

Chapter 2 – Age of the Gods

“In the ages of the Gods, when clashes between Gods, Guardians and the Rakshasas were happening all over the world. A time, when the Gods were so generous towards man, that when the men used to call them with all their hearts, the gods would leave their thrones in the heaven and come down to this earthly mortal plain to respond to their plea. However” the Old man’s voice deepened “at the same time the Rakshasas or the demons were also hiding in the bushes, running around the corners, throwing atrocities on the people beloved of the Gods”

Not only the children but the villagers were also captivated by the words of the old Man.

“And when those Rakshasas crossed their limits and their sins started to flow through the land link the blood you have just seen, then the Gods would select guardians to protect their people. among those many guardians that appeared all over the world, we had our own guardian protecting this land with the blessings from the Gods.”

“Throughout history many tales have been spoken about this powerful protector. As stories of his deeds spread throughout various cultures, they intermingled with the prevailing local myths.”

The old man continued “As his exploits began to be sung by wandering ballads, singing popular folk tales’ village to village, it took on a life of its own.

After seen the anticipated faces of the villager, the old man smiled

“Here is one such tale.”

“There was once a village not far from here, which was the envy of all the neighboring 18 villages. There was always joy and bountiful harvest at that community.”

“People used to come from all over to attend the vibrant annual fair. Such was its exalted status around these parts.”

“But, this village also had a deep, dark secret.” The old man became overjoyed by the changing expression on the children’s faces.

“Its borders were on the peripheral of a large, mystical forest. A forest that was inhabited by a tribe of Arakkas.”

“What are Arakkas, Thatha ?” asked one of the children seated in the crowd.

“Arakkas were a race of Asuras,” the old man looked at the Children “the one your mothers tell you about when you don’t listen to them. “They were the ones who had eternal enmity with the race of divine beings known as the Devas. Throughout the ages of the Gods, they had continuously fought against the Devas for the ownership of the Swarga, but because they were evil and always schemed about destruction of the people, they never succeeded in their wars. But when they were defeated, then some of them fled to the Naraka and some of them fled to the earth. They were much larger than us humans, had strength and stamina to rival even the Devas, and grew in power as the sun set.”

“Now, these Arakkas often had a disdain for humans and would many a time cause trouble to them in many other parts, but in this village, the elders had a pact with the Arakkas.”

“Pact?” one of the Villagers said “What pact?”

“They would offer sacrifices in front of an entrance to a cave where the Arakkas were known to frequent, every new moon, and in return, they would not trouble the village.”

“Did it work?”

“It used to, but Arakkas being true to their nature, began causing trouble to the village nonetheless.”

“At first they started by destroying the paddy and millet fields that the village was known for through the 18 villages, even after accepting the sacrifices.

As the time passed they begin to grow even more malicious and started stealing livestock, in the middle of the night, when everyone was asleep.

Day by day, their nefarious deeds grew.”

The Villagers held their breath in anticipation on what is to come next.

“Now, in this tribe of dark beings, there was one in particular, who was an outsider. He was said to have come from another lost tribe of Arakkas and had joined this tribe.

And while some of these Arakkas relished disturbing the peace among the humans, this outsider, preferred to stay in the jungle and hunt for sport, large prey.

He had the fur of a tiger, wrapped around his waist, and the hide of a bull elephant, he had hunted previously.

He also relished battles, with other mystical beings like Yakshas that sometimes inhabited the water bodies near the lush forest.

He never really had a good opinion of the humans, who seemed to cut down the trees and plants of the jungle wantonly, and stayed away from them as much as he could.

The others in the tribe generally stayed away from him, as he was larger than most and was known for his temper. They called him Karuppu or “*Black*” as he was even darker in complexion than the rest of these dark beings.

In the course of time, the Arakkas begin to go too far. One time, in the dead of night, one of them had snatched a new born baby from the grasps of its mother and ran into the jungle.

The commotion of the villagers who stood helplessly at the edge of the forest and the sound of the cries of the mother and the laughter of the Arakka running with the baby woke Karuppu from his slumber.

On that day, things changed forever.” The old man paused and looked at the engulfed faces

“What happened next?” one of the children sitting in the front asked

“As the people, looked toward the pitch black jungle,” the old man continued “at the periphery of their village, and as the mother was weeping, incessantly, a large silhouette could be seen moving slowly toward the edge of the forest.

