pashi hunts for the Manu who has desire,
Life is now visible in Nimeṣas only,
The Papi reaps in fire,
What Mother Parvati desires!”*

After saying this, Viṣṇu Kali disconnected, removed the SIM card, and broke it.

Hari tore the paper off the pad, looked at it, folded it, and put it in his wallet. Then he went to the toilet.

06:36. Hari came down to have breakfast. He noticed Arjun at a distance, sipping a cup of tea. He walked over to his table and said, “Good morning, buddy! Did you sleep well?” He then narrated the second call he had received that morning and the riddle.

Day 2 06:48 – 07:36 | Āhi (आहि) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

07:00. Hari and Arjun left in the black Mahindra SUV for a residence.

Day 2 07:36 - 08:24 | Mitra (मित्र) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

07:36. They reached Sharma’s home, in one of Delhi’s posh neighborhoods on Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Road. There were two Delhi S.W.A.T. vans standing outside the building. As they entered the building and took the elevator to the 3rd

floor, they noticed an eerie silence on all the floors. They entered flat no. 301.

As Hari walked in, he observed the clean white marble floor. Within 3 ft, the hall appeared on the left with beautiful red contemporary sofas, and a 65-inch widescreen HD TV on the wall. There were two individuals with plastic gloves dusting off the furniture to check for any fingerprints. A couple of blue bags were lying on the floor with plastic gloves and containers for exhibits. On the right side of the wall, a glass door was left open. He peaked in and noticed it was a home office.

07:42. He stepped into the home office. Arjun followed him. Arjun had taken two pairs of plastic gloves from the blue bag, handed a pair to Hari and wore one. There were lots of blood stains on the floor. The chalk mark of the dead body was barely visible considering the marble floor. The contemporary glass desk was littered with a bunch of papers. At the far end of the desk was a fax machine. He noticed a large black leather office chair behind the desk. Behind the chair there was a contemporary shelf with books, a couple of framed pictures of Sharma and others, decorative artwork, and files at the bottom. Arjun went behind the desk to observe the shelf. While Hari remained in front of the desk, carefully ensuring that he does not step on the blood stain and markings on the floor.

Hari asked, “Do we know what the murder weapon was?”

Arjun said, “There is no evidence of a murder weapon.”

07:48. Hari continued, “Maybe Sharma knew his murderer. Maybe he turned around to greet the person. Then, something happened. He fell back to the desk. He then held

onto the desk as he slid down. By the body marks on the floor, he seems to have been in a sitting posture.”

Arjun, looking at a few photographs that an agent had handed over, “Yup, you are correct. Here are a few photographs before removing the body. I also have confirmation that the main door was closed when the agents got here, and that there are no fingerprints anywhere in the house. The rest of the house seems to be very clean. So, this is not a robbery. I need to make a call.” Arjun left the room. Hari looked at the photographs.

Sharma was a collector. Then, he turned around and walked close to the chalk drawing on the floor and knelt on the floor. He looked at the photographs again and tried to visualize the direction in which the head may have been facing. The head seem to be facing the photo frames. He then got up and walked over to the photo frames on the wall. He had pictures, lithographs, and other artworks. Hari looked at three photo frames slowly and carefully. They were the James Prinsep’s Prints - *The City of Bunaras surveyed by James Princep*, *Dusaswumedh ghat Benares*, and *Bruhma ghat Benares*.

He then looked at the photograph again and looked up again in the direction of a coffee table at the corner. He saw a book, *The secrets of Manusmṛti*, on the coffee table.

07:52. Hari picked up the book, flipped the pages, and then put the book back on the coffee table. He then bent down to see if there was anything below the coffee table. He noticed a shoebox underneath the table. He stretched his hand, pressing his head against the coffee table, to pull out the shoe box. He opened the shoebox and looked at the contents. There was a bubble-wrapped object in the box. He kept the shoebox on the coffee table and took the bubble-wrapped

object out of the box. It must have weighed less than one hundred grams. He then turned the object around. It was neatly taped. He removed the tape and wrapper carefully and placed it in the shoebox. He observed the dark blue-black cube, analyzed its sides, and wondered if this could be the Seal of Manu. He noticed a white paper in the shoebox. He reached out for the white paper and unfolded it while holding the object. He saw the six pencil etched drawings and looked at the object again. He turned it around to see and compare. All the six drawings were identical to the figures on the object.

Why would Sharma keep such an object in a shoebox below the coffee table? What does this object signify? It looks like an insignia of some era. It is light but made of some strange metal. The edges are perfect. It has some markings, but I may need to analyze it later.

Without thinking any further, he wrapped the object again, sealed it with the tape where he could, and put it in his backpack. Then, he folded the paper and put it in his wallet and placed the empty box below the coffee table. Then, he walked towards the bookshelf. His eyes moved slowly across the remaining books - *The Rise of the Mauryan Empire*, *Arthashastra*, and *Ashoka, The Great*.”

08:06. Arjun came back into the room. He said, “Hari, Time to leave now! We need to go for an urgent meeting.”

Day 2 08:24 - 09:12 | Pitṛ (पितृ) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

08:24. The black SUV drove straight to South Block entrance, Ministry of Defense. There were two National Security Guards waiting for them. As soon as Arjun got out

of the SUV, they saluted him. He reciprocated with a salute. They were escorted into the building.

Arjun and Hari entered a room. The newly appointed Home Minister, the *Griha Mantri*, the Defense Minister, *Raksha Mantri*, and other high-ranking officials from across every important department in the government were seated along a grand U-shaped table. Arjun pointed Hari to a chair behind him. The speaker broke the silence, “We have a crisis! There is a lunatic who wants us to make the word *Caste* illegal, abolish the identification, classification, grouping or ranking of Jātis and abolish the reservation system! This person is threatening to kill hostages if his demands are not met.”

A debrief folder was placed in front of everyone at the table.

08:30. Hari became impatient, and said loudly, “The person is not a lunatic!”

The speaker turned around and barked, “Who are you?”

Arjun immediately came to the rescue. “Sir, Dr. Hari has been invited by the R&AW to assist us with this case.”

“How is he going to assist us?”

Hari got up and said, “Sir, with all due respect, the person is not a lunatic. Assuming this person is a male for our convenience, his demands reflect the poison that is slowly spreading across this country. A poison that was fed in its infancy during the birth of this nation by people who held the highest power regardless of how the future generations would be impacted. In fact, a few notable architects of the constitution had even voiced their opinion to abolish it before it spread, like virus, in every Indian’s blood, turning them into a zombie that destroys their hope and future for them.”

08:36. “What bull shit!” growled the speaker.

Hari started walking across the table side, looking at every person in the eye, and slowly raising his voice, “Sir, I am talking about the caste and reservation system.” The Home Minister’s face grew grim. Everyone at the table lifted their heads and were now paying attention to him. They were silently waiting for him to continue.

“The Communal Award, introduced by our British colonial masters, created the first legislative social divide among Indians based on religion, caste and ethnicity, giving a new meaning to the British Policy of *Divide and Rule*. The original architects of our constitution had noble intentions of uplifting underprivileged communities and improving their lives through quota systems or reservations. Dr B R Ambedkar believed the legislation does not change people and that reservations of constituencies or job do not change the way Indian society looks at lower castes. So, he agreed to reservations in Parliament and Legislatures with the belief that it would be discontinued ten years after the adoption of the constitution. I repeat...ten years after the adoption of the constitution. What year are we in now?

Several years before India got its independence, in 1932, Dr. B R Ambedkar reached an agreement with Gandhi during the Poona Act to allow a certain number of reserved seats for Harijans. Fast forward to the 1950s, our constitution designated two groups—the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes...SC/ST as we know them better. According to the 2011 Census, these two groups accounted for 17% and 9% of the Indian population. In 1954, 20% of seats in educational institutions were reserved for SC/ST. Thirty years later, in 1984, 22.5% of vacancies in public-

sector and government-aided educational institutions were reserved for SC/STs. From the 1950s to today, we have socially divided our population further into forward caste, backward caste, OBCs, BCs, MBCs, backward class A, B, and more. Today many states have more than 50-70% reservation for backward castes. It has become a vote bank politics for every political party to appease the minorities or backward castes by tinkering with the reservation system. We have a colonial mindset in the 21st century.

08:42. We need to decolonize the way we think, breathe and live now!” Hari paused and slowly walked around and stopped behind the Home Minister.

He then loudly remarked, “The Constitution provides a three-pronged strategy to improve the situation of SC/ST through protective arrangements, affirmative action and development. However, it creates a false narrative of who is forward or backward based on a colonial mindset. We have too many divisions and rankings, when not all backward castes are necessarily economically backward!” and thumped the table looking at the Home Minister. Everybody became startled. Arjun looked at the security men standing near the door who were ready to pounce on him if he were to attack the Home Minister. Hari moved on.

“Likewise, so-called forward castes are not necessarily economically forward. This section of the society fights for a smaller pie with limited resources.” Hari paused. “I could go on...But, if the lunatic person is making these demands, then think about it for a moment. I am not his champion or suggesting his method to get away with his demands.”

The speaker interjected loudly, “Spoken like an idealist!”

Hari gave a smile, and lifted a glass of water on the table, took a few sips and continued, “People are talking and listening to excellent debates on Indian Nationalism, Hindutva and Hinduism by eminent scholars and personalities such as J Sai Deepak and Dr Shashi Tharoor. This is the time to act! Today, as Bhāratvasis, we need to expect more. We should be proud of our dharmic roots. We have traded our ability to grow our nation based on hard work, self-esteem, integrity, intelligence and dreams for a corrosive, divisive vote-bank politics. We love to say India is Rising! However, our India will only RISE by abolishing the reservation system. By doing so, we are parting from the colonial mindset and resetting the parameters for a dharmic growth mindset. It takes three generations for a mindset to change, and it starts with our children.”

08:48. Hari looked at the Home Minister again and said earnestly, “We must build their identity on who they are...and not their caste! We must build their intelligence on what they like to do...and not their caste! We must build their dreams on who they want to be...and not their caste! We must build their character and integrity...build their moral and ethical principles, not build their attitude and hatred towards other castes.” Hari paused, looked around the room and then continued. “We must not seed hatred. We must build a nation that will make everyone proud regardless of their religion, caste, creed, language, or ethnicity!”

Hari took a deep pause. The Home Minister started clapping slowly. He was able to relate to the caste problems, having grown up through one. The speech elicited a few to clap slowly while most sat with a disgruntled look. The speaker broke the applause, “Ok. Quiet! Thank you for the electoral

speech, Dr. Hari.” A heated debate ensued for a few more minutes.

08:54. The speaker abruptly cut off everyone. “Let us wrap up our discussion. This will be called *Operation Dharma*. Arjun, Deputy Director, R&AW, will lead this clandestine operation to release the victims and bring the lunatic person behind bars. Based on our deliberations and Arjun’s reassurance, we feel Dr. Hari will be an asset and will be assisting him. They will report to me, and I will share the progress with this committee daily.”

Hari nudged Arjun and whispered, “Let’s fly to Vārāṇasī! The path is difficult! But something tells me we will find our answers over there!”

Both left the room for the airport while the rest continued to discuss.

Day 2 10:00 - 10:48 | Vārāha (वाराह) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

10:00. The Bombardier Global 5000 departed for Lal Bahadur Shastri Airport. Hari looked at his watch. He knew they left at an auspicious time. But something made him uncomfortable about the danger that was lurking ahead. They had no idea how the lunatic looked, what the person wanted or when or where the next murder would take place!

Hari took out the object from his backpack.

“Arjun, I want to show you something. Before Sharma was murdered, he texted me about the shoebox. I knew Sharma loved to collect archaic historical objects.” He held the object for Arjun to see.

Arjun took the object from Hari and carefully removed the wrapper. He keenly observed its dimensions, weight and protrusions. He wrapped it up like it was and handed it back to Hari. Hari put it back in his backpack.

“I have not been able to make the connection yet. Our mystery caller, this object, and the murder at Vārāṇasī? But I strongly feel they are related.”

10:06. “Burning Man? Object?” asked Arjun.

“When our mystery caller called me up today morning around 6:00, he asked me to solve a riddle,” said Hari. He then picked out a small, folded shoebox paper from his wallet and handed it to Arjun. Arjun saw the figures and then handed it back to Hari.

“I do not understand what these figures are.” said Arjun. Then Hari handed him another paper with the riddle.

“Our mystery caller had a riddle for us to solve.” said Hari. Arjun looked at the paper and handed it back to Hari.

“I have a strong feeling there is going to be another murder soon.”

“What is your hunch? When and where?” asked Arjun.

10:12. “Vārāṇasī! Don’t know when, but the caller seems to be serious. We first must solve the riddle.”

“You mentioned something about the Seal of Manu. What is this object or who is Manu?” asked Arjun.

Hari smiled and said, “Arjun, this object could be what the caller is searching for. It would take several days, if not months, for you to comprehend the greatest wisdom of Sanāthana Dharma on the cycle of time. But let me see if I

can quickly explain to you. Manu is the son of Brahmā...the creator. He is considered the first man per the scriptures and beliefs. Now, etymologically speaking it is believed that the word Manu in its original form seeded the Proto-Indo-European form that was imbibed into Proto-Germanic Mann that eventually got into old English Mann or human being. Now coming back to Manu, Hindus believe him to be the first ruler of the ancient world. Now, this gets complicated. There is not one but 14 Manus. The time scale that Hindus believe in is based on our Sun's cycle. The belief is that Sun has 14 phases or Manvantaras." Hari paused to see if Arjun was following. "Each Manvantara has a Manu or a human race and is 307 million years long."

Arjun interjected, "Wow! Wait a minute! Are you telling me that in Sanāthana Dharma, you know how long we humans have been in existence, actually?"

10:18. Hari smiled and said, "It is a long explanation that I provide to my students. But, let me see if I can explain this differently. Hindus do something called Sankalp, which is a proclamation by the person doing the rituals, to initiate with a formal prayer explaining when we are performing the ritual. It goes like this...

Mamo partha samastha duritha kshya dwara Śri Parameswara preethyartham......which essentially means for removing all problems and pains in life...

Now here comes the part that explains the time....

*Aadhya Brahma...*The Current Brahmā.

*Dweethiye parardhe...*The second half of the lifespan of Brahmā, which is 50 Cosmic Years.

Sveta Varaha Kalpe...Kalpa is a day in the life of Brahmā. There are 30 Kalpas, and one Kalpa is equal to 4.32 billion human years. The name of the current Kalpa is *Sveta Varaha*.

Vaivaswatha Manvanthare...There are 14 Manvantaras, and we are in the seventh phase of the Sun's cycle, known as *Vaivasta Manvantara*. The current Manu or human race is from *Vaivasvat*. Now, since he was considered the first man or the King, he is also believed to have laid down the code of conduct for the society. We refer to this code as Manusmṛti.

10:24. *Ashta vimshathi thame*...Within the 7th Manvantara, 27 Chatur Yugas have transpired, and we are presently in the 28th Chatur Yuga of which,

Kali yuge...We are in Kali Yuga...

And it goes on.

It means...about 1.97 billion human years have transpired since our Sun came into existence.”

Arjun was astounded. Hari looked at the window and said, while laughing, “Someone must have been smoking some top-notch weed, right?”

“Keeping jokes aside, the human mind is much more powerful than we know. Our Rṣis were able to fathom this through their penances. Today, science is coming close to this. One day, they will appreciate our treasures— the Vedas.”

Hari then looked intensely at Arjun and said, “Now here is where the problem lies. The Manusmṛti, I referred to earlier, is quite controversial in today's context as it is perceived that certain parts of this scripture treat some sections of the

society and particularly women poorly than others. There are verses in it that if read in isolation of its time, place and possibly societal framework, beliefs, culture, it could be viewed extremely discriminatory in today's world. To make matters worse, another common perception is that one of the Varnas, namely, the Brāhmaṇas drafted it." Hari paused and looked out the window.

10:30. Then, he looked back at Arjun and continued, "There is a big gap in perceptions. This is my theory. If the timescale is as large as what I explained, nobody knows who the original author is, what the person's caste, by today's definition, was, when it was written, or where the original manuscript is. Now, let me make this simple. Let us compare this to our Indian Constitution. Since its inception in 1950, as of October 2021, the constitution has been amended 105 times. Now...going back to Manusmṛti, this could have been written several...and I mean several...millions of years ago and...modified several times...at a time when society was probably more homogeneous, had a very small population, had a different vision for society, where they could have been clustered possibly with a single faith or pluralistic, or no belief at all. Remember, we believe the Dharma in Sanāthana Dharma evolved over time, place, or people's needs. Somewhere this evolution distorted or lost its original purpose because of warring kingdoms and multiple external threats...like the Mughals or the Britishers. The current translation into English was done in 1776 by Sir William Jones. Now, imagine this...this philologist comes to our country, has no prior roots, no appreciation for our culture or ways of living, but tries to convert a sacred text. Moreover, several scholars point to inconsistencies and have questioned the authenticity of the verses. Mahatma Gandhi himself

agreed that nobody has the original text. At this point, it is pure speculation. Divisive elements, who want to see Bhārat as a failed state, can take advantage of this to create chaos in the society and balkanize it.”

10:36. Hari paused, and his face suddenly lit up like a child with a toy. “Everyone is searching for a panacea. Now, what if this object, the seal or symbol from Manu, provides us with the cure we are looking for? In all my research, I have never known or heard of any such object. I get a lot of prank calls every now and then. So, when I got this anonymous call inquiring about the seal, I dismissed it. I then called my friend, Sharma, to confirm its existence yesterday.

While the strength of Bhārat Mata lies in its diversity, it is also its Achilles heel. It is a melting pot of cultures, languages, religions, castes, and tribes. God help this great nation!”

Arjun fell into deep thoughts.

ध्यायतो विषयान् पुंसः सङ्गस्तेषूपजायते ।
सङ्गात् सञ्जायते कामः कामात् क्रोधोऽभिजायते ॥
क्रोधाद् भवति सम्मोहः सम्मोहात् स्मृति-विभ्रमः ।
स्मृति-भ्रंशाद् बुद्धि-नाशो बुद्धि-नाशात् प्रणश्यति ॥

While contemplating on the objects of the senses, one develops attachment to them. Attachment leads to desire, and from desire arises anger.

Anger leads to clouding of judgment, which results in bewilderment of memory. When memory is bewildered, the intellect gets destroyed; and when the intellect is destroyed, one is ruined.

— Śrīmad Bhāgavat Gita 2.62

Day 2 – The Kotwal of Kāśī

Sunday Ravivāsaraḥ (रविवासरः)

Day 2 11:36 - 12:24 | Vidhi (विधि) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

11:36. The flight landed at Lal Bahadur Shastri International Airport (VNS). The Bombardier taxied into a remote hangar where a black Mahindra SUV was waiting for them. When they got into the SUV, Arjun asked, “Where are we going?”

Hari looked at him, puzzled, and said, “Let us go to Kaal Bhairava Mandir first. The guardian deity here is considered the *Kotwal of Kāśī*. Some even believe He is the Kotwal of Creation.”

The SUV immediately left the airport and took NH 31 Lucknow to Vārāṇasī Highway towards Kaal Bharaiv Mandir. It was a forty-five-minute ride to the temple.

Day 2 12:24 - 13:12 | Sutamukhī (सतमुखी) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

12:24. They reached the Kāla Bhairav Mandir located at Bharonath, Vishweshwarganj. As they walked up to the temple, they stopped outside for a moment. Arjun asked, “What do we plan to do here exactly?”

Hari said, “The belief is that until Kaal Bharaiv does not give both of us permission to stay in this city, we cannot.” Arjun folded his palms and said, “Professor Hari, please lead the way!”

Hari laughed, walking inside towards the Garbhagriha (sanctum sanctorum). A priest was busy showing ārthi for the main deity.

12:30. Hari and Arjun approached the deity as closely as possible. Hari looked at Bhagawān Kāla Bhairav. Suddenly, he reached into his pocket and took out the paper with 6 images etched on it. One of the images depicted a fierce-looking four-handed figure with skulls arranged as a garland, a sword in the right hand, and a head in the left. He pointed Arjun to the image.

Hari continued, “Could the object be linked to this temple or the city? It just doesn’t make any sense. Bizarre events are unfolding at Kāśī. Let me talk to the priest.”

Hari went closer to the priest and started conversing in Hindi. Hari said, “Maharaj! My friend and I are here to seek the blessings of Śrī Kāla Bhairav.” He handed him a hundred-rupee note. Arjun whispered, “Are you trying to bribe him?” Hari showed him his eyes and asked him to focus on what the priest was doing. The priest went close to the deity to get a plate and placed the ārthi on it.

12:36. He then started reciting a few slokas loudly, while all other devotees were chanting Har Har Mahādev! with folded palms. He then came back with the ārthi plate. Hari hovered his palms over the holy fire and then covered his closed eyes with the inside of his palm. He then opened his palms in a supplicatory way and waited for the priest to share the offerings and tilak. Arjun followed Hari. The priest then requested both to stand on the side and wait.

12:42. He then attended to the remaining devotees one by one. After the last devotee left, he came to Hari and Arjun.

12:48. Speaking in good English, the priest asked, “Are you both new to the city?”. Hari nodded. Then the priest continued, “Bhagawān Kaal Bhairava commands the Ashta Bhairava, the eight Guardians of Kāśī or manifestations of Lord Śiva, guard the directions of the universe. They are Asitanga Bhairava—guards East, RuRu Bhairava—guards South-East, Unmatta Bhairava—guards West, Chanda Bhairava—guards South, Krodha Bhairava—guards South-West, Kapala Bhairava—guards North-West, Bhishana Bhairava—guards North, and Samhara Bhairava—guards North-East. Together they protect Kāśī. They will all give you both strength and blessings.” Hari thanked him with folded palms again.

He asked, “Maharaj, in the past few days, did anyone approach you with a weird behavior or did you suspect anything?”

The priest began to think for a few minutes, “I do not recall anything suspicious. We usually get a lot of people from different parts of the country. Some come here for the first time, while others are regulars. There is always someone who behaves differently or weirdly. Let me think. Is there something weird about this person that I should recollect?”

Hari asked, “Did anyone show any paper? Or take something from the temple?”

12:54. The priest immediately said, “Yes, Sir! There was this person who was acting weirdly about two days back. He stood close to Bhagawān and kept looking at Him for about ten to fifteen minutes without talking. We get all sorts of creeps here. But he was dressed neatly in a white cotton dhoti and kameez. He had three white ash stripes on his forehead.”

Hari remarked, “He doesn’t seem to be the type of weirdo we are looking for?”

The priest continued, “One minute, Sir! His questions started with the face of Bhagawān. He wanted to know the origin of the face. He was curious about the metal...when it was created, why it was created, and many more questions! While I would try to answer his questions, his face would make weird expressions. He seemed to be restless. He would look at Bhagawān and then turn around to check if anyone was around.”

13:00. Arjun asked, “Was he trying to search for something? What else did he ask? Did he give you anything?”

The priest looked up thinking about those few moments, and said, “There was something else peculiar about him. He kept rolling a coin using his middle finger and thumb. He would look at it and then look at the face of Bhagawān. Now and then, he would look at the side posts and other areas. He then walked around the deity looking at the walls and posts. Finally, he prostrated and left the mandir.”

Hari asked, “Maharaj! Did you see the coin? Did the coin have any image?” Hari spread open the paper and showed him the 6 images. The priest immediately stopped Hari and pointed him to one image. The image was that of a feather that was printed on the top center of the paper. Hari and Arjun looked at each other.

Hari asked Arjun, “Shall we walk?” Arjun asked the vehicle to come to the ghat.

Both thanked the priest, left the temple for Dashaśvamedhá Ghat on foot.

Day 2 13:12 - 14:00 | Puruhūta (पुरुहूत) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

13:30. On arriving at Dashaśvamedhá Ghat, they were greeted by 3 agents, namely, Harbir, Maanyatha, and Sanket, from Arjun's team. They were seasoned officers who had been with Arjun on other perilous cases.

There was yellow tape around the crime scene. Arjun led the way towards the burnt boat. There were a couple of senior policemen close to the crime scene.

13:36. Uttar Pradesh is broken down into Police Zones, Ranges and District. The Additional Deputy General of Police (ADGP) (Head of the Vārāṇasī Zone), Inspector General (IG) (Head of Vārāṇasī Range) and the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) (Head of Vārāṇasī District) had received a call that morning from the Chief Minister to treat this murder case with utmost sensitivity and urgency. SSP Balaram Gupta recognized Arjun and walked up to receive him. Both greeted each other with a salute. Arjun introduced Dr. Hari.

While walking to the crime scene, SSP said, in a mix of Bhojpuri and Hindi, "Welcome to Vārāṇasī! We have been waiting for you. We have preserved the crime scene as best as we could. The onlookers from the banks only noticed a fire burning off a pole from the distance. However, only later did we get to know that there was a person tied to the pole. We have collected DNA samples from the burnt body. And have reached out to the kidnapped victim's families to see if we have a match. The boat is unregistered. It was remote-controlled. So, our murderer must have been close. It also

seems to have come from the northern side of Gaṅgā. We have searched the entire boat for any evidence. None so far.”

13:42. A lady officer walked in with a couple of files. SSP introduced ASP Disha to Arjun and Hari. Disha saluted Arjun and said, “Sir, here are the files of the kidnapped victims. We have collected every piece of information we could find on each one of them, including their DNA samples. We will be matching the DNA samples of the burnt victim to see if it matches any of our kidnapped victims.” Arjun took it from the ASP and looked at Hari. Hari, in the meantime, was lost in thought when he saw Disha. He always had an appreciation for women in uniform. Disha was different. Disha noticed Hari’s stare and cut him off with a short cough. Hari realized that he was caught staring and immediately looked at Arjun. Arjun smiled, paying no attention to Hari’s actions, said, “We have the profiles of the kidnapped victims. Let us go through them.” He turned towards the SSP and asked if Disha could join his team. SSP nodded his head. Disha led the way back to the Jeep. Arjun followed Hari and Disha.

There are more than 30 police stations at Vārāṇasī. A war room was required that was safe from media and public. The city of Vārāṇasī was shaken by the *Burning Boat* incident and by the bizarre cases of kidnapping or abductions.

Arjun, Hari, and Disha left in a police jeep for the Kotwali Police Station, while Harbir, Maanyatha, and Sanket followed in the black Mahindra SUV.

Day 2 14:00 - 14:48 | Vāhinī (वाहिनी) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

14:00. Arjun, Hari, Disha, Harbir, Maanyatha, and Sanket, and two constables walked into a room. While the constables arranged and cleaned the desks, moved the whiteboard, installed desktops, large-sized monitors and other gadgets to convert into a hi-tech control room, Disha and Arjun went over the files one by one and kept writing main pointers, sticking photos, and connecting the pieces of information with blue and red threads on the whiteboard.

14:18. Hari requested everyone to huddle up. He spent the next ten minutes describing the weird call, the murder of Sharma, the object, the demand letter, and finally the riddle.

“Let us focus on what we understand. What is the motive? There could be four possible scenarios. First scenario...could our kidnapper be working with a foreign country and creating chaos by tinkering with religion and caste? We do not have friendly neighbors. Someone could be planning on creating an internal crisis.” Hari looked at Arjun and then started writing on the whiteboard—*Motive 1. National Security – Terrorism - Civil Unrest.*

“Motive 2...could our kidnapper be a Hindu vigilante trying to set an example by kidnapping these individuals?” said Hari.

“What makes you think that our kidnapper is a Hindu? Demand Letter? That is a big assumption for now,” said Disha.

14:24. Hari went along with the thought, and said, “Ok...next scenario...could our kidnapper genuinely have a grudge with the reservation system...because he belongs to

a particular caste and was victimized? Now he is randomly picking a few folks of a particular caste.”

Harbir jumped in and said, “Ok Let us assume he is a Hindu. We see many caste-based killings every day. Nothing new. The only difference is that in this case, the murder has been sensationalized on National TV, followed by a demand letter.”

One of the constables spoke, “Sir, if I may add.” Hari nodded. He continued, “Please remember that many locations in Vārāṇasī were historically owned and venerated by Hindus. During the Mughal invasions, some were destroyed, and at some of these locations, Mosques or Islamic buildings were constructed. Panchgaṅgā Ghat is popular for Alamgir Mosque, one of the most popular tourist destinations. This mosque is believed to have been constructed by Aurangzeb on the site of Bindu Madhava, a temple constructed by the Maratha chieftain Beni Madhav Rao Scindia in the 17th century. Now this place is known as Beni Madhav-ka-Darera.”

Hari said, “Yes, hopefully the kidnapper is not planning to start a communal crisis here. Disha, can you have the police protect these locations?”

Disha quickly remarked, “That’s impossible! There are so many locations like these. We will have to call the reserve police or the army to help us out. However, let me try.” She made a quick call to her SSP, explained the possibility and requested additional forces to be on stand-by at such locations.

14:30. Hari started writing on the whiteboard again—*Motive 2. Hindu vigilante – caste - reservation system.*

Maanyatha came forward and said, “What if our kidnapper has a specific grudge with these individuals? He knows them well...had some nasty experiences with them. We need to dig deeper.”

Hari said, “Possible!” and started writing on the white board again—*Motive 3. Personal grudge – Knows the individuals.*

Arjun said, “Maybe...just maybe there is another scenario that we should consider...what if the kidnapper is distracting us with the reservation system and killing his victims while he is on the hunt for something else.” Then looking at Hari, he continued, “...the object.”

