

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

The Slaying of Ariṣṭā, the Bull Demon

This chapter describes how Kṛṣṇa killed Ariṣṭāsura and how Kaṁsa reacted when he learned from Nārada that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma were the sons of Vasudeva.

The demon Ariṣṭa wanted to kill Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, and thus he assumed the form of a huge bull with sharp horns. Everyone in Kṛṣṇa's cowherd village became terrified when Ariṣṭāsura approached it, but the Lord pacified them, and when the bull demon charged Him He seized him by the horns and threw him about six yards. Though weakened, Ariṣṭa still wanted to attack Kṛṣṇa. Thus, dripping with sweat, he charged the Lord once again. This time Kṛṣṇa grabbed his horns, threw him to the ground and thrashed him like a pile of wet clothing. The demon vomited blood and gave up his life. Then Kṛṣṇa and Rāma, while being honored by the demigods and cowherd boys, returned to the village.

A short time later Nārada Muni, the great sage among the demigods, came to see King Kaṁsa. He informed the King that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma were not Nanda's sons but rather Vasudeva's. It was out of fear of Kaṁsa that Vasudeva had put the two boys under Nanda's care. Furthermore, said Nārada, Kaṁsa would meet his death at Their hands.

Kaṁsa shook with fear and anger when he heard all this, and in great agitation he began thinking of how to destroy Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. He called for the demons Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika and instructed them to kill the two brothers in a wrestling match. Then he spoke to Akrūra, who was expert at executing his duties. Taking Akrūra by the hand, Kaṁsa persuaded him to go to Vraja to bring the two boys to Mathurā. Akrūra agreed to carry out Kaṁsa's order and then returned home.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Goswāmī said: The demon Ariṣṭa then came to the cowherd village. Appearing in the form of a bull with a large hump, he made the earth tremble as he tore it apart with his hooves.

Text 2:

Ariṣṭāśura bellowed very harshly and pawed the ground. With his tail raised and his eyes glaring, he began to tear up the embankments with the tips of his horns, every now and then passing a little stool and urine.

Texts 3-4:

My dear King, clouds hovered about sharp-horned Ariṣṭāśura's hump, mistaking it for a mountain, and when the cowherd men and ladies caught sight of the demon, they were struck with terror. Indeed, the strident reverberation of his roar so frightened the pregnant cows and women that they lost their fetuses in miscarriages.

Text 5:

The domestic animals fled the pasture in fear, O King, and all the inhabitants rushed to Lord Govinda for shelter, crying, "Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa!"

Text 6:

When the Supreme Lord saw the cowherd community distraught and fleeing in fear, He calmed them, saying, "Don't be afraid." Then He called out to the bull demon as follows.

Text 7:

You fool! What do you think you're doing, you wicked rascal, frightening the cowherd community and their animals when I am here just to punish corrupt miscreants like you!

Text 8:

Having spoken these words, the infallible Lord Hari slapped His arms with His palms, further angering Ariṣṭa with the loud sound. The Lord then casually threw His mighty, serpentine arm over the shoulder of a friend and stood facing the demon.

Text 9:

Thus provoked, Ariṣṭa pawed the ground with one of his hooves and then, with the clouds hovering around his upraised tail, furiously charged Kṛṣṇa.

Text 10:

Pointing the tips of his horns straight ahead and glaring menacingly at Lord Kṛṣṇa from the corners of his bloodshot eyes, Ariṣṭa rushed toward Him at full speed, like a thunderbolt hurled by Indra.

Text 11:

The Supreme Lord Kṛṣṇa seized Ariṣṭāsura by the horns and threw him back eighteen steps, just as an elephant might do when fighting a rival elephant.

Text 12:

Thus repulsed by the Supreme Lord, the bull demon got up and, breathing hard and sweating all over his body, again charged Him in a mindless rage.

Text 13:

As Ariṣṭa attacked, Lord Kṛṣṇa seized him by the horns and knocked him to the ground with His foot. The Lord then thrashed him as if he were a wet cloth, and finally He yanked out one of the demon's horns and struck him with it until he lay prostrate.

Text 14:

Vomiting blood and profusely excreting stool and urine, kicking his legs and rolling his eyes about, Ariṣṭāsura thus went painfully to the abode of Death. The demigods honored Lord Kṛṣṇa by scattering flowers upon Him.