At first, red eyes were only things that could be seen in the darkness, then a silhouette of a powerful body, too big to be a human begin to emerge from the darkness, holding on one hand a wooden staff , and on another, a bundle.”

The Old man again paused as the air filled with curiosity “No, not just a bundle, but a baby!

As the villagers looked on, the mother ran to the being and fell at his feet.

He dropped the child carefully in the mother's arms and said, take care of your child safely.

How can we be safe with your kind, terrorizing us, stealing our food, destroying our crops and now this?

We have no one to protect us, we are alone! Cried the mother; breaking down in tears.

Silence cut through the place. Even the villagers kept quiet.

After what seemed an eternity. The figure spoke.

Not anymore. From today, this village and its people are under my protection.

Cheers echoed throughout the village and echoed through the jungles.

“But Thatha, aren't Asuras supposed to be bad? My Amma used to tell me many stories from the Puranas about evil Asuras. And how they were always attacking humans, killing and eating away the children. She even told me that if I don't be a good boy and finish my daal then one of the Ashuras will come and take me to his cave” the people around them let out a quite laughter at the children's curiosity.

The old man smiled warmly at the child's curiosity. “My child, one is not defined solely by the birth that he takes, but by the actions he chooses to live by. Take, for example, the famous puranic story of Narasimha and Hiranyakashipu. Many overlook the fact that Prahlada, who is revered as the epitome of Bhakti, was also born an Asura.”

He paused to ensure the child was following, then continued, “In the *Narada Bhakti Sutras*, one of the holy scriptures, spoken by the divine Deva Rishi Narada Muni, he cites four matchless examples of devotion, saying, '*Bhakthir-ith-uchyathe Bhishma Prahlada UddavaNaradahuh.*' This means he names Pitamaha Bhishma, Prahlada, Uddhava, and himself as the four supreme devotees. These devotees came as supreme devotees of the Gods despite the difference in their birth.”

The man's eyes twinkled with the joy of teaching as he added, “Moreover, in the *Srimad Bhagavatam*, Yama Dharmaraja, when advising his Yama Dutas, lists: 'SvayambhurNaradahSambhuhKumarahKapilo Manuh, PrahladoJanakoBhismo, BalirVaiyasakirVayam,' highlighting twelve great authorities of Dharma, including Brahma, Narada, Shiva, Kumara, Kapila Muni, Manu, Prahlada, Janaka, Bhishma, Bali, Suka Deva, and Yamaraja himself.”

“So, you see,” he concluded, “Prahlada, though of Asura birth, is celebrated as both a peerless example of Bhakti and a great authority on Dharma.”

The child, now intrigued, pressed further, “I get what you mean, all the time mother has been telling me that the Ashuras are bad and will eat me but are there any Asuras actually fighting for Dharma, outside of just being great devotees?”

“Yes, indeed,” the old man replied, his voice deepening with the gravity of the tales. “The great *Vibhishana* in the Ramayana, who took refuge at the feet of Lord Shri Rama and valiantly fought against his evil brother Ravana’s forces. Vibhishana, despite being an Ashura at his birth and not just that he was younger brother of the King Ravana who was said to be so strong that he picked up the Kailash parvat with his bare hands to

bring it to his home. Yet, when the war between right and wrong ensued, Vibhishana left his brother and sided with Lord Shri Rama.

Similarly, in the Mahabharata, there was an Ashura who was stronger than anyone, bigger than anyone and it was said that if he continued to fight, the war would have ended in a few moments; his name was Ghatotkacha. Ghatotkacha, born to Bhima from Hidimba, his wife belonging to a Rakshasha lineage, fought alongside the Pandavas. His formidable presence on the battlefield caused immense havoc among the ranks of those who stood against Dharma. And even in his death, he caused considerable damage to those who were against Dharma.”

He leaned closer, lowering his voice as if sharing a sacred secret, “Would you be surprised to learn that even the great god Ganesha himself once assumed a form in the lineage of the Asuras, known as Mahotkata?”

“Wow! I didn’t know that, tatha!” exclaimed the child, eyes wide with wonder.

“Now, let us continue,” the old man said, eager to delve deeper into the background of the dark protector.