Hari nodded and started writing on the whiteboard again—*Motive 4. Seal of Manu – kidnapping is a distraction.*

Hari quizzically asked, “What I am still not able to comprehend is the connection between the reservation system and the object. Maybe it is all a distraction.”

14:36. Hari looked at the six names with their pictures on the board, and said, “Let us take ten minutes to know our victims better.” Everyone moved around to their desks, started using the computers and files to research. They would walk to the board, write something, use colors to highlight, threads to connect the dots, and sticky to paste info. Hari was becoming anxious...thinking about the riddle.

Day 2 14:48 – 15:36 | Naktanakarā (नक्तनकरा) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

14:48. After twelve minutes, the evidence board was like a mind mapping graph with several leader lines and boxes describing the kidnapped victim’s age, location, profession,

religion, caste, family, education, criminal cases, character, wealth, cases, professional life, private life, and more.

1. Arumugam Ramaswamy – 40, Coimbatore, Vice-chancellor, Sri Science & Technology University, adopted child, married with no children, charges on bribery for admissions were dropped.
2. Dilip Singh - 42, Mirzapur, State Minister for education, charges on rape and murder were dropped, forward caste.
3. Mahendra Pratap - 44, Bhopal, business owner, higher caste, charges
4. Priya - 39, Bangalore, MSc MPhil Graduate, Naradha hospitals, no charges
5. Naresh Choudhary - Head of Community, charges for instigating caste hatred

The sixth victim was not on the board yet. They were waiting on the file.

Hari broke the silence, “Arjun, something does not make sense. Let us start with some simple analysis. Their age, location, profession, family background, and education are all different. All the victims are from different states, are of both genders, and are not celebrities. Arumugam and Dilip Singh are connected to education, while others are different. Their castes are not the same. Three of them are from the forward caste, two from the lower caste, and one is unknown. The only common denominator with them is their religion...all of them are Hindus...at least on paper. Dilip Singh is the only one who has rape charges against him.”

Disha interjected, “Well, Sir....”

Hari stopped her and said, “Call me Hari.”

Disha blushed momentarily and looked at him. “Will do, Hari. About the kidnapper...kidnapping six victims across the country and possibly bringing them here to Vārāṇasī cannot be the act of a single person. It must be a group, a well-coordinated and assisted group. Next...can we discuss a little more about the victims?”

“Sure,” said Arjun.

14:54. Disha got up, walked towards the board, and continued, “I agree with your cursory analysis, Hari. They probably are not familiar with each other or have any relationships. They may not have worked together, and they may not even have a common cause or belief. However, they are connected to education in some shape or form, which we can agree.”

Hari looked at her quizzically.

“Expanding on what you mentioned about our victims...The Burning Man...that is...Arumugam...had a humble beginning. He married the daughter of a politician who owns Sri Science & Technology University. He has no criminal cases, but there were one or two allegations that he accepted bribes for admission. News articles indicate that his institution had state-of-the-art laboratories and computer rooms. Nothing has been proven about any bribes.” She paused to look at Hari and Arjun for their thoughts.

Hari said, “Interesting! Sources?”

Disha smiled and said, “Google Maharaj, Perplexity, and of course...our databases!”

15:00. She winked at Hari and paused as a small boy walked in with six glasses of tea, left them on the table, and left. She grabbed a glass of tea, took a sip, and continued, “Dilip Singh, on the other hand, has access to all university admissions in UP. A criminal case was lodged against him during his school days for raping a girl. The girl committed suicide. No one came forward to incriminate him or prove anything. His father was a central minister then. In another incident, a woman committed suicide, and her family claims that he was responsible for her death. Now nobody knows anything about the family’s whereabouts. Again...nothing was proven, and the case was dropped.”

Hari and Arjun grabbed their tea glasses.

“Our third victim, Priya, is a Nurse at a Bangalore-based college. She had a troubled childhood. She is a divorcee. Sources indicate that she may have helped students during medical entrance examinations. She could have benefited financially. However, she has no criminal record.”

15:06. Hari said, “Ok. Arumugam may be greedy for bribes, Dilip Singh may have a problem with women, while Priya is a mystery for now.”

Disha said, “What intrigues me is...why would the kidnapper release the names and pictures of the kidnapped? Publicity? Why were only six kidnapped? Easier to handle?” Hari and Arjun looked at each other and then at Disha. She continued, “I mean, why not two or four or five?”

Arjun said, “Good question! To answer your first question...about publicity...probably that is his MO...it is a very common MO for offenders who are narcissistic, want others to acknowledge his act. However, we should be

looking for his signature...a ritual that is unique to our kidnapper.”

Hari interjected, “Your next question on why six...or only six...sometimes numbers have significance...this may be one of his signatures...maybe his lucky number or religious beliefs. For instance, in Sanāthana Dharma, certain numbers are considered important while others could be just patterns. For instance, zero, one, three, four, seven, eighteen, and 108 are considered significant.” While speaking, he started writing on the whiteboard.

15:12. Śūnya or zero is about nothingness or Nirguṇa Brahmān...the formless or eternal divinity while Éka (?) is the opposite, Saguṇa Brahmān is about the divine manifestation with qualities. Do not confuse Brahmān with Lord Brahmā or Brāhmaṇa.

Three or Tri (३) is important as it represents the Trimūrti-Three sacred forms in Sanāthana Dharma - the one who creates is Brahmā, the one who preserves is Viṣṇu, and the one who destroys is Śiva.

Four or Catúr (४) has many significances, for example, the Four Vedas - Ṛgvedā, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, and Atharvaveda. The four objectives of human pursuit referred to as Puruṣārthas, namely, Dharma, which means righteousness, Artha—prosperity, Kama—pleasure, and Mokṣa—liberation. Another representation of the four phases or periods of human life is referred to as Ashramas. Brahmācharya is the first phase of a human where he learns. Grihastha is the second phase where a human gets married and becomes a householder. Next, Vanaprastha symbolically means going to the forest. This is the third phase of life when humans want

to spend the rest of their lives in the forest. Finally, Saṃnyāsa is considered the final phase of the human when he renounces everything.

15:18. Now, the number six is different!” Everyone started paying attention.

“There are 6 limbs of Vedas known as Vedāṅga - Śikṣā...phonetics, Chandas...prosody, Vyākaraṇa... grammar, Nirukta... etymology, Kalpa... ritual, and Jyotisa... auspicious time for rituals or astrology and astronomy. Please understand that it is possible that the original creators of the Vedāṅga did not get up one fine day and determine that there should be six. It could have evolved over time.

Another one that could have evolved is—6 schools of Hindu philosophy. They are Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Samkhya, Yoga, Mīmāṃsā, and Vedanta.” Hari paused before he mentioned the next one.

He sat and looked down and suddenly started stroking his chin with his index and middle finger on one side, while resting the chin on his thumb, and said, “There are six enemies of the mind known as Ariśadvarga or Śadripu. Ari means enemy, Shat means six, and Varga means a band. They are Kama—desire, Krodha—anger, Lobha—greed, Moha—attachment, Mada—arrogance, and Matsarya—jealousy.”

15:24. Disha immediately remarked, “Your body language seems to be serious!” Hari looked up and dropped his hands. Disha continued, “What if our kidnapped victims are the...Shat!” With that, she looked at Hari and Arjun inquisitively and paused. “They seem like the six enemies. For example, maybe Arumugam was suffering from Lobha. Dilip Singh has lust for women so maybe he suffers from

Kama. You get the drift, right? I am unable to place others just yet.”

Hari looked at the board for a few minutes and then turned towards Disha and Arjun and said, “Far-fetched, but it’s possible!”

Arjun then got a call. “Sir...Ok...Ok Sir!” He then hung up the phone and looked at the message he had just received. He stared at it for a minute before looking at Hari.

“What is it?”, said Hari.

“Your riddle, my friend! The PMO received a fax a few minutes back. And it was addressed to Dr. Hari.” Arjun handed his phone to him.

15:30. Hari then pulled his wallet out and took the paper from it. He then compared it with the screen image.

“Can we get a printout of this?”

“Sure. Can you give me the phone?” said Disha.

In the next few mins, Disha got 5 printouts. She pinned one to the board, handed each to Maanyatha, Hari, Arjun, and kept one for herself. Harbir huddled next to Arjun while others stood closer to the board.

Day 2 15:36–16:24 | Varuṇa (वरुण) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

15:36. “There seems to be a disc-shaped circle with ball-like shapes around the perimeter,” said Hari.

*As is his desire, so is his will,
As is his will, so is his deed,
As is his deed, so he reaps!*

*Muhūrta waits for no one,
Pashi hunts for the Manu who has desire,
Life is now visible in Nimeṣas only,
The Papi reaps in fire,
What Mother Parvati desires!"*

“The disc-shape seems to appear like a compass. The small round marble shapes around the perimeter of the disc have...1...2...3 distinct styles.” Hari started to count as he spoke. “Two of them seem to have a saffron hue and they are only on the right side. Nine of them seem to have a grey hue while the remaining have a red hue.”

“I have seen the first three lines somewhere,” said Disha. She started doing a Google search.

15:42. Hari immediately cut her and said, “They are from the Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad.”

“You are right,” said Disha. “What is special about this Upaniṣad,” said Disha. “What is a Upaniṣad?” asked Arjun.

“Upaniṣad is a Sanskrit word. *Upa* means by, and *ni-ṣad* means sitting down. It referred to students sitting down near their Guru seeking knowledge. It is considered as Vedānta or end of Vedas. There are about 108 Upaniṣads, and Bṛhadāraṇyaka is one of the greatest among the Upaniṣads. Śrī Adi Śaṅkarācārya referred to this Upaniṣad as Ātmavidyā or knowledge of the self. Bṛhadāraṇyaka means “Great Forest”. Upaniṣad is sometimes referred to as the esoteric doctrine.”

Maanyatha asked, “Did he write this Upaniṣad?”

“No. Śrī Adi Śaṅkarācārya was an 8th-century Vedic scholar and ācārya. He has provided beautiful Bhāṣyas—

commentaries for this Upaniṣad. The actual authors for this are unknown. It may have been enhanced over time by multiple authors. Clearly, this riddle is about something wrong that the victim may have committed, given the lines are about deeds and reaping for it. We need to ask ourselves—who and what wrong did the victim do to instigate our kidnapper?”

15:48. “I have never heard of Pashi. What does it mean? Google is throwing out some tribe names.” said Disha.

Arjun recognized the word, Manu. “Hey Hari. Does the word Manu mean man here?” asked Arjun.

“Yes, could be. So, this Pashi is hunting a man who has desire.”

“Does desire here mean Kama? One of the six Aris that you meant a few minutes back?” asked Maanyatha.

“Good! Our Pashi is hunting a man with Kama...who also happens to be the Papi or sinner.”

“Probably, Muhūrta points to the time when the Papi, I mean victim, is going to be killed.” said Harbir.

“Muhūrta refers to time. You are correct. It probably means Muhūrta is not good for the man. Nimeṣas is the lowest denominator of Muhūrta in the Vedic time scale.”

15:54. “Maybe his judgement is to be burnt in fire. Maybe Goddess Parvathi wants him to burn in fire. It does not add up,” said Disha.

Hari was deep in thoughts. He was trying to recollect the Muhūrta time scale while counting the marble shaped circles.

“If you notice the 30 marble shaped circles around the edge of the disc, they may represent the 30 Muhūrtas.”

“Can you explain what Muhūrta means?” asked Arjun.

Hari started describing the time scale as he started writing on the board. “Vedic scriptures describe Time as Kālah, The Vedic Time Scale can be grand at the cosmic level and inconsequential at the human level. At the human level, one Muhūrta is forty-eight minutes, and there are thirty blocks totally to twenty-four hours. There are three to four thoughts of measurement such as sidereal, solar, lunar and Vedic. I am going to mention only the Vedic measurement.” And Hari started writing on the board.”

16:00. “So, the Muhūrta refers to a block of forty-eight minutes. Those thirty blocks are being represented by the marbles in the disc. Nimeṣas also means literally the twinkle of the eyes. Seems like the victim is alive only through his eyes. But, when? It does not make sense.”

Hari looked at the image once again.

Disha immediately remarked, “If we cannot figure out when, can we discuss who is next? Is there any order to the Shat you described? And where is the murder going to take place?”

Maanyatha said, “Madam, if I may? The order is clearly defined in our shastras and Purāṇas. Kama or desire is the first state of a human mind. Depending on whether the desire is unfulfilled or fulfilled, the human mind may enter the second state –Krodha, anger or joy. Now if the desire is fulfilled, the human mind yearns for more and leads to the third state–Lobha, greed. Regardless, both anger and joy lead leads to a fourth state–Moha, delusion. Sometimes, too much

fulfillment can lead to a fifth state—Mada, pride or superiority, while unfulfilled desires or sorrow can lead to Matsarya—jealousy. Ultimately, this is all about a spiritual journey.”

16:06. Arjun laughed, “Hey Maanyatha! Since when has Miss Amrut become spiritual?” Maanyatha blushed. She loved the Indian Scotch, Amrut, and Arjun knew that.

Hari said, “Quite good, Maanyatha. I believe you were referring to verses 2.62 and 2.63 in Śrīmad Bhāgavat Gita. Thank you for recollecting it for me!” And he started chanting the Sanskrit shlokas.

16:12. “The Ariśadvarga describes what is commonly referred to as the ladder of fall of human behaviors. Now, let’s go back to your question...who is next? If we consider Arumugam to be an example of desire, then who could be associated with anger? To me, so far, based on what I heard, Dilip Singh has desires. So did Arumugam.”

Arjun said, “Ok, someone is going to be murdered today. I guess we need to figure out where it may happen.”

Hari was in deep thought for a few mins. Others were flipping through the files for clues. Hari broke the silence, “Remember, the kidnapper was trying to make a point by burning Arumugam in front of everyone during Gaṅgā ārti. The murder will be repeated where there is a crowd, and our victim could possibly be sedated. We must think like the kidnapper.”

Disha said, “Let us consider Dilip Singh. Now, if I want to murder a person who ill-treats a woman, I will search for a ghat that identifies with a woman...Devi...and give her importance.”

16:18. Hari immediately remarked in a loud voice, “That’s it! Isn’t Manikarnika Ghat about Goddess Sati? And Goddess Sati is none other than Mother Parvati.”

Disha nodded her head slowly in agreement.

Hari said, “Many are cremated there. There is usually a crowd there. Ironically, this is the ghat where the dead are cremated in the hope that they attain Mokṣa.”

Disha said angrily, “If I were the kidnapper, I would not murder Dilip Singh at this ghat. He views women as objects of lust.” Disha gave a cold stare to Hari and Arjun, saying this.

Hari thought for a few seconds and then said, “Just maybe that you strongly believe that Devi would give him the right punishment befitting his crime.” And he looked at her. “Let’s leave our reasons for a minute. I have a strange feeling that the next murder will take place at this ghat!”

Arjun said, “Ok. Let us assume it is this ghat. Back to our previous dilemma...when?”

Hari picked up the paper again. He used his finger to look at each marble and kept mumbling something. “The burning boat appeared at the ghat after sunset when the crowd was ready to watch the Gaṅgā āratī...around 7-7:30 in the evening. Today it may not be at the same time. Let us say the kidnapper believes in auspicious or inauspicious Muhūrtas of the day.”

Day 2 16:24–17:12 | Aryaman (अर्यमन्) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

16:24. Disha jokingly said, “Seems like the kidnapper has control of the victim’s time of death. Maybe Yama must resign and hand over the reign to this kidnapper today!”

Hari looked at her and smiled. He immediately hugged her. Disha blushed.

“Yama is also known as Pashi...the wielder of the noose. There are 30 Muhūrtas in a day of which 21 are considered as auspicious and the remaining as inauspicious. And, each Muhūrta has a name to it. Metaphorically speaking, our kidnapper is going to be the Yama today who is most likely going to wield the noose or take a soul at His allocated time...between 10:00-10:48 tonight...which is referred to as Yama Muhūrta.” Hari was smiling.

Everybody was silent for a minute.

Disha made a quick call and asked for some more constables to deploy immediately at the ghat and be on the lookout for anything suspicious. Everyone immediately left for the ghat.

काममया एवायं पुरुष इति

सा यथाकामो भवति तत्क्रतुर भवति

यात्क्रतुर भवति तत कर्म कुरुते

यत कर्म कुरुते तद अभिसम पद्यते

You are what your deep, driving desire is

As your desire is, so is your will

As your will is, so is your deed

As your deed is, so is your destiny

— Brihadaranyaka Upaniṣad

Day 2 – The Crematory Fire

Sunday Ravivāsaraḥ (रविवारः)

Day 2 18:00–18:48 | Girīśa (गिरीश) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

18:00. After having a quick dinner, Hari, Disha, Arjun, Harbir, Maanyatha, Sanket, and five policemen walked from Dashaśvamedhá Ghat across Dr. Rajendra Prasad Ghat. Hari checked his phone for Google Maps. Although it displayed a duration of seven minutes by walk to Lalita Ghat, Hari was skeptical, given the contours of the steps. There was an offensive smell due to the pumping station. Except for a few beggars and sweepers, at this hour, there was no crowd. In about 92 m, they reached Dr. Rajendra Prasad Ghat, which was quite small compared with other ghats. It was less clean than other ghats and lit up by the big and bright flood lights on the two Pumping Stations.

In 1979, the State government had paved this ghat and named it after the First President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad. This ghat, by its earlier name, Ghoda, was the place where horses were traded since the Maurya period. Department of Tourism organizes Gaṅgā Mahotsav at this ghat. There are two sewage pumping stations at this ghat.

The infrastructure of Vārāṇasī, such as sewer, sanitation, drainage, or electric poles and wires, is in an old condition and is being rehabilitated.

Vārāṇasī generates over 300 million liters of daily (MLD) sewage. Today, Vārāṇasī boosts an operational capacity of 420 MLD sewage treatment capacity with a few sewage treatment plants (STP) such as 140 MLD STP in Dinapur, 120 MLD STP in Goitha, 50 MLD STP in Rāmana, 10 MLD STP in Bhagawanpur, and 10 MLD STP capacity (using the latest Anaerobic-Anoxic-Aerobic (A2O) technology) at Ramnagar.

18:06. In about 83 m from Dr. Rajendra Prasad Ghat, the group continued the walk quickly past Man Mandir Ghat. The distinct palace in white was a sight to see from the boats on the river.

In 1600, Mahārāja Man Singh of Amer built his palace at Man Mandir Ghat. Until the 18th century, its old name was Someśwar Ghat. Mahārāja Man Singh's palace has an ornate window carvings, white in color compared with other forts next to it, and other splendid features that make it a tourist attraction. Mahārāja Sawai Jai Singh II built one of the five observatories in the palace called Jantar Mantar in 1737 AD. The other four observatories were built in Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, and Mahura. Some of the popular instruments in this observatory, otherwise known as Nakshatra Vaidshala, are Disha Yantra, Digansha Yantra, Dhruva Yantra, Prakash Yantra, Ram Yantra, Krantivritta Yantra, and Samrat Yantra.

A few kids were enjoying a game of badminton in front of the bright blue-color Dolphin restaurant. In about 270 m from Man Mandir Ghat, they crossed into Tripura Bhairavi Ghat and then in about 50 m into Meer Ghat.

18:12. As soon as they crossed the signage carving on the wall for Meer Ghat, they saw a steep flight of stairs that was designed in six groups of five steps and separated by a metal barricade in the middle. Hari stopped in front of these stairs and looked up towards the buildings at the top. He observed the steps. Most of the steps were long stone slabs that were at least two ft wide and one foot tall. Arjun, Disha, Harbir, Maanyatha, Sanket, and others immediately stopped and looked around. Hari asked Disha, “Let us position a policeman here.” Disha assigned one policeman to this location.

Next to the stairs, Hari noticed a colosseum-style arch in the first and second levels of a building on the right that was adjoining the Alka hotel. This hotel had a clear view of the lake from an open courtyard on the second floor. The façade in front of the hotel looked like a pyramid-style mini Chichen Itza with a narrow flight of steps in the center leading to the hotel. Everyone heard a loud motor chugging sound and turned around to see a brightly lit two-tiered boat with three tall saffron flags sailing southwards along the river. The boat looked like a casino riverboat in the United States, except for its loud noise.

In 1735, the Faujdar of Kashi, Mir Rustam Ali, got the Meer Ghat. There are a couple of temples on the top of this ghat – Jarasandheśwarer, Viśālākṣī, Śwet Madhav, Asha Vinayak, and Yagya Varaha

temple. The old name of Meer Ghat was Jarasandh Ghat, named after Jarasandheśwarer temple. In the Karthik month, day of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Chaturdashi, people take a holy dip and worship Jarasandheśwarer. Besides temples, this ghat also has two Maths - Bhajrashram Math and Nanak Panthi Sikh Saints Math. Women of the Bengali community reside mostly at Bhajanashram Math.

18:18. In about 190 m, they finally reached Lalita Ghat. Even at this hour, the five floodlight columns at Lalita Ghat made it one of the brightly lit ghats along the river. Another unique feature of this ghat was its huge expansive riverfront with a long pier to welcome tourists riding on boats from other ghats.

Lalita Ghat is one of the many important and venerated ghats at Vārāṇasī and is named after Goddess Lalita, who is revered as the highest form of Adi Śākthi and an embodiment of Durga. Parvati is considered an incarnation of Lalita Maha Tripura Sundari. Hindus believe that a glimpse of Lalitha Devi at the Lalita Gauri mandir eliminates problems and brings prosperity.

Lalita Ghat provides a historical link between Vārāṇasī and Nepal. As Swami Nirgunanda, the King of Nepal, Rana Bahadur Shah decided to build a replica of Paśupatiṇath temple at Vārāṇasī from 1800 to 1804. While construction was in progress, the King returned to Nepal on 25 April, 1806. On his return, he was stabbed to death by his

stepbrother, Sher Bahadur Shah. The King's son Girvan Yuddha Bikram Shah Deva continued with the construction of the Nepali Mandir, a Dharamshala, and Lalita Ghat, and completed them in 1843. Today, the area under the Nepali mandir, Dharamshala, and Lalita Ghat belongs to the Nepali government.

Śrī Samrajeśwar Paśupatinath Mahādev mandir is known by many names, Nepali mandir, Kanthwala mandir, and Mini Kajuraho mandir. It is a pagoda-style mandir constructed in the Nepali style of structure and made up of wood, terracotta, and stone.

As a part of the Kāśī Viśwanath Dham Corridor Project, devotees now have direct access to the temple, from the holy Gaṅges river, along 320 m long and 20 m wide paved walkway, through Lalita Ghat to Lord Kāśī Viśwanath mandir. Also, as a part of the Corridor project, a sewage pumping station that had earlier obscured the ghat has been relocated.

Hari appreciated its beauty and said, “Arjun, this is Bhārat for you.” Everyone looked at him. Spreading his hands and turning 360 degrees in a circle, he continued, “If this place, this architecture, this beauty, this divinity doesn't make you feel proud, what will?” He stopped and faced the ghat. “Isn't this like ancient Rome? As Sadhguru beautifully describes Kāśī - *When Athens was not even thought of, Kāśī was! When Rome did not even exist in people's minds, Kāśī was! When*

Egypt did not even exist, Kāśī was! This view is so mesmerizing.”

His tone suddenly changed to seriousness. “Disha, we need to have two policemen guarding this place at various entry or exit points. Do we have enough?”

18:24. Disha asked two of them to stay back and said, “Let me make a call.” She made a quick call. “There will be more coming over soon. Shall we continue?”

Now Hari, Disha, Harbir, Maanyatha, Sanket and two policemen walked across Lalita Ghat to reach Manikarnika Ghat.

18:30. In about 220 m, as they walked into the ghat, Hari noticed the entrance to a tunnel that led to Kāśī Viśwanath temple. There were water marks on the ghat from the river to this tunnel. Devotees could cremate, take a dip in the holy Gaṅges, and then take the passageway to the Kāśī Viśwanath temple directly.

Hari said, “Let us place a policeman here.” They were greeted by a grim sight with people walking around with flowers, logs, and dead bodies.

Manikarnika Ghat, located between Lalita Ghat and Scindia Ghat, is one of the holiest sites along the river Gaṅgā. This ghat is known as Mahasamshan, the great cremation ground. It is also one of the oldest ghats in Vārāṇasī, with references in the Matsya Purāṇa and 5th-century Gupta inscriptions. It is believed that when someone dies here, they attain mokṣa. Because of these reasons, about 200 dead bodies are cremated

almost every day at this ghat! Of the two ghats, Manikarnika and Hariścandra Ghat, where dead bodies are cremated, Manikarnika Ghat is bigger. There are huge stacks of wood logs at the top of the ghat. The family of the deceased can purchase funeral packages that include wood, sandalwood, sawdust, ghee, priest's services, and other items required for the ritual. Under the Kāśī Viswanath Dham project, Manikarnika Ghat was renovated and now has about 18 pyre frames on three platforms.

There are many legends associated with this ghat. One legend is around Mother Sati. It is believed that she sacrificed herself by immolating herself when her father, Raja Daksh Prajapathi, humiliated Lord Śiva. Lord Śiva then carried her body to Mount Kailasha in grief. To end his sorrow, Lord Viṣṇu sent his divine Chakra to cut Mother Sati into 51 pieces. The place where each piece falls on earth is called 'Ekannaya Shaktipeeth.' It is believed that Mother Sati's earrings fell at Manikarnika Ghat. Hence, the name. The shrine for the Shaktipeeth is referred to as 'Viśālākṣī' or 'Manikarni.' Another legend is when Lord Śiva comes to the holy city with Parvathi, and bathes at a Kund on the banks of Gaṅgā, he drops his earrings into the well.

18:36. Hari, Arjun, Disha and others started walking up the flight of stairs located in the middle of the ghat and stopped mid-way. Harbir, Maanyatha, Sanket and the two policemen

were waiting below. Hari, Arjun and Disha looked around. Hari observed three levels with four funeral pyres on each level. At this hour, multiple funeral pyres were burning and pungent smoke in the air made the evening look apocalyptic. Hari and Arjun used a handkerchief to cover their mouths. Disha walked further up and waited to avoid the smoke. Many half-burnt logs and trash were all over the place. Just then, they heard the chants of *Ram Nam Sathya Hai* from the top of the steps. A dead body was brought down the steps by four bearers and a few people surrounded them. One person was in the lead requesting people to step aside. Hari and Arjun stood on the side giving way to the procession. The group carrying the dead body walked past them. There was an orange-colored cloth on top of the body. They watched them go down the steps towards the sands of the riverbank.

18:42. Arjun asked, “Hari, why are they chanting Ram Naam Sathya Hai?” Hari looked at the people in the procession, paused for a few seconds, and then turned around to look at Arjun and said, “It means Lord Rama is the Truth! Hindus believe everything is Maya or illusion, and to attain the Lord is the ultimate salvation. Every name of the Lord has significance or describes the qualities of the Lord. In Sanskrit, the letters that make up the name, especially RA-MA, are considered as Beeja Aksharas.”

Arjun looked lost. Hari continued, “Ok. Leave aside the etymological significance of the letters. The greatest of all Beeja Aksharas in Hinduism is OM. You have heard the sound...OM, right?” Arjun nodded his head. Hari continued, “RA-MA is quite similar. One reason is, by chanting RA-MA, it indirectly helps one console mentally when they are

grieving for their dead friend or family member. The sound soothes the mind. Another belief is that it helps the soul release itself from this Saṃsāra.”

Day 2 18:48–19:36 | Ajapāda (अजपाद) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

18:48. A stray, brown-colored cow was sitting on the sands facing the ghat and oblivious to the group carrying the body or the loud chants. The body was kept slowly down on the sand. The four bearers folded their pants up as they were planning to take the body to the river. Two of them removed their shirt. They ensured the shrouded body was adjusted and tied to the stretcher firmly, folded the hanging garlands on the stretcher, and then walked into the river to dip the body lightly. One of them folded their palms in a cup shape, took water from the river, and sprinkled it over the body. Then started their loud chants again and lifted the body back towards the riverbank, and one of the pyres.

Arjun broke the silence and asked, “This mass burial is so grim!”

Hari asked him if this was his first visit to Vārāṇasī. Arjun nodded.

Hari laughed and said, “You are going to get mokṣa now, having visited the holiest city for the Hindus.” Arjun laughed. They looked around. There were a few stray dogs lazily walking around.

18:54. Hari waved at Disha to indicate that they were planning to walk down towards the river. Disha showed thumbs up and continued to wait at the top. Hari and Arjun

walked down towards the river, crossed the remaining team members and came to a corner.

Hari said, “Look at the river from here. Isn’t it a beautiful sight? Did you know that the Mughal emperor Akbar called it ‘the water of immortality’ and served it in his court?”

Standing on the sands of the riverbank, a huzur moment developed within Hari as he described Mother Gaṅgā, “We know that Mother Gaṅgā has been in existence for at least 5000 years. At the end of the Great War, which we refer to as Mahābhārata, Queen Kunti of the powerful Kurus family beseeched Lord Kṛṣṇa to stay with them. Her prayer describes Mother Gaṅgā in a beautiful prayer.”

19:00. Hari began reciting a Sanskrit sloka, closing his eyes and folding his palms in prayer. Due to the noise and crowd, Arjun, Harbir, Maanyatha, Sanket, and the two policemen moved closer to Hari to listen.

tvayi mē'nanyaviṣayā matirmadhupatē'sakṛt |
ratimudvahatādaddhā gaṅgēvaughamudanvati ||

He then opened his eyes and turned towards Arjun. “The Queen prays that she should be constantly attracted to Him without any hindrance, just as this eternal mighty river,’ Hari paused and extended his hand pointing in the direction of the river, and continued, “flows without any hindrance or diversion to the sea. Vedas are not just religious scriptures. For us, they guide a human through a spiritual journey. Moreover, for those who are not spiritual, they also provide geography and historical references.” He then turned towards the river.