Text 15:

Having thus killed the bull demon Ariṣṭa, He who is a festival for the gopīs' eyes entered the cowherd village with Balarāma.

Text 16:

After Ariṣṭāsura had been killed by Kṛṣṇa, who acts wonderfully, Nārada Muni went to speak to King Kāṁsa. That powerful sage of godly vision addressed the King as follows.

Text 17:

[Nārada told Kāṁsa:] Yaśodā's child was actually a daughter, and Kṛṣṇa is the son of Devakī. Also, Rāma is the son of Rohiṇī. Out of fear, Vasudeva entrusted Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to his friend Nanda Mahārāja, and it is these two boys who have killed your men.

Text 18:

Upon hearing this, the master of the Bhojas became furious and lost control of his senses. He picked up a sharp sword to kill Vasudeva.

Text 19:

But Nārada restrained Kaṁsa by reminding him that it was the two sons of Vasudeva who would cause his death. Kaṁsa then had Vasudeva and his wife shackled in iron chains.

Text 20:

After Nārada left, King Kaṁsa summoned Keśī and ordered him, “Go kill Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.”

Text 21:

The King of the Bhojas next called for his ministers, headed by Muṣṭika, Cāṇūra, Śāla and Tośāla, and also for his elephant-keepers. The King addressed them as follows.

Texts 22-23:

My dear heroic Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika, please hear this. Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, the sons of Ānakadundubhi [Vasudeva], are living in Nanda’s cowherd village. It has been predicted that these two boys will be the cause of my death. When They are brought here, kill Them on the pretext of engaging Them in a wrestling match.

Text 24:

Erect a wrestling ring with many surrounding viewing stands, and bring all the residents of the city and the outlying districts to see the open competition.

Text 25:

You, elephant-keeper, my good man, should position the elephant Kuvalayāpīḍa at the entrance to the wrestling arena and have him kill my two enemies.

Text 26:

Commence the bow sacrifice on the Caturdaśī day in accordance with the relevant Vedic injunctions. In ritual slaughter offer the appropriate kinds of animals to the magnanimous Lord Śiva.

Text 27:

Having thus commanded his ministers, Kaṁsa next called for Akrūra, the most eminent of the Yadus. Kaṁsa knew the art of securing personal advantage, and thus he took Akrūra's hand in his own and spoke to him as follows.

Text 28:

My dear Akrūra, most charitable one, please do me a friendly favor out of respect. Among the Bhojas and Vṛṣṇis, there is no one else as kind to us as you.

Text 29:

Gentle Akrūra, you always carry out your duties soberly, and therefore I am depending on you, just as powerful Indra took shelter of Lord Viṣṇu to achieve his goals.

Text 30:

Please go to Nanda's village, where the two sons of Ānakadundubhi are living, and without delay bring Them here on this chariot.

Text 31:

The demigods, who are under the protection of Viṣṇu, have sent these two boys as my death. Bring Them here, and also have Nanda and the other cowherd men come with gifts of tribute.

Text 32:

After you bring Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, I will have Them killed by my elephant, who is as powerful as death itself. And if by chance They escape from him, I will have Them killed by my wrestlers, who are as strong as lightning.

Text 33:

When these two have been killed, I will kill Vasudeva and all Their lamenting relatives — the Vṛṣṇis, Bhojas and Daśārhas.

Text 34:

I will also kill my old father, Ugrasena, who is greedy for my kingdom, and I will kill his brother Devaka and all my other enemies as well.

Text 35:

Then, my friend, this earth will be free of thorns.

Text 36:

My elder relative Jarāsandha and my dear friend Dvivida are solid well-wishers of mine, as are Śambara, Naraka and Bāṇa. I will use them all to kill off those kings who are allied with the demigods, and then I will rule the earth.

Text 37:

Now that you understand my intentions, please go at once and bring Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to watch the bow sacrifice and see the opulence of the Yadus' capital.

Text 38:

Śrī Akrūra said: O King, you have expertly devised a process to free yourself of misfortune. Still, one should be equal in success and failure, since it is certainly destiny that produces the results of one's work.

Text 39:

An ordinary person is determined to act on his desires even when fate prevents their fulfillment. Therefore he encounters both happiness and distress. Yet even though such is the case, I will execute your order.

Text 40:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Having thus instructed Akrūra, King Kāṁsa dismissed his ministers and retired to his quarters, and Akrūra returned home.