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**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu.**

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# Keepers of the Kalachakra

By Ashwin Sanghi

## Part 14

64

Vijay looked at the information deck of the treadmill that he was running on. Not bad, he thought to himself. Forty-five minutes at eight kilometres per hour. He felt good. Three machines away, the scientist from England was vigorously using the elliptical trainer. She was huffing and puffing to work off the extra calories that Daulat Singh's chocolate fudge cake had added to her diet the previous night. No one else was around.

Vijay turned off the machine, stepped off and wiped it down as a matter of courtesy for the next user. He then headed to the men's changing room that was attached to the gym. As he closed the door behind him, he felt a hand clamp over his mouth. He managed to angle himself to catch a glimpse of the offender.

It was Mikhailov.

The Russian took his hand off Vijay's mouth and quickly brought a finger to his own lips. Be quiet, I'll explain.

Mikhailov seemed to be chewing gum, as usual. He walked over to the large mirror that ran across one of the walls and gently felt the bolts that held the mirror against the wall. He then took the chewing gum from his mouth and placed it over one of the bolts.

'Sorry about that,' he said softly. 'I hate chewing gum. I only chew it so that I may block the bugging equipment at will.'

'Listening devices in a changing room?' asked Vijay.

'You can observe the CCTV cameras in plain sight,' said Mikhailov. 'But even when there are no cameras, you should always assume that there is a listening device. You must not forget this rule, even inside your own personal living quarters.'

'Could there also be cameras behind this mirror?' asked Vijay.

‘No,’ said Mikhailov. ‘I used a handheld sonar from my lab to check the depth behind the mirror. It is constant and uniform. No hardware there.’

‘Why are you telling me all this?’ asked Vijay. ‘You were rather standoffish on my first day at work.’

‘Sorry about that,’ said Mikhailov. ‘I was caught up in my own thoughts. I wasn’t being arrogant.’

‘I’m still not clear,’ said Vijay. ‘Why should you confide in me?’

‘I am not just a scientist,’ explained Mikhailov, ‘I am also a Hindu practitioner trained in Vedanta and a Buddhist practitioner trained in Kalachakra.’

‘Kalachakra?’ asked Vijay. He was already familiar with Vedanta.

‘The wheel of time,’ replied Mikhailov. ‘Drop in at the library and pick up a book by Professor Vignesh Thakur. It will tell you what Kalachakra is about. I don’t know if you realize this, but Kalachakra practised over many years gives one a more evolved sixth sense. My sixth sense has brought me to talk to you.’

‘So talk,’ said Vijay, still miffed at the manner in which he had been rebuffed the previous day by Mikhailov.

## 65

‘Do you know why this place is called Milesian Labs?’ asked Mikhailov.

‘Inspired by the Milesian school, I would imagine,’ replied Vijay.

‘Correct,’ said Mikhailov. ‘Philosophers from the Ionian town of Miletus, much like the sages of India, were proponents of the theory regarding the interconnectedness of everything in the universe, something that quantum physics has only recently picked up on.’

‘Like Brahman?’ asked Vijay.

‘Absolutely,’ said Mikhailov. ‘When Krishna spoke to Arjuna before the Mahabharata battle about one underlying reality called Brahman, interconnectedness is what he was referring to. It’s the same thing as Dharmakaya in Buddhism or Tao in Taoism. All phenomena in the world are manifestations of a fundamental oneness. All things are interdependent and indivisible parts of a cosmic whole.’

‘And what is Milesian Labs trying to do?’ asked Vijay.

‘This place is an attempt to reassemble the knowledge of the Milesians,’ said Mikhailov. ‘Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes were the three philosophers who exemplified Milesian ideas. In those days, philosophy and science were one and the same. The ancient sages of India and the philosophers of Miletus were after the same thing as today’s researchers into quantum physics—the ability to understand the interrelatedness of the universe.’

Vijay wondered where the conversation with Mikhailov was headed but he didn’t say anything.

‘Do you know that studies by a researcher—Cleve Backster—show that all living things, including plants, bacteria, insects, fish, birds, animals and humans, are continually communicating with one another? This interaction apparently uses a field that is not even supposed to exist. It is not present in the electromagnetic spectrum of visible light. It is not in radio waves or infrared or microwaves. It is not in X-rays. Possibly we screen out this communication to prevent ourselves from going insane, but the sages of the East knew how to tune in to this channel. Unfortunately, all scientific knowledge can be used in different ways, both good and bad.’