19:06. “Arjun, my friend, we see divinity in everything, including rivers! We do not separate the Creator from the

Creations. We believe that Creator is in the Creation, and that is why we see Godliness in animate and inanimate objects such as stones.”

Still looking at the river, Hari continued, “This ghat is one place that everyone should visit to understand the purpose of their existence. One may be rich, poor, famous, criminal, single, married, young, old, male, or female; everyone dies one day. Many fortunate are brought here in the end, for their final journey from their existing human form to any of the 8.4 million life forms based on their good or bad karma.”

19:12. The group was watching the river for a few minutes. Hari then turned towards Arjun, and said, “What if—a big what if we hand over the Seal of Manu to the kidnapper and secure the release of the victims. Shall we walk back?” Arjun nodded.

Hari, Arjun, Harbir, Maanyatha, Sanket, and the two policemen walked up the steps. On reaching the top, Hari suggested waiting here for ten minutes and observing everything around them.

19:18. Hari had bought the day’s newspaper at a tea stall on their way here. He looked at the local newspaper and showed Arjun the front page. The front page had a big photo of the Burning Man. Headlines read, “The Burning Man! Mokṣa or Murder!”

Arjun immediately remarked, “We need to be quick in locating the victims. Shall we spread and search?” Hari paused for a few seconds and replied, “Yes, let’s do that. It is going to be a long evening, maybe night! Ask everyone to assemble here around 21:15.” The team started to spread out.

Meanwhile, Viṣṇu Kali reached his dimly lit hut. It was time to prepare his next sacrifice. He had brought in a man earlier and made him sit on the floor, his hands tied to a post. This man was a middle-aged politician and had been heavily sedated earlier. Viṣṇu Kali opened the locks from the outside and pushed the rusty door open. He looked at his new victim from a distance and could see the victim's head moving from side to side. He then looked at his watch and decided it was time for the victim to wake up.

19:24. He came close to him, observed him, and then lifted the victim's head slowly and removed the stuffed cloth slowly. The victim started to cough and spit saliva. He gave it a few minutes before stuffing the cloth back into the victim's mouth. He said in a low voice, "The great Dilip Singh, Minister of Secondary and Higher Education!" The victim lifted his head slowly and could barely open his eyes due to the sedatives. He then threw a bucket of cold water on his head! Dilip Singh suddenly woke up in fear and shook his head from side to side.

Viṣṇu Kali growled, "Do you know why you are here?" There was anger on the victim's face.

The victim, Dilip Singh, was born to a zamindari family in UP. His father and brothers owned large tracts of land and were one of the most powerful families in UP politics. Despite all the family fortunes, Dilip Singh's childhood was a nightmare. His father, Jai Chand Singh was a political party leader who was well-known for his pride and arrogance. He would ill-treat and beat his wife almost every day and then leave the house to spend the night with his mistress. His anger knew no limits. He would take out his belt to whip young Dilip Singh. As Dilip Singh grew older

into a disgruntled, arrogant youth, he started to steal money from home and spend time with 5 useless friends who hung around him for his money. Together they would bully every other kid in the school. In high school, he started to participate in school politics and then gradually moved on to college politics.

Booze and women became his weakness. He felt that women were weak creatures and should be controlled. His first victim in the high school days was a girl from a lower caste. One day, he and his friends followed her after school on their motorcycles. At one point, she had to walk alone towards her home. They drove their motorbikes past her and stopped. They offered her a ride home. She refused out of fear. But they coaxed her into riding with Ram. She reluctantly sat behind him. They drove the motorbikes along the dirt road and quickly made a turn into a desolate pathway leading to the fields. She got scared and jumped off the motorbike. His friends who were behind caught her and held her tightly. Her mouth was muffled with her dupatta. They carried her into the tall rice fields. Dilip Singh followed them. They stopped at a clearing in the middle of the fields and put her down. Dilip Singh's friends held down and he raped the girl. The girl cried in pain, but she could not move her hands or legs. Then, after Dilip Singh was done, his friends took turns. Finally, after they were all done raping her, they threatened to kill her if she told anyone. Once the girl's parents heard about the incident, they went to the local police to lodge a complaint. The constable on duty promptly called Dilip Singh's father and explained the situation. Dilip Singh's father promised money in return for closing the case. The parents were devastated and the girl committed suicide in a couple of days.

After a few years in college, Dilip Singh joined mainstream politics on his father's insistence. He was married to a local rich businessman's daughter. But he continued to enjoy spending time and money on women outside his marriage. He grew up the ranks slowly and became the Minister for Secondary and Higher Education in his father's administration. Over the years, several parents would come to him seeking his recommendation to get their children admitted into a school or college and their choice of degree program for a fee.

One day, a family had come to seek admission for their son. The parents, Jitendra and Ruchika, walked into his office with their son's application. Although Ruchika got married at a young age, at 35 years, she could still turn a few heads. The moment she entered Dilip Singh's office he appreciated her beauty and wanted to have her. He asked Jitendra to pay the application dues and come back and requested Ruchika to wait while Jitendra completed the process. He then winked at his peon who was standing close to the exit. His peon got the message and led Jitendra outside towards the administration building. After Jitendra left the room, he made his move. He stood up and walked towards the door and locked it. He asked Ruchika if her son's dreams of going to college mattered to her. Ruchika felt uneasy as he approached her from behind her. He then lay his palms on Ruchika's shoulders. Ruchika's uneasiness and fear increased. He told her that she was the key to her husband's safety and son's admission. And, that if she did anything for him, he would ensure her son gets the admission without any donation and get the choice of program. Ruchika's tears started to roll down. She would do anything to make sure her son did not suffer the life they did. She reluctantly agreed.

He led her to the adjoining room and locked the door. Then he went close to her and pulled her towards him. He smelled her hair and used his thumb to slide along her lower lip. He then made her turn around. He held her tearful face and slowly pressed his lips against her. She let out a muffled sound as tears poured. He then raped her. After 20 minutes, both walked out. He then texted his peon to bring Jitendra. Jitendra returned 10 minutes later and was provided with a college admission seal. Over the next few months, Dilip Singh would take advantage of her whenever he could. It became worse when he started threatening her with naked photos of her in compromising positions and started using her as whore. He started forcing her to attend his private events, where she would attend to his clients' needs. She started hating her life and was pushed into depression. One day, she decided to take her life!

19:30. Dilip Singh lifted his head and asked, “Where am I? Who are you?”

He screamed, “Shut up! You only need to know why you are here. You have committed a *maha-pāpā*. You had one of the most important roles in society! You used your office to satisfy your *Kama*...your insatiable desire for women. You raped and destroyed the lives of several women!”

Dilip Singh asked, “How much money do you want?”

He bent down and looked at him, “You are what your deepest desires are...desires of lust give you strength, and this strength makes you commit deeds...grave deeds of taking what is not yours...deeds of disrespecting women! You have humiliated Mother Sati. You will be burnt alive at Manikarnika Ghat. I pray to Mother Sati to give you the treatment that befits the way you mistreated women!”

Dilip Singh started to pee in his pants.

Day 2 19:36–20:24 | Ahir-Budhnya (अहिर्बुध्न्य) Muhūrta |

Quality of time - Auspicious ||

19:36. Viṣṇu Kali turned around, went back to the table, took out a bottle containing white, odorless, bitter crystalline powder, Strychnine. He mixed this strong poison with a vial of liquid and used a syringe to suck the mixture in. Then, he spread a white cotton cloth across the table and turned around and walked towards the victim with the syringe. As soon as Dilip Singh saw Viṣṇu Kali walking towards him, he violently shook his body to free himself. Viṣṇu Kali held Dilip Singh's head tightly with his left hand while he used the right hand to jab the syringe into Dilip Singh's neck intravenously. Then, he removed his hand and checked the time. He expected the victim's arms and legs to become rigid, jaw to start tightening, and breathing to become difficult in the next 30 minutes.

20:00. Viṣṇu Kali untied the victim, carried him outside to an old ambulance, and placed him inside. They drove towards Godowalia Chauraha and then turned into Bansphatak road.

Day 2 20:24–21:12 | Puṣya (पुष्य) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

20:24. The area close to the Lord Kāśī Viśwanath temple Gate No. 4 was congested with a stream of heavy traffic in both directions, street hawkers, and pedestrians. Policemen stood guard around the Gate and guided traffic.

20:36. Viṣṇu Kali was finally able to reach the Dwar and park the van at a remote corner across the street from

Manikarnika Dwar. He looked around. Then he went to the back of the van, opened the doors, and climbed inside to check on Dilip Singh. His body may have been motionless, but his teary eyes were asking for forgiveness.

20:42. Viṣṇu Kali started removing his clothes one by one and made him completely naked. He then covered his body with flowers. After decorating him, Viṣṇu Kali stepped out of the van, closed its doors, and set out to find four people who could carry the body to the ghat.

21:00 He returned with four people after 10 minutes to carry the stretcher. They pulled the stretcher, with Dilip Singh motionless on it, out of the van and covered him with more flowers.

Day 2 21:12 - 22:00 | Aśvinī (अश्विनी) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

21:12. He had timed the walk earlier to the ghat at eleven minutes and forty-two seconds. Since they had to carry the body, he expected a delay. Moreover, it was dark, and the crowd at this hour was slightly more than early morning. They had to maintain pace and reach the ghat within the next 15 to 20 minutes, given the weight of the body.

21:18. They crossed the road and reached the Dwar. Viṣṇu Kali started his stopwatch!

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Meanwhile, Hari checked his watch. The team had been searching for the last 2 hours but they had no success. They were getting close to the Yama Muhūrta. Everyone was slowly assembling around the original meeting place.

Hari asked Arjun, “Shall we take this gali and walk up further?” Arjun nodded. Hari asked if the policemen knew the way from here to the main road. One of them answered. “Sir, Yehan se hum Manikarnika Dwar pahunch sakthe hein.” (*Sir, we can reach Manikarnika Dwar from here.*) Hari asked him to lead the way. Hari, Arjun, Disha, Harbir, Maanyatha, and Sanket followed him, leaving behind one policeman at Manikarnika Ghat close to the burning pyres.

21:24. They walked past Tarakeśwar Mahādev mandir and a multistoried crematorium on their left. Then they crossed the huge piles of wood that were stacked on either side. In about 82 m, they crossed Śri Upśateśwar Mahādev mandir on the right and Śri Kumbha Mahādev mandir on the left.

Hari felt a sharp increase in the number of people who walked through this part of the gali. Nobody was carrying dead bodies for cremation. He checked his watch. It was Yama Muhūrta. *Could it be that people did not want to bury their dead in this Muhūrta?* He wondered.

21:30. The team picked up pace through these galis in a single file, observing everybody and every building around them. Since it was dark, most doors were closed. Motorbikes and bicycles were parked on some sides. They paused at a gali that appeared on the right. No one seemed to be walking in this gali. A stray white cow and its calf were sitting at a distance. The policeman said, “Sir, Mujhe patha nahi yeh gali kahaan jathi hei. Hamme seedha jana hai.” (*Sir, I do not know where this gali goes. We must go straight.*) And he pointed in the direction they were originally heading. Hari looked at Google Maps and noticed that this gali led to a bigger road. However, the digital map lacked a name for the road. He did not want to take any chances. “Arjun and

Maanyatha, can you take this gali? Call me if you see anything suspicious.”

Arjun nodded and took this path along with Maanyatha.

21:36. As the remaining five members of the team continued and came close to the *Śri Hanuman Bhandar Bhojanalya* signboard, they saw four men carrying a dead body on a stretcher-style wood frame, chanting *Ram Naam Sathya Hai*, who walked quickly past them. The policeman and Hari moved to the right side while Disha moved to the left side, giving them way to walk. They were followed by a group of ten to 15 men.

Hari observed this group closely. A thin white cloth covered this body from top to bottom. Only the face was visible. There were cotton stubs in the nose. A nice fragrance came from the shrouded body, as it was covered with rose petals and a garland. He noticed a tall, strong, middle-aged man was leading this group towards the ghat. He was bare-chested and wearing a white panchakacham with a yellow cloth tied around his hip. His hair was combed backwards but not tied. He had a small U-shaped tilak using sandalwood paste and a red dot Kumkum in his glabella. He sported a moustache and a bristly beard.

21:42. He turned around for a few seconds to give Hari a quick glance. Hari’s eye met his. Something about this person made Hari feel that he had met him elsewhere. He was quick to notice something around this person’s neck. It was not clear from a distance.

As Viṣṇu Kali turned back and continued his walk with the group, the dim streetlights revealed a faint dark feather tattoo

on his left shoulder! Hari was unable to recollect where he had seen it before.

As the team took a few steps forward, they noticed another gali on the right. Hari directed Disha and Harbir to take the gali. Both nodded and left. The policeman, Hari, and Sanket walked a few more steps before they came to a left turn.

21:48. A few men were walking around in this turn. They were walking fast now, when they came towards another gali that turned left. This spot looked like a T-road. The policeman pointed at Hari and Sanket and told them to walk straight. When they were about to continue, Hari got a call from Disha. Disha was screaming, “Maanyatha called. Arjun has been knifed. He is bleeding profusely. She has been hit on the head.”

Hari shouted, “Fuck! Where are you?”

Disha was out of breath, yet she screamed, “Come to the spot where you asked Arjun and Maanyatha to make the right turn.” Hari, Sanket, and the policeman started running back towards the location.

Day 2 22:00 - 22:48 | Yama (यम) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

22:00. In the dark, it looked like time was eternal, and all galis were the same. They reached the spot in three to four minutes. Arjun was partially unconscious and unable to talk. He had lost a lot of blood. His shirt had a few dirt stains, while his face had a few bruises, signs of a punch. Disha was holding his right hand over her shoulder, while she tightly grasped his waist with a blood-drenched cloth with her left hand.

Maanyatha was rubbing her head with her right hand while holding a phone in her left hand. Disha said, “He is bleeding badly. I have called the medics. Arjun was blabbering something about a tall man and a feather. I could not make any sense from what he was trying to say.” She asked the policeman to lift Arjun. Sanket helped lift Maanyatha up. All started walking slowly towards Manikarnika Ghat.

Hari told Disha to lead Maanyatha, Arjun, and Sanket back to the ghat slowly, while he, Harbir, and the policeman ran toward the ghat.

22:06. Flashes of the discussion with the priest about the coin with the feather design appeared in his mind. They came to Tripura Bhairavi Road and were about to make a left when a large crowd carrying a dead body appeared. The chants were loud. There was little space to move. Since it was dark at this corner, and the crowd was thick, Hari could not locate the previous group.

22:12. He started pushing himself through this crowd. People were getting upset. His shoulder hit a lady carrying a baby. She started screaming at the top of her lungs. Some of the men in the group came to her rescue and started holding him tightly. The policeman from the ghat came from the opposite direction. He freed him and shouted at the crowd to move aside. Hari and Harbir continued to run with the policeman's help.

They were now close to the shops, where they had several stacks of wood.

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Meanwhile, Viṣṇu Kali and the group reached the ghat. The cremation site had multiple funeral pyres burning

simultaneously on the mud. The sound of metal clanging was loud. The group had to find a funeral pyre where they could cremate the body. The four helpers did not take him to the river.

22:18. Instead, they removed Dilip Singh from the stretcher and placed him on the nearest open pyre for cremation. While Dilip Singh screamed internally, he could not move his mouth or body. The helpers kept several logs on him quickly and covered him completely, except his face.

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Hari, Harbir, and the policeman finally came to the location where the pyres were and started searching for them. Hari could not locate Viṣṇu Kali. He noticed something strange with a small group of four people.

22:24. He ran towards the funeral pyre, pushing everyone to the side. When he reached the pyre, he checked out the body that was being burnt. He noticed the eyelids were open! It looked as though the eyeballs were trying to move. It seemed alive! However, the body's nostrils were covered. He saw some traces of liquid on the mud below the pyre.

22:30. He bent down, used his fingers to touch the liquid, and smell it. From the other side of the pyre, Viṣṇu Kali quickly brought a burning log and set Dilip Singh on fire. The pyre burst into flames. The fire rose about a foot high and was intense. Hari fell back. Suddenly, Dilip Singh started screaming and trying to move. But the weight of the logs was too much for him to do anything. He screamed at the top of his lungs. Hari shouted at Harbir and the policeman, "The person is alive! Get some water."

Disha, Maanyatha, and Sanket arrived at the scene.

22:36. Harbir and the policeman searched for a bucket and ran down the ghat to get some water. Sensing something was wrong, some of the men who stood close by followed Harbir and started filling buckets of water and throwing them at the pyre. They could not do anything. Mother Sati took over!

Meanwhile, Viṣṇu Kali ran in the direction of Dashaśvamedhá Ghat. Hari noticed him at a distance as he slipped away, but he wanted to help the person on the pyre.

22:42. Some men pulled Dilip Singh out of the burning pyre. He was breathing his last as his body was half charred with fourth-degree burns! While they carefully tried to lay him on a stretcher, Hari ran in the direction of Dashaśvamedhá Ghat.

Disha, Harbir, and Maanyatha saw him running and followed him. Sanket and the policemen stayed back. Hari was unsure if Viṣṇu Kali had taken the tunnel or the ghats and decided to enter the tunnel regardless but could not find anyone at this hour. He ran to the side of the ghats, but it was dark. He asked Disha to call the policeman she had positioned at Meer Ghat. He reported that no one had crossed him. They could not locate Viṣṇu Kali or anyone who carried the body.

Day 2 22:48–23:36 | Agni (अग्नि) | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

22:48. Hari, Disha, Harbir, and Maanyatha returned to the pyres. Hari asked how Arjun was doing, and Disha said they rushed him to the nearest open hospital. Hari looked at Maanyatha and inquired how she was doing. “Doing Ok! Just a bad headache. No bleeding!” A battalion of policemen had reached the ghat to take over.

23:00. Disha asked Harbir, Maanyatha, and Sanket to take some rest for the night.

23:30. She then left the ghat with Hari for the Taj Ganges. She recommended that he take a good rest for the night. She was beginning to feel concerned for Hari. The evening had taken a toll on everyone. Hari was deeply concerned about his friend, Arjun.

Day 2 23:36–00:24 | Vidhātṛ (विधातृ) Muhūrta | Quality of time – Auspicious ||

00:00. They reached Taj Ganges. She helped Hari check into the hotel and walked him to his room. Hari opened the door and walked in. Disha followed. He sat on the bed and started removing his shoes. Disha got a call. After hanging up the call, she said, “Arjun is now out of the danger zone. He needs a lot of rest. We will see him in the morning.”

00:06. Hari opened the refrigerator and searched for some scotch. He asked if Disha wanted to have a drink. She nodded. He opened two 1.7-ounce mini liquor-sized scotch bottles and poured them into two glasses. He came to the bedside and handed her a glass. She sat next to him, removed her shoes and socks. They tapped their glasses slowly and took a sip.

Hari was tired. He looked at her. He said, “Thank you for being there!” Disha said, “We are a team. We are together in this. Arjun will be ok.” Hari looked at his glass and said, “This is for my friend.” Disha chimed, “To our friend!”

00:12. He finished his glass, looked at her, and said, “Another?” She nodded and offered to take the glass. When she tried to take the glass from him, her fingers grazed his, and a spark triggered in her. She looked at him and his lips.

He looked at her, then at her lips. This was the moment he had been waiting for.

00:18. He stooped forward slowly to kiss her. She dropped the glass on the bed. He went for her upper lip, and then for her lower lip. She let her tongue out a little. He tasted the tip of her tongue with his, as a little saliva from her mouth stretched onto his tongue, and then sucked on her tongue. They passionately kissed for a few minutes. He then turned her around and held her head, kissing her. He then cupped her breasts and started squeezing them gently.

00:24. Disha lowered her hands, allowing him to take control. He then took his right hand down, slowly went down to her belt, and unbuckled her. Disha unlocked her lips from his and stared at the mirror in front of them. She noticed how he unbuttoned her pants, parted them open. She saw his hand slide inside and closed her eyes. He saw her black panty line for a few seconds and then slowly slid his hand inside them. He gently stroked her. Then, they moved back a little. She turned around to face him. He started to open her shirt buttons one by one and finally took her tucked shirts out of her pants. She bent down, looked up at him, and unzipped his swollen pants. She unbelted him partially and slid her hands inside his underwear, while looking at him seductively with a smile.

00:30. She could feel his hardness. She took it out, brought her nose to the tip to relish the smell for a few seconds. Hari closed his eyes while enjoying the sensation. He forgot about Arjun and the chaotic evening. She had not been with a man for a long time and enjoyed it slowly.

Then, he made her stand up, removed her belt completely, and pulled her pants down. He made her lie down on the bed

while he licked the side of her legs and went up. He came to her panties and smelt them. The juices had started to flow out. The smell was evident. Then he pulled her black panties out slowly and appreciated the thin streak of hair.

00:36. He said, “I love a clean-shaven pussy with a landing-strip hair style.” Disha smiled and said, “I know you would like it. Now fly down and finish what you started, Pilot!” And she pulled his head towards her. It had been a while since his last American girlfriend, who taught him how to perform this. Disha felt a tickle at first, but then she enjoyed the sloppy warmth. She was getting aroused. Then, they both decided to become completely naked. Disha took the lead, climbed onto the bed, and made love for the most part that night.

Day 3 – The Mahārāja

Monday Somavāsaraḥ (सोमवासरः)

Day 3 03:36 - 04:24 | Dyumadgadyuti (द्युमद्गद्युति) Muhūrta

| Quality of time - Auspicious ||

03:36. After returning from Manikarnika Ghat, Viṣṇu Kali had a disturbed sleep. His medications were not working. He realized his meditation was disturbed by thoughts about who the next victim might be. *Should I get rid of Krodha, Moha, Mada, or Matsarya? Which one should be next?*

03:42. Viṣṇu Kali, a creature of habits, got up early and prepared himself for meditation during the Brahmā Muhūrta time. He tried to refocus his mind on slokas but became restless and, in a moment of anger, opened his eyes, screamed, and kicked the plate and cup in front of him. He was breathing heavily. The anger was intense. He tried to avoid medications, but it never worked.

03:48. He slowly regained his composure and found his answer. He realized anger was the next archenemy he had to destroy. Somehow, he felt things were going to be different today and were going to pick up pace. He got up and walked to the adjoining room to prepare for the video recordings. He covered the windows with a thick black cloth and then a single chair. Then he powered his laptop and configured the real-time voice changer software. He ensured the laptop was positioned to display his entire upper torso as he sat in the chair.

After he was satisfied with the laptop setup, he went to the bathroom to take a shower.

04:12. After his shower, he did a quick recording to test the video and audio. He played the short clip to confirm his face was not visible and his voice was different. He reviewed his script to ensure there were no clues to his whereabouts or potential leads. His clear and stern message was a warning meant for the Indian polity. He was ready.

04:18. He decided to relax and meditate for a few minutes before beginning the recording.

Day 3 04:24–05:12 | Brahma (ब्रह्म) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

04:30. He opened his eyes to check his watch for the Brahmā Muhūrta.

Viṣṇu Kali began his recording. He checked his watch and knew it was auspicious.

“Jai Hind!

I am the one who has kidnapped the six personalities. I am the one who burnt the first victim on a boat. I am angry! Many like me are angry!

Since the birth of India 75 years back, we have been divided on language, caste, and religion. Our colonial masters were skillful in keeping this nation divided until independence. They have sown a deep hatred and division amongst us. Today, we live with this colonial mindset of caste and the reservation system. Our fathers of the Constitution have got this wrong!

The word *Caste* does not belong to our saṃskṛti and is derived from the Portuguese word *casta* which means race, lineage, and breed. Scheduled Castes, as a term, was first coined by our colonial masters through the Government of India Act, 1935. At that point in time, a Scheduled Caste group was defined as such castes, parts of groups within castes, which appear to His Majesty in Council to correspond to the classes of persons formerly known as the *Depressed Classes*, as His Majesty in Council may prefer. Please note.”

Viṣṇu Kali paused and pronounced the next two words slowly and loudly, “may prefer.”

He continued, “This self-serving definition to divide-and-conquer us was expanded in The Government of India (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1936, and contained a list of castes that His Majesty may prefer.

Varṇa is as ancient as Bhārat is. It belongs to our saṃskṛti...our Indic cultural roots. In Sanāthana Dharma, there were four broad groups - Kṣatriya, Brāhmaṇa, Vaiśya, and Śūdra. While Varṇa was based on an individual’s occupation, the caste was based on birth. Caste is a rigid structure that never provided an individual with an opportunity to advance in society.

04:36. Bhārat has about 5000 Jātis and about 700 tribes with varying cultures, beliefs, religion, and languages. Embrace our cultural roots and identity, and practice what is unique to us. But do not use that identity and unique practice to discriminate against one another. Our roots are in the same Indic civilization, which is several thousand years old. We are all descendants of Bhārata! It is equally important that we do not instill this discrimination in young minds as well.

Let me remind everyone of the famous quote that Dr. BR Ambedkar made in 1946... *our difficulty is how to make the heterogeneous mass that we have today decide in common and march cooperatively on that road which is bound to lead us to unity.*

Today, our Smṛti is broken!

The constitutional reference to the caste begins with Article 15, which deals with *the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, or place of birth*. While Article 15 (3) makes a special provision for women and children, Article 15 (4) and (5) are about the advancement of any socially and educationally backward classes, SCs, and STs. Articles 330, 332, 334 have been modified many times since the commencement of this reservation system. While the original intent of these articles may have been sincere and honorable, they have been abused over time by our political masters for vote banks and have destroyed the ethos of our civilization's Dharma.

These articles were meant for a short period. Most of you may not realize that the original intent was to keep the reservation system for a limited time of 10 years to uplift the weaker sections of our nation. Today, we embrace an unmanageably complex reservation system, designed in the colonial era, commenced in 1950, that should have ceased in 1960, and extended seven times through several amendments, including eighth, twenty-third, forty-fifth, sixty-second, seventy-ninth, ninety-fifth, one hundred-third, and one hundred-fourth. The latest one, the 104th Amendment Act was passed on December 10, 2019, to extend the reservation system for another 10 years.”

04:42. Moreover, the Supreme Court of India ruled in 1992 that reservations could not exceed 50 percent. It put a cap on reservations. But as many as six states continue to exceed this reservation quota today...83% in Chhattisgarh, 73% in Madhya Pradesh, 69% in Tamil Nadu, and 65% in Maharashtra, 60% in Haryana, and Bihar. These high percentages are suffocating real talent and young minds.

Our political masters use the reservation system to seed a false narrative in young minds and have propagated the vicious cycle of division and hatred. The system teaches our young minds to discriminate because in its eyes certain castes are better, forward or worse, backward than others.”

He paused and then said slowly, “Let me repeat...No Jāti is upper or forward or depressed or lower or backward!”

He then continued, “Many now have taken it as a fashionable or political posture to blame Sanāthana Dharma for the misgivings of a few who practice such discrimination. Do not judge Hinduism or Sanāthana Dharma by the lens of such people! Learn from saints and scholars such as Chaitanya, Sant Dnyaneshwar, Tukaram, Thiruvalluvar, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Vivekanand, and others.

It is high time that we abolished the entire reservation system that is based on a colonial mindset! Bhāratvāshis, decolonize yourself from the past! Learn about your saṁskṛti and embrace it proudly!

We need to get rid of official caste identification and must build a casteless society. However, we should allow individuals to embrace and nurture their Jāti. Abolish the reservation system! Do not use Jāti to allocate in educational institutions or employment in government offices. Our

cultural ethos has flourished for thousands of years without any need for documentation. Let us not issue caste certificates and refer to them as upper, forward, lower, or backward. This kind of identification or classification balkanizes us.

04:54. Law should condemn and act on those who cause harm or target specific Jātis. Law should protect, uplift, and advance poorer and weaker sections of Bhārat based on economic backwardness alone.

From 1951 to 2011, every Census has published data on SC/STs only. An exception should be made for the comprehensive Census enumeration to identify how all Jātis are doing for equity in the distribution of opportunities based on economic backwardness.

Do not create hatred by making the Jātis compete. Sanāthana Dharma did not create or embrace these shackles. Remove the shackles of hatred based on this colonial caste idea!

Embrace all humans and their Jāti. Every Jāti is a child of Bhārat. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam!

In summary, I have three demands.

First, *make the word caste illegal and remove it completely from the constitution*. We must embrace all Hindus, their Jāti and culture. All Jāti should be identified as citizens of Bhārat and nothing less. We can be of any Jāti, speak any language, follow any spiritual path or religion, or belong to any state.

Second, *abolish the identification, classification, grouping or ranking of Jāti* as Scheduled Castes, OBCs, forward, upper, backward, lower, or depressed. All citizens of Bhārat

belonging to any Jāti should be equal in the eyes of the law and the constitution.

Finally, my most important demand is to *abolish the reservation system*! Implement a process to identify, protect, uplift, or advance specific individuals, children, women, or families who are economically weaker based on income or wealth. Do not identify quotas by Jāti!

In three generations, everyone will start embracing each other and forget their hatred for other Jātis.

05:00. If my demands are not met, remaining victims will face similar consequences! There will be more like me who will rise from anger and hatred!

Jai Hind! Bhārat Mata ki Jai!”

Then Viṣṇu Kali started playing the clip where he showed his interaction with Dilip Singh in the building as he prepared him for murder. He completed his video after several takes, edits and attached the video recording in two emails – one for the local TV station and another for the PMO.

