



Learn English Through Stories.

J Series

J6

**Adapted and modified by
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Keepers of the Kalachakra

By Ashwin Sanghi

Part 6

Twenty-four

Sharma walked into a spartan room that was occupied by the monk who had been watching him from a distance. Brahmananda visited Dhamma Salila whenever he came down into the plains from the mountains. Sharma had known him ever since that terrible war in Kargil during which he had lost his leg.

‘How are you, Rakesh?’ asked Brahmananda, looking up from his open notebook and putting down his pen.

‘Only beginning to understand that there is no me and no you,’ Sharma smiled at the monk, who always emanated an unexplainable radiance. ‘What are you working on in that lotus-embossed notebook of yours?’

Brahmananda laughed. ‘The lotus has always fascinated you,’ he remarked, pouring some hot lemon water from a flask into two cups and handing one over to him.

‘To answer your question,’ said Brahmananda, ‘a treatise on the Katapayadi system — a south Indian system of numerical representation.’

‘The last time I saw you, you were working on binary numbers,’ said Sharma.

‘I was,’ replied Brahmananda, ‘because binary numbers are the language of life.’

‘How so?’ asked Sharma.

‘Try expressing everything as a combination of zeros and ones and you realize that the binary system is a perfect representation of dualities,’ said Brahmananda. ‘One day I hope to explain that to you in greater detail. In the meantime, read the Valmiki Ramayana, followed by the Gayatri Mantra. You will understand my point. Now, what brings you here?’

‘I heard you were visiting this place. I figured I’d take a chance and drop in,’ said Sharma.

‘You never just drop in,’ said Brahmananda, his eyes twinkling. ‘But I’m happy to hear that you are shedding the Cartesian illusion.’ Sharma and Brahmananda had spent many hours discussing the fallacy of dualism—the distinction between mind and matter — between body and soul.

‘The celebrated view of Descartes, I think, therefore I am, has led humans to equate their identity with their mind rather than their whole organism,’ said Brahmananda. ‘This foolish view has encouraged humans to treat matter as dead and independent from themselves.’

Sharma laughed. ‘I was almost dead when I met you at the hospital in Kargil,’ he joked. ‘But that was another matter!’

Brahmananda laughed at the wordplay. ‘We tend to divide the world into distinct objects and events,’ he said. ‘This separation is convenient but is not reality. It’s an abstraction. Thinking of our abstraction as reality is ignorance — avidya.’

‘Isn’t that precisely the point made by Einstein?’ asked Sharma. ‘That objects and events —or space and time—are united, not separate?’

‘But can you visualize the dimensions of space combined with the dimension of time?’ asked Brahmananda. ‘The Upanishads say: “There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind; we know not, we understand not: how would one teach it?” There are only two ways to understand space-time — mathematics or perception. You decide the route you wish to take.’

The room was still for a moment.

‘Reality cannot be explained by words, because it lies beyond the realms of the senses and the intellect,’ said the monk. ‘It can only be intuitively experienced. When the rational mind is quietened, the intuitive mind awakes.’

‘But distractions often get in the way,’ said Sharma.

‘The mind of a warrior in a duel is not distracted,’ said Brahmananda. ‘It is a heightened state of awareness. Distractions are pushed into the background.’

‘Meditation is a duel?’ asked Sharma, a tad surprised.

‘Sounds ridiculous, doesn’t it?’ said Brahmananda. ‘Imagine that you are a warrior in a swordfight. Your opponent is equally matched. The slightest error could mean instant death. You watch your opponent with utmost vigilance. A crowd has gathered to see the fight. Given that you aren’t blind, you can see

them from the corner of your eye. And because you aren't deaf, you hear them in the background. But your mind remains focused on your opponent and his moves. That is meditation.'

Sharma nodded. Brahmananda always made things so simple. 'Master the knot,' said Brahmananda eventually.

'What is that?' asked Sharma.

'The ability to understand your connection to the rest of the universe,' replied Brahmananda. 'That is what I mean by the knot. The Upanishads talk of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam — the notion that the world is one family. It is the idea that everyone and everything are related. Distinctions and separations are false.'

A thoughtful Sharma bid farewell to the monk and headed to the car park. He was to attend a security conference in Delhi and then catch a flight out to Kathmandu the next day.

He decided to fight his duel as best he could.

Twenty-five

Sharma sat in the last row listening to a speech by the National Security Advisor of India. 'Global Security & Intelligence Conference', proclaimed the huge backdrop to the stage. They were inside a large convention hall that was packed to capacity. Almost seven hundred people were present, including police officers, armed forces personnel, intelligence operatives, counter-terrorism experts, academics and researchers.

He heard the NSA drone on in a monotonous voice about the security challenges in an ever-changing world. His speech was followed by those of the Home Minister and the Minister of Defence. All of them followed the bland approach of reading from prepared texts and delivering the same without any significant expression.

Sharma sighed. This was not where he wanted to be. He slipped out from the back row and made his way to the coffee counter. He poured himself a cup and was about to take a sip when someone tapped him on the shoulder. Sharma turned around.

'Professor Thakur!' he exclaimed. 'What a surprise to see you here.' Sharma had read many of Vignesh Thakur's books on Buddhism and met him several times.