‘And this place is about the bad?’ asked Vijay.

Mikhailov nodded. ‘We must talk in greater detail,’ he said. ‘My apartment is located in the block adjacent to yours. Number seventeen. Drop in later tonight. Avoid the cameras. They sweep at intervals of twenty-three seconds. Trust me, I’ve checked.’

Mikhailov handed over a piece of paper that showed the layout of the Milesian facility. Several locations had been marked with an X.

‘What are these?’ asked Vijay.

‘Blind spots,’ replied Mikhailov. ‘Whenever you need to avoid the camera sweep, these are locations where you can stand for a few seconds to avoid being detected.’

Vijay folded the paper and put it away in his pocket.

‘Leave your apartment door open when you enter it later today,’ continued Mikhailov. ‘In future as well, leave it open when you come to see me.’

‘Why?’ asked Vijay.

‘Locking your door does not prevent Milesian from accessing your apartment,’ said Mikhailov. ‘But a sensor records each time any door is opened or closed. The time stamp will remain stuck at the time you entered your apartment. I will leave my door open for you so that there is no record of you having come. Ten o’clock tonight.’

Mikhailov removed the chewing gum that he had stuck to the mirror, flushed it down one of the toilets and left.

## 66

Judith drove her car through the George Washington Memorial Parkway to reach 1000 Colonial Farm Road via a private road only available to authorized vehicles. Very few outsiders knew the address. Those who did knew it as the George Bush Centre for Intelligence, or CIA HQ. But usually, the building was called just Langley, echoing the name of the region in Fairfax County, Virginia, where it was located.

Judith passed through security checks at OHB—the Original Headquarters Building—and crossed through a tunnel to the New HQ building. She walked briskly towards a designated conference room where the Middle East team awaited. Waiting outside the door was a staff member holding a tray of Starbucks coffee cups for the attendees. She thanked him, took one, entered the room and sat down at the table.

‘So, are we any closer to finding Mafraqi’s family connections?’ she asked.

One of the younger analysts got up from his seat and began speaking carefully. ‘Mafraqi claims descent from the Quraysh—the tribe to which Muhammad belonged,’ he said. ‘His alleged lineage has strengthened his claim to being the caliph of all Muslims. But we believe it is a sham.’

Judith took a sip of her coffee. There seemed to be nothing new in what the young man was telling her, but she knew that she would have to be patient. In her years of service, Judith had found that the greatest quality of a good operative or analyst was the ability to listen.

‘Why is that?’ asked Judith.

‘The first Saudi state went to war with the Ottoman Empire,’ explained the analyst. ‘This war ended in 1818 with the defeat of the grandson of Saud at the hands of the Ottomans. He was captured and sent to Istanbul to be beheaded. Evidence exists that he was forced to listen to a lute being played before he was killed.’

‘Why?’ asked Judith.

‘Because Saud was fanatically opposed to any form of music,’ said the analyst. ‘When he was beheaded in Istanbul, so were some of his other followers. One of those executed was supposedly from the Quraysh. Mafraqi claims descent from him.’

‘Is it one of those things that can neither be proved nor disproved?’ asked Judith.

‘It was one of those things,’ said the analyst. ‘But we believe that circumstances have changed.’

‘What has changed?’ asked Judith.

‘Evidence,’ said the analyst. ‘Have a look at the recent archaeological findings from Istanbul.’

‘What about them?’ asked Judith.

‘The Turkish Historical Society found the lute,’ said the analyst. ‘It has an engraving on it.’ He advanced the slide to allow Judith to have a look at the artefact in the picture. She stared at the new slide for a while.

‘The question is how we can use this information as leverage,’ she said.

‘You may also wish to consider some chatter we picked up about his deputy—Habib— through our spy satellites,’ he replied.

## 67

The oak-panelled library was magnificent. Rows of leather-bound books competed for space with carved friezes and ornate pilasters. Polished oak and brass ladders were attached to rollers along the upper shelves in order to access the books at higher levels. Antique grain leather chairs accompanied by ornate seventeenth-century table replicas punctuated the rows of unending shelves. The pattern was repeated on each of the four floors. A central atrium flooded the library with light and allowed a combined view of all floors.