He then decided to leave for Assi Ghat around 5:15.

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Meanwhile at the hospital, Arjun had an important visitor. Maanyatha, Harbir and Sanket who were sitting outside the room, stood up to salute the visitor, followed him into the room, closed the door behind them.

Arjun’s medications made him hallucinate. He was having visions of a battle: the sound of swords, soldiers fighting, arrows in the air, elephants blowing their trumpets, chariots

racing, cannonballs bursting with fire, dead soldiers and horses everywhere, and blood flowing like a river. He was in the middle of this battle and screaming *Har Har Mahadev* loudly when the visitor came close to Arjun's bedside.

The visitor noticed the contortions and sweat on Arjun's face. He picked up a towel that was lying on the bedside and slowly wiped the sweat off Arjun's face.

05:06. Arjun opened his eyes slowly. He was puzzled to see the Mahārāja. He asked, "Mahārāja, why are you here?"

He tried to get up. Mahārāja helped him rise slowly and placed two pillows on his back. He then took Arjun's left-hand palm and put it between his palms and said, "My dear General, you are always there for me and the country. How can I not be here when you are hurt? You have served me well for thousands of years!"

Arjun looked at the door to see if it was closed properly. He noticed Maanyatha, Harbir and Sanket were standing close to the door. He said softly, "Mahārāja, with due respect, this time I am not so sure if you are doing the right thing. Viṣṇu Kali is an unstable person. He could start a civil war. We cannot solve the problem of caste by giving him the divine object. It's too dangerous! Why are you doing this?"

Day 3 05:12 - 06:00 | Samudra (समुद्र) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

05:12. Mahārāja pulled up a chair beside Arjun's bed, sat down, and said, "I agree it is dangerous, Arjun. But the time is ripe. We must do something. This beautiful country is being Balkanized based on caste system, language, and religion. So, we need to fix it soon and unite all believers,

non-believers, and Jātis of Sanāthana Dharma together before external forces break this country!

We need to have a contemporary national political debate and erase the mental discriminatory shackles that our colonial masters had created to divide us. We must ask ourselves important questions – what is our understanding of Caste vs Varṇa vs Jāti? Which Jāti or dynasty was in a Varṇa? How did the Varṇa change over time? Is a Varṇa or Jāti even relevant today?

Let us start with Varṇa. During the Vedic period, our society was broadly divided into four social classes based on occupation. All Varṇas...Kṣatriya, Brāhmaṇa, Vaiśya and Śūdra had an equitable and important role to play in a society. Do not confuse Varṇa with Jāti, which we indirectly and obscurely refer to as caste today. Every Varṇa had a pivotal role in protecting and advancing society. Then and even today, each Varṇa is composed of many Jāti...or communities...or tribes. While the classification and primary functional occupation remained uniform across Bhārat, languages, food, or even cultural habits among similar Varṇa or Jāti varied by place. While the primordial cause for creation of the Varṇa may never be known and can be debated, the characteristics of these four remain even today.

Do we not have an army, politicians, traders, industrialists, professionals or daily wage workers? If we refer to them in English, we do not complain. Our Macaulay mindset has been mostly colonized, so that if we use the Varṇa or Jāti word, we cringe. Caste, based on the colonial definition, has destroyed our understanding of Varṇa or Jāti, reduced our

dignity of labor, created a division among the Jāti, and created a chaotic political environment!

05:18. Arjun said, “People have forgotten the history behind the people who made up each Varṇa. Unless their story is told, they would not be proud of their Varṇa.”

The Mahārāja nodded his head and said, “Satyameva Jayate!” Maanyatha, Harbir and Sanket were interested to hear this and came closer to them.

The Mahārāja continued, “Ancient times in *Bhāratavarṣa* were turbulent. Valiant men fought for kingdoms, family honor, women, and above everything, righteousness or moral duties. *Dharma* was revered and protected with one’s life. Those who protected it were considered noble ones. Āryās ruled large parts of the ancient world, *Āryāvarta*. Those were also Vedic times when the Gods came down from the heavens to earth as humans. *Avatāras* lived alongside these Āryās to uphold the Dharma and protect the ancient wisdoms known as the Vedas.

Many Kṣatriya dynasties and kingdoms, such as Sūryavaṃśa or Ikṣvāku, Somavaṃśī, Agnivaṃśī, Nagavaṃśī, Kuru, Br̥hadratha, Gopala, Pundravardhana, Anga, Vidarbha, Panchala, Gandhara, Matsya, Surasena, Kashi, Chedi, Pradyota, Pandiyan, Chera, Paurava, and Chola, upheld Vedic traditions. I mentioned a few only. But the geographical boundaries of these dynasties or kingdoms spanned present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Nepal.”

05:24. Maanyatha, Harbir, and Sanket were amazed at the Mahārāja’s knowledge of Itihāsa.

“The Kṣatriyas lived by the Kṣatriya Dharma, respected and protected all other Varṇa. Notable Vedic Kṣatriyas were Mahārāja Dilīpa, Raghu, Aja, Daśaratha, Lord Rāma, Yudhiṣṭhira, Parīkṣit, Pravahana-Jaivali, Janaka, and more. I still remember vividly how Dharmic they were in their thoughts and actions.

During the medieval times, there were dynasties or kingdoms such as Kushan, Rajput, Gurjara-Pratihara, Marathas, Ahoms, Jats, Cholas, Chalukyas, Rashtrakutas, Hoysalas, Kakatiyas, Vijayanagara, and more who lived per Kṣatriya Dharma. The geographical boundaries of these dynasties or kingdoms spanned present-day Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. That was the extent to which Sanāthana Dharma was widespread.”

Maanyatha said, “Since independence, we were taught more about Mughals, and other aggressors rather than Hindu kings in schools. Some Kings that come to my mind are Maharana Pratap, Chhatrapati Shivaji, Sambhaji, Peshwas, Rājārāja Choḷa, and more, who fought against the invaders. Thank you for making us feel proud.”

05:30. The Mahārāja said, “It is sad that we did not teach our real Itihasa to our future generations. In the name of secularism, we were intentionally kept ignorant for various political reasons. Now, if you were to compare Kṣatriyas with our institutions today, the closest would be our Indian Armed Forces and political parties. So, what has changed? Today, the Indian Armed Forces does not necessarily comprise members of the Kṣatriya Jāti. In fact, the Supreme Court ruled out caste-based reservation while retaining the importance of gender issues in Indian military schools. The

Indian Armed Forces, regardless, is the only institution in the country that is largely apolitical and passionately united as far as national security and patriotism for the country are concerned.”

Arjun felt proud to hear those words.

The Mahārāja continued, “During the colonial era, post 1857 Sepoy Mutiny, the Jonathan Peel Commission was tasked to identify social groups and races for loyal soldiers. They created a caste-based and region-based regiment. While many of these regiments created in the colonial era, such as the Brahmān Infantry, Chamar Regiment, and 1st Lingayat Battalion, were disbanded by the end of WW I and II, 26 of them still exist today, namely, Punjab, Madras, Rajputana, Sikh, Dogra, Kumaon, Bihar, and Naga regiments, Gorkha Rifles, Maratha, and Sikh Light Infantry, and Ladakh, Arunachal, and Sikkim scouts. Today, the composition of these regiments is expanding to include other castes. The Rajputana Rifles have both Rajput and Jat; the Rajput regiment has Rajputs, Gurjars, and Muslims. Today, political parties include in their election manifesto and promise to form, if elected, caste-based infantry regiments such as the Ahir Infantry Regiment. The National Commission for Scheduled Castes also supported a similar move to reinstate the Chamar Regiment. Today, the President’s bodyguards, first formed in 1773 by Governor Warren Hastings, is a small unit of 150 troops, still selected from three castes – Hindu Jat, Jat Sikh, and Rajput. The Army has cleared this in the Supreme Court that the recruitment from the castes is more functional in nature and not based on caste or religion.

05:36. Rest assured, Arjun, I have the greatest respect for our Indian Armed Forces, the individuals who put their country

ahead of religion, Jāti, or Varṇa, and sacrifice their lives for their country.

Just before independence, there were 3 types of states: territories of British India, Princely states, and colonial territories of France and Portugal. At the time of independence, it was a herculean task to bring together 565 Princely states and 17 provinces to join the Indian Union and to form 14 states and 6 Union Territories. 5 princely states that initially refused to join the Indian Union, namely Travancore, Jodhpur, Bhopal, Hyderabad, and Junagadh, later acceded to the Dominion of India. Post-independence, many Mahārajas and Princes became Zamindars—landlords—joined Indian politics, converted their palaces into luxury hotels, became traders, or emigrated to Pakistan or another country. So, the Kṣatriya Jātis still do exist in many states today.

Now, about our political parties...while our Prime Minister is a democratically elected leader, our President is the Chief of the Indian Armed Forces. Since our independence, we have elected individuals from both genders, all Varṇas, or religions, to these leadership roles in our country. We have been led by about 15...18 Presidents and 14 Prime Ministers until today. President Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan-ji was a Telegu-speaking Niyogi Brāhmaṇa, President Zakir Hussain-ji was an economist and a Pashtun Muslim hailing from Kheshgi and Afridi family, President APJ Abdul Kalam-ji...our *Missile Man* hailed from a Tamil Marakayar Muslim family, President Pratibha Patil-ji was the first female president of India and hailed from a Marathi family, Indira Gandhi-ji, first and only lady to be elected as Prime Minister, President Ram Nath Kovind-ji hailed from Koli

family, an agricultural caste of Gujarat, and current President of India Droupadi Murmu-ji, first lady who hails from a Santali tribal community. I would say we are much more progressive than most developed nations, which seem to champion democracy and equal rights, wouldn't you agree?

05:42. In fact, historically speaking, there were many valiant and powerful Queens such as Ahilyabhai Holkar, Tarabhai Bhonsle, Rani Chennamma, Samyutha Devi, Rani Lakshmibhai, Rani Velu Nachiyar, Abbakka Chowta, Rani Durgavati, Rani Chennabhairadevi, and more. Today, women play a key role in the Indian Armed Forces in combat support roles. However, this is also changing. As of 2020, three women have been granted the rank of lieutenant general or equivalent. For the first time, in 2021, about 83 women were included as Jawans. Recently, two women officers, Colonel Sophia Quershi of the Indian Army and Wing Commander Vyomika Singh of the Indian Air Force, were decorated for Operation Sindoor.”

Arjun interjected, “Mahārāja, tell me about your perspective on the next Varṇa – the Brāhmaṇas.” Mahārāja got up and walked towards the window. Facing the window, he said, “Ah, yes! The Brāhmaṇas...the keepers of the Vedas!” Then, he turned around and continued, “Since Vedic times, many Jātis who were spiritually oriented towards seeking the Brahman—ultimate reality...were collectively called the Brāhmaṇas.” Arjun interjected, “Pardon me, Mahārāja, you are saying that any Varṇa could seek the Brahman, right?”

The Mahārāja nodded and said, “I will explain it shortly. Brāhmaṇas provided cultural and spiritual advice to Kṣatriyas on how to run their kingdoms based on Vedic traditions...such as Sage Vasiṣṭha did for our Śrī Rāma.

Over time, they were constantly under threat to their existence because of the knowledge of Vedic traditions, the very backbone of the societal order.

While most Brāhmaṇas were traditionally ascetics or priests, even in Vedic times, as described in the Mahābhārata, there were Brāhmaṇas who were great teachers, warriors, and leaders of armies ... such as Dronacharya, Aśvatthāmā, and Kripacharya. During medieval times, Brāhmaṇas such as the Peshwas and Patwardhans ruled parts of India; Parivrajakas ruled parts of central India; Kanvas ruled Magadh; Kadambas ruled parts of Karnataka; and Oinawars ruled parts of Bihar. Today, every Jāti has taken up modern professions such as information technology, medicine, and law... and is sadly forgetting its roots in Vedic heritage. This includes Jātis under Brāhmaṇa Varṇa who work for other multi-national companies, run their own businesses or are in the Indian Army, giving up their original purpose to learn and upkeep the Vedas.

05:48. Contrary to the rigid caste system, the Vedic idea of Varṇa promoted fluidity where a Jāti could go across Varṇa!

We need to understand the genesis of anti-Brāhmaṇa. This originates from the brutal massacres of Brāhmaṇas by the Turkish invaders and Mughal rulers followed by Machiavellian maneuvers to uproot Brāhmaṇas from society by the British and Portuguese colonizers. Let me give you a few examples. In 1323, Alauddin Khalji's general Ulugh Khan and his army killed more than 12,000 Vaishnavites who protected the Srirangam temple. In 1783, the Muslim ruler of Mysore, Tipu Sultan, brutally massacred more than 800 Mandya Iyengars.

As our infamous colonizer, Max Mueller, the propagator of the Aryan invasion theory, wrote a letter to his wife, Georgina Adelaide, in 1867.” The Mahārāja looked at his phone and said, “I quote...*It took only 200 years for us to Christianize the whole of Africa, but even after 400 years, India eludes us. I have come to realize that it is Sanskrit that has enabled India to do so. And to break it, I have decided to learn Sanskrit...I feel convinced, though I shall not live to see it, that this edition of mine and the translation of the Veda will hereafter tell a great extent on the fate of India, and on the growth of millions of souls in that country. It is the root of their religion, and to show them what that root is, I feel sure, the only way of uprooting all that has sprung from it during the last 3,000 years.*”

05:54. The Mahārāja paused and said, loudly, “Uprooting!”. Then he lowered his voice to a normal tone and continued, “...this Vedic tradition to spread Christianity with false explanations and theories such as the Aryan Invasion Theory. Likewise, St. Francis Xavier wrote to the king of Portugal...*If there were no Brahmins, all pagans would be converted to our faith.* Do you know...today, more than 400,000 Kashmiri Paṇḍits live as refugees in Bhārat.

The anti-Brāhmaṇa hatred continues to this day due to misunderstanding of the Vedic tradition, misinformation propagated by political parties, and others who have only one goal...to eradicate Sanāthana Dharma. Because of this bias and hatred, in the 80s and 90s...due to the stupid reservation system, many Brāhmaṇa, among other Jātis, decided to go abroad for education and to escape the ill-treatment by other Jātis or religion.

In today's context, they are not necessarily kingmakers, influencers, or even rich! Constitutionally identified and framed, as forward...is not right! There are facts to show that many Brāhmaṇas today are economically backward. Today, in Bhārat, they account for only about four to five percent of the total population. We are just fortunate that, among the remaining who still live in this country, a few try to learn the Vedic scriptures, teach them to their children, and keep our cultural values and traditions alive. We should acknowledge and respect these individuals and families.

Never forget the foundation of Bhārat and its Vedic tradition! If this tradition is either forgotten or eradicated, Sanāthana Dharma will perish, and Bhārat will cease to exist!”

The Mahārāja paused and looked at Arjun. “Are you feeling drowsy? Do you need some rest?” Arjun insisted that he was ok.

Day 3 – The Seal of Manu

Monday Somavāsaraḥ (सोमवासरः)

Day 3 06:00 - 06:48 | Rudra (रुद्र) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

06:00. Viṣṇu Kali arrived at Assi Ghat thirty minutes later. The morning traffic was light. He took an auto and came along the Assi Ghat road into Nagwa Road. The road was temporarily closed near the Assi Ghat entrance.

Assi Ghat is one of the most important, popular with tourists, and farthest ghats down south along the river Gaṅges at Vārāṇasī. It is located at the southern end of the city, close to the union of the river Gaṅgā and Assi. It has been described in various Purāṇas, such as the Matsya, Kurma, Padma, Agni, and Skanda Purāṇas. The fourth chapter of Skanda Purāṇa is Kāśī Khaṇḍa. It is also believed that the consort of Lord Śiva, Goddess Durga, threw her sword into the Assi River after killing the demons Shumbha and Nishumbha. Worshippers who come to this ghat offer Gaṅgā water to a huge Śiva Lingam, situated under the peepal tree, after taking a holy bath in the Gaṅgā water.

He felt blissful on entering the ghat. Today, it was clean and not as crowded as other ghats. There is pairs of cylindrical

metallic dumpsters all over the ghat. He walked towards the wide steps leading to the sandy riverbanks.

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06:00. Meanwhile, at Taj Gaṅgā, Hari and Disha woke up to a loud banging on his room door. Disha’s right leg was on top of him. Both were naked. She got up and put her index finger to her mouth, asking Hari to remain quiet. She then grabbed her clothes, pushed the shoes under the bed, and went into the bathroom. He shouted, “Coming!” He searched for his shorts and T-shirt.

When he opened the door, a policeman stood there with a newspaper. Hari grabbed the newspaper and checked his phone. There were two missed calls from an unknown number around 4:45. It must have been him! He saw a WhatsApp video that Arjun sent earlier. His face grew grim. The kidnapper’s face was not visible. He carefully reviewed the video and noticed a familiar tattoo on the kidnapper’s left arm.

Hari began thinking. *What is he trying to do? He is going to start a major civil unrest across the country.* He then said to the policeman, “Let us go to the Manikarnika Ghat again. I will take a quick shower.” The policeman told him that he would wait for him in the lobby. He followed the policeman out, closed the door, and opened the door to the bathroom. Disha was waiting for him to take a shower together.

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06:00. The Mahārāja continued, “The next Varṇa are the Vaiśyas. Every civilization flourished because of communities that were traditionally responsible for agriculture, trade, and commerce. These communities made

the Kings wealthy and played a key role in building economic dominance, creating international networks, driving agricultural innovation and urbanization, and philanthropic contributions. The contemporary definition and composition of a Vaiśya Varṇa have changed. Today, a Vaiśya can be anyone who farms, runs a business, a restaurant, or a shop, works for other individuals or companies, has studied commerce, finance, or accounting, or owns land. Likewise, Vaiśya Jātis today are religious, learn the Vedas, or join the Indian Army or politics.

Contrary to the rigid caste system, the Vedic idea of Varṇa again shows the fluidity in which a Jāti could cross Varṇa!

Now coming to some prominent empires, business families or individuals...Gupta or Vākāṭaka empires during medieval times...prominent individuals such as Bhamashah were advisors to Maharana Pratap and Mahatma Gandhi, Ram Manohar Lohia, and Lala Lajpat Rai. There are many contemporary business families, such as the Tatas, Birlas, Jindals, Adanis, Bajajs, and Mahendras. While GD Birla, Dhirubhai Ambani, Lakshmi Mittal, Sunil Mittal, Adani, and Jamnalal Bajaj belong to the Baniya Vaiśya community, others, such as the Tatas, are Parsis, and the Mahendras are Kṣatriyas. Today, there are many Vaiśya Jātis, such as Bhatia, Lohana, Marwari, Chetti, Sakya, Patidar, Parsi, Jain, and others, which constitute about 45% of the total population.

06:06. The next Varṇa is that of the Śūdra. The Jātis under this were mainly laborers, artisans, workers, and those who did not clearly fit within the other Varṇas. In the Vedic period, this Varṇa was equally important. My friend, Maharishi Vedavyāsa, or Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, was born to

Maharishi Parāśara and Satyavati. Satyavati belonged to a Śūdra tribe that ferried people across the river Yamuna while Maharishi Parāśara was a Brāhmaṇa. If the Varṇas were so rigid, how could this happen? What Varṇa does my friend, Maharishi Vedavyāsa, belong to? Just because he had a Śūdra mother, he was not discriminated. He is, in fact, regarded as an Aṃśāvatāra, an incarnation of Śrī Viṣṇu. He was instrumental in organizing the Vedas into four - Ṛgvedā, Yajurveda, Sāmaveda, and Atharvaveda for everyone to assimilate. Also, he had authored the Mahābhārata and other important texts such as Purāṇas.”

Arjun had a question, “How was the education system during the Vedic ages? Were they discriminatory towards Śūdra and other lower castes?”

The Mahārāja laughed and continued, “Our colonial rulers never had organized schools until the Sunday School movement started in 1780 by Robert Raikes, leading gradually to just 2290 Sunday schools by 1801. We, on the other hand, had, before 1835, almost 732,000 Gurukulas and Pāṭhaśālās in India. Now, let me substantiate with facts for those who claim that native Gurukulas and Pāṭhaśālās were out of reach for the socially and economically backward sections of society. In 1823, Mr. A.D. Campbell, Collector of Bellary district, stated...that there were 533 schools in his district where 6398 students studied, of which 6,338 were boys, and 60 were girls. The Varṇa distribution was about 1,187 Brāhmaṇas, 982 Vaiśyas, 3,024 Śūdras, and 1,205 of other castes. The number of students belonging to the Śūdra and other lower Jāti was more than twice that of Brāhmaṇa students. So, there was no discrimination. In fact, the official pattern of education across the Madras Presidency indicated

attendance rates of 50-75% among Śūdra and other lower Jāti students. For example, 66% in North Arcot, 61% in Thanjavur, and 76% in Trichy were Śūdra. In fact, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, and Śrīmad Bhāgavata were taught to all Varṇa. Sanskrit was the dominant medium of instruction with local languages until English was introduced in 1835.

06:12. Now please understand...Societal stratification existed across the world. It was common to find feudal and class-ridden societies in ancient and medieval times across the world. Our colonial masters were adept at maintaining such a society themselves. Broadly speaking, the English and Europeans had three classes: an upper class comprising aristocrats and the wealthy; a middle class including industrialists, professionals, and traders; and a third class comprising agricultural and factory workers. Our colonial masters brought this rigid hierarchical class mindset to us in the form of the caste system.

Our Varṇa system was neither perfect nor better. As Vedic traditions morphed or decayed over time, so did one's understanding of the Dharma of their Varṇa or tolerance for other Jāti. This was further fueled by our colonial masters, who were good at dividing the population and favoring one Jāti over another, thereby creating mutual distrust among the Jāti. To make matters worse, over time, bigger or wealthier Jāti began to ill-treat other smaller Jāti. The brunt of the ill-treatment was borne by the Jāti classified as Śūdra Varṇa. Today, even the Brāhmaṇas or Dalits are targeted by other Jāti or political parties alike.

These discriminations or hatred have never been acceptable to me. Now all the Varṇa and Jāti served under me. So, if I,

the Mahārāja or political leader, am powerful, righteous, and treat my subjects equally, wouldn't my subjects, the people, not behave similarly and harmoniously? If I preach discrimination, then my subjects will follow me. Do we not see this in many states today? In my eyes, the law should be equal for all and protect all."

06:18. Arjun asked, "The Government of India Act 1935, created by our colonial masters, could have been to protect the lower castes and uplift them. But today, are you suggesting that it is irrelevant even though it divides our people into forward or backward?"

The Mahārāja replied, "The seed for the current reservation system was possibly sown during the colonial era by Chhatrapati Shahu of the princely state of Kolhapur. In 1881, Jyotiba Phule had mooted the idea of reservation of backward classes to the Hunter Commission, set up by the British government to enquire the status of primary and secondary education in India. Inspired by Jyotiba Phule, on 26th July 1902, Chhatrapati Shahu passed an administrative order to allocate 50% of vacancies for backward classes. Soon after this, the *reformer king* passed several reformist laws, including compulsory primary education in 1917, laws against domestic violence against women and widow remarriage in 1919, and the legalization of inter-caste marriage.

But it was not until 1932 when the Communal Award provided Muslims, Europeans, Sikhs, Indian Christians, Anglo- Indians, Marathas, depressed classes, and women a separate electorate. Dr Ambedkar had stressed that the depressed classes should be treated as a separate electorate. Also, 3% of the seats were reserved for women in all

provinces, except the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP). Seats were to be allocated to laborers, landlords, traders, and industrialists.

While the first fundamental right of the people of India is...Article 14 – Right to Equality, Article 15 deals with the *Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of race, religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth*. While Article 15 (3) makes a special provision for women and children, Article 15 (4) and (5) are about the *advancement* of any socially and educationally backward classes, SCs, and STs. Article 16 deals with equal opportunity to all citizens in matters related to employment in the public sector. Both articles maintain a balance between equality and social justice. Articles 330, 332, and 334 enable reservation of seats in the Union and State legislatures for SCs and STs. Like other laws, these articles are continuously amended.

06:24. However, the elephant in the room is that we carry a complex reservation system that was instituted in the 1960s by Article 334, which should have ceased in 10 years, and that has been amended seventeen times. It was first extended in 1970 through the Eighth Amendment for 10 years. On January 25, 2020, we extended it again for another 10 years.

The vicious cycle of division and hatred continues generation after generation. Constitutionally instituted articles keep reminding every generation of our caste divisions and it has created this artificial sense of hierarchy.

Before 2019, the reservation system was based on social and educational backwardness. In 2019, after the 103rd constitutional amendment, economic backwardness was included. The Supreme Court of India ruled in 1992 that

reservations could not exceed 50. It put a cap on reservations. But many states continue to violate this today.

Let me address relevancy. Every Jāti is like a tribe having a common set of conventions, practices or beliefs within the principles of Sanāthana Dharma. In the last two hundred years, due to the industrial revolution, information technology revolution, internet and social media and AI, the cultural values and practices of every Jāti have evolved or changed with time, place or events. We live in an age where any person from any Jāti is free to run a business, work as a civil servant in the government, or work as a professional for large private corporations. Then, the traditional classification of an entire Jāti into a single Varṇa may not be accurate, as a Jāti could span across all Varṇas. In other words, Varṇa may no longer be relevant and serves only as a generic classification of professions, not a Jāti in its entirety. And since Śūdra has acquired a negative connotation, its use could be completely banned in any institution.

While some values are still being practiced and retained by a Jāti, most have lost the original import, or are misunderstood, questioned, ignored, or even forgotten due to Western influence. Another disturbing trend is that Gen Z or Alpha generations in India may take pride in being a Hindu, but they do not take pride or give importance to their Jāti or Varṇa.”

06:30. The Mahārāja continued, “We are at an inflection point...we are under a constant threat... from external and internal forces to eradicate our Sanāthana Dharma...while we must forgive the injustices of the past...I am not asking to forget...we must unite as one to save this great nation from

these forces, and if not for our generation...it must be for our children.”

Arjun said, “So many facts that I never knew. Thank you for enlightening me, Mahārāja.”

Mahārāja replied, “I may be factually wrong in some cases, but I guess you understand the drift.”

Arjun nodded and asked, “Then, what is the solution to this complex problem?”

“To begin with, we need to be patriotic!

We must allow all Jāti to thrive without any hatred or classification in the colonial mindset as forward or backward. The constitution must protect all Jāti and treat them equally.

Do not attribute or blame this mess on Sanāthana Dharma! Sanāthana Dharma adapts to person, place, and time.

Varṇa could be relegated to Itihasa. Jāti could remain and be conserved from a cultural identity with its roots to a particular place and time. But not in its original colonial construct or Macaulay mind-set. The colonial basis of identifying and classifying the caste on a pyramid structure with a few Jāti on top as forward and others as backward is flawed. The reservation system is based on this definition, identification and classification of castes.

It is a common fallacy to think that all individuals or families within a Jāti are either financially strong or weak. Therefore, the constitutional definition, identification and classification of caste as forward or backward is atrocious and should be abolished! The current form of reservation system must be abolished too.

06:36. Therefore, we should not issue caste certificates. We have been successful in digitization of society through Aadhar and PAN. We need to use this to identify the economically weaker sections of the society, allow them to advance and be represented, yet... not identify them by their castes or Jāti or Varṇa. Even Jāti should not be asked in any official papers for the purpose of benefitting any specific Jāti. When people cannot be identified by their castes or Jāti or Varṇa at school and university or at work, the younger generation will not discriminate.

Do you know that our kids who are born and grew up abroad may know their origin. But they rarely identify their fellow Indians by their Jāti. It usually takes about three generations for a population to forget something. Let the culture of the Jāti thrive by being proud and not by hatred. Let caste and Varṇa be relegated to history textbooks so that the younger generation does not forget it's past yet live in an equitable society.”

Arjun slowly nodded with his eyes closed due to the medication. The Mahārāja felt that Arjun needed some rest and whispered, “Sadly, no political party is willing to do this for fear of losing power. My dear General, take some rest. I will be here beside you. I am going nowhere until you are strong.” Arjun started dozing off.

The Mahārāja walked to the door along with Maanyatha, Harbir, and Sanket. He instructed them to go to Manikarnika Dwar and assist with the murder investigation. He closed the door behind them and walked towards the window in deep thought. He wondered when Bhārat would get back to its glorious Vedic period! Kali Yuga still had 426,874 years to

go, and he was concerned at the decay of civilization and unknown dangers in the years to come to Sanāthana Dharma!

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06:36. On the left side, Viṣṇu Kali saw a small red temple for Lord Hanuman. He bowed and continued a few steps further only to notice another Śrī Lakshmi Narayan Mandir. Behind this temple was another red-walled compound, the Maa Gaṅgā Nav Durga Mandir. He bowed again. His attention then drifted towards a small group singing the Hanuman Chalisa bhajan on a small, covered platform at the Subah-Yeh-Banaras structure erected by the Ministry of Culture.

Walking further, he noticed two sets of platforms where the Gaṅgā āratī is usually performed. Gaṅgā āratī was usually performed around 5:00-5:30 am. The crowd had dispersed by now. One āratī is organized by the Gaṅgā Seva Samithi, while the other one is Jhanvi Seva Samithi. The orange platforms and the area were empty.

06:42. A small kid decided to exhibit her roller-skating skills over there while a doting father took pictures of her. Right next to the platforms was a small tea shack, and behind this shack were steep stairs, roughly around fifty of them, leading up to the Śrī Pancharatna Mandir. He climbed up the steep stairway towards this temple.