Soon enough, the vow that Karuppan had taken in front of the villagers, quickly reached the ears of the Arakka Chieftain. Many of those in the tribe, already mistrusted him due to his outsider status and threatening appearance, as well as his unwillingness to take part in the raids they did on the villagers. More than treating him like an outsider, they were more afraid of him because of his powers and his stature.

This enraged them even more as they saw it as an act of betrayal. As they debated over what to do. How can an Ashura can betray his own kind for humans? Hasn’t he heard how their ancestors were driven out of

Swarga and their rightful ownership of the throne of the Swarga was taken away from them. How can he forget that these very humans are the ones, loved by the gods, always called the Gods to slay their ancestors in the past and they always received short hand of the stick in every scenario? Even when they were made to believe that they were given equal rights to the treasure that will come out of the Samudra Manthan for which their ancestors worked so hard, in the end when the elixir of life came out it was given to the Devas and they were given the poison, a drop of which could have destroyed the entire Ashura race.

As they were discussing all these, Karuppan appeared in front of them and said 'I am grateful for my acceptance into this tribe, but I can no longer stand by and watch your atrocities committed on the humans living peacefully in this village

'These humans are the reason why we are here in the first place, don't you know our history?' One of the Ashura said back

'I know of the history very well, but these humans have nothing to do with that. Whatever happened, it happened in the past, and today we don't have to be abide by them.'

'We have been tolerating your behavior for far too long, outsider' another Ashura said with an authority in his voice 'we have been way too much merciful to you for letting you live in this forest with our tribe. But, you need know your boundaries and stay away from tribe's affairs'

Seeing no alternative to his approach he came forward 'I hereby challenge the Chieftain to a duel. And if I win, you will leave this area and not bother the villagers any more'. The air was thick with tension as the two of them faced off in the clearing in the middle of the jungle.

As the battle began, the two beings charged at each other with reckless abandon, their weapons clashing in a shower of sparks.

As the fight wore on, the trees around them began to suffer the consequences of their battle. Branches were snapped off, bark was stripped away, and leaves were crushed underfoot. It was a brutal fight, with both beings fighting with all their might to emerge victorious.

Finally, after what seemed like a deadlock, The chief winced from a powerful blow from Karuppan and stumbled back, his club falling from his grasp. For a moment, it seemed as though he might still fight on, but then he collapsed to the ground, defeated.

Karuppan roared in victory, thumping his chest triumphantly, as all the other Arakkas, knelt around him in respect.”

“At that very instant, the sky grew dark and ominous. Thunder rumbled and lightning flashed overhead, casting an eerie glow over the forest. There was a blinding flash of light, and a figure appeared in the midst of the chaos.

It was the Great Goddess, Maha Mari, ruler of the heavens and earth. She stood tall and regal, her eyes flashing with the power of the lightning bolts that crackled around her. The Asuras fell to their knees in awe, recognizing her as the divine mother of all that she was.

The Great Goddess surveyed the scene before her, her gaze sweeping over the battlefield and the warriors who had fought so bravely. And then, with a smile that lit up the sky, she approached the dark complexioned one.”

“Congratulations, brave warrior,” she said, her voice like the peal of thunder. “Your victory is well deserved, and I am honored to bestow upon you a great gift.”

With a wave of her hand, the Great Goddess summoned forth a set of magic chains. They glimmered in the darkness, pulsing with a power that could be felt by all who stood nearby.

“These chains,” she said, “were forged in the pits of Naraka Loka, the darkest of realms. They can bind even the mightiest of beings that you may encounter in journey.

May you put it to good use, protecting the defenseless and punishing the wicked.

The dark warrior who had just won the battle stared in awe at the chains, realizing the incredible power that they held. He knew that he had been blessed by the Great Goddess herself, and that he was chosen by her to serve Dharma.

And so, with a deep sense of gratitude and reverence, Karuppan accepted the gift of the enchanted chains from her.

As the Great Goddess vanished into the ether, her departure marked by a roar of thunder and a streak of lightning, Karuppan stood tall and proud, his new weapon clutched tightly in his hand.

And his great watch would start then, for thousands of years, protecting us and watching over us, whether unseen in the spirit realm or through the shamans and oracles whose bloodline he would descend unto.