



DEVI
AND THE
ENCHANTRESS

Kakoli G



Notion Press

Old No. 38, New No. 6
McNichols Road, Chetpet
Chennai - 600 031

First Published by Notion Press 2019
Copyright © Kakali Dutta 2019
All Rights Reserved.

ISBN 978-1-64650-541-8

This book has been published with all efforts taken to make the material error-free after the consent of the author. However, the author and the publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

While every effort has been made to avoid any mistake or omission, this publication is being sold on the condition and understanding that neither the author nor the publishers or printers would be liable in any manner to any person by reason of any mistake or omission in this publication or for any action taken or omitted to be taken or advice rendered or accepted on the basis of this work. For any defect in printing or binding the publishers will be liable only to replace the defective copy by another copy of this work then available.

Cover Courtesy: Papia Ghoshal

CHAPTER 1



The season of colors was approaching and mother earth was looking resplendent in all the vibrant hues she had splashed upon herself.

The pink and white lotuses floating in the ponds smiled at the yellow and orange marigold flowers lining the edges of the waterbody. They nodded back in agreement.

So did the bright red hibiscus, the pristine white jasmine and the royal blue butterfly pea flowers as they waved to each other mirthfully.

But it was the silky white wild sugarcane swaying sensuously along the riverbank that let out the secret, that special message – She was coming home!

The City of Joy was getting ready to welcome the Goddess and her children on her annual journey back to her maternal home on earth. Devi Durga, the protective mother Goddess seated atop a lion and slaying Mahishasura, the sly, mighty demon out to disrupt peace and harmony among the earthlings.

This five-day festival brought the city to a complete standstill. Kolkata resembled a bejeweled princess, decked up to the hilt with illumination lighting up the skyline. The colorful *pandals* with their creative themes adorned every lane and by-lane of the city. The celebratory mood was infectious, with people thronging out to see these marquees in the ephemeral setups, dressed in brand

new clothes, gorging on the delicious street food dished out from makeshift stalls and engaging in a good *adda* session. Definitely, the right time to find out what Kolkata is thinking through the avid conversations and intellectual exchanges!

Bamboo sticks, jute ropes, thermocol sheets and multicolored rolls of fabrics lay strewn on one side of the road leading to Magic Space, the most sought after destination in the city. This Durga Puja Pandal had always been a crowd puller because of all the innovative themes it had exhibited in the past. The temporary structure which would be erected in front of the park near Magic Space had a special theme this year – women’s empowerment. A topic which was the darling of the virtual world as well as the materialistic world, whether it was political parties cashing in on it to gather votes, debates and discussions held on television channels out to increase their TRPs or online posts smelling remotely of any discrimination and subjugation going viral, triggering violence at times. Everyone spoke about how it was time to stop all the atrocities against the fairer gender and give them their due.

With a mall just ahead of the condominium complex and the various pre-festive activities going on inside it to catch the customers’ attention, it was just the most happening place to be in at the moment. The sprawling manicured lawns, the lighted cobbled pathways, the palm trees swaying gently, the autumnal breeze creating ripples in the water in the swimming pool, the multihued flowers in full bloom among the neatly trimmed grass in the garden area, it all seemed so perfect.

Almost like an enchanted land!

The mellow moonlight peeping in through the white clouds floating merrily in the October skies smiled down at this recently constructed architectural marvel.

It stood stoic and unmoved, vainly protruding out like an eye sore among the neighboring slums.

Magic Space!!

Never had the city witnessed such opulence and grandeur in recent times.

An ultra-luxury space where only the uber rich resided.

The heavily guarded magnificent building would sometimes resemble a fortress where each and every visitor would be minutely scrutinized before being let into the premises.

“A housefly also can’t enter the complex without our knowledge and permission. Leave alone that rustic villager trying to sneak in to sell those pathetic looking flower pots.” Jatin, the authoritative security personnel in black uniform at the security desk had informed Mrs. Roy while moving around with his walkie talkie.

It was the central block within the complex which housed the crème de la crème of the city.