Day 3 06:48 - 07:36 | Āhi (आहि) | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

06:48. When he reached the top, he noticed that it was closed. He also noticed a small plaque that provided details of the name of the temple, its owner, Śrī Takur Lakshmi

Narayan Swami Estate, and other information. The temple walls had Assi Ghat printed on them. Beside this temple, he noticed a small, narrow lane. He checked Google Maps and noticed that this narrow lane passed through old houses and finally into a two-lane road that connected the Assi Ghat road artery. He admired the temple briefly. It had 3 spire-like dome structures, which were common for the temple architecture in this part of the country.

He then came down and reached the tea shack. A few people were settling down for their morning cup of tea. The small boy served tea in eco-friendly clay cups called khulad. There were sacks spread out on the steps by the tea shack. He took a spot on the sack. The tea boy looked at him, and he pointed his index finger back, indicating Ek Chai (*one tea*). The tea had a unique taste in the khulad. He noticed that everyone dumped the khulad into a nearby dustbin after relishing the tea.

While sipping tea, he observed a white couple sitting on the steps doing yoga. He thought to himself. *We have given up our culture and ape the Westerners. Yet here they are redeeming ours!*

The boats were pulling up onto the sandy riverbanks. They were being prepared for the boat rides on the Gaṅges that morning.

06:54. He walked further north along the banks towards Dashaśvamedhá Ghat. The first ghat next to Assi Ghat was the Gaṅgā Mahal Ghat, followed by the Rewa Ghat.

— ψ —

06:54. Hari, Disha, and the policemen arrived at Manikarnika Dwar. Maanyatha, Harbir, Sanket were already

waiting for them. While they walked quickly towards the ghat, they searched for any possible clue that the kidnapper may have left behind.

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07:00. He stopped in front of a platform at Rewa Ghat. He looked at the fort and noticed the Namāmi Gange graffiti on the walls. This graffiti was about a public awareness campaign to keep the ghats and Gaṅgā clean. They were painted on many structures along the ghats.

Lala Misir, the priest of the King of Punjab, Ranjeet Singh, built Rewa Ghat. Its original name was Lalamisir Ghat and was later renamed to Leelaram Ghat. This ghat and its mahal were purchased by Mahārāja Rewan in 1879. Rewa Naresh, i.e., the King of Rewa, presented this ghat to Kashi Hindu Vishwavidyalaya in the twentieth century, and it is now a dormitory for the university's students of performing and visual arts.

No one was around this ghat. He placed a mat on the ground and chose a quiet place to think in solitude.

O! Mother Durga, Chamundeshwari, slayer of the two Asuras Chanda and Munda, you killed demons Shumbha and Nishumbha, the two symbols of arrogance and pride here, and blessed us with the Assi river. Tonight, with your blessings, I plan to slay two evils here. Both resemble arrogance and pride. May the divine Mother accept my offerings!

07:06. Viṣṇu Kali opened his eyes and felt a cool whiff from the river. Except for a few birds chirping at a distance, the silence was quite relaxing. A lone black cow was sitting on the sandy riverbank in front of Rewa Ghat. At a distance, the Sun was not visible, yet the crimson red to bluish hue had a cathartic effect. There were 2-3 hand-operated oar boats with a few enthusiastic tourists on it taking pictures and admiring nature's beauty in this holy city. Closer to Rewa Ghat, some were waking up from their docked boats slowly and brushing their teeth. He turned left to see the entire stretch of ghats along the river. *So much history across the 6.8 km stretches of Mother Gaṅges! This holy city has been protected and rebuilt by many Hindu Kings and Queens.*

07:12. He got up, adjusted the mat, and began to do the Surya Namaskar yoga for the next four minutes. He then checked his escape route for today. This ghat was flanked by a flight of stairs on either side. He checked Google Maps and smiled. It was close to where he hid his next kidnap victim.

07:18. He took out a box from his chocolate brown leather tote, opened it, and took out a small black drone. He connected a few parts to make it operational, tested the video, and let the small drone, which looked like a bird from a distance, fly up. He controlled the movement with a joystick and observed the terrain below.

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07:18. Finally, Hari, Disha and the policemen arrived at Manikarnika Ghat and walked towards the pyre at the crime scene. SSP Balaram and five policemen were already there. Hari observed the platform closely where the body was burnt. The body had been removed by then to avoid any press media. Hari asked if the post-mortem report was available.

SSP Balaram shook his head and said, “They would be available by afternoon, but I am sure it will not reveal much.” Hari said, “Nobody could have burnt a person...alive at least unless the person was heavily medicated with a tranquilizer or injected with a neuromuscular blocking agent like succinylcholine. We need to check if the body had any chemicals in it?” Hari asked for photos of the body, then bent down to closely observe the ashes on the pyre and the ground. He moved them around with a stick, searching for clues. After a few minutes, he looked up towards the ghat and walked the steps with Disha in search of security cameras. None of the buildings or temple structures had any security cameras.

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07:24. After a few minutes, Viṣṇu Kali brought the drone down and checked his watch. He was getting ready for his morning act!

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07:24. Hari got up and asked Disha, “Can we check if there was any van or large vehicle along the main roads that brought a dead body?”

Just then, Hari’s cell phone rang. It was an unknown number. Hari looked at Disha and pointed his right-hand index finger to his phone. Disha made a quick call to the cybercrime unit and requested them to trace the number. Hari picked up the call, put it on speaker, and answered, “This is Hari!”

Viṣṇu Kali said, “Of course it is you, Hari! Hari Om!” He sensed a few seconds of silence. “Are you trying to trace me? Stop it! You can never find me. Did you meet your friend Sharma?”

Hari was angry, but controlled himself and replied, “I wish I had met him sooner.”

“You must thank your friend. He was generous in gifting the divine object to you.”

Hari wondered. *How did he know about the object?* “What are you talking about?”

Viṣṇu Kali raised his voice. “You fool! What do you take me for? He gave you the divine object. Don’t you think I know it? How is Manikarnika Ghat this morning? Did you see Dilip Singh?” Viṣṇu Kali started laughing.

07:30. Hari was in thought. *How does he know we are here at Manikarnika Ghat? Is he watching us from somewhere?* He turned around to see if Viṣṇu Kali was close by. Just a few burning pyres and men working on it, policemen walking around the place, people bathing in the river, and a few coming out of the river. He noticed a few boats at a distance moving slowly, with people and tourists watching the ghat from a distance. He then looked up to see if anyone was in the buildings and started walking quickly towards the riverfront steps, with Disha, Maanyatha, and Harbir following closely behind him. Sanket decided to stay at the top.

“Why are you doing this?”

Viṣṇu Kali calmly responded, “Do you think the reservation system is right?”

“Kidnapping or murdering is also not right and does not help you or anyone solve the problem. Do you realize the mayhem you have caused with your video?”

Viṣṇu Kali laughed and said, “I am serious about my demands. Blood must spill! People must rise! Politicians will not budge unless they see fear!”

“If I give you the object, how is it going to help you solve the problem? Why do you kill the kidnapped victims for the object?”

Viṣṇu Kali raised his voice, “Thank you for the confirmation!”

Hari looked at Disha, puzzled. Disha looked at him and then at his backpack on his shoulders.

Day 3 07:36 - 08:24 | Mitra (मित्र) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

07:36. “I am sure you are familiar with The Laws of Manu or Manusmṛti. You must know that Svāyambhuva Manu, from the first Manvantara, himself gave the Smṛti! This means the Smṛti was written several...several million years back! When King Vaivasvata Manu implemented the code of conduct several million years back, he never intended to discriminate against anyone or any Jāti. He had Varṇas to identify one’s potential inner strength for the growth of his people and to uphold Dharmic values.

Over time, in the previous Yugas, the population grew, republics grew, Jātis grew, and wars were fought, yet Varṇashrāma or cultural norms and mores within Jātis were protected. At the end of the Dvāpara Yuga, human values decayed as the Kali Yuga commenced. You must know that around 1 billion six-hundred and sixty million valiant men...as King Yudhiṣṭhira quotes in the Stri-parva of Mahābhārata, with the knowledge of Vedas and who upheld

dharmic values were killed in war...Knowledge of the Vedas was lost!

Several centuries into Kali Yuga, a dharmic King decided to inscribe the Manusmṛti on a copper plate. So, he identified a trusted group of individuals, each from one of the four Varṇa, to protect the Seal of Manu and the Dharmaśāstras. You may call them The Keepers! They were asked to maintain a sacred code of silence and come out in the open only to resolve a major calamity. To this day, these Keepers have been living in secrecy. They have never come out in the open for the last 5000 years...even if there were foreign invasions or any internal threat.”

On hearing this, Maanyatha and Harbir exchanged glances.

07:42. Viṣṇu Kali continued, “Our learning traditions were primarily oral through Guru-Siśya Parampara. Nothing was written down. They made an exception and created several manuscripts of Dharmaśūtras, Dharmaśāstras, Saṃhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Āraṇyakas, Upaniṣads, Purāṇas, and other Vedic scriptures. Of the many Dharmaśāstras, Manu Smṛti was carefully handwritten, kept secret and passed down from one generation to the next. While keeping the major structure intact, this Manusmṛti manuscript evolved over time for a particular place. Over time, more than 9 million such sacred texts were collected and preserved at the ancient Nalanda University. The Keepers decided to secretly keep the Manusmṛti and other manuscripts at Nalanda as well for learning and Vichāra.

The university had been attacked three times since its existence around the 3rd century BCE. During the reign of Skandagupta, the Huns led by Mihirakula destroyed the

university for the first time. Our keepers ensured that the manuscripts were moved to safety before the attack. After Skandagupta, his successors restored the library, and the manuscripts were returned to it. During the reign of the Buddhist king Harshavardhana, the university was restored after the Gaudas destroyed it for the second time. Nalanda University had three libraries - Ratnasagara, Ratnodadhi, and Rat-naranjala. After the second attack, our keepers moved the sacred collection to safety in the nine-storied Ratnasagara. In 1193 CE, Turkish Muslim invaders known as Mamluks, led by Bakhtiyar Khilji, ransacked and burnt the university, destroying all the manuscripts and texts.

This final destruction was so brutal and devastating. Persian historian Minhaj-i-Siraj wrote in his book, *Tabaaqat-i-Nasiri*, that all Brāhmaṇas were killed, and thousands of monks were burnt alive or beheaded. He also stated that the libraries had been burning for three months. This was also a big blow to Sanskrit, as many of the texts were in this divine language. We have never recovered from this destruction until recently. Our keepers somehow managed to move the manuscripts and the Seal of Manu to safety. So, we have never seen or heard of the original manuscripts or the Seal of Manu in over eight hundred years.”

07:48. While Viṣṇu Kali spoke, Hari put the phone on mute and tried to check with Disha again to see if they had been able to track the caller. Disha called the cybercrime unit again, but they could not trace the signal. Looking at the drone video, Viṣṇu Kali laughed and said, “There you are again. Stop searching for me!”

Hari was puzzled. *How did he know?* He said in a low voice to Disha and Maanyatha, “We are being watched.”

Maanyatha wore her shades and was looking up without lifting her head too much. Harbir and Sanket were already wearing their shades and followed Maanyatha. Harbir found something black hovering in the distance above Disha's head. He then whispered into Maanyatha's ears.

Maanyatha came close to Hari and brought her shades down a little to hint the direction of the drone. He wore his shades, looked up, and saw something black hovering in the distance. He said, "Disha, do not turn back. Put on your shades. There seems to be a small drone above your head." Disha walked towards him, without lifting her head, turned around slowly, and set her eyes in that direction. He told Maanyatha to grab the GTHUNDER infrared digital binoculars from his backpack. Maanyatha unzipped his backpack and took it out.

07:54. Viṣṇu Kali continued, "During the medieval times, true understanding of Varṇa now remained with a few. With external forces constantly invading, raping or murdering, conversions to Islam or Christianity were rampant. Jātis became protective of their social habits and customs. Power and wealth determined which Varṇa or Jātis was stronger or to be respected. Movement of Jātis across Varṇa became more restrictive and increasingly based on lineage. Various adharmic values grew in prominence and acceptance as time and pace changed.

In 1794, Sir William Jones translated the Manusmṛti into English with the help of a few learned scholars. However, without the context or time, this transliteration of the verses, which had survived through oral tradition, was deliberately misrepresented to create a divide among our population. The Smṛti thus became the most hated scripture due to gender and bias. To date, only about 50 manuscripts have been

found. Britishers introduced their culture and enamored our educated and powerful to trade our culture. Others followed. Our values and respect for each other further declined.

Manu's Smṛti was finally broken!

Today, there are so many reasons why the colonial-era caste system has many problems. However, it is kept alive by seeding hatred and discrimination among young minds through our reservation system.”

08:00. Hari unmuted his phone and asked Viṣṇu Kali, “Where does the divine object fit in?”

“The Seal of Manu is meant to help us come out of this darkness of hatred. It is a symbol of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*. It is meant to reassure people that we are one big family and casteless... where each Jāti is important and integral to our Sanāthana Dharma.

Everyone must proudly embrace their cultural norms and mores, keeping in line with today's place and time. No Jāti is inferior or backward...or superior or forward...due to their status, lineage, color, education, or wealth. All the kidnapped victims were in positions of power. They used their Jāti and others' Jāti to their benefit. They should have respected every Jāti.”

Hari replied, “Let us not resort to any more killing! I agree with you on what you said. Let us work together to resolve this. Let our political leaders solve this problem. Please release the kidnapped victims.”

“Either you are naïve or stupid! Do you really think everyone is going to suddenly wake up and respect each other? Do you really think politicians are going to scrap the reservation system and caste? In fact, they are the ones who are creating

the echo-chambers for caste classification and division, so that everyone hears it repeatedly. Everyone is so gullible and brainwashed that they keep casting their votes to the same leaders.

Lately, traditions of the past are decaying at a faster rate since the Kali Yuga began. I need the divine object to fix it. Then, you will have them back safely!”

08:06. Hari said, “I will give it to you. Let’s meet?”

“So soon. You are trying to solve this complex conundrum of caste with ease. I cannot let you do that. Let’s see if you can solve the next riddle if you want to save the next victim!”

Hari screamed, “Wait!” He asked Maanyatha and Harbir for a pen and paper.

He started scribbling as Viṣṇu Kali spoke.

*“As this Diti’s hair of gold gets angry
Seeks a boon of invulnerability!
Muhūrta waits for no one,
A blue-hue Sūkara comes out of Nāsikā
As Nandaka to slay another Diti’s golden eye
Where the Mother reveals herself!*

Wait for my instructions.”

Viṣṇu Kali hung up the phone.

Hari looked up immediately to see the drone head south. Then he noticed Disha, Maanyatha, Harbir and Sanket were already running towards the sandy riverbank where the boats were docked. Hari and the policeman quickly followed them. A 35-passenger-capacity motorboat, making a loud chugging noise, was heading south with two policemen.

They jump across the stationary boats to get into the moving motorboat.

08:12. Disha grabbed the binoculars from Maanyatha and tried to locate the drone. She screamed to the boatsman, “Assi Ghat ki tharaf! Fata phat!” (*Go in the direction of Assi Ghat—fast!*) Hari moved to the bow side and kept searching for the drone. He finally located it at a distance. Hari screamed out loud, as the sound of the motor was deafening. “Disha, it is on my 6:00.” Disha looked through the binoculars. The motorboat was not a speedboat.

Motor suddenly went dead. Disha screamed at motorboat driver. “Yeh kya ho raha hai?” (*What is going on?*) He was busy rotating the crank again to jumpstart it. Hari looked back at Disha and then forward in the direction of the drone.

08:18. Hari saw the drone swoop down to a ghat. Close to the ghat there was a large gold-colored boat docked at the ghat. At the bow, it had a figure of a lady with folded hands. He adjusted his infrared digital binoculars and saw one person at the ghat. This person was wearing a panchakacham and a white shirt. He was bending down to pick the drone up. Then he turned his back to Hari to put the drone into a bag. Hari was eagerly waiting for him to turn around and show his face. After the person put the drone in his bag, he turned around to see with his binoculars in Hari’s direction. Hari recognized the person!

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Viṣṇu Kali now had a smile on his face. Hari received a call. “Hari Om, Hari! I see your face is radiating with joy! Make sure you bring what I seek.” Then, he disconnected the call, removed the SIM card and threw it into the water.

Day 3 – The Riddle of Sūkara

Monday Somavāsaraḥ (सोमवासरः)

**Day 3 08:24 - 09:12 | Pitṛ (पितृ) Muhūrta | Quality of time
- Inauspicious ||**

08:24. He then took Godauliya Lanka road to a small narrow gali. He had placed his next victim in one of the houses.

According to the 2011 census, the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) together accounted for about 25% of India's total population. In the state of Karnataka, the population distribution ranged from single communities such as Dalit 19.5%, Lingayats 14%, Vokkaligas 11% to Muslims 16%, and tribals 5%.

The third victim, Priya, was from a backward caste in Karnataka. Her father was actively engaged in politics, and her mother was a housewife. She had a little brother who was two years younger. They lived in an area where constant clashes among various castes were common. One day, during such clashes, when her brother was walking back from school, a group of young boys from another community tied him to a tree and started abusing him. (Even among the castes identified as backward, there seemed to be a hierarchy.) When her mother tried to rescue him, she was thrashed by them. Priya rushed to the scene and, in a fit of anger, threw acid at the boys. It became a big local issue. She was taken into custody by the local police. Some of the policemen at the station were of a different caste. They took this opportunity to grope her, strip her naked, and run their

hands along her private parts. Her father was not allowed to meet her until the next day, when a major political party intervened in support of the family. She decided to have political affiliations after that incident and never forgot or forgave the policemen. Over the years, she developed an inherent hatred towards the other caste.

A few years passed. She grew up into a beautiful woman. She had a charming face with beautiful eyes. She decided to use her beauty to charm her way up the political chain and get boons such as protection or favor from the powerful ministers of the state.

She also worked hard academically and became a well-known doctor in her area. She was now in the selection committee for the university Hospital and would use the reservation system to assist any child from her community. Whenever a student from the other community came to the hospital, she would give them a hard time and force the student to leave. Whenever a patient from the other community would come for any treatment, she would ensure her staff neglected them and not provide necessary services to treat them. Many died under her watch.

She was lying on the floor unconscious, with her hands and feet tied up and her mouth stuffed with a torn cloth to prevent her from screaming.

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Meanwhile, on the boat, Hari screamed back at Disha, asking her to rush. It took them about five minutes to start the motor and speed towards the southern end. At a distance, Hari saw the Lal Bahadur Shastri bridge.

“Hari, which ghat did the drone go to?” screamed Disha.

“I did not see the ghat name properly. Closer to this ghat, there was a boat with the design of a woman, in gold color and with folded hands, in the place of a bowsprit.”

“What is a bowsprit?” asked Disha.

“It is a spar extending from the front of a boat or bow,” said Hari.

They went as fast as they could in the direction of Assi Ghat. As they approached Tulsi Ghat, they noticed a large, gold-painted boat with twin decks. The bowsprit had a woman who looked like a mermaid with a tiara and folded hands. The boat was docked, and there was no one inside it.

Hari asked Disha, “Where do the ghats end?” Disha replied, “Assi Ghat is the last major ghat.” And pointed to the sandy banks ahead.

“Ok. Let us get down at Assi Ghat.”

08:30. Maanyatha had been in constant touch with Arjun during the chase. He had placed a request for twelve policemen. They were assembled at Assi Ghat. The boat docked close to the sandy banks of the Assi Ghat. They got down and went to the steps.

08:36. Disha said, “That was a long conversation. He sounds like a religious maniac.” Hari shook his head.

Hari noticed that Maanyatha, Harbir, and Sanket were walking towards a nearby tea shack. He asked Disha if they could discuss the riddle further and solve it over tea. When they were close to the tea shack, he noticed the twelve policemen as well. He looked around for a place to sit, noticing a couple of men seated on the ground, including an

old man in an orange kurta with a long rudrākṣa bead necklace around his neck.

He found a spot on the sacks spread out on the steps, sat down, removed the backpack from his shoulders, and placed it in between his legs on the ground. Disha found a spot next to him. Harbir and Sanket stood behind Hari.

08:42. A small boy brought tea in a kettle and a few clay cups, *khulads*. Hari indicated that everyone, including the policemen, needed tea. The boy had never seen so many customers at one time in the last few days. He began happily pouring tea into the khulads, handing it over to Hari and others one by one while Hari observed the people around them.

After sipping tea, Hari broke the silence.

Hari said, “He has a point, Disha. Our people are still steeped in the colonial way of thinking. It is hurting us. Anyways, we have another fucking riddle to solve, and God knows how soon he wants us to solve it. However, I feel he must be somewhere close to us in these ghats. I can sense him.” He took another sip of tea, looked at Disha and Maanyatha, and said, “I just hope he wants to collect the object only and not harm anyone this time.”

“The question remains, where and when.” Hari looked at the Google map of the ghats along the river on his iPhone with his right hand while sipping the tea with his left hand.

08:48. Pointing to the map, Hari said, “Let us place a policeman at each of the important ghats – Assi, Chet Singh, Darbhanga, Bhonsale, Man Mandir, and Panchgaṅgā.”

Hari took out the paper from his pocket and started reading the riddle loud,

*“As this Diti’s hair of gold gets angry
Seeks a boon of invulnerability!
Muhūrta waits for no one,
A blue-hue Sūkara comes out of Nāsikā
As Nandaka to slay another Diti’s golden eye
Where the Mother reveals herself!”*

Everyone was silent for a few seconds until Disha asked.
“Who is Diti?”

Maanyatha said, “I have a hunch I know who this Diti is, and I think the hair of gold or golden eye, makes me want to bet I am close.”

Everyone became attentive.

“According to Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Diti is one of the sixty daughters of Prajāpati Dakṣa and one of the many wives of Sage Kaśyapa. With Sage Kaśyapa, she has twin Asura sons, Hiraṇyakaśipu and Hiraṇyākṣa. Here is where it gets interesting...does the riddle refer to hair-of-gold or golden-eye?”

Hari nodded.

Maanyatha continued, “Well, the twins...Hiraṇyākṣa, in Sanskrit, literally translates to golden-eye, and Hiraṇyakaśipu literally translates to hair-of-gold.”

08:54. Hari gave a big smile, patted Maanyatha, and said, “Well done! You may be on to something here!” Maanyatha blushed.

Hari said, “Just to expand on what you just said...in the same Bhāgavata Purāṇa, one of the Dvarapalas—gatekeepers of Lord Viṣṇu—Vijaya is reborn as Hiraṇyākṣa. The story goes that this Hiraṇyākṣa is so bad that he torments the three worlds. So, Lord Viṣṇu takes the form of a wild boar...we know this as His avatar...Varaha.” He looked at everyone while they nodded.

Disha said, “Oh! That mythology!” and smiled.

Maanyatha got angry. “Pardon me, Madam. But we have made a travesty of ourselves. What is with liberal Western-educated folks? Many of these events could have occurred several thousand years ago. We do not call the stories about the Greeks, Romans, Egyptians, Colonialism, Akbar, Genghis Khan, Ashoka, Buddha, Constantine, Socrates, and more a myth, do we? Yet we like to call the Mahābhārata, which occurred around 3000 BCE, a myth. Maybe it is not common understanding after all, as this happened several years before the common...sense...era! Do people even understand we have historical evidence to prove Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa were real, yet we want to conveniently brush them aside as bedtime stories?”

Disha apologized, “I am sorry if I hurt your sentiment, Maanyatha!”

Maanyatha said, “That’s ok. Macaulay must be laughing in his grave. He has been successful in making us adapt to the Western lifestyle. It has insidiously changed the mindset of young Hindus. I am not opposed to accepting other religions or cultures. But it is time for us to know our Vedic roots, acknowledge our heritage and culture, and appreciate Sanāthana Dharma.”

There was a brief silence.

09:00. Sanket intervened, “Could I interject? Where do Sūkara and Nandaka fit in?” Hari and Disha turned back towards Sanket.

The old man in an orange kurta, who until now was amused with the group conversation, started chanting, “Vanamālī gadī śārṅgī śaṅkhī cakrī ca nandakī, Śrīmān Nārāyaṇō Viṣṇur Vāsudevō bhirakṣatu.” Suddenly, as soon as the old man started this chant, everyone, including the boy, chimed in and repeated it three times. Then, with palms folded in a Namaste mudra, he ended it solo with, “Śrī Vāsudevō bhirakṣatu Om Nama iti!”

People who were standing or sitting around him screamed, “Har Har Mahadev!”

Lifting his hands in a U-shape to his shoulder and with open palms, the old man finished it with, “Jai Śrī Kṛṣṇa!”.

Hari smiled, “Praise be to Sanāthana Dharma!”

Disha asked, “I am not sure I understand.”

The old man said, in American English, “Protect us, Oh Lord Narayana! Who wears the forest as His garland, who has the mace, conch, sword, and the wheel. And who is called Viṣṇu and Vasudeva.” He then sipped tea and continued looking at Disha, who still had a puzzled look, “Nandaka, my dear, is Lord Visnu’s sword.”

09:06. Hari remarked, “You speak good English.” The old man replied, “Why? Just because I wear an orange kurta! We must thank our colonial masters for one thing.” and smiled. Hari asked, “What is that?”

“The bloody English united us on a common language. Damn the English!”

Hari smiled, folded his palms, and said, “Rādhe Kṛṣṇa!”

Hari then continued, “The verse that this man chanted is the 108th sloka in Viṣṇu Sahasranāma, the 1000 names of Lord Viṣṇu. Sūkara is an epithet for Lord Varaha in the Ṛgvedā. Lord Varaha emerges from the Nāsikā, nostrils, of Lord Brahma. In this verse, Lord Viṣṇu...is called Nandaki or the one who wields Nandaka. The blue hue probably refers to the blue color of the Lord Viṣṇu in the form of a boar or the blue-hue sword.”

Disha said, “Wait a minute!” She was checking her black notebook and ran through some pages until she stopped at one specific page. She started running her fingers down the list of Muhūrtas. “There is a Muhūrta called Vārāha. It is from 10-10:48.” Disha stared at Hari and Maanyatha.

Day 3 09:12 - 10:00 | Vasu (वसु) Muhūrta | Quality of time – Auspicious ||

09:12. Hari checked his phone. “Time is 9:12. Vārāha Muhūrta is between 10:00 and 10:48.” He got up and placed the backpack on his shoulders. “We need to rush. But...WHERE?” He looked at the Google map of the ghats along the river on his iPhone. He saw Tulsi Ghat, then ran his index finger up the ghats, stopping at Hariścandra Ghat. “I saw him close to Tulsi Ghat. He could not have walked far away from there.”

The team immediately began the ride toward Hariścandra Ghat.

Disha paid the boy and thanked him for the tea. She then identified one policeman for Assi Ghat. SSP Balaram had asked a guide to help them out, and he introduced himself to Disha.

Hari, Disha, Harbir, Maanyatha, Sanket, eleven policemen, and a guide began their walk towards Hariścandra Ghat. One policeman remained at Assi Ghat.

09:18. Hari and team crossed Gaṅgā Mahal Ghat into Rewa Ghat. Everyone spread across the sandbanks, searching for every possible clue.

Hari stopped at a platform at Rewa Ghat. He noticed the mat. Then, I looked at the fort and noticed the Namāmi Gange graffiti on the walls. Disha asked, “What happened?”

Hari felt something. He walked towards the platform and knelt on the floor to see the mat and the floor closely. He then stood up and looked in the direction of the large boat with a bowsprit in the shape of a golden-colored mermaid with a tiara and folded hands. Up close, it was simply fabulous!

A policeman, who was closer to the water, screamed, “Sir! Yeha pe ek brown color bag hai” (*There is a brown bag here.*)

Hari shouted, “Do not touch it. Disha, ask a bomb squad to be here quickly.”

Disha asked all the policemen to back off. They waited about 10 feet away from the bag.

Given the tensions in the city, a bomb squad was on standby near their location.

09:36. Two men wearing full-body protective suits walked towards the bag and checked it. There was a small crowd in

various boats watching the incident. In five minutes, they decided it was a harmless bag. They unzipped and shared the contents with Hari and Disha. Hari cursed himself for wasting time. He checked the bag's contents and found a drone and a phone.

He handed the bag to a policeman and asked him to check the bag for fingerprints.

09:42. Hari checked his phone and said, "Let's continue!" Disha identified a policeman for Rewa Ghat and told him to provide updates. The group continued their walk towards Hariścandra Ghat.

09:48. They reached Tulsi Ghat next. Hari checked his phone. He looked at the small boats that were docked. A few people were getting ready to take a dip in the Gaṅges. The morning was pleasant so far, with the sun slowly increasing in intensity. The sand banks were shrinking. He noticed a long flight of stairs going up.

Named after the 16th-century poet, Sant Tulsidas, Tulsi Ghat was where he wrote the greatest Hindu epic, Ramcharitmanas, and Hanuman Chalisa. The house in which Sant Tulsidas died has been preserved, and his samadhi, wooden clogs, pillow, and the idol of Hanuman, which Tulsi worshipped, are all still intact here. Tulsi Ghat was earlier known by the name of Lolark ghat. It is believed that when Sant Tulsidas's manuscript fell into the Gaṅges River, it did not sink. This ghat was rebuilt with cement by Baldeo Das Birla in 1941.

Hari asked the guide, “Yeh seediyan kahan tak jaati hai?” (*Where do these stairs lead to?*). The guide replied, “Yehan se Tulsi Ghat road ko jaati hai. Wahan se baayen mein Assi road aur daayen mein Godauliya Lanka road see milthi hai.” (*It leads to Tulsi Ghat road. This road connects on the left side with Assi road and on the right side with Godauliya Lanka road.*)

Hari looked at Google Maps. The next stop was Bhadaini Ghat, a seven-minute walk away.