Vijay entered the massive library through the heavy doors that swung open the instant that he offered his thumbprint to the biometric scanner. The librarian on duty smiled at him as he walked in. She was seated inside a circular information desk that looked medieval but was equipped with twenty-first-century technology.

‘May I help you, Mr Sundaram?’ she asked, as Vijay walked up to her.

‘Hello, Anjali,’ said Vijay, looking at her nametag. ‘I was wondering where I would find books by Professor Vignesh Thakur.’

Any other man would have spent an extra moment admiring Anjali. She looked absolutely ravishing in a tight red sweater that emphasized her curves. But her charms were lost on Vijay.

‘Let me check for you,’ said Anjali, her fingers efficiently typing a query into the sleek computer that was snugly fitted into her desk.

She looked up from the screen. ‘Eight books by Professor Vignesh Thakur in this library,’ she said. ‘Are you looking for a specific one?’

‘Not really,’ said Vijay. ‘I would prefer to have a look at all of them in order to decide which one I want.’

The librarian smiled understandingly. ‘Check your email inbox,’ she said. ‘The shelf coordinates for all eight books should be there.’

He looked at his phone. She was right. Vijay was among the rare breed fascinated by the incredible organization and systems of the Milesian library instead of being mesmerized by Anjali.

Exactly nine minutes later, Vijay walked out with a book in his hand. A Guide to Kalachakra Initiation by Professor Vignesh Thakur.

## 68

Vijay entered his flat and left the door open, as suggested by Mikhailov. He placed the book on his study desk and opened a browser window on his computer. His session started with a very basic search for the Buddha and Kalachakra.



The first few search results told him stuff he already knew: that Siddhartha Gautama was born sometime around 563 BCE to Suddhodana, an elected Hindu chief of a tribal confederacy in the eastern part of the Indian subcontinent; that upon his birth, astrologers predicted that he would grow up to be a great king or a great sage; that his father surrounded Siddhartha with luxury so that he would become a king instead of a sage; that Siddhartha left the palace in search of enlightenment at age twenty-nine and attained it six years later having become the Buddha—the enlightened one.

The search results on the third page informed Vijay that the Buddha was said to have preached at a place called Dhanyakatakam in the present-day Indian state of Andhra Pradesh during the last year of his life. One of the students was King Suchandara, who had come from his kingdom of Shambhala in the north. The king had come to learn something very special from the Buddha. It was called the Kalachakra Multantra or the ‘wheel of time’. It was a technique by which non-celibates such as King Suchandara could work towards becoming Bodhisattvas. These were beings that had the power to attain, at will, nirvana—liberation from further rebirths—but delayed it in their quest to help the universe through their continued presence.

After learning the Kalachakra Multantra from the Buddha, Suchandara returned to Shambhala and taught it there for two years before passing on the knowledge to his son. He even wrote an explanatory commentary on the Buddha’s original Multantra, but both documents—the Multantra and Suchandara’s commentary—were eventually lost to time.

Six succeeding kings of Shambhala preserved the Kalachakra teachings and taught them to an inner circle. King Suchandara and the six kings who succeeded him came to be known as the Seven Dharmarajas of Shambhala.

Vijay took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He took a deep breath. Why was Mikhailov wasting his time with this stuff? But there was also something that excited Vijay. He couldn’t say what it was, but there was something compelling him to plod on.

The kings that followed the Seven Dharmarajas were known as the Rigden kings. The first among them, Manjushrikirti, was born around 159 BCE. He summarized the Kalachakra teachings into a simplified text called the Sri Kalachakra. He prophesied that the world would be convulsed by a new

religion eight hundred years after him. Buddhists saw the Islamic conquests as that convulsion.

Manjushrikirti initiated a sect of Brahmin priests of Shambhala into the Kalachakra. These were sun-worshippers who followed a practice called Surya Samadhi. The amazing powers of these Brahmin priests—including their ability to live for days solely on sunlight —were well-known and many of their practices were absorbed into the Kalachakra. Manjushrikirti permitted this assimilation to ensure that all the inhabitants of Shambhala would be united into a single tribe. Thus they would be better equipped to deal with the onslaught of a foreign faith.