Mr. Vivek Kumar and his wife Vimmi occupied the duplex on the fifteenth floor, flanked by Mr. Pankaj Agarwal’s flat on one side and Mrs. Ira Roy’s on the other side,

The Kumars were a perfect example of an upwardly mobile couple. An Audi Q 7 and a Mercedes displayed in their parking lot,

the exotic locales they had explored on their last vacation posted on their social media pages, the lavish parties thrown every weekend in their tastefully done apartment and, of course, the most expensive boarding school their children attended in Switzerland all seemed to indicate that God had been too kind to them.

Vivek would hardly be seen going around for work during the day. Most of the time he would be flitting in and out of his car with his man Friday carrying his golf set.

As Vimmi had explained cattily to Mrs. Roy the other day, “He works very late into the night, you see. Running a flourishing business is not easy. It is not in everyone’s genes to be successful.”

She was referring to most of the service class people in the neighborhood doing a regular nine to five job. “Being money savvy is the need of the hour. How much can education help you if you are not smart enough to know how to utilize it?” Vimmi continued caustically. She was referring to a discussion held among the ladies in the park which was overheard by her domestic help.

She went on dangling her Gucci bag before stepping into the elevator. The lady seemed miffed by the obsession the city had with education and academic qualification, which its dwellers thought would automatically translate into success.

Mrs. Roy looked embarrassed. Indeed, last Friday, she and her friends were openly talking about Vivek being a school dropout and yet doing so well in life.

She walked back into her apartment deep in thought. Both her husband and son were professionally well qualified, yet neither of them could match Vivek’s level of financial success.

The camera that her son, Arin, had installed near her doorway keeping her safety in mind sometimes captured the most interesting sights. There would be a large number of carton boxes coming in late at night. The labels indicated that the boxes were carrying packaged drinking water, tomato ketchup bottles or premium quality detergent powder.

“Maybe they are distributors of an FMCG company,” Mrs. Roy’s friend Sandy had remarked when they’d been discussing the family.

“I think they must own a chain of popular retail outlets,” Pammy had stated.

“Why would they want to dump it in their apartment? They must be having a godown or some other similar place,” Mrs. Roy had wondered aloud.

Pammy had looked at Mrs. Roy contemptuously. “There is no need for you to contemplate so much, Ira. They are rich people, unlike their neighbors. They are making a fortune by utilizing their resources smartly.”

“Poor Ira is feeling jealous. Her son could not even host her landmark birthday in a five-star hotel,” Sandy had added haughtily.

Ira had just looked miserable as both her friends snootily dismissed her observation as the result of being envious and insecure.

The Kumars had their chauffeurs on duty round the clock. They resembled more like the bouncers in pubs and night clubs than drivers. They were hefty, tall, intimidating and seemed to have no problems doing night shifts month after month. In fact, they looked

more alive and active while carrying on their nocturnal activity of ferrying the cartons.

Vimmi would sometimes appear on Mrs. Roy's screen, sitting on the floor of the lobby with a glass of liquor in one hand, patting, cuddling and talking to her dog. The conversation with her pet would continue quite late into the night.

In fact, several residents had seen Vimmi in the basement also, inside her car with the dog, drinking merrily and talking to herself.

The Kumars interacted with very few people and mostly kept to themselves. They seemed to have an aversion toward these mundane people and their even more mundane lifestyles.

One day soon after, Mrs. Roy bumped into them as they were returning home. "Oh, how lovely," Mrs. Roy admired the huge solitaire on Vimmi's manicured finger one day.

"This is a gift from my generous husband," Vimmi smiled as she hugged Vivek.

"Anything for my beautiful wife," Vivek said as he ran his finger through his wife's hair.

"Why don't you both come home for dinner one day?" Mrs. Roy asked, very keen to be a part of their social circle. Maybe the Kumars would extend an invitation to her also. Maybe she could introduce her son Arin to Vivek. Maybe Vivek could share his success mantra with Arin.

"Sure, aunty, will let you know whenever Vivek is in town next week," Vimmi dismissed off her neighbor's invitation curtly.