Hari asked Sanket to check Tulsi Ghat road for anything odd, then join them at Bhadaini or Vacharaj Ghat.

Disha asked a policeman to join him and wait by the ghat.

Hari looked at everyone and said, “Let us continue!”

09:54. Hari, Disha, Harbir, Maanyatha, nine policemen, and the guide started spreading across the ghat steps, continuing to look for clues. They crossed the Bhadaini water tank, built in 1907 by the Municipal Corporation of Vārāṇasī, and reached the Bhadaini Ghat.

This ghat, for a long time, was a part of Lolarka Ghat. The area was earlier known as Bhadra Vana (forest of the Bhadra Tree), based on Bhadreshvara Shiva and Bhadra Vinayaka (Ganesha) shrines. Since 1907, this ghat has also been known as Jalakala Ghat, after the Municipal Corporation of Vārāṇasī installed a water supply pump here. No religious activities are typically performed at this ghat.

The group noticed that this place was much more serene than the previous ghats they had crossed, with birds chirping, small boats tethered to small wood poles on the sand, a stray dog, and a sweeper mundanely cleaning the ghat and disposing of the trash into a green trash bin. Hari and Harbir observed the graffiti of Lord Hanuman lifting the water tower. Harbir remarked, “Seems like the water tower symbolizes the epic Dronagiri mountain that serves the city of Vārāṇasī with healing water. People have their humor in an artfully spiritual way.” Hari turned around and noticed that the brick walls sloped at about 45 degrees, with grass and plants growing between the cracks. He saw a tourist at the top with an SLR camera, enjoying the beauty of Mother Gaṅges in the morning, and another person about ten feet away from him, meditating, facing the morning Sun.

Hari could not see any specific religious activity at this ghat. Just a few people strolling by or sitting at the wide-open steps close to the river, performing Prāṇāyāma.

He then looked at the guide and asked where the flight of stairs led. The guide replied, “Yeh sedeyaan seedhe Godauliya Lanka road milthi hai.” (*These stairs lead to Godauliya Lanka road.*)

He asked Disha to have a policeman check the path up to Godauliya Lanka road, then come back to the ghat. The group continued to Jānakī Ghat next.

Day 3 10:00–10:48 | Vārāha (वाराह) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

10:00. They stopped in front of the iconic name signage for Jānakī Ghat, which was black on a yellow background, and looked around.

Five ghats are quite close to each other – Bhadaini, Jānakī, Śrī Ānandamayī, Vachchrāja, and Jain Ghat. Bhadaini and Jānakī Ghat are almost close to each other, separated by a flight of stairs. Jānakī Ghat was originally a natural open ground and was known for the Hayagriva Keshava shrine. Later, a ghat was built by Rai Girdhara Lal in 1860, and was known as Girdhar Lal Ghat. Some referred to it as Nigambar Ghat. It was later renamed as Jānakī Ghat when Queen Rani Kunwar of Sursand purchased this ghat, made it even better, and built a shrine for Mother Sita, Janaki. In 1917, Thakur Asarphi Singh, a senior member of the Sursand estate, renovated the ghat and built stone steps from the ghat to the neighborhood.

Hari, Disha, Maanyatha, and Harbir stood facing the ghat. Like Bhadaini Ghat, there were a couple of boats tethered to poles along the edge of the ghat.

Hari said, “Look at all the people around you. This is why Jāti does not matter. All of them seem to be oblivious of others’ Jāti, color, language, or dress. They are all here seeking their bliss in their own way.” Hari keenly observed an old Brāhmaṇa with a long white beard and long matted brown hair, seated on a mat, ready to begin his morning prayers. This elder looked upwards, allowing his long hair to flow freely, and then used his hands to smooth it out. Beside this elder was a young man dressed in an orange kurta. He wore an old dhoti in the traditional panchakacham style. standing up and adjusting his short curly hair. There was a small rusted Trishul with a flower garland in front of them.

The guide broke the silence, “Sahib, Yehan pe paani bahut gehra hai.” (*Sahib, the water is deep here.*)

Disha posted a policeman to watch the ghat and continued walking across Jānakī Ghat to the next one, along with Hari, Maanyatha, Harbir, and seven policemen.

10:06. They reached Śrī Ānandamayī Ghat.

Śrī Ānandamayī Ghat is named after Saint Anandamayi Ma (30 April 1896 – 27 August 1982), often referred to as Joy-permeated Mother, and is revered as a spiritual guide and an incarnation of Goddess Durga. Sri Anandamay Ma Ashram is located close to the ghat, where those who seek spiritual growth, inner transformation, and a serene environment to meditate in peace.

The ghat was purchased from Rai Baldeo Sahai in 1944, and the upper part was developed for her ashram and Anandamayi Kanyapath, a residential school for girls. Later in 1945, Shiv Prasad Gupt improved the lower part. The ashram contains the temples of Annapurna and Shiva.

He noticed the white building on the top of the ghat and next to it a steep flight of stairs. The guide said, “Uper Maa Anandamayi ki ashram hai!” (*The ashram of Maa Anandamayi is up there!*)

On the other side of the stairs, he noticed a temple. Disha asked, “What are you looking at?”

Hari replied, “The temple on the right of the stairs has a unique Nagara style of temple architecture. While its main dome has curved-shaped structures called a Shikara, it is surrounded by multiple smaller curved structures. Do you notice it?”

Disha was perplexed by his observation. “So what?”

“Nothing. I love architecture. The beauty lies in its intricate shapes.”

Disha smiled. “I am sure you do. Do you observe such details in humans and structures alike?”

Hari looked at her and laughed.

“I try to relish everything I see or smell or taste.” And he winked.

Disha nudged him.

10:12. Meanwhile, Maanyatha was checking the phone to learn more about Śrī Ānandamayī. Her eyes caught a few words. She said, “Hari, even though Varaha is about revealing Mother Earth from the ocean, what if the location is right here at Śrī Ānandamayī Ghat. If you read about Maa’s Divine life, it says how she revealed herself.”

Hari spent a few minutes going through the website for Śrī Ānandamayī.

He then said, “What if you are correct? But where?”

Hari turned to the guide and asked him about the temple. The guide explained that there are 3-4 temples up there, namely, Mother Gaṅgā, Akrureshwar, Sri Bhadaini Shwetamber Jain Teerth, and Gopal temple.

Hari asked Disha to have a policeman stand in front of Śrī Ānandamayī Ghat.

10:18. Hari, Disha, Maanyatha, Harbir, and eight policemen continued further. Hari stopped them in front of Vacharaj Ghat. Now, there were two flights of stairs on either side of this ghat.

Vacharaj Ghat was built by a businessman in the 18th century and then renovated in 1965 by the Government of Uttar Pradesh. In 1831, English historian Princep had also mentioned Vacharaj Ghat. There are four temples at the top of the Vacharaj Ghat – Mother Gaṅgā Temple dedicated to Goddess Gaṅgā, Lord Ganesh & Lord Shiva, Akrureshwar Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva, Suparshvanath Jain Temple, and a shrine called Gopal Temple.

He checked Google Maps to see the distance they had covered from Assi Ghat. They had hardly traveled 550 m from Assi Ghat. Even though Google Maps showed eight minutes, it seemed as though it took them about sixty minutes. He also noticed that some members of the team were getting tired as the ghats leading to the river were steep.

Hari looked at Google Maps again.

Disha asked, “What are you thinking?”

Hari said, “We are in Vārāha Muhūrta. And we still do not know what we are looking for?”

Hari asked the guide, “How many more ghats to go to Hariścandra Ghat?” The guide kept his right hand to his head, closed his eyes, and started rattling names while counting with fingers on his left hand...Vacharaj, Jain, Panchkot, Prabhu, Chet Singh, Niranjani, Mahanirvani, Shivala, and Hanuman. He looked at Hari and said, “Nau.” (*Nine.*)

“We took an hour to get here. We covered about 550 m from Assi Ghat. According to Google Maps, the distance from here to Hariścandra Ghat is 700 m. And we need to cross about nine ghats to reach it. Our kidnapper disappeared as soon as we landed at Assi Ghat. I have a hunch that he must have fled through one of these flights of stairs. He probably has about 20-30 minutes of lead time. So, where could he have gone?”

10:24. As soon as he asked this question, he turned around and faced the flight of stairs on the right side of Vacharaj Ghat. Something made him feel this was the place.

Hari was surprised. He looked at the vibrating phone and then at Disha.

“Hari Om! Welcome to Śrī Ānandamayī and Vacharaj Ghat. You seem to be doing well on time. Do you have the object with you?”

Hari looked at Disha, surprised. How did he know? Clearly, either he is following us or has a drone circling us. He looked up at the sky. There was nothing.

“Yes. Where do we meet?”

Viṣṇu Kali laughed. “Are you searching for a drone?” He stepped out in the clear at the top of Vacharaj Ghat. He was standing behind an unconscious lady in a wheelchair.

“Now listen to my instructions carefully. Ask everyone to drop their phones in the red bucket in front of the stairs.”

Hari searched for a red bucket. He conveyed the message to the group. Disha said, “It is over there!” The red bucket was in front of a small ghat opening. Maanyatha, Harbir, and the eight policemen came forward and dropped their phones into the red bucket. Maanyatha texted Sanket about the situation at the Vacharaj Ghat before dropping the phone.

Viṣṇu Kali continued, “Ask them to go down the stairs and wait closer to the river.”

10:30. Hari looked at them and asked them to go down the stairs. They started walking down the stairs hesitatingly.

Viṣṇu Kali then continued, “Ask them to continue walking down the stairs until I say it is ok.”

After all of them reached the last step before the river’s edge, he asked them to walk into the river and remain neck-deep in the water. Disha screamed in anger and refused to walk into the river. Hari asked her to stop and follow the instructions. They walked into the river and were neck-deep in the river.

Viṣṇu Kali dropped canisters that released colored smoke, down the stairs. He asked Hari to bring the bag up the stairs slowly.

10:36. While he was walking up the stairs, he noticed Viṣṇu Kali looking at someone behind him. The colored smoke made it difficult for him to see who it was.

Viṣṇu Kali made the lady wait at the edge of the stairs. Then he faced Sanket. As Sanket was running and coming close to the stairs, Viṣṇu Kali shot him at his knees. He then pushed him down the stairs. Maanyatha saw this horror from a distance and screamed.

Hari saw Sanket rolling down. He rushed upwards to stop him halfway. Sanket was hurt badly and unconscious. But he was still breathing.

Viṣṇu Kali called him again on his phone, “I told you to come up the stairs alone. I want the divine object. Ask everyone to stay in the water. Otherwise, the lady is next.”

Hari saw Maanyatha and Disha running up the stairs. He showed his hand and asked them to go back to the water. Both went back reluctantly.

10:42. Hari walked up the stairs and reached the top.

Viṣṇu Kali said, “We finally meet face to face.” Hari could not see him completely as the colored smoke masked his appearance. He asked, “Let the lady go. You have done enough damage already. I have the object in the bag.”

यदा यदा हि धर्मस्य ग्लानिर्भवति भारत ।
अभ्युत्थानमधर्मस्य तदात्मानं सृजाम्यहम् ॥
परित्राणाय साधूनां विनाशाय च दुष्कृताम् ।
धर्मसंस्थापनार्थाय सम्भवामि युगे युगे ॥

Whenever there is decay of righteousness,
O Bhārata,

And there is exaltation of unrighteousness, then
I Myself come forth.

For the protection of the good, for the
destruction of evil doers,

For the sake of firmly establishing
righteousness, I am born from age to age.

— Śrīmad Bhāgavat Gita 4.7 and 4.8

Day 3 – 4748

Monday Somavāsaraḥ (सोमवासरः)

Day 3 10:48–11:36 | Viśvedevā (विश्वेदेवा) Muhūrta |
Quality of time - Auspicious ||

10:48. Viṣṇu Kali said, “You are a smart person.” When he came close to Hari, he stretched his right hand to collect the bag. Hari was looking at his face. Viṣṇu Kali grabbed the bag and pushed the lady down the stairs.

Hari knew this would happen. He rushed towards Viṣṇu Kali instead of the lady. Viṣṇu Kali was waiting for him. He went behind Hari and punched him. He then hit him with an iron rod. Hari fell to the ground. Disha or Maanyatha could not see what was happening behind the colored smoke. But when they saw the lady in the chair rolling down, they were horrified and rushed immediately towards her.

10:54. When Disha, Maanyatha, and Harbir reached the lady, Harbir checked to see if she was still alive. He looked at Disha and Maanyatha and nodded. Then they ran upwards to check on Hari. As soon as they reached the top, the colored smoke had cleared. They noticed Hari lying unconscious. Viṣṇu Kali was nowhere to be seen!

Disha ran up the street in search of him while Maanyatha checked on Hari. They sent the remaining policemen in different directions. The backpack was lying next to Hari. It was open, and the object was missing!

— ψ —

Meanwhile, at the hospital, Arjun finally woke up. The nurse had helped him go to the toilet. He then had a cup of coffee and was trying to sit upright on a sofa next to the Mahārāja.

Arjun said, “I agree, we need a national debate on this and resolve it. We need broader acceptance and a clear timeline for action. We also do not need outside forces to derail us when we have a fifth column that is adept at this.”

He was interrupted by a call.

11:00. Arjun looked at the phone and said, “Mahārāja, may I take this call?” The Mahārāja nodded.

Maanyatha said, “Jai Hind!” and explained the situation. He listened to her patiently for a few minutes and then disconnected. He had an intense, angry look while disconnecting the call, and turned to look at the Mahārāja,

“Viṣṇu Kali was close to committing the fourth murder. My friend, Hari, could have been killed. We were able to rescue the third kidnapped victim, but she is critically unconscious. Maanyatha believes she has fractures and may take some time to recover.” He paused.

Then, he spoke strongly. “I am angry with Viṣṇu Kali. He has hurt my friend. Hari has an injury to the head and is also unconscious. It could have been life-threatening. Sanket was also critically injured. All are being rushed to this hospital.

Mahārāja, Viṣṇu Kali is unstable. I must repeat my question. I fear this madman may use the Seal of Manu for his selfish goals. With your permission, this is a grave situation, and we need to invoke The Keepers.”

— ψ —

11:12. Viṣṇu Kali entered a building where his next victim was tied up. Then he came to the table and placed his bag on a chair next to his. He then spread a small, red-colored square cloth on the table and sat down. He looked at the bag and wondered about the object. He then slowly opened the bag, removed the Seal of Manu, and placed it carefully on the red cloth.

After a few seconds of appreciating what was in front of him, he picked it up. It looked like a perfect five-inch cube. He then got up and walked over to a small shelf to take out a long brown duffel bag containing a mini lab kit and other instruments and brought it to the table. He organized the test tubes in a stand and poured a few chemicals into the tubes, slightly scraped the object and pushed the dust into the tube. He examined the tube to see the reactions.

11:18. It must be some type of Cupronickel alloy. He then googled Cupronickel to understand its properties. 90/10 or 70/30 Cu/Ni compositions...Resistant to corrosion...High melting point...used in marine applications, coinage, electrical and electronic applications, and medical equipment.

Bhārata has a rich maritime history dating back 3000-5000 years BCE. Most notably, the main alloy could have been in use at the city, Dvārakā, built by Śrī Kṛṣṇa, that had a rich maritime history.

Viṣṇu Kali pressed a paper against the protruding figures slowly and used a pencil to etch the shape. He did this for all the figures. *It is durable as it has lasted this long. The figures that have been stamped on each of its faces must have been done with ease.* He looked at the paper and observed the six figures. He was able to recognize their shapes but was unsure

of their significance. He made a note of the figures...Bhairav, Feather, Cow, Flute. He decided to call the Mahārāja.

— ψ —

11:24. Mahārāja received the call he was waiting for. He signaled Arjun to remain quiet. Then, he said, “Hari Om!” and patiently listened to Viṣṇu Kali. He then said in an angry tone, “What are you doing?”

While looking at the object, Viṣṇu Kali said, “Mahārāja, I have been able to get the object as you asked me to. Hari resisted, and others were around him. I had to defend myself.”

“Ok. But you could have avoided hurting Hari. Where are you now? Let us meet.”

“Mahārāja, I need to go.”, and he hung up. Mahārāja sensed an unexpected change in his tone and was in deep thought. *If only Viṣṇu Kali understood what was inside the box.*

— ψ —

11:24. Viṣṇu Kali observed the cube with a magnifying glass but could not see any cracks, lines dividing the boxes or any holes. This cannot be a perfect cube. Although it weighs less than 100 g, there must be something inside it. This is the symbol of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam...a proud symbol of our Sanāthana Dharma. But what is it that makes the Mahārāja think that it is connected to Śrī Kṛṣṇa? What is so divine about it? Could something be inside it? He took out a 3M Littman Classic III stethoscope from his bag. He was shaking the object. There was no sound.

He placed the object on the table again. And looked at it intensely. *Is it just a block of metal? Is it part of something larger?*

— ψ —

11:24. Meanwhile, Hari, Sanket and the lady were brought to the same hospital where Arjun was being treated. The entire floor was cleared for these four and was well-protected with seven policemen at different points of entrance and exit. Disha was in tears while walking alongside Hari, as he was wheeled in on a stretcher. Harbir walked alongside Sanket. Then the lady was wheeled into a stretcher. Maanyatha followed everyone looking everywhere for anything suspicious. Policemen were at the hospital doors, on every floor, all entrance and exits. They were checking the credentials of all Doctors and Nurses. The hospital was heavily fortified. Hari's room was next to Arjun, followed by Sanket and the lady. A policeman stood guard outside each of these rooms.

Disha stayed in Hari's room. Maanyatha walked over to Arjun's room.

— ψ —

11:30. The Mahārāja got up from his chair and slowly paced across the room three times before stopping by the window. Then, he turned around to face Arjun and said, “Go ahead and invoke The Keepers to retrieve the object. Do not hurt Viṣṇu Kali. Bring him to me. I will deal with him.” Saying this the Mahārāja started walking to the door.

Arjun asked, “Mahārāja, Thank you! We will secure it from him and place it where it belongs! Did he tell you where and when he plans to murder the next victim?”

Mahāraja turned around and said, “No he did not! Jai Hind!” He then left the room in a haste. Arjun sensed something was wrong. He called Harbir and asked him to follow the Mahāraja at a distance.

Now that he had the Mahāraja's permission to call The Keepers, he was energized. He immediately went to a WhatsApp group called *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*.

He texted, 4748. This code for the entire group was verses from chapter 4 (Jñāna Karm Sanyās Yog) and sloka 7 and 8.

Maanyatha, Harbir, Sanket, SSP Balaram Gupta and 427 other phones received the clarion call. They were across Bhārata, across various echelons of society, and knew each other. They dropped whatever they were doing and were preparing themselves to protect Dharma at whatever cost...with their lives if necessary.

— ψ —

11:30. Viṣṇu Kali got up to prepare for the video recording. He set up the black screen behind the chair and covered the windows with a thick black cloth. He powered his laptop and configured the real-time voice changer software. He ensured that the laptop was positioned to display his entire body sitting on the chair, and the cube was clearly visible before him.

After he was satisfied with setting up the laptop, he adjusted his panchakacham. He thought about this for a few minutes.

Am I the chosen One? Am I the Avatār? Maybe it is a divine intervention. Maybe I belong to the lineage of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The more he thought, he convinced himself that everything was happening for a reason. He had not taken his medications.

He did a quick recording to test the video and audio and checked the time on the laptop. It is the Viśvedevā Muhūrta.
May all Vedic deities help me in my endeavor!

11:36. He looked at his paper one more time, folded it and turned on the recording.

“Jai Śri Ram! Jai Śri Kṛṣṇa!

I had made three demands earlier. Let me repeat them,

First, make the word *Caste* illegal and remove it completely from the Constitution. Erase the colonial mindset!

Second, abolish the identification, classification or grouping of Jātis as Scheduled Castes, OBCs, forward, upper, backward, lower, or depressed.

Finally, the most important demand, abolish the reservation system! Implement a process to identify, protect, uplift, or advance anyone who is economically weaker based on income or wealth.

Stop talking about Caste! All Jātis are equal. Treat all with respect...and humanely. We need to embrace Sanāthana Dharma without any discrimination! If we do not embrace our Jātis, we will see them leaving for other faiths.

Today, I have something from the past. I want to show this very special object to the world. I have proof of a divine object that was created during the time of Śri Kṛṣṇa!

Jai Hind!”

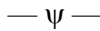
He attached the video recording to two emails again like last time – one for the local TV station and another for PMO.

11:36. Meanwhile, at the hospital, Arjun asked, “How bad is it?” Maanyatha replied in anger, “When I get my hands on Viṣṇu Kali I am going to make him regret it.”

Arjun asked, “How is Sanket?”

“He barely escaped. Thanks to Hari, his fall on the stairs was stopped. He may have a few fractures. The kidnapped lady is in critical condition. What is the plan, Boss?”

Arjun said, “Everyone should be in Vārāṇasī in the next two to three hours. Meet with your group and get them ready. We are going to have a long night. Address Sanket’s group. We should not congregate anywhere. Tell everyone to be stealth.” Looking at the clock on the wall, he continued, “I will meet you...around noon.”



11:42. Viṣṇu Kali left for Kāśī Viśwanath temple for the Bhog āraṭi.

There are four main āraṭi for Lord Shiva at the Kāśī Viśwanath temple: Mangala (3:00-4:00), mid-day Bhog (11:15-12:20), Sapt Rishi (19:00-20:15), and Shringar Bhog (21:00-22:15).

Mangala āraṭi is the first āraṭi of the morning. Bhog āraṭi is the second āraṭi for the day when praṣādam is offered to Lord Viśveśwarā. Sapt Rishi āraṭi is the third āraṭi for the day, symbolizing the seven great Rṣis performing the āraṭi for Lord Viśveśwarā, a practice that has been around for 750 years. Shringar Bhog āraṭi is the fourth āraṭi for the day when praṣādam is offered to Lord Viśveśwarā.

12:00. He was ushered inside the temple through his contacts. He bypassed the long line of devotees who were patiently waiting to seek darshan of Lord Viśveśwarā and stood at a corner for the Bhog pooja. He noticed a group of priests bringing large pots of consecrated food offerings, praśād, on their heads, followed by a group of devotees walking in a single file. He quietly joined them. The policeman who was standing nearby chose to ignore Viṣṇu Kali.

The group of devotees was brought closer to the deity. The head priest noticed him and asked him to come inside the garbhagriha, where the presiding deity resides. Viṣṇu Kali picked a remote corner inside the sanctum sanctorum. The priests were chanting the sacred hymns, the Śrī Rudram Namakam anuvākas, while offering milk and other offerings to the deity.

He then took the rudrākṣa bead chain from his pocket, closed his eyes, and, while counting the beads, started chanting “Om Namah Shivaya!”

O Namah Shivaya! I bow to thee, Supreme reality. Please forgive me for what I am about to do today. This world has become chaotic, and humans have forgotten their Dharma. Their faith and duty need to be restored.

Day 3 11:36–12:24 | Vidhi (विधि) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

12:06. While the priests were chanting the Śrī Rudram Namakam hymn, Viṣṇu Kali started chanting Mahā Mr̥tyuñjaya Mantra 108 times.

Oṃ tryambakam yajāmahe sugandhim puṣṭivardhanam Urvārukamiva bandhanānmṛtyormukṣīya mā'mṛtāt	We sacrifice to Tryambaka the fragrant, increaser of prosperity. Like a cucumber from its stem, might I be freed from death, not from deathlessness.
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Śrī Rudram Namakam is an 11-verse hymn in praise of Lord Shiva. They enumerate the various epithets and names of Rudra. It is in the 4th Kāṇḍa 5th Prapāṭhaka of Taittriya Samhita in Kṛṣṇa Yajurveda. The Mahā Mṛtyuñjaya Mantra, also known as the Rudra or Tryambaka mantra, is found in Mandala 7 Sukta 59 and Mantra 12 of the Ṛgvedā. It is considered one of the most important mantras in Shaivism.

12:12. The priests concluded the Śrī Rudram Namakam hymn and then were about to start the Chamakam hymn. Viṣṇu Kali checked the watch.

The head priest looked at Viṣṇu Kali and nodded. Viṣṇu Kali got up and walked over. He then prostrated and offered the flower to the Lord. The priest took some of it and offered it back to him. He prostrated before the deity, returned to his remote corner in the garbhagriha and closed his eyes in meditation while chanting the Chamakam hymn with the priests.

— ψ —

12:12. Meanwhile, the Mahārāja was watching news about Viṣṇu Kali on YouTube and smiling.

Viṣṇu Kali has not been able to open the cube. Mahārāja dialed a number.

Viṣṇu Kali's meditation was disturbed by the phone's vibration. He saw the number and got up to find a less noisy spot in the temple. He redialed the number.

“Mahārāja, Hari Om!”, said Viṣṇu Kali.

Mahārāja demanded, “Let us meet at Chet Singh Ghat at Varuṇa muhurta instead. Bring the Seal of Manu!”

“May I ask why now, Mahārāja? Is my video making everyone nervous?”, Viṣṇu Kali said it with a mild laughter.

“I never gave you authorization to murder anyone or hurt Hari. You were to retrieve the Seal of Manu and then disappear. Instead, you let your emotions take over.”

Viṣṇu Kali sat down and spoke, “Mahārāja, people have misunderstood Sanāthana Dharma. We cannot change this society unless something is seriously done. You have given me everything. You have taught me how the Vedic scriptures are the solution to our problems. I am asking our Bhāratvāshis to embrace our Vedic culture. Combine it with modern science, we will have a rich mindset. But what we now have is a colonized mindset, and our politicians are making it much worse. All Jāti are equal and must respect each other. Existing constitutional laws are creating a false chasm among communities by making one look superior to another.”

12:18. The Mahārāja said, “It still does not give you the right to anyone's life. We have had bloodshed for the last 2000 years. We cannot have more bloodshed. This country will fall into a civil war.”

Viṣṇu Kali replied, “I did not want you or others to take on this burden of fixing our Bhārat. So, I had to take matters in my own hands. Nobody was going to do it for us.”

Mahārāja felt Viṣṇu Kali was not listening to him. He said angrily, “Just hand over the Seal of Manu. Stop the madness.”

Viṣṇu Kali realized this was going nowhere. He lowered his tone and said, “Ok. I will bring it over. Please come alone.”

Mahārāja disconnected the phone. He felt uneasy by Viṣṇu Kali’s last statement.

Viṣṇu Kali went close to Lord Kāśī Viśwanath, folded his hands, closed his eyes, and mentally said his final prayers, *O Lord! Give me mokṣa after this final act.* He left the temple and walked towards Lalita Ghat. It took him about twelve minutes while he was lost in thoughts.

Day 3 12:24–13:12 | Sutamukhī (सतमुखी) Muhūrta |
Quality of time - Auspicious ||

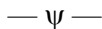
12:24. He stopped in front of Lalita Ghat and checked the direction and distance to Hariścandra Ghat in Google Maps. It was a 20-minute walk in the blistering heat and about 31 ghats to Hariścandra Ghat, namely, Tripura Bhairavi, Meer, Shiv Satendra Prajapati, Sarahi, Man Mandir, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Dashaśvamedhá, Prayag, Sitala, Ahilyabhai, Munshi, Darbhanga, Brijrama, Rana Mahal, Chousatti, Omkar, Rāmashram, Sarveshvar, Digpatiya, Kori, Banaras, Raja, Manasorovar, Kshemeshwar, Chauki, Mukesh, Varanasi, Kedar, Vijayanagaram, Shankaracharya, and Lali.

That is a lot of ghats to cross in this heat. He looked up, covering his eyes with his palm. *Surya Bhagawan is intense*

today. O! Surya Bhagwan! I seek your blessings today to go against a formidable enemy. Just like Śrī Rāma did his prayers for you, I bow to thee! He searched for a place with a shade nearby. He sat down and closed his eyes before reciting the Ādityahṛdayam.

Ādityahṛdayam is a 31-verses hymn dedicated to Āditya or Sūrya. This hymn is found in the Yuddha Kānda (6.105) of Vālmīki's Rāmāyana. Sage Agasthya recited this hymn to Śrī Rāma before He prepares for battle with Rāvaṇa.

12:30. After reciting the prayers, Ādityahṛdayam, to the Sun God, Viṣṇu Kali got up, folded his hands towards the Sun, before walking across towards the Assi Ghat.



Day 3 14:00 - 14:48 | Vāhini (वाहिनी) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

14:00. Meanwhile at the hospital, Hari opened his eyes slowly. He had a bad headache. “How long have I been down?” Disha was excited to see him wake up. She immediately came close to him, and said, “About two and half hours dear!” Hari asked, “How is Sanket? How is the lady in the wheelchair?” Disha said, “Sanket is doing better and sleeping. The lady is in critical condition.”

Hari asked, “Did we catch Viṣṇu Kali?”

She said, “No.” She then called Arjun to let him know Hari had woken up, disconnected and narrated the entire incident to him.

Arjun, and Maanyatha entered Hari’s room to check on him. Arjun said, “Hey buddy, how are you doing now?”

Hari was groggy due to the pain medicine. He said, “The head hurts. Viṣṇu Kali has the object.” He tried to pull himself up, but his head was aching badly. He moaned in pain. Disha and Maanyatha helped him sit up and lean his back on the pillows.

Arjun said, “Yes, I know.”