He predicted that the world would be overrun by barbarians in the year 2424 CE and it would be the twenty-fifth Rigden king, Rudrachakrin, who would fight the hordes, re-establish dharma and mark the advent of a golden age.

Exciting stuff, but then, all prophecies had a grand air to them.

Vijay turned to the book he had borrowed from the library. He learnt that the second Rigden king had written a commentary called Vimalaprabha. The Sri Kalachakra and the Vimalaprabha together constituted the entire texts of the Kalachakra system. All other writings were mere commentaries on these texts while all previous texts had been lost down the ages. The book went on to explain that there were three levels of teachings that the Buddha imparted to King Suchandara—outer teachings, inner teachings and intuitive teachings.

Outer teachings dealt with the physical world. These included the calculations used for the Kalachakra calendar, the start and end of universes, and the planetary system. Inner teachings dealt with the human body and mind. They covered areas such as gestation and birth, functions of the human body and the four commonly observed states of mind— awake, dreaming, asleep and orgasmic. Intuitive teachings constituted the very core of the Kalachakra. They were the path to enlightenment that could be achieved by balancing the outer with the inner. Once enlightened, one could enter the realms of Shambhala.

And then Vijay came across a line that made his jaw drop because it almost reflected the crux of his research.

*As it is outside, so it is within the body.*

Vijay put down the Professor Thakur book and let the thought sink in. He got up, pulled out the roll of clingwrap from the kitchen cabinet, tore off a segment and placed it on the keyboard. He then waited for a minute. Miraculously, alternative letters and numbers appeared on the wrap owing to chemical activation. He noticed that the first six letters of the keyboard, Q-W-E-R-T-Y, now appeared as K-N-P-A-S-J on the film. Likewise, all other letters and numbers on the keyboard were covered by alternatives on the wrap. Vijay quickly activated Tor, CSpace and ZRTP.

Vijay shuddered involuntarily as he entered the world of the Dark Web. Tor was mostly a network of filth and depravity. It was used by drug dealers, traders in endangered species of animals, vendors of pornography, paedophiles, illegal dealers in fire-arms, human traffickers, counterfeiters and brokers for human organs. It was sick, but it was anonymous. He entered a private chat room where Judith was waiting.

Vijay began typing up his feedback. He described the layout of Milesian, the incredibly high security, the vastness of the area, profiles of the other nine researchers, his brief interaction with Schmidt and the odd behaviour of Mikhailov.

‘Why does he want to meet you separately?’ Judith typed. ‘No idea,’ replied Vijay. ‘Not sure if he is sane.’

‘Be careful,’ replied Judith. ‘He could be a plant of the SVR. I will dig into his background and have more for you next time.’

In the security room, the bank of parallel computers meticulously recorded each of Vijay’s individual keystrokes for the attention of Cracker.

Vijay’s brief abduction in New Delhi by IG4 had also been a crash course in communication technology. ‘You need to familiarize yourself with our communication protocol,’ Judith had said. ‘I will be your main point of contact, your handler, once you are inside. Petrov will be responsible for mounting surveillance around the Milesian Labs location. Sharma will ensure that Sujatha is protected and Zhang will oversee technology support from Beijing.’

'But Milesian will not allow me to use any of my personal equipment,' said Vijay. 'I've read their epic code of conduct. They will provide me with a phone, tablet and notebook computer. How do I communicate with you? They could easily be listening in.'

'Exactly,' replied Judith. 'They will be listening in. Have you heard of Tor?'

'The Onion Router?' asked Vijay. Of course, he was familiar with it. It was software code that allowed anonymous communication. Tor channelled internet data through a free global network of thousands of relays. Thus, Tor could hide a user's location and usage from anyone attempting to eavesdrop. Using Tor made it next to impossible for net usage to be traced back to the user. This included the user's website visits, online posts, chat room exchanges and instant messages.

'Yes,' replied Judith. 'But at IG4 we have combined Tor with CSpace and ZRTP. That gives you an absolutely safe way of chatting with me without the slightest risk of our exchange being intercepted. Even the NSA would be unable to break in.'

'But keystrokes can be monitored,' argued Vijay. 'If Milesian wants, they can simply monitor my keyboard activity. They don't need to intercept the data transmission.'