Mrs. Roy looked on as Vimmi and Vivek walked into their apartment and slammed the door behind them. She looked crestfallen. Vimmi's attitude made her feel so small and insignificant. She did not even have the decency to conclude the conversation gracefully.

Mrs. Roy walked back into her apartment, deep in thoughts and in self-doubt. *Maybe they think I am too drab and won't be able to gel in with their glamorous friends.*

CHAPTER 2



Priya Agarwal watched as her husband generously dabbed aftershave on his face, adjusted his brightly colored tie while whistling and singing to himself. This was not the first time she had caught him behaving outlandishly, trying to seek female attention. In their span of nearly four decades of marriage, it had happened many times. Her husband had a roving eye and she had slowly learned to deal with it. Most of the time, she would ignore it till it fizzled out. Yes, there had been a couple of instances when she had had to air her thoughts when the harmless flirting had started to affect her, and each time Pankaj had immediately recoiled back, sensing her displeasure.

His family was everything for him; it was his lifeline. He had always been cautious never to cross the line and jeopardize his marriage.

This time Priya was worried. Pankaj seemed to be in no mood to control his feelings for the new CMO who had joined the organization.

“Have to get the deck in order for the new investor. Pinky is really spending a lot of time working on it.” Pankaj seemed impressed by his CMO and her complete dedication toward her work.

“You seem enamored by her rather than her work,” Priya remarked scathingly as they sat down to have breakfast.

“Now what makes you think so? You make a mountain of a molehill.” Pankaj seemed irritated as he collected his briefcase and left for office.

Pinky Biswas was a single mother of a five-year-old boy. She was glamorous, smart, articulate and ambitious. She had men gaping at her hourglass figure as she walked in and out of her cabin in a pair of stilettos, stylishly attired. Her big, beautiful, kohl-lined eyes, her dimpled smile and her sensuous voice were a killer.

* * *

Pankaj Agarwal watched Pinky approaching his room through the glass door. He had settled into his armchair with his huge mug of coffee which the office boy had just placed before him.

He smiled impishly to himself. *Priya was right. This girl is too good to be true.*

Pinky greeted him and started showing him the presentation she had prepared for the next investor meet.

Pankaj stood up, walked across the desk and sat on the chair beside her to get a better view of the slides. Taking the clue, Pinky looked at her boss and said seductively, “Ah-ha, this is a zip file.” She bent slightly over and continued, “I need someone to open it.”

Pankaj was panting heavily as his eyes slid from Pinky’s cleavage to her shapely legs. He could feel the tautness between his legs. His mind was telling him it was wrong, a disaster awaiting him if he acted mindlessly.

Pinky drawled sensuously, “I know a place where we can go, unzip this easily and see the contents.” She looked at her boss in a coquettish manner as she held open the cabin door for him.

Pankaj got up and wordlessly followed Pinky as she led him outside the office toward her waiting car. They went to her house. He wanted to stop and get back to the office, but something even more overpowering was leading him toward the couch Pinky was guiding him to.

“There is no one at home; my son is in school and today is the maid’s day off,” she said, handing over a glass of amber-colored fluid to him.

“No, no, I don’t drink in the morning,” he protested feebly.

“Have it; you will enjoy every moment.” Pinky slowly started taking off her clothes, teasing him all the way.

Pankaj tried to focus. He thought of his wife, Priya, his daughter, Parineeta, in a faraway land, his grandchildren...he started losing control over himself as Pinky stood in front of him stark naked. He should have pushed her away from him at that moment, but it was a moment consumed by pure lust and he gave in.

The next morning, Pankaj sat at his desk, not knowing what to do. His mind was fuzzy, and he just could not concentrate on anything. Last evening, he had walked back into his apartment silently, quite late. He’d thought his wife would be asleep. At least he would have time to regain his composure before he faced her.

But Priya had been awake. She had taken one look at her husband and had understood. She had locked herself in her bedroom after a major showdown. Pankaj had bent backward asking for forgiveness, but Priya was in no mood to listen.