The professor smiled. He had wrinkled skin like ancient parchment and his teeth were nicotine-stained from his hookah habit. 'Not one of the places where you would usually expect to find me,' he said. 'But Buddhist aggression in countries like Myanmar as a reaction to Islamist interests has also become a security risk in some parts of the world. I am scheduled to deliver a talk later today on that subject.'

'Religious conflict is a constant across the ages,' said Sharma. 'When Pakistan was created in 1947, Hindus were 15 per cent of the population but were less than 2 per cent by 1998. In Bangladesh of 1931, Hindus were around 30 per cent of the population but are less than 10 per cent today.'

'Yes,' said Thakur. 'Contrast that with the Muslim population of India that was less than 10 per cent in 1951 and grew to over 14 per cent by 2011. Secularism is the only way to allow people to flourish. Are you aware that the Kalachakra texts talk about a massive world conflict in 2424?'

‘I’ll be dead and gone by then,’ said Sharma jokingly. ‘I’m not worried.’

Thakur did not smile. ‘It’s possible that the predicted conflict may be arriving sooner,’ he said. ‘We should all be worried. Nidhane.’

‘What’s that?’ asked Sharma.

‘Destruction.’

Twenty-six

And it’s another day and it’s time for me, Masoud, to jot down my thoughts. I have been tardy over the last few weeks and I plan to make up for that by writing more regularly from now on.

There are those who say that radical Islamism is the result of something within the doctrine of Islam itself. There are others who say that this terror is actually the consequence of Western interference. I believe that both groups are right in their own ways.

Why do so many people ignore the deleterious impact of Western colonialism on the Muslim world? In 1798, Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Egypt. In 1830, the French captured Algeria. A decade later, the British annexed Yemen. In 1881, the French took over Tunisia, and a year later the English took over Egypt. In 1911, Russia annexed parts of Persia while Italy annexed Tripoli—eventually leading to the creation of Libya. In 1912, the French occupied Morocco.

A groundswell of resentment against the West was only natural. When colonialism eventually died, it was followed by mass immigration of Muslim subjects into the lands of their erstwhile colonial masters. But immigration was accompanied by social exclusion, and dissatisfied immigrants became fertile hunting ground for radical imams.

One also cannot ignore the impact of the Muslim Brotherhood. It emerged in 1928 in Egypt, seeking to Islamize societies and compel governments in Muslim countries to adhere to Sharia. Several terror groups such as the Hamas, Jamaat al-Islamiyya, and Al- Qaeda are affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood. In fact, the brotherhood has spawned some of the world’s most notorious terrorists.

Then there's the fact that the British allowed the Jews to settle in Palestine. The establishment of the state of Israel followed in 1948. The Muslim world was further humiliated when a unified front of Arab armies lost a bitter war to the newly created country of only 600,000 Jews. Muslim resentment peaked.

Frankly, though, I think that the biggest factor that fuelled the growth of radical Islam was the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938. Until then, Wahhabism—the rigid and fanatical form of Islam—could not really spread far and wide. The discovery of oil changed all that. The huge inflow of money from oil wells was used to keep conservative elements of the Saudi state happy. More than ten billion dollars were invested in Islamic charities and foundations that carried a stark and intolerant version of Islam to different parts of the world.

The overthrow of the Shah of Iran as a consequence of the 1979 revolution also gave impetus to Islamists around the world. Iran became the world's first modern Islamic republic and their new leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, ensured that Sharia became the law of the land.

And can one overlook the consequences of the Cold War in accelerating radical Islamist ideology? The Americans used Jihad as a tool to get Arab and Afghan fighters to bleed the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Billions of CIA dollars were poured into mujahideen groups through Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence—the ISI. Even Osama bin Laden was initially supported by the CIA. When the Soviets were defeated, the holy warriors needed new wars to fight.

America's myopic vision propped up dictators in the Middle East and then toppled them during the Arab Spring. They did not realize that choices in the Arab world are never about good versus bad. They are often about bad versus worse. While dictators such as Hosni Mubarak, Saddam Hussein, Bashar al-Assad and Muammar Gaddafi were terrible men, they kept Islamists in check and prevented outright Islamization of their countries. They were the proverbial lid on a can of worms. And we all know what happens when the lid is removed.

Usually the very people demanding democracy on the streets of the Arab world are actually Islamists who look forward to sacrificing all democratic norms at the altar of theocracy, once they are in power.

Twenty-seven

Vijay looked at the visiting card that his landlord had given him. It was of simple white ivory paper, the sort that could be ordered at any online printing store. The name and address on it were in ordinary block letters.

Vijay entered the website of the company into his browser but it took him to a page marked as 'under construction'. He did a quick search via Google for the company but it did not seem to exist. He picked up his phone and dialled the number provided on the card. It was out of service. Then he visited his phone's mapping app to do an address search. The street ended before the block number in question. He sent an email but it bounced back within seconds.

He was aware that every domain name had to be registered. All domain name registrars provided what was known as a 'Who Is' lookup. He entered the domain name into the search box. Privacy settings had been enabled. The registrar was masking the name of the owner.

Vijay realized that the visiting card had simply been a dud to get access into his apartment. It was a dead end.