14:06. Arjun turned on the TV. All TV channels were playing his video.

Hari was shocked. *Why would he want to show the divine object to the world?* Disha asked, “What is he trying to do by showing the world?”

Hari replied, “Maybe he wants to prove something with the object.” He turned towards Arjun and asked, “Did he share any private letters or details with the PMO office?”

Arjun said, “No, what were you expecting from him?”

Hari said, “Something inside the object, purpose of the object, or who created the object...anything.”

Arjun replied, “Sometimes, some things are best kept secret. There is a time and a place for it. Maybe, it is not now!” Saying this, he glanced at Maanyatha. He continued, “Ok, how are you feeling? We must go back to the ghats and find him before he creates chaos.”

Hari replied, “Can you give me thirty to forty minutes? I will change my clothes.” He was still in pain, and he felt dizzy from all the medication. Disha immediately moved closer and helped him sit up. She said, “Hari, you should take bed rest.” Hari replied, “I am better. I agree with Arjun. Before this madman creates chaos, we need to get to him and the object.”

**Day 3 14:48 – 15:36 | Naktanakarā (नक्तनकरा) Muhūrta |
Quality of time - Inauspicious ||**

14:48. Hari, Disha, Arjun, and Maanyatha left the room towards the ghat.

**Day 3 15:36 –16:24 | Varuṇa (वरुण) Muhūrta | Quality of
time – Auspicious ||**

15:36. The team arrived at Vacharaj Ghat. SSP Balaram and twelve policemen were already waiting for them.

They checked the place out for any clues. As Hari and Arjun walked up the stairs, Hari recollected his recent near-death experience with Viṣṇu Kali at this ghat. His head began to hurt.

Disha did not recognize the twelve policemen assembled at the ghat. They were minimum six ft tall, with broad shoulders, physically fit, and, most notably, all of them had a short Sandalwood Tilak on their forehead. Arjun looked at them and acknowledged. Disha was perplexed. SSP Balaram told Disha, “They are the finest and are here at your command, Disha. I also brought a guide for you.” The guide also seemed quite tall and strong. Disha looked at him and was pretty sure she had not seen them before. SSP Balaram looked at Arjun. He nodded.

Arjun addressed everyone. “We do not have enough time. Our man should be somewhere close by. He must strike in one of the nearby ghats.”

15:42. Hari was checking Google maps to see what ghats appeared.

He then said, “We came from Assi Ghat. The next most prominent ghat from here in the northly direction are Chet Singh and Hariścandra Ghat. But depending on a community, there are other prominent ghats as well. It takes about nine minutes to reach Hariścandra Ghat from here.”

Arjun asked the guide, “How many ghats do we have to cross in order to get to Hariścandra Ghat?” The guide was counting his fingers, while saying, “Jain, Nishadraj, Panchkot, Prabhu, Chet Singh.” The guide paused to think, and then continued, “Niranjani, Mahanirvani...” He paused again to think, “Shivala, Hanuman, Karnataka, Hariścandra.”

Hari replied, “That is around ten ghats.”

Arjun texted – *Two Ks at all ghats.*

Disha saw him texting. She asked, “Whom are you texting Arjun?” Arjun said, “My girlfriend. She is quite anxious about my safety.” Hari smiled.

15:48. Maanyatha winked while saying, “You never mentioned about your girlfriend.”

Disha asked, “How old are you, Arjun? What’s with you and Hari? Do you guys ever think about getting married?” Hari laughed. The pain in his head muted his laughter.

Arjun said, “Let us focus on our problem here.” Disha walked away. For a moment Arjun thought he had avoided explaining to her. Maanyatha was observing. She said to Arjun, “You got to be careful, boss!”

Arjun screamed, “Ok Listen up everyone! Let us walk from here towards Hariścandra. Check every ghat. Look for anything suspicious! We have a killer on the loose. We do not know when and where he will strike next.”

Hari's face turned grim. *Whose dharma do I protect? Both want to uphold it in their own way.*

The team started the walk across the ghats – Jain, Nishadraj, Panchkot, Prabhu, Chet Singh, Mahanirvani, Niranjani, Shivala, Hanuman, and Karnataka.

Arjun had instructed three of his men to go ahead and scout the area before the rest of the team joined them.

15:54. In about two minutes, the rest of the team came to Jain Ghat. The slope from the top to the riverfront looked prominent. This slope is flanked by two steep stairs leading to the top.

Jain Ghat was built by Janki Das, a Jain trader, in the 17th century. He built it to enable Jain devotees to pay homage to Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara of Jainism. Before 1931, this ghat was identified with Vacharaj Ghat. The Jain community expanded it to provide its community with a place to conduct their rites at the riverbanks.

Arjun positioned a person at the ghat, and the team moved on. The next ghat, Nishadraj, a less prominent one, seemed small.

Nishadraj Ghat is steeped in history. This ghat is named after the Nishad community, which is traditionally a fishing and boatman community. This is the place from where Lord Ram, Sita, and Lakshman crossed the river Ganges.

There are multiple stairs leading to the top. Arjun was perplexed. He took out his binoculars to look at the very top and had his men walk to the top to check for any clues. Finally, he positioned one man before moving on.

He looked up at the sun. Even with his sunglasses on, he could feel the heat. He noticed everyone was getting tired. He wanted to ensure everyone was hydrated. So, he asked everyone to have some water before continuing.

He somehow felt uneasy about the events that were going to unfold. If he only he knew of the imminent danger that was lurking 110 m at Chet Singh Ghat.

— ψ —

15:54. Viṣṇu Kali stood in the left balcony, on the roof of Raja Chet Singh palace, facing the river.

The state of Benares came into existence somewhere between 1739 and 1760 by the dynasty of Gautam Bumihar Brahmins. In 1911, Benares became a Princely state. On 15, October 1948 the last Benares ruler acceded to the Indian nation.

Rafa'at wa Awal-i-Martabat Mahārāja Shri Chet Singh Sahib Bahadur, known as Raja Chet Singh, succeeded his father, Mahārāja Balwant Singh, in 1770 as the Raja of Benares. Mahārāja Balwant Singh built the Ramnagar fort, also known as the Raja Chet Singh Palace, in chunar sandstone with typical Mughal architecture. Now, the Nawab of Awadh exercised total suzerainty over Benares. In 1773, the British encouraged the Nawab to recognize Chet Singh as Raja of Benares. The

Nawab, fed up with the Britishers, handed over Benares to the East India Company. Under the new terms, Raja Chet Singh was forced to contribute to the company's cavalry and maintenance grants for its sepoy battalion. But Raja Chet Singh refused this, and the 1781 mutiny against them ensued.

He heard footsteps behind him. Without turning back, he started talking, “Please join me in seeing this blissful view of Mother Gaṅges. Raja Chet Singh fought the colonizer Hastings here. Every ghat along this mighty river tells how our forefathers fought and gave up their life protecting dharma. And here we are today, trying to stay quiet. It is shameful!”

Mahārāja walked over and stood in the middle balcony next to him, facing the river.

16:00. Mahārāja took a deep breath and said, “We have lost so many valiant warriors fighting the Greeks, Turks, Mongols, Mughals, Britishers, and worse, treacherous Bhāratvāshis who sold their souls to our enemies. I don’t believe our Bhāratvāshis understand the crisis we are living with. Unless people revolt against the politicians and establishments, who have a colonial mindset and promote caste to further their agenda, we will be standing against a vast army of powerful politicians and individuals. This war would be nastier and bloodier than the Mahābhārata of 5000 years ago. We do not have Śrī Kṛṣṇa to guide or protect us. We will have to survive until Śrī Kalki is born.

Did you bring the Seal of Manu?”

Viṣṇu Kali reached into his bag and handed the box to the Mahārāja.

Mahārāja took it and observed it for a few seconds. He looked at Viṣṇu Kali and asked, “Do you know what is inside the box?”

Viṣṇu Kali said, “I was hoping you could tell me.”

Mahārāja looked at Mother Gaṅges again.

16:06. Before he could turn around, Viṣṇu Kali placed his left arm around the Mahārāja’s neck and used his right hand to cover the nose of the Mahārāja with a chloroform cloth. Mahārāja struggled to remove the hands around the neck, as the strong chloroform scent made him faint slowly. He looked at Viṣṇu Kali’s eyes before closing his. Viṣṇu Kali then pushed him over.

Viṣṇu Kali said, “Please forgive me Mahārāja!” while pushing him over the balcony. He then left the palace with the Seal of Manu. Mahārāja fell on the steps of the palace. Blood started oozing out.

— ψ —

16:06. Harbir texted. *Code Red. Chet Singh Ghat!*

Arjun, Maanyatha, SSP Balram, and all the policemen checked the phone and looked at Arjun. Arjun immediately called Harbir to understand the text. Harbir explained that he had been following the Mahārāja at a distance and waited outside Chet Singh Palace. After a few minutes of waiting, he saw the Mahārāja falling from the balcony. He never saw anyone else on the balcony.

Arjun looked pale. Hari checked his phone but could not find any text. Disha was looking at everyone, checking their phones.

Arjun screamed at everyone, “Everyone to Chet Singh Ghat!” and started running towards Chet Singh Ghat.

Hari asked, “What happened, Arjun? Is the next victim murdered?” Arjun was expressionless and not replying. Disha was wondering why she did not receive any text. SSP Balaram never shared anything with her. But he kept checking his phone every minute. Everything was strange!

It was not easy to run across the ghats. The steps were steep in some places. Arjun was screaming at everyone before him to move aside. Hari, Disha and Maanyatha were running closely behind him.

16:12. As they crossed Panchkot ghat, Arjun sent a man to check the palatial building at the top. Hari looked at the palatial two-story building at the top and wondered if it could be the place where the victims were held.

The King of Panchkot of Bengal constructed the palatial structure at the ghat around the latter half of the 19th century. It is open for everyone to see.

They continued to run.

Arjun’s man signaled a thumbs-up from the top. Arjun checked his phone as he ran.

Panchkot Ghat. Secure.

Hari checked the watch. Arjun kept checking the phone to understand what was going on at Chet Singh Ghat. Disha noticed it again.

They continued running towards the next ghat, Prabhu Ghat.

Prabhu Ghat was built around the 18th century and is named after the Mahārāja of Varanasi, Prabhu Narayan Singh.

Arjun flinched in pain where he had the stab wound. His shirt started showing blood stains. Maanyatha was getting worried. She screamed at Arjun, “Arjun, slow down! Your stab wound is going to get worse.”

Arjun asked a policeman to check Prabhu Ghat out while they continued to run. It must have been a good five-minute run to Chet Singh Ghat crossing Nishadraj, Panchkot, and Prabhu Ghats. Everyone was concerned. As they were getting closer, they could hear a helicopter.

16:18. When they reached Chet Singh Ghat, there was a crowd at the top of the stairs. There were policemen on the palace balcony, scanning the area. The stretchers arrived. A helicopter was in the air, lowering the rapid-stretcher extraction kit. Arjun pushed everyone aside until he got to the orange barricade. Hari, Maanyatha, and Harbir were closely behind him. Arjun’s men were busy pushing people back while they set the barricade even further away. They grabbed the phone from anyone recording a video and deleted it.

Day 3 16:24 –17:12 | Aryaman (अर्यमन्) Muhūrta | Quality of time – Auspicious ||

16:24. Arjun looked tense while he ensured the Mahārāja was secured to the stretcher. Hari and Disha were watching the person who was being airlifted. Harbir came close to Arjun and whispered into his ear. Arjun screamed angrily. Everyone around felt scared for a few seconds.

While the extraction stretcher was in midair, the helicopter started moving southward. Arjun instructed Harbir to go with the Mahārāja.

Hari and Disha came close to him. Hari asked him, “Who was he, Arjun? Is he an important person?”

Arjun said, “Let’s just say...the guardian of Sanāthana Dharma who has been trying to hold Bhārat together for a long time. Let us sit down for a few minutes.”

Hari and Arjun walked down a few steps of the ghat, followed by Disha, Maanyatha, and two men. Hari and Arjun sat down a few steps before the river. Disha, Maanyatha, and the two men stood few feet behind them, looking around to ensure their safety.

16:30. Hari asked Arjun, “What are you thinking?”

Arjun said, “We now have another casualty, and somebody is going to get killed tonight. But it will not matter to the nation. It will be another news item, and everyone will get on with their desultory lives. The murderer is not going to give up until there is some resolution.”

Hari then turned towards Arjun and asked, “What is the guardian’s name? Why is he so important?”

Arjun looked at the river and said, “He is known as the Mahārāja. Every important leader and powerful individual in this country and abroad knows him. He has been around for a long time.”

16:36. Hari asked, “Ok...What is his connection to Viṣṇu Kali?”

Arjun was in deep thought for a few seconds. Then he started talking, “There are some things I cannot explain. You would never understand.”

Hari quickly retorted, “Try me!”

Arjun looked at Hari and then at the river. “Would you believe if there are Keepers of Sanāthana Dharma.” He paused and then continued, “In this case, to protect the Seal of Manu.”

Hari repeated, “Keepers?”

“Yes, The Keepers! Ever since Mahābhārata, there have been the Keepers of Sanāthana Dharma trying to protect Bhārat, the secrets and treasures of Sanāthana Dharma, and more. Somehow, the Seal of Manu was lost over time. Your friend Sharma discovered it and was planning to hand it over to the Mahārāja. If the Seal fell into the wrong hands, it could be used to mischaracterize by those who seek to destroy our Dharma. So, our Mahārāja decided to send his personal aide, Viṣṇu Kali, to collect it. Little did he know that Viṣṇu Kali had a personal agenda, carried out a different plan by making political demands, using kidnapped victims as leverage, and killing the victims if his demands were not met.”

16:42. Hari was surprised. “So, you knew about Viṣṇu Kali all along, you knew his motives, and you wanted me to tag along?”

Arjun looked at Hari and said, “I am sorry, friend. I have never met Viṣṇu Kali before. I still do not know who he is. But I was beginning to feel he was somehow connected with the Mahārāja.”

“Why did you not ask him then?”

Arjun explained. “The Keepers have a code of secrecy. You must be familiar with secret societies such as *the Knights Templar, the Freemasons, the Illuminati, the Skull and Bones, the Rosicrucians, the Bilderberg Group, and the Elders of Zion*. But you would never have heard of our very own, The Keepers of Sanāthana Dharma. They do not question the Mahārāja. The other thing that you should know is that Keepers have never been called for duty in the last 100 years. A clarion call has been used for the first time in almost a century. We were busy fighting battles with the Mughals and the Britishers, while we forgot our original purpose—to protect our own treasures. Our rank-and-file were dying to protect our mother, Bhārat. We had to constantly fill the gaps with strong believers of Sanāthana Dharma.

16:48. I had never met the Mahārāja in person until this morning. We maintain our distance and secrecy for reasons. But I know His intent was in the best interests of Sanāthana Dharma. When I heard that Viṣṇu Kali had hurt you and Sanket, I was angry. I confronted the Mahārāja and requested him to call The Keepers. After his acceptance, I startled everyone with the clarion call.”

“Ok, but why did you choose me?”

Arjun looked at Hari and said, “Given the circumstances, I could only trust you.”

Hari felt angry and betrayed. “You used the word...WE... a couple of times. Why you? Why me? Who are you?”

Arjun got it. He then removed his shirt to show the tattoo of a sword and a mace crossing each other on his shoulder.

16:54. He said, “I am the leader of the Kṣatriya clan. The Kṣatriya clan tattoo denotes the oath we have taken to protect the country and Sanāthana Dharma.”

Hari was bewildered. “What do you mean by the Kṣatriya clan?”

“The Keepers are about 432 members, about 108 of each Varna clan. We are the deep state network that protects Sanāthana Dharma.”

Hari rebuffed him. “What rubbish!”

“Hari, my dear friend! We live in a complex world. Our ways of dharma are being challenged from all directions... politicians, powerful Western institutions, our neighbors across the borders, foreign intelligence agencies, private groups, anti-democracy institutions, and more. Our enemies were very clearly identifiable for the last 1000 years until the turn of the 19th Century. Now it’s a multi-dimensional covert war on all fronts with many powerful clandestine forces. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Dharmic Kings of those times must have anticipated these situations 5000 years ago. After all, the cosmic timeline keeps repeating.”

17:00. Hari thought to himself...*profound beauty of time from Manvantaras to Muhūrtas.*

Arjun continued, “However, let’s be clear. We do not know who or when someone may have started The Keepers, but we are ancient. We pass the baton to our trusted kith or kin. We are not immortals!”

Disha quietly listened to Arjun and Hari’s conversations. She was puzzled. Yet she did not say anything.

Hari said, “You could have told me earlier. We could have avoided the situation for the Mahārāja.”

Arjun said, “Frankly, I did not know he was meeting with Viṣṇu Kali today afternoon at this place. He must have called Viṣṇu Kali and asked him to meet here to get the object. After the Mahārāja left my room this morning, I had Harbir follow him. He did not see Viṣṇu Kali, but he saw the Mahārāja falling.” Disha was listening quietly.

17:06. “Ok, what next, Prince! Is that what they address you as?”

Arjun said, “I am merely Arjun for everyone...a humble servant of Sanāthana Dharma. What are your thoughts? What will Viṣṇu Kali do?”

Hari said, “If I were Viṣṇu Kali, I would not be concerned with murdering the next victim. I would show the object to the world. I would do it where there are lots of people. Maybe a prominent ghat. And it would be my final act before either fighting and dying or disappearing.”

Then Hari became silent, deep in thought. Arjun ordered tea for the group while they silently watched the river. Hari started sipping his tea.

He then looked at his watch and said, “Maybe I would commit my final act at Hariścandra Ghat around Yama Muhūrta.”

Day 3 17:12 –18:00 | Bhaga (भग) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

17:12. Arjun asked, “We have no other information and everything to lose. Let’s go there. But why Yama Muhūrta again?”

He said, “I feel it is Yama who gives him the final test. Hariścandra passes the test and finally goes to heaven. Viṣṇu Kali has read the Vedas. He believes in the right reasons, but his methods are wrong. He may believe in the Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa legend. But your guess is as good as mine, and I am running out of ideas.”

Arjun asked again, “Ok. When is the Yama Muhūrta?”

Hari looked at his watch again. “In five hours.” Arjun and Hari wondered what lay ahead that evening. Maanyatha was getting worried about Arjun and Hari. Harbir was feeling angry that he could not protect the Mahārāja.

17:18. Arjun got up and texted. *One K at the entrance, riverfront, big boats, temples, or any prominent place of all 88 ghats.*

He showed Hari the text messages.

Hari said, “Ok. Let us start walking towards Hariścandra Ghat. Per Google Maps, it is about 450 m from here and should take us about six minutes.”

Arjun looked at everyone and said, “Time to make a move!”

They started their walk to Mahanirvani ghat. It was about 57 m from Chet Singh Ghat. There was a large gap between the fort and the steps to the river.

Hari and Arjun looked around and made a few observations. At one corner, there were two concrete benches. A couple was sitting on one of the concrete benches. There was a metal railing in front of the benches to prevent any falls. This distinct, thick white mortar with brown stones on the fort made it stand apart from others. In the middle, fifteen steps led to a bright reddish-brown entry. It had sliding doors that seemed to be locked. Maanyatha checked and came down. A couple of sadhus were sitting by the river singing bhajans. Children were running around.

17:24. They spent about two minutes before moving on towards the next ghat.

At about 110 m, they crossed Niranjani and Shivala at a slow pace. Arjun sent his men to scout each ghat for some clue. They decided to sit down for ten minutes.

Hari checked Google Maps again. Hariścandra Ghat was about 280 m away. They had to cross the Hanuman and Karnataka Ghats.

— ψ —

17:24. Meanwhile, Viṣṇu Kali was in Dashaśvamedhá Ghat. He picked a spot from where he could watch Gaṅgā āratī. He somehow felt he had little time left.

Arjun received a text. *Code Orange. POI at Dashaśvamedhá Ghat.* He read it out to Hari and the rest.

Disha was aghast, but she hid her feelings. Hari was in deep thought. *What is he doing?* He checked his phone for the time. It was 17:29.

17:30. SSP Balaram asked if he could have the police arrest him. Hari replied quickly, “Don’t stop him yet. He may lead us to the place where the other kidnapped victims are.”

Arjun agreed and said, “He may harm them if he is threatened.” Then, he said loudly, “He is our man. He will be taken away to be dealt with severely in our code of honor.”

Hari was surprised. But that did not bother him. He said, “Our priority should be to safely release the kidnapped victims and to secure the object. How you guys deal with him is your problem. Let us wait here until we hear further.”

Arjun texted. *Follow. Update. Do not apprehend.*

17:36. Viṣṇu Kali got up and started walking away from the ghat. He knew he was being watched. He started walking slowly towards Raja Ghat, which was about 400 m from Dashaśvamedhá Ghat.

Midway, Viṣṇu Kali decided to stop at a small tea shop to eat snacks and drink tea. Two men were now waiting patiently for him to finish his tea and follow him to the location where the victims were held.

Day 3 – The Doppelgängers

Monday Somavāsaraḥ (सोमवासरः)

Day 3 18:00 - 18:48 | Girīśa (गिरीश) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

18:00. After having tea, he left the shop. He reached the house.

POI entered the house. Sharing coordinates.

Arjun texted. *Stay outside. Do not enter. POI may be armed and dangerous.*

Everyone waited eagerly, ready to act.

18:12. Suddenly, the door opened. Viṣṇu Kali stepped out of the house.

POI leaving the house.

Arjun texted. *Follow.*

Suddenly...*Another look-alike is leaving the house.*

Maanyatha looked at the text and then at Arjun.

Ten seconds later, *Wait! Another look-alike is leaving the house. Same height, bag, clothes. Walking in a different direction!*

Ten seconds later, *Wait! Another look-alike is leaving the house. Same height, bag, clothes. Walking in the opposite direction! Command?*

Arjun, Maanyatha, Harbir and SSP Balram were perplexed. He updated Hari. Disha pursed her lips in a self-satisfied smirk.

The text kept coming. Hari asked, “How many look-alikes did your men see? Arjun said that it seems like twenty-two to twenty-four.

Hari started to think. *Why would Viṣṇu Kali do this? From the same building? He is distracting us.*

18:18. He got a call. Hari could not recognize the number. He checked his watch and looked at Disha and Arjun. Then, he answered the phone.

“Hari Om! Do you have all The Keepers chasing me?” Hari stood expressionless. “Your friend needs to understand that we are on the same team. What are you doing at Shivala Ghat?”

Hari started looking in all directions to see if there was another drone. Viṣṇu Kali said, “Calm down, Hari.”

Hari said angrily, “What do you mean calm down? You attempted to murder the Mahārāja! Next, you plan to murder someone tonight, and you have the Seal of Manu.”

Viṣṇu Kali started laughing. “So, you know the Mahārāja now, is it? The problem is you, of all the idiots, are not taking me seriously. I plan to reveal the Seal of Manu—to the world. My demands were clear but have not been met yet!

Hari said, “Have you ever wondered if any government tries to address this, we will end up in a civil war. If it were that easy as you say to remove, don’t you think any government would have done it?”

18:24. “There we go again. Another debate!” Viṣṇu Kali then screamed, “I want action. I want the caste and reservation system to be removed. Period! Anyways, stop chasing POIs. I have not done anything yet.” With that, he closed the call.

Hari was in thought. He played back Viṣṇu Kali’s words. *Your friend needs to understand that we are on the same team. How does he know we are at Shivala Ghat?* He pulled Arjun aside and asked, “Arjun, do you know everyone in your WhatsApp group?”

Arjun nodded and said, “I do. I am the admin. I ensure everyone’s background is researched thoroughly before adding them.” Hari asked Arjun again, “Is the group by invitation only?”

“Yes! I share the invitation based on instructions from the Mahārāja.”

Hari asked, “Ok. Let me ask this again, do you know all The Keepers?”

Arjun thought for a few seconds. “Well! I have not seen everyone in person.”

Hari said, “Stop posting messages in the group for some time. You have a black sheep! Viṣṇu Kali or someone who works for him is in the group.” Hari paused. Then, he said, “I know you are one of them. Who amongst us out here are The Keepers?”

Disha walked closer to the duo to hear them. Arjun said, “Me. Maanyatha, Harbir, SSP Balram, and the twelve policemen who joined us.” Hari looked at each one of them and wondered. *So, Disha and I are the only ones who are not*

Keepers. Who is telling Viṣṇu Kali where we are? Who is the black sheep? Could it be one of the Keepers?

18:30. Disha looked at all of them as Arjun mentioned the names. She was not surprised at all given their behaviors that afternoon. Little did she realize that Hari was observing her.

Suddenly, the text sounds started trickling in the main group.

A look-alike sighted north towards Assi Ghat.

A look-alike was sighted in the direction of Lalita Ghat.

A look-alike walking towards Dashaśvamedhá Ghat.

The names of the ghats appeared one by one, but in no specific order. Hari, Arjun, and Maanyatha looked at each other. The count was nearly twenty-four! Not ten!

Hari had an idea. He pulled Arjun aside again, away from Disha, and said softly, “Let’s beat him at his game. Create a new splinter group. Add only those you absolutely trust and have met...to this group. Our strategy should be to feed misinformation to the main group.” Disha was looking at them but could not hear them.

Arjun created a splinter group and called it *The Guardians*. He added himself, Maanyatha, Harbir, SSP Balram, and the twelve policemen. Arjun asked Hari, “Shall I add you and Disha to the group?” Hari hesitated for a few seconds before replying, “Just add me!”

18:36. Hari said, “This is getting messy. I am not sure what Viṣṇu Kali is trying to do. And I don’t trust the ones in the main group. Viṣṇu Kali wants us to go after look-alikes, yet he explicitly told me not to. He is baiting us. Let’s just make him think we are following his plan. Ask them to provide an update in that group if they see a POI. Can we ask four

policemen...' He then looked at the policemen and said, "I meant Keepers from here to go to the house coordinates and check if there are any victims."

Arjun nodded and looked at the policemen. He texted in the *Guardian* group. *Four Keepers to the house. the Knights Templar, the Freemasons, the Illuminati, the Skull and Bones, the Rosicrucians, the Bilderberg Group, and the*

Disha saw Hari, Maanyatha, and SSP Balram checking their phones. She checked hers. She had no text. She suspected being left out. But decided to play along.

18:42. They waited eagerly for 5-6 minutes. Meanwhile, Arjun texted in the main group and showed it to Hari. *24 Ks to follow look-alikes.* Arjun then spoke loudly to the group, "We will have 24 members of our team follow them."

Disha asked, "Why twenty-four? Do we have the right number?"

Hari smiled when Disha was eagerly asking the question. He said, "It is one of those important numbers in Sanāthana Dharma. For example, Gāyatrī Mantra has twenty-four syllables." Saying this, Hari walked towards the river and wondered. *What is he doing? He is engaging yet distracting us.*

Hari requested Arjun to post a message in the main group to share twenty seconds of clear video footage of each POI.

Day 3 18:48 - 19:36 | Ajapāda (अजपाद) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious |

18:48. The video messages started trickling in. He along with Maanyatha and Disha started to analyze if anything was

unique about each POI. They took about ten minutes and exchanged some notes.

— ψ —

18:51. The crowd began to gather around the platforms where the seven paṇḍits were going to perform the Gaṅgā āraṭi that evening. Viṣṇu Kali had been meditating.

When he opened his eyes, he checked his watch. It was 18:51 and the sun was beginning to set slowly by 18:53. He then enjoyed watching the Gaṅgā āraṭi!

— ψ —

19:00. Maanyatha and Disha were surprised. The POIs looked almost identical. Their facial features, height, body size was almost similar. They explained to Hari. Disha said, “Viṣṇu Kali is taking great pains to create chaos. Why is he doing this?”

He turned to Maanyatha and Disha, and said, “Keep observing as the videos start coming in. The moment you feel something odd about any person, notify the Keeper who sent the message to be alert.”

Disha asked Arjun to find out if there was any News media coverage. Hari wondered. *Now why did I not think of it? The news media is needed to telecast anything big tonight. What made Disha ask that question?*

Hari said, “I agree. Viṣṇu Kali wants to do something big. He wants attention. He wants the whole nation to hear him out today.”

19:06. Arjun started making a few calls. When they got off the calls, Arjun said, “He has called a few news media stations to the ghats.”

Hari was talking loudly, “He has twenty-three impostors running across the ghats. But there must be only one of him. Which one is the real Viṣṇu Kali? He has probably also replicated the Seal of Manu. He may give an emotional speech. People may surround him. He may try to create mayhem.”

Turning to SSP Balaram, he said, “Sir, please have your men close to any medium-to-large size gathering at any ghat to prevent any mayhem.”

19:12. Maanyatha and Disha were continuing to analyze the videos. Hari looked at a few. He noticed that all of them had an uncanny similarity...a red band with an amulet around their right hand.

The Keepers were chasing the look-alikes. Their movements were being monitored.

19:24. Four Keepers were near the house. They were monitoring it for a few minutes from outside.

No one is around the house.

Arjun texted. *Take precaution.*

A Keeper, dressed in street hawker clothes, walked towards the door. He had a tiny hidden camera that everyone was using to monitor his movements. He looked around to check if anyone was around. He sensed something was wrong, but he couldn't place it.

K is approaching the house.

19:30. Arjun, Hari, Disha, Maanyatha, Harbir, and SSP Balram were now watching the suspense over a laptop. The Keeper walked over to the side window slowly and peeped into the house. He could not notice anyone. A TV was playing. Next, it was a shelf full of books.