Let me give her battered heart some time. A woeful Pankaj thought to himself.

The days which were to follow would be spent in uncomfortable silence between the couple. Pankaj had always been a flirt, but never had he been physically unfaithful to his wife. She had been apprehensive ever since she had been introduced to Pinky Biswas at an official do. There had been a lot of rumors surrounding the new CMO. She had been labeled a gold digger who left her first husband for a rich old businessman who finally did not marry her. Next came a famous artist in her life. Somehow that affair also fizzled off.

The new CMO had a colorful past and didn't quite seem to mind adding a few more spicy chapters to her life. She was gregarious and threw caution to the wind after a couple of drinks. Pankaj remembered a conversation he'd had with Priya after an office party.

"Quite a popular figure among the men in the office," Priya remarked while coming back home after a late evening party.

"Come on, you are envious and feel threatened so easily," Pankaj remarked harshly.

Priya had looked at her husband scornfully and had chosen to remain quiet, for the time being. Yet her sixth sense was telling her that this woman spelled trouble.

Over the next few days, ever since that painful incident, she had confined herself to her room. Her world had turned topsy turvy. That her husband could cheat on her after such a long partnership was something she could not come to terms with. She went on reminiscing all her life events, all the good times she shared with him, all the sacrifices she made for him...it seemed a never-ending list.

Were they really happy times? I don't think he ever loved me!! What an absolute fool I was to think we are a happily married couple. Her mind was racing, erupting with questions and looking for answers all at the same time.

She tried to calm herself down. The moment she closed her eyes, these intrusive thoughts reared their ugly head.

Her head was exploding. She sat up and reached for the glass of water kept on the bedside table.

She stood up and walked across to the dressing table. She stood in front of the mirror as if seeking an answer from her reflection.

What could have possibly gone wrong? I should have taken care of my physical appearance. Maybe he lost interest in me because of my fading looks. Priya paced around in her room helplessly pausing every now and then to wipe her tears and collect her breath.

“I am becoming senile; I need to talk to someone” She looked at the clock. It was one o'clock in the morning.

“Pari, how are you?” Priya was on a call with her daughter Parineeta. This was the best time to call and pour her heart out.

“Mama, I am fine. I have been trying to speak to you for the past two days. You just sent me a message saying you would call back. I hope you are ok. How is Papa?”

Priya swallowed the lump in her throat. She thought of her daughter. She had married a senior of hers whom she had met while studying in medical college. Both the doctors then moved to the US for further studies and finally settled there.

Priya was dilly-dallying in misery. *Should I tell Parineeta everything? How will my son-in-law react? What about my adorable grandchildren? Such an embarrassment!*

“Mama, are you there? What has happened? Mama?” Pari sounded terse.

Priya began sobbing uncontrollably as she narrated all that had happened.

Her daughter had been her best friend, a pillar of strength and support. Yet she did not want her daughter to know this painful detail. After confiding in her daughter all that had happened, she disconnected the call and stared stonily out the window. This luxurious apartment was in her name and she had a couple of properties which solely belonged to her. Financially, she would be dependent on none if she walked out of the marriage. But did she want that?

She thought of her husband. Her intuition was telling her something more dangerous was going to engulf him soon. There was a sinister plot waiting to rip him apart, but she had no idea what it was.

The phone rang suddenly. It was Parineeta.

“Mama, I have booked myself for coming Saturday’s flight back home.”

“No, please don’t do that. No need to act in haste. I am completely capable of taking care of myself. What about the children?” Priya sounded alarmed.

“My in-laws are here. Don’t worry, the children will be fine.”

* * *

The next morning, Pankaj and Pinky were having an argument at work.

“I cannot sanction this kind of marketing budget and this advertising company is quoting far more than the others. Look at the events management company you are recommending! Haven’t you negotiated with them at all?”

Pinky looked slyly at him and said, “I am a master negotiator. I always do my homework well. Perhaps you would like to see the presentation which I have prepared for the next board meeting.”