Judith smiled. 'Want a sandwich?' she asked. She pushed what looked like a roll of clingwrap his way.

'What's this?' he asked.

'It's what we call encryption film,' she said. 'Each time you get into a chat with me, you tear off a new segment of the film and place it over your keyboard. Each segment of the roll randomly assigns new letters and numbers to different keys of the keyboard and continues doing so every few seconds. You will find a roll of this film when you return to your flat. Put it in your luggage.'

They know where I live and they do not need keys to access my flat. These guys are no less spooky than the ones at Minerva, thought Vijay.

'They could easily decode the reassignment of letters and numbers,' countered Vijay.

'Not quite,' replied Judith. 'Randomized assignment is already built into the film. Unlike codes that depend on a formula, this one has none. Even if

Milesian monitors your equipment, it would be near impossible for anyone to decipher the communication. It's the twenty-first-century version of Enigma.'

Enigma machines were electro-mechanical rotor cipher machines that had been used by the Nazis to protect their communications during the Second World War. Vijay wanted to remind Judith that the British had eventually cracked the Enigma code, but he kept his thoughts to himself.

## 71

Vijay left his flat a few minutes before ten, leaving the door unlocked so that the last time stamp would indicate the time he had entered instead of the time he left. Once outside, he kept a careful watch on the CCTV cameras, ensuring that their sweeping gaze remained away from him. He took the hundred-odd steps towards Mikhailov's apartment, intermittently pausing and hurrying, according to camera sweeps. He did not make use of the blind spots.

The Russian, too, had left his door open and Vijay walked in. The old scientist was in the kitchen, boiling water in a small electric samovar. 'Will you have tea?' he asked Vijay. Without waiting for an answer, he poured a small quantity of concentrate from a teapot that sat atop the samovar into a teacup and then topped it up with steaming hot water from the samovar.

He repeated the process for himself. 'Zavarka,' he said. 'Strong Russian tea. Try it. Opens up the mind to new possibilities.'

'Za tvajo zdarovyе,' he said to Vijay as they sipped the tea. 'To your health.' Vijay took a couple of sips. It was strong but good.

'Are we sure that no one is listening?' asked Vijay.

'See the number of used chewing gum-blockers,' said Mikhailov, pointing to three that were in full view.

Vijay looked around. Mikhailov's apartment was stark, a perfect example of Zen minimalism. They sat on tatami mats on the floor.

'So, Schmidt wants you to study planets,' said Mikhailov, chuckling. 'All part of his grand scheme to control the world.'

'What do you mean?' asked Vijay.

‘The ancient Milesian view that we spoke about earlier today?’ said Mikhailov. ‘About the interconnectedness of the universe. . .’

‘Yes?’

‘That ancient view which emerged from the sages of the East is only now being proved by science,’ said Mikhailov. ‘After all, there is no real difference between matter and energy. Einstein had demonstrated the interchangeability of matter and energy through his famous equation  $E=mc^2$ , but after the discovery of the Higgs boson, scientists are now realizing that the entire universe is nothing but energy!’

Mikhailov slurped his tea noisily and continued. ‘All so-called particles can be converted into other particles. They can be fashioned from energy and can disappear into energy. Classical notions of elementary particles or separated objects are irrelevant. The whole universe seems like a moving web of indivisible energy arrangements.’

‘True,’ said Vijay. But where is he going with this? What is so earth-shattering that he called me over?

‘Even what is called matter is actually energy programmed to behave like matter,’ continued Mikhailov, ignoring the look of confusion on Vijay’s face. ‘There is little to differentiate our bodies from the houses we live in, the trees, shrubs, rocks and mountains around us, the air that we breathe, or the fires that keep us warm. Anything and everything around us, including our bodies, are simply energy. Even things that we cannot explain fully—such as thoughts, consciousness and the human soul—are just that, energy! That’s precisely what the sages of ancient India were attempting to experience—the oneness of that energy.’

‘Linking everything to ancient India is getting to be a tedious habit these days,’ said Vijay. ‘I hope you’re not going to tell me that the Vatican is etymologically derived from vatika and that its shape is like a Shiv lingam?’

‘That’s for religious nutters,’ said Mikhailov. ‘But we should not throw out the baby with the bath water. There is tremendous value in what the ancient yogis told us and we should revisit their knowledge to refresh our own.’