He whispered, “I do not see anyone. Going in.” He looked at the doorknob and attempted to turn it. The moment he opened it a little, a bomb went off. His body was thrown back and his limb was severed.

Everyone watching the monitor was shocked at the turn of events.

Code Red! K down!

Arjun texted. *Charge!*

All the nearby Keepers rushed towards the house. One stopped by the body to check if there was any life left in the fallen Keeper.

Code Red. K dead!

Day 3 19:36 - 20:24 | Ahir-Budhnya (अहिर्बुध्न्य) Muhūrta
| Quality of time - Auspicious ||

19:36. They rushed into the house with a small handgun in their hands. Two walked up the stairs slowly. One went further inside on the ground floor. They noticed a few security cameras. As they crossed it, they broke it. The Keeper on the ground floor entered a room with a table and a computer, the screen dark, probably used as a background.

The two Keepers on the upper floor saw two doors on either side. Both went for each door. They cautiously opened it.

19:42. Both screamed, “Victim found!” The Keeper on the ground floor screamed, “Victim found!”

Hari and Arjun heaved a sigh of relief. They found three victims in three different rooms. All of them were heavily drugged.

3 victims found. Critical health.

Arjun and Hari saw the text. Arjun instructed Disha to call ambulances and extra police support. He then instructed the Keepers at the house to take the victims to the nearest hospital immediately and protect them.”

Arjun, Maanyatha, and SSP Balram were angry.

Arjun texted. *Protect! Do not leak the hospital location to the media!*

Disha called for three ambulances and the police immediately. A Keeper checked on the victim health. Others checked the rooms for any drugs or other devices.

— ψ —

19:48. Viṣṇu Kali checked his phone. An hour had passed. He decided to leave the place to prepare for his final act! He got up and looked in the direction of Lord Kāśī Viśwanath and prayed.

The video of the house was not playing anymore. He rewound it and saw the explosion. He smiled. He then began his walk along the ghat in the southern direction.

— ψ —

20:06. Three ambulances and four police jeeps came to the scene. The place was chaotic. The policemen cordoned off the house. The crowd started gathering and was busy taking

videos. The Keepers were busy pushing them away, confiscating the phones, and taking videos.

20:12. Suddenly, many of the POIs started to move away from the ghats. They seemed to be moving back in the direction of the house.

The phones started making sounds.

POIs turning back from the ghats.

Arjun shouted, “What nonsense is this? He is playing games with us.”

Hari was startled and asked Arjun, “Did they find anything else? Arjun shook his head. He said, “The POIs are turning back probably towards the house.” Disha noticed Maanyatha was busy with the videos. She stepped aside to text.

Hari noticed Disha texting. *Who is she texting?*

20:18. Then she walked towards Hari. Hari acted as if he was busy with something. Disha asked, “Are you happy now? We found the victims.” Hari said, “I am happy for the victims, but I am angry that we lost a Keeper today. I am angry with Viṣṇu Kali. I am going to kill him when I meet him.” He looked at her when he said that. Disha did not flinch. He asked Arjun, “Any indication of the direction they are heading?” Arjun could not confirm their direction clearly.

Hari was perplexed. *Why are they turning back? Clearly, he must have done this to distract us.* Hari said, “The real Viṣṇu Kali is buying time. He has been distracting us from 6 pm...two hours. He had POIs lead us one way, while he must have gone in a different direction. He wanted us to enter the house and find the victims. He now wants us to arrest the POIs. We are clearly doing what he wants us to do. He is

planning on doing something big tonight. But what is he planning to do?”

Day 3 20:24 - 21:12 | Puṣya (पुष्य) Muhūrta | Quality of time – Auspicious

20.24. Hari paused and looked at the river for a few minutes. Then he turned towards Arjun and said, “We need to make the first move now. We have *The Keepers* positioned at each of the eighty-four ghats, right?” Arjun nodded. Hari continued, “Ask them to arrest any POI when they see one.”

Disha was listening to Hari and gave a smug smile, and she then walked over to Maanyatha and continued to review the videos.

20.30. Arjun texted in main group. *Apprehend any POI in sight.*

The day seemed to be long. Hari faced the river while others were busy. Hari wondered. *It seemed very easy for The Keepers to enter the house and find the victims. A single bomb at the door? What am I missing?*

Mother Gaṅges seemed to be calm tonight. *Maybe it's the calm before a storm.*

Arjun noticed Hari. He asked, “Hey buddy! What are you thinking?”

Hari replied, “Having a tenalach moment, buddy. Whenever I see Mother Gaṅges, I feel there is some connection between her and me. It appears I have lived here through multiple births. I have seen her and this place a thousand times, yet I am here again looking at her for the first time.”

20:36. Suddenly, text sounds were heard. Arjun looked at his phone.

1 look-alike apprehended at Dashaśvamedhá Ghat!

1 look-alike apprehended at Assi Ghat!

1 look-alike apprehended at Karnataka ghat!

Hari asked, “What’s going on?” Arjun replied, “We were able to apprehend ten POIs.”

More texts were flowing in.

20:42. Hari then turned back towards the river. *Why would he go to this length?*

Hari asked for the News media team list by the ghat. Arjun texted it to him directly. He looked at it for anything peculiar. He noticed an unknown news media team going to Hariścandra Ghat. Hari showed it to Arjun and asked, “Do you know them?” Arjun shook his head and said, “No. I will check them out.”

More texts were flowing in.

1 POI apprehended at Lalita Ghat!

1 POI apprehended at Raja Chet Singh Ghat!

20:48. Hari and Arjun were getting anxious. *Where was the real Viṣṇu Kali hiding?* Hari walked over to Disha and Maanyatha to see if they had found any leads. They shook their head.

Disha asked Hari, “Why do you think this object is so important for Viṣṇu Kali?” Hari thought for a few seconds. *Why is she keen on knowing? She should know better.* He

replied, “Have you ever heard of a copper object called the Kalpa Vighraha?” Disha shook her head.

“It’s a 26,000-year-old Hindu Idol that depicts Lord Shiva. It was discovered in Nepal. What if this object that Viṣṇu Kali has is much older than that? It changes our perception of recorded history. What if he uses this to claim something gravely wrong!” Hari was beginning to feel scared of the possibilities.

Arjun interjected and informed Hari in his ear that all 23 POIs had been caught.

20:54. Hari acknowledged and said, “Let us move! But we will need to split and search at a few of the main ghats.” Arjun said, “Hari! We have sent The Keepers to each ghat.” Hari replied, “That’s true. But we...you, me, Disha, Maanyatha, Harbir, and SSP Balram need to pick one important ghat and check it out together. We know this moron better.”

Arjun did not like the idea, but he agreed.

Hari asked, “So where is everyone going to?” and he looked at everyone.

Arjun said, “I will go to Dashaśvamedhá.” Disha, Maanyatha, Harbir, and SSP picked Lalitha, Manikarnika, Assi, and Darbhanga Ghats, respectively. The remaining eight picked a ghat each.

21:00. The team was waiting to hear from Hari. Hari said, “I will be here for a while and then go to Hariścandra Ghat. Please start walking to your ghats. I need time to think. However, let’s all meet at Hariścandra Ghat by 10 pm.”

Arjun pulled Hari to a side and handed him a Colt King Cobra .357 Magnum revolver, and said, “Take this for your safety, buddy. I don’t want you to get hurt. Have you used this before?”

Hari felt it. It was small, lightweight, and concealable. He shook his head and said, “Never! But I will take it.” He then kept it in his backpack.

Everyone started walking. Harbir started walking towards Assi Ghat. Hari could see Arjun, Disha, Maanyatha, and SSP Balaram at a distance. SSP Balaram was walking rather slowly and was on the phone talking to someone.

21:06. Hari was lost in thought. *Why did Disha not pick Hariścandra? Disha did not insist on accompanying me. Why did SSP pick Darbhanga Ghat? SSP has been acting weird from the start. Why is Harbir picking the farthest, most northern ghat? Why does Maanyatha want to go to Manikarnika Ghat again? Why is no one picking Hariścandra? I have never heard of Sanathani News before. Too many unexplained questions.*

Day 3 – The Avatār

Monday Somavāsaraḥ (सोमवासरः)

Day 3 21:12 - 22:00 | Aśvinī (अश्विनी) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Auspicious ||

21:12. After some distance, Disha, Arjun, and Maanyatha decided to take different paths to the ghats. Hari looked at them for a few minutes.

21:18. Then he decided to make a move. *Let me go to Hariścandra Ghat!*

At Vārāṇasī, Manikarnika and Hariścandra are the only two important ghats where cremations are done. This burning ghat is named after King Hariścandra, the king of truth. Markandeya Purana describes his story in Chapter Seven. This Treta Yuga King is virtuous, has performed the thousand-horse sacrifice, and is the valiant among all Men. He must give up his kingdom and all that he possessed, except his wife and son, to Sage Viśvāmitra due to a misfortune event. Despite giving him everything, the Sage demands a Dakshina of Rājasūya within a month. The King, his wife and son arrive at Vārāṇasī, only to realize time is up. His misfortune continues with selling his wife and son to an old Brāhmaṇa and finally himself to a Chandala for a hundred million coins to give the Sage his dues. He then works at the

cremation grounds, only to see his son die and come there for cremation. His misfortune finally ends when he and his wife prepare a pyre for themselves. The Gods, pleased with his qualities of forgiveness, self-control, and truthfulness, offer him, his wife, and son a place in heaven. It is believed that since then this ghat has been named after this virtuous King.

It is estimated that about thirty cremations are performed daily at Hariścandra Ghat. On July 7, 2023, the Modi government laid the foundation for the redevelopment of both Manikarnika and Hariścandra Ghats to improve the infrastructure and amenities offered to guests, provisions for public restrooms, wood storage, waste disposal, and eco-friendly cremation pyres.

21:24. It was getting dark. The sun had set.

While he was walking, he noticed the large boat, with a mermaid-like woman at the bowsprit, sail in the middle of the river. He noticed some movement on the boat and became suspicious. He placed his backpack down and unzipped it. Then, he took out his infrared digital binoculars and placed it on the stand. He was observing the boat from the stern and moving along slowly across the Port side. While Mother Gaṅges was only about 3.21 km wide at the widest point, the binoculars were capable of 10x digital vision, and he could see the boat very clearly on his 3-inch screen even though it was pitch dark.

He continued to observe the boat for the next few minutes.

21:30. As he moved slowly towards the bow, he noticed someone who looked like Viṣṇu Kali. This person was looking straight ahead at the bow. He then turned his head towards the ghats. Hari zoomed in. It was Viṣṇu Kali!

One of the three men standing behind him was speaking to him. He had men walking across the starboard side. They were armed with submachine guns. There must have been at least eighty-nine of them. Hari focused on him again. He had a small backpack hanging from his shoulder. He probably has the *Seal of Manu* with him in this bag. *How did not even one of the Keepers see him?* He picked up his phone to text in the splinter group. He started to type – *Located look-alike on...*

Then he stopped and looked up.

I don't know anyone anymore. Arjun could have stopped Viṣṇu Kali if he wanted to. Mahārāja knew him and could not stop him. Who else knows him? There are many Keepers in the WhatsApp group. He turned the binoculars in the northern direction along the ghats. SSP was busy walking ahead without looking to his right. *Why is he not looking in the direction of the boat? Did he notice it earlier? Where were the others?*

Hari started to erase his text message.

21:36. *How do I get to the ship?* He noticed a small boat tied to a small wooden crude pier near him. There was no one in sight. It had a motor! It also had an oar. He hoped it was not a motor that required a crank to start it.

He untied the ropes and slowly pushed the boat further into the river. Then he jumped in. He noticed that this motor also required a crank. He cranked the motor a few times, and it

finally came to life. It did not make too much noise. He moved slowly northward towards Assi Ghat before turning the boat around to face its stern.

21:54. He must have been about 150 m from the big boat before he turned off the motor. He took out his GTHUNDER, which could provide clear images up to 250 m, to check the Port side. No one seemed to be guarding it. He noticed the red and green lights of the boat.

At a distance, someone was observing every move Hari was making and informing Viṣṇu Kali. Hari started paddling towards the starboard side of the boat.

He checked the time. *Two minutes to Yama Muhūrta!* It looked as though Dharma Raja was eagerly waiting for the two mortals to come to Hariścandra Ghat to demonstrate whose dharma was greater!

Day 3 22:00 - 22:48 | Yama (यम) Muhūrta | Quality of time - Inauspicious ||

22:06. Surprisingly, he found a rope ladder hanging on the starboard side. He climbed the rope to the top.

He slowly popped his head up. As soon as he heard a few steps, he went under. When the sound faded, he popped his head up. Nobody was around. He climbed up and went towards the cabin. Everyone was in the bow guarding Viṣṇu Kali. Hari hid himself waiting for the right moment.

22:12. The boat was slowing down and closing in towards Hariścandra Ghat.

While some were performing the final rites for their beloved departed ones, others were slowly trickling in. But

something was odd. Two colors stood out in the crowd. One group was dressed in saffron, while the other in deep blue.

A stage was being set up. People were going back and forth with speakers and lights. Viṣṇu Kali, standing behind in the shadows, looked at his watch and signaled to his men.

22:18. “Namaste! Glory to Śrī Kṛṣṇa! Glory to Lord Rāma!”

Hari wondered. *Why was Viṣṇu Kali in the shadows? Nobody at the ghat will be able to see him.* However, the people at the ghat started to notice the ship and the loud voice on speakers. The next few words would give a shock to Hari.

“I have appeared before you several times, making my demands. Please allow me to repeat it one last time.

First, make the word Caste illegal and remove it completely from the Constitution. We must embrace all Hindus, Jātis and their culture. We can be of any Jāti, speak any language, follow any spiritual path or be a non-believer.

Second, abolish the identification, classification, grouping or ranking of Jātis as Scheduled Castes, OBCs, forward, upper, backward, lower, or depressed. All citizens of Bhārat belonging to any Jāti should be equal in the eyes of the law and Constitution.

Finally, the most important demand, abolish the reservation system! Implement a process to identify, protect and uplift or advance specific individuals, children, women, or families who are economically weaker based on income or wealth.”

Viṣṇu Kali was emphasizing each demand slowly and clearly. He was also observing the people at the ghat.

22:24. Unfortunately, these demands have not been met. The administration has not taken me seriously.”

Heads turned at the ghat toward the mysterious voice.

“Tonight, I am going to reveal who I am.” The focus lights were turned on.

“I am the Avatār of Lord Viṣṇu!”

Hari was shocked to hear this! *Viṣṇu Kali would do anything to get his demands met.* He noticed one of his Keepers walking along the Port. Hari knocked him down and dragged him into a secluded spot.

“I am born to fix the problems we have. I have a divine object called The Seal of Manu. It is the original Smṛti that was practiced during the Dvāpara Yuga. It does not discriminate any Jāti. Our colonial masters created the caste system to divide us. We must save Sanāthana Dharma.”

22:30. He lifted the divine object in the air. Sanathani News crew was at the ghat covering his speech. The TV stations started to show the object. Somebody started shouting, “Hare Kṛṣṇa! Rādhe Kṛṣṇa!” The crowd was becoming loud. He was acting as if he was opening the divine object. But he pulled a metallic plate from the side. Then he lifted the metallic plate with his right-hand and showed it to everyone. The media stations were focused on the plate. He looked at the plate as though he was reading from it, and said, “All Jātis are equal. Śrī Kṛṣṇa says...All are my family...means...Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.”

Hari was in thoughts. *Viṣṇu Kali is acting like Moses with a metallic plate as his commandments. Why is he going to such*

a great length to prove something he has not seen? He has not been able to open the divine object.

22:36. Hari jumped on one of the men behind Viṣṇu Kali and pushed him to the ground. He then pointed the revolver at Viṣṇu Kali.

Viṣṇu Kali laughed. He said, “I was expecting you sooner, Hari.” He turned towards the crowd and pointed at Hari. “Here is a man who wants to steal this Smṛti from us and give it to our political leaders.” The crowd started screaming at Hari. The TV stations now had their cameras focused on Hari.

Disha jumped in and pointed her gun at Viṣṇu Kali. Hari shouted, “Disha, why did you come here?” Disha said, “I have been following you all along. I knew you were on to something.”

Hari screamed at Viṣṇu Kali. “Ok Viṣṇu Kali. Please stop this madness. You have proven your point. Stop the murders and hand over the divine object. We have two guns pointing at you, please hand over the Seal of Manu.”

22:42. Viṣṇu Kali laughed again. “Why are you so sure?”

Hari turned to look at Disha. Disha moved to her right and was now pointing the gun at Hari. She said, “I am sorry, Hari. I have known Viṣṇu Kali for a long time. He is doing the right thing by forcing the government and political class to act. Please join us.”

Hari felt betrayed. He said, “I suspected you. But I never believed it. How could you do this, Disha? I thought you loved me.”

She said, “I do love you. But I have a greater purpose in helping the Avatār!”

Hari screamed back, “He is no Avatār. He is a con man who firmly believes in his Dharma. He does not respect the Dharma of the land. He has killed three people, hurt our friends Sanket and Arjun, and has put the Mahārāja in a critical state.”

22:48. Disha started shedding tears. “He is for real, Hari. We cannot have the political leaders, who have replaced our colonial masters and control us based on Caste. The government is listening, Bhāratvāshis are paying attention. This is the time for them to realize. Please drop your gun.”

Hari said, “You played me all along. I trusted you.”

“No, Hari I love you. But Viṣṇu Kali’s purpose means more to me. I have suffered because of this stupid caste system. Sanāthana Dharma needs to be protected. This is the only solution.”

22:54. Meanwhile, Arjun and his Keepers were taking positions at the ghat and on the ship. He had two snipers, one aiming for Viṣṇu Kali and the other one at Disha. Several of Viṣṇu Kali’s loyal men at the ghat were being slowly subdued by Arjun’s Keepers.

SSP Balaram had all roads to Hariścandra Ghat cordoned off. Arjun asked his snipers to take shots at Disha and Viṣṇu Kali. They were instructed not to kill.

23:00. Arjun gave the green signal. Viṣṇu Kali got hit on his shoulder. The divine object slipped from his hand. Nobody paid attention to it. Viṣṇu Kali’s Keepers ran to protect him.

They surrounded him and dragged him to the starboard side, where a speedboat was waiting for them.

The second sniper missed Disha. But Hari turned around and took an accidental fatal shot at Disha while she was looking at Viṣṇu Kali fall. She fell on her knees and dropped her gun. Hari screamed and ran towards her.

Arjun, Maanyatha, and Harbir climbed on the boat, but they could not locate Viṣṇu Kali or his men. They saw a speedboat leave in the northern direction. Arjun spoke to SSP and let him know the direction.

23:06. Meanwhile, Hari had Disha on his lap. He cried. While she struggled with pain, Disha said, “Hari, you know I was never going to shoot. We all believe in the same cause...this dreaded colonial caste system must go, and Dharma must be restored. Sometimes our methods may not match, but our hearts are seeking the same. I will always love you and will be waiting for you on the other side.” She put her bloody palm around Hari’s face and then breathed her last.

23:12. Maanyatha and Harbir came to them. Arjun was angry. He wanted this to end peacefully.

Arjun noticed a black object on the far side, closer to where Viṣṇu Kali was shot. He picked up the object and placed it in his backpack. Maanyatha and Harbir saw him and covered him.

The crowd became restless, but Arjun’s Keepers and SSP’s men had it under control. A stretcher was rushed to the boat. But Hari stopped them. He decided to perform the final rites for Disha at Hariścandra Ghat. He lifted her and walked with her down to the ghat. Maanyatha and Harbir helped him.

धर्मो रक्षति रक्षित

He who does not observe Dharma is destroyed,
while he who follows it meticulously is
protected!

Day 4 – Eternal Treasures

Tuesday Maṅgalavāsaraḥ (मङ्गलवासरः)

A clandestine meeting was held at The Oberoi hotel, probably for the last time, or until the next calamity emerges. The Mahārāja recited the śloka 4.7 - 4.8.

He paused for a few seconds and continued, “For now, the threat has been thwarted. But we must remain vigilant!”.

Rishi Viśvāmitra asked, “Where is The Seal of Manu? Has it been secured and kept in a safe place?”

“Yes, in a secret vault, that humans may not open soon! However, we will continue to monitor the situation. If there is any hint of humans tampering with the vault, The Keepers will quickly move the seal and other eternal treasures to a safe place. We will continue to do this throughout Kali Yuga until the final avatar of Lord Viṣṇu, Kalki, emerges!”

Meanwhile, the country entered a serious debate about caste, colonial mindset, and the reservation system. The ruling party decided to introduce a bill to scrap the reservation system, introduce an approach to identify socially and economically backward sections of the society, and prohibit the use of Caste in identification and classification. The talk shows were having a field day while the experts were debating the pros and con of the new bill. The opposition was blaming the ruling party for the current chaos and challenged their position on protecting the backward sections of society.

The electoral polls were favoring the opposition. In six months, the ruling party fell. The opposition party led the

country for the next 4 years on the platform of strengthening the reservation system. People were cajoled about the possible loss of status. However, the citizens of Bhārat realized they had lost the opportunity to fix what was genuinely disastrous. The previous ruling party was voted back on the promise that the reservation system would be abolished, and the word *Caste* would be made illegal. Everyone finally hoped to be equal in the eyes of the law, and they could put the colonial Macaulay mindset behind them.

Chronology of main historical events

3137 BCE¹	18-days <i>Mahābhārata</i> war
3102 BCE	Beginning of Kali Yuga, 35 years after <i>Mahābhārata</i> , Śrī Kṛṣṇa leaves Mother earth.
February 2, 1835	Lord Macaulay's address to the British Parliament on 2 February 1835.
1902	The Mahārāja of the princely state of Kolhapur, Rajarshi Shahu (26 June 1874 - 6 May 1922) introduces reservation for non-Brāhmaṇas and backward classes in education. He appealed both for a class-free India and the abolition of untouchability.
1918	Mysore Raja Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar created a committee to implement reservations for non-Brāhmaṇas in government jobs and education.
1921	Mysore initiates reservation for backward castes.
September 16, 1921	Justice Party government passed the first Communal Government Order to legislate reservations.
August 16, 1932	The British government led by Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald announces the Communal or McDonald Award granting separate electorates in India for Forward Caste, Lower Caste, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Christians, Anglo-Indians, Europeans and Depressed Classes. Dr. B R Ambedkar reaches an agreement with

¹ As mentioned by Aryabhata and in the *Aihole* inscription of 634 AD

	Mahatma Gandhi during the Poona Act to allow a certain number of reserved seats for Harijans.
1942	Viceroy's Executive Council, cabinet of government of British India, recommends 8.5% reservation for Scheduled Castes in civil services.
1950	Indian Constitution commits to reservations for Scheduled Castes and Tribes. A Government Order excluded converts (except four Sikh Dalit castes) but by 1990s, Sikh and Buddhist castes were included, but Christian and Muslim Dalits remain excluded.
1951	First amendment in Constitution to legalize caste-based reservation in face of court cases against quota.
1954	20% of seats in educational institutions were reserved for SC/ST.
1975	Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared a state of <i>Emergency</i> across the country for a 21-month period from 25 June 1975 to 21 March 1977.
1976	The Preamble of the Indian Constitution declared that India is a <i>secular</i> nation with the 42nd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, 1976
1984	22.5% of vacancies in public-sector and government-aided educational institutions were reserved for SC/STs.
1990	Mandal Commission report recommending 27 per cent reservation to OBCs is implemented by Prime Minister V P Singh
1992	Supreme Court orders 50 per cent cap on caste-based reservation. Also strikes down Narasimha Rao government's move to reserve 10% government jobs for poor among Upper Castes.

	“Economic condition not a criterion for reservation.”
2011	According to 2011 census, SC and ST groups account for 17% and 9% of Indian population respectively.
2019	Parliament passes Article 15 amendment bill allowing 10 per cent quota for poor in higher education and jobs. Bill challenged in Supreme Court.
2020	Reservation in the legislature was only till 1960, but it has been extended every 10 years. The latest extension was made in 2010 and is valid up to 26 January 2020. There was never a deadline for reservations in education and jobs.

Articles of the Constitution

On November 26, 1949, 395 articles were adopted when the Constitution of India was framed. After several amendments over the post-independence period, there are 448 articles in 25 parts in the Indian Constitution.

The Articles of Constitution discussed in this book are,

Article 15	No discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.
Article 27	Prohibits using tax-payers money for the promotion of any religion.
Articles 36-51	Under Part-IV of the Indian Constitution deal with Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP).
Article 44	The State shall endeavor to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India.

Constitutional Amendments

Constitution (Eighth Amendment) Act, 1959	Article 334 of the Constitution was amended. The period of reservation of seats for the SC/ST and representation of the Anglo-Indians in the Lok Sabha and the State Legislative Assemblies was extended for ten years, i.e., up to 26 January 1970. Ratified by 10 states (AP, Assam, Bombay, Madras, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal). 4 States did not ratify (Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and Madhya Pradesh). Signed on January 6, 1960, by President Rajendra Prasad
Constitution (Twenty-Third Amendment) Act, 1969	In Article 330, ST of Nagaland were included. Reservation for SCs, STs, and Anglo-Indians in the legislature was extended until 1980
45th Amendment, 1980	Reservation for SCs, STs, and Anglo-Indians in the legislature was extended until 1990
51st Amendment, 1986 57th Amendment, 1987 72nd Amendment, 1992	Reservation for SCs, STs from north-eastern states in Lok Sabha and Legislative assemblies.
62nd Amendment, 1989	Reservation for SCs, STs, and Anglo-Indians in the legislature was extended until 2000

65th Amendment, 1990	Established National Commission for SCs and STs. Constituted under Article 338.
76th Amendment, 1994	After Indira Sawhney Judgement that prescribed 50% limit on reservation. Not a mandatory provision. Tamil Nadu has 69% reservation. Schedule 9 of Constitution includes Tamil Nadu's Reservation Act of 1994 within it to protect from Judicial review.
77th Amendment, 1995	Article 16 amended to include provisions for States to make reservations in promotions in SCs and STs.
79th Amendment, 2000	Reservation for SCs, STs, and Anglo-Indians in the legislature was extended until 2010
81st Amendment, 2000	Article 16 amended to include provisions for States to consider unfilled reserved vacancies as a separate class and
82nd Amendment, 2000	Relaxation in qualifying marks and other standards for reservations in promotion in public services
85th Amendment, 2002	Article 16 th amended to protect consequential seniority in promotion under reservation policy for government servants belonging to SCs and STs

Vedic Timescale of Muhūrtas

No.	Daily period	Name (मुहूर्त)	Quality, or guṇa (गुण)
1	06:00–06:48 (sunrise)	Rudra (रुद्र)	Inauspicious
2	06:48–07:36	Āhi (आहि)	Inauspicious
3	07:36–08:24	Mitra (मित्र)	Auspicious
4	08:24–09:12	Pitṛ (पितृ)	Inauspicious
5	09:12–10:00	Vasu (वसु)	Auspicious
6	10:00–10:48	Vārāha (वाराह)	Auspicious
7	10:48–11:36	Viśvedevā (विश्वेदेवा)	Auspicious
8	11:36–12:24	Vidhi (विधि)	Auspicious, except Mondays and Fridays
9	12:24–13:12	Sutamukhī (सतमुखी)	Auspicious
10	13:12–14:00	Puruhūta (पुरुहूत)	Inauspicious
11	14:00–14:48	Vāhinī (वाहिनी)	Inauspicious
12	14:48–15:36	Nakṭanakarā (नक्तनकरा)	Inauspicious
13	15:36–16:24	Varuṇa (वरुण)	Auspicious
14	16:24–17:12	Aryaman (अर्यमन्)	Auspicious, except Sundays
15	17:12–18:00	Bhaga (भग)	Inauspicious
16	18:00–18:48 (sunset)	Girīśa (गिरीश)	Auspicious
17	18:48–19:36	Ajapāda (अजपाद)	Inauspicious
18	19:36–20:24	Ahir-Budhnya (अहिर्बुध्न्य)	Auspicious

19	20:24–21:12	Puṣya (पुष्य)	Auspicious
20	21:12–22:00	Aśvinī (अश्विनी)	Auspicious
21	22:00–22:48	Yama (यम)	Inauspicious
22	22:48–23:36	Agni (अग्नि)	Auspicious
23	23:36–00:24	Vidhātṛ (विधातृ)	Auspicious
24	00:24–01:12	Kaṇḍa (कण्ड)	Auspicious
25	01:12–02:00	Aditi (अदिति)	Auspicious
26	02:00–02:48	Jīva/Amṛta (जीव/अमृत)	Very Auspicious
27	02:48–03:36	Viṣṇu (विष्णु)	Auspicious
28	03:36–04:24	Dyumaḍgadyuti (द्युमद्गद्युति)	Auspicious
29	04:24–05:12	Brahmā (ब्रह्म)	Very Auspicious
30	05:12–06:00	Samudra (समुद्र)	Auspicious

Vedic Timescale in Manvantaras and Yugas

In terms of Solar Years			Also Known As
Satya Yuga	1,728,000	4x Treta Yuga	
Treta Yuga	1,296,000	3x Dwapara Yuga	
Dvāpara Yuga	864,000	2x Kali Yuga	
Kali Yuga	432,000		
Chathur Yuga	4,320,000	Satya + Treta + Dvāpara + Kali	Maha Yuga
Manvantara	308,571,428	71.43 Maha Yugas	
Kalpa	4,320,000,000	1000 Maha Yugas	1 day or night for Brahmā
1 full day of Brahmā	8,640,000,000	2x Kalpa	
1 year of Brahmā	3,110,400,000,000		