“Let Mr. Govind have a look at the deck,” Pankaj replied. He was in no mood to let Pinky have her way. She was a dreadful mistake. He was trying his best to add a layer between them so that interaction could be kept to a bare minimum.

Pinky walked across the table and perched herself on the armrest of her boss’s chair, much to Mr. Govind’s discomfort and placed her laptop in front of Pankaj.

Pankaj glared at Pinky, glanced at the screen she had thrust before him, before trying to push it toward Mr. Govind. Then he froze. The screen was playing the coupling episode which had taken place in Pinky's apartment. It was on mute, thank goodness for that.

“Do you want Mr. Govind to see all the data I have captured?”

“Govind, I will call you in a moment,” Pankaj was trembling as he dismissed Mr. Govind.

He looked squarely at Pinky the moment Govind left the room. “What exactly do you want, Pinky?”

“I need fifty lakhs by today evening and a fifty more by Wednesday.”

“Are you crazy?” he yelled.

“Keep your voice low, sweetheart,” I have given you a fantastic time. In fact, I am willing to do it again whenever you feel the need to be rejuvenated. I know that middle-aged wife of yours must be quite inactive in bed.”

Pankaj was seething with anger. “Keep Priya out of this, ok! She is my life partner, my companion for decades who has stood beside me through thick and thin. She has looked after my aging parents while I was busy making a career. She is the mother of our daughter.” He paused and looked at Pinky, “I will do anything to protect her from this mess.”

“You did not think of all this before?” Pinky mocked sarcastically. “Well, I am keenly observing the SheSays movement... very interesting, I must say. Oh, I forgot to mention. I have to meet Madhuri, our HR head, in an hour. A number of popular women's

forums have asked Madhuri and me to join them. The debates and panel discussions mostly center around women stuck in their professional life because they refused to oblige their superiors. I am personally looking forward to participating in this raging topic – quite fascinating isn't it?" Pinky looked at him slyly and left the room.

Pankaj was deep in thought. A moment spent in madness was ruining his life. Every social media platform was abuzz with the SheSays movement, a movement started to address the problem of sexual harassment and misconduct faced by women, be it at work, inside the confines of their home or on the roads.

He thought of Priya. They may not have had the most perfect marriage, but they were very much a couple, slowly walking toward their sunset years together.

Besides he had a daughter. He knew that the mother and daughter shared a very close bond and he was terrified of his daughter finding out. He was getting jitters.

What will Parineeta do? Walk out of the house and my life with her mother? That would be unbearable! He worried incessantly.

By evening, he called Pinky to his cabin and handed over a check for thirty lakhs.

He'd had to break a fixed deposit in his sole name in his personal account – a heavy price to pay for an unintentional mistake.

"This is all you will get, take it or leave it."

Pinky took the check and looked at him squarely, "Balance seventy lakhs is left. Since you have been a good boy, I am willing

to give you an extra day to send me the balance, but no negotiating on the amount. You have a lot at stake and this is not too big an amount for you.”

He just stared at her stonily.

“Ok, let me tell you the truth. I really don’t want to participate in the SheSays movement.” Pinky was at her melodramatic best. She took in a deep breath, paused and whispered in his ear as if letting out the world’s best-kept secret, “How would your famous cardiac surgeon son-in-law and his family react if I actually did?” She giggled wickedly.

“Enough, get out of my room,” Pankaj roared.

“I just want the balance amount,” Pinky looked at her boss defiantly before marching out of the room.

He slumped back into his chair. There seemed to be no respite in sight. Pinky would not budge on the amount of the extortion money. In fact, he had a lot at stake if he did not yield to her demand. Everyone would take her side. In fact, it would be considered sacrilege to question a victim filing a harassment case. The question was where would he get such a huge amount from at such a short notice?

Pankaj met his neighbor Vivek near the lift lobby in the evening.

“Pankaj Bhai, you look as if you could do with a drink. Come over, let’s celebrate. I have just closed a big deal.”

“Really? Congratulations my friend, but I have to refuse your offer today. Some other time.”

Enjoyed reading this sample?

Purchase the whole copy at

amazon.in