

## The Ashwatthama Files

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### The Ashwatthama Files

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### Introduction: The Weight of Forever

The wound on his forehead did not throb like a human injury; it hummed, a low-frequency vibration that had outlasted empires. It was a weeping third eye, oozing oil and ancient pus that smelled perpetually of copper and rot, a scent no deodorant or modern perfume could mask. Ashwatthama stood on the edge of a flyover in

Delhi. The air was thick, heavy with smog and the acrid smell of diesel fumes, cut through by the sharp, greasy scent of fried street food wafting up from the market below.

The traffic beneath him flowed like a molten river. Headlights were blinding white streaks, and taillights created a constant, hypnotizing river of urgent, bloody red. Above him, a digital billboard flashed a politician's face in aggressive strokes of electric blue and toxic pink, promising a "Smart City." The sound was a physical assault: the deep, ceaseless roar of engines, the metallic, impatient blare of a thousand horns, and the high, insistent whine of distant sirens. His punishment was no longer the solitude of the forest; his punishment was this cacophony of progress.

His tattered shawl was soaked with the humidity that tasted of dust and stagnant rain. He sought a house, an Aadhaar, a ration card. This curse, once epic, was now mundane. This book is a satire, a mirror reflecting the harsh white glare of bureaucracy.

Ashwatthama's timeless suffering collides with contemporary promises, revealing the truth in the margins. It is his struggle, lit by flickering fluorescent tubes and underscored by the ceaseless, mechanical drone of a system that promises inclusion but delivers only illusion.

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## Chapter 1: The Eternal Wanderer Meets The Visionary

Ashwatthama had walked for centuries. His feet, caked in the dust of a thousand roads, were hardened like petrified wood. The skin on his heels was cracked, mapping the geography of his exile more accurately than any cartographer. But today, the dust was different.

It was the red, choking dust of a rally ground, kicked up by thousands of sandals and the rotor wash of descending helicopters.

He stood at the edge of a colossal crowd, a sea of humanity surging against bamboo barricades. The noise was a physical assault. Giant black speakers, stacked like totems of a new religion, blasted campaign songs that distorted into a wall of bass and static. The air was thick, humid, and heavy with the scent of marigolds, crushed grass, and the distinct, metallic tang of nervous sweat.

Before him rose a stage that seemed to defy gravity, draped in blinding saffron fabrics that snapped in the wind. The color was everywhere—saffron caps, saffron flags, saffron scarves—glowing under the harsh, white glare of halogen floodlights that turned the evening into a hyper-exposed noon.

The crowd roared, a sound that vibrated in Ashwatthama's chest, reminding him of the conch shells of Kurukshetra. But this was not a war of arrows; it was a war of optics.

The Leader emerged.

He did not walk; he materialized from the backstage shadows, bathed in a spotlight that seemed to follow him like a devoted hound. He was a man of pristine whites and carefully groomed greys, his vest stiff with starch. When he raised his hand, the roar of the crowd reached a fever pitch, a deafening wave of adoration. He spoke of a "New Dawn," his voice booming, echoing off the distant high-rises, promising that the sun itself bowed to his command.

Ashwatthama waited. He had learned patience in the centuries of silence, waiting for wounds to scab over. He watched the theatrics—the release of doves that looked confused by the lights,

the showering of petals that smelled of cheap perfume. When the rally ended, and the dust began to settle, the Leader descended the stairs, surrounded by a phalanx of commandos and sycophants.

The immortal warrior stepped forward. He looked out of place—a relic in rags amidst the crisp linens of power.

“Sir,” Ashwatthama said. His voice was a rusty gate opening after an age, cracked like the dry earth of the Vidarbha plains. “I need a ration card, an Aadhaar card, and a house. I am tired of roaming. I have not slept in centuries.”

The security guards tensed, their hands reaching for holsters, but the Leader held up a hand. He squinted at Ashwatthama, his eyes scanning the warrior not with empathy, but with the cold calculation of a lens shutter. He saw the wound, the ancient sorrow, the dramatic potential.

“Brother,” the Leader said, his voice dropping to a practiced, intimate baritone. He gripped Ashwatthama’s shoulder. The Leader’s hands were soft, manicured, smelling of sanitizer and sandalwood soap. “Your story is inspiring! You are the embodiment of resilience. We will make you the face of our campaign— *From Myth to Modernity!*”

Ashwatthama blinked, the flashbulbs blinding him. *Click. Click. Click.* The sound was like a thousand cicadas.

“I... just need a house,” Ashwatthama whispered, the smell of the Leader’s cologne overpowering the stench of his own curse.

“And you shall have it!” The Leader turned to the cameras, his smile dazzling, white teeth gleaming against the night sky. “But first, the nation must know you.”

Before Ashwatthama could protest, a heavy garland of marigolds was thrust around his neck. The flowers were wet and cold, their scent cloying and suffocating. He was paraded before the media, his ancient, weeping wound hidden under layers of thick, beige television makeup that smelled of clay and chemicals.

Promises flowed like the rivers he had crossed: a house under the Grand Housing Scheme, free healthcare under the Flagship Program, a ration card delivered by drones. The words were beautiful, shimmering in the air like heat hazes.

Days turned into weeks. Ashwatthama was shuttled from one photo-op to another in air-conditioned SUVs that smelled of "New Car" spray and leather. He saw his face on social media, trending as "The Eternal Beneficiary". He stood on stages, waved at crowds, and nodded when told to nod.

But the house never came. The ration card remained a dream, trapped in a server he couldn't access. His Aadhaar status on the portal always read the same, in blinking red pixels: "*Under Process*".

One night, the caravan left him behind. He lay on a borrowed cot in a dusty warehouse on the outskirts of the city. The air here was still, smelling of cardboard and rat droppings. A single tube light flickered above him, buzzing like a dying fly.

Ashwatthama touched the makeup on his forehead, peeling it back to reveal the throbbing wound. He whispered to the silence, **"Even the gods must apply for clearance."**

Outside, through a broken window, he saw a billboard glowing in the dark. It was his own face, retouched and radiant, next to the Leader's slogan: "*No one left behind*".