

CHAPTER SEVENTY-SIX

The Battle Between Śālva and the Vṛṣṇis

This chapter relates how the demon Śālva acquired a huge and terrifying airship, how he used it to attack the Vṛṣṇis in Dvārakā, and how Lord Pradyumna was taken from the battlefield during the fighting that ensued.

Śālva was one of the kings who had been defeated at the time of Rukmiṇī-devī's marriage. Having vowed then that he would rid the earth of all the Yādavas, he began worshiping Lord Śiva each day by eating only a palmful of dust. After a year had passed, Śiva appeared before Śālva and asked him to choose a benediction. Śālva begged for a flying machine that could go anywhere and that would strike terror into the hearts of demigods, demons and humans alike. Lord Śiva granted this request and had Maya Dānava construct for Śālva a flying iron city named Saubha. Śālva took this vehicle to Dvārakā, where he and his huge army laid siege to the city. From his airplane Śālva bombarded Dvārakā with tree trunks, boulders and other missiles, and he produced a mighty whirlwind that obscured everything with dust.

When Pradyumna, Sātyaki and the other Yadu heroes saw the plight of Dvārakā and her residents, they went out to do battle with Śālva's forces. Pradyumna, the best of warriors, destroyed with His divine weapons all of Śālva's illusory magic, and He also bewildered Śālva himself. Thus Śālva's airplane began wandering aimlessly on the earth, in the sky and on the tops of mountains. But then a follower of Śālva's named Dyumān struck Pradyumna on the chest with his club, whereupon Pradyumna's chariot driver, thinking his master seriously injured, carried Him from the battlefield. But Pradyumna quickly regained consciousness and sharply criticized His driver for doing this.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Now please hear, O King, another wondrous deed performed by Lord Kṛṣṇa, who appeared in His humanlike body to enjoy transcendental pastimes. Hear how He killed the master of Saubha.

Text 2:

Śālva was a friend of Śiśupāla's. When he attended the wedding of Rukmiṇī, the Yadu warriors defeated him in battle, along with Jarāsandha and the other kings.

Text 3:

Śālva swore in the presence of all the kings: "I will rid the earth of Yādavas. Just see my prowess!"

Text 4:

Having thus made his vow, the foolish King proceeded to worship Lord Paśupati [Śiva] as his deity by eating a handful of dust each day, and nothing more.

Text 5:

The great Lord Umāpati is known as "he who is quickly pleased," yet only at the end of a year did he gratify Śālva, who had approached him for shelter, by offering him a choice of benedictions.

Text 6:

Śālva chose a vehicle that could be destroyed by neither demigods, demons, humans, Gandharvas, Uragas nor Rākṣasas, that could travel anywhere he wished to go, and that would terrify the Vṛṣṇis.

Text 7:

Lord Śiva said, "So be it." On his order, Maya Dānava, who conquers his enemies' cities, constructed a flying iron city named Saubha and presented it to Śālva.

Text 8:

This unassailable vehicle was filled with darkness and could go anywhere. Upon obtaining it, Śālva went to Dvārakā, remembering the Vṛṣṇis' enmity toward him.

Texts 9-11:

Śālva besieged the city with a large army, O best of the Bharatas, decimating the outlying parks and gardens, the mansions along with their observatories, towering gateways and surrounding walls, and also the public recreational areas. From his excellent airship he threw down a

torrent of weapons, including stones, tree trunks, thunderbolts, snakes and hailstones. A fierce whirlwind arose and blanketed all directions with dust.

Text 12:

Thus terribly tormented by the airship Saubha, Lord Kṛṣṇa's city had no peace, O King, just like the earth when it was attacked by the three aerial cities of the demons.

Text 13:

Seeing His subjects so harassed, the glorious and heroic Lord Pradyumna told them, "Do not fear," and mounted His chariot.

Texts 14-15:

The chief commanders of the chariot warriors — Sātyaki, Cārudeṣṇa, Sāmba, Akrūra and his younger brothers, along with Hārdikya, Bhānuvinda, Gada, Śuka and Sāraṇa — went out of the city with many other eminent bowmen, all girded in armor and protected by contingents of soldiers riding on chariots, elephants and horses, and also by companies of infantry.

Text 16:

A tumultuous, hair-raising battle then commenced between Śālva's forces and the Yadus. It equaled the great battles between the demons and demigods.

Text 17:

With His divine weapons Pradyumna instantly destroyed all of Śālva's magic illusions, in the same way that the warm rays of the sun dissipate the darkness of night.

Texts 18-19:

Lord Pradyumna's arrows all had gold shafts, iron heads and perfectly smooth joints. With twenty-five of them He struck down Śālva's commander-in-chief [Dyumnān], and with one hundred He struck Śālva himself. Then He pierced Śālva's officers with one arrow each, his chariot drivers with ten arrows each, and his horses and other carriers with three arrows each.

Text 20:

When they saw the glorious Pradyumna perform that amazing and mighty feat, all the soldiers on both sides praised Him.

Text 21:

At one moment the magic airship built by Maya Dānava appeared in many identical forms, and the next moment it was again only one. Sometimes it was visible, and sometimes not. Thus Śālva's opponents could never be sure where it was.

Text 22:

From one moment to the next the Saubha airship appeared on the earth, in the sky, on a mountain peak or in the water. Like a whirling, flaming baton, it never remained in any one place.

Text 23:

Wherever Śālva would appear with his Saubha ship and his army, there the Yadu commanders would shoot their arrows.

Text 24:

Śālva became bewildered upon seeing his army and aerial city thus harassed by his enemy's arrows, which struck like fire and the sun and were as intolerable as snake venom.

Text 25:

Because the heroes of the Vṛṣṇi clan were eager for victory in this world and the next, they did not abandon their assigned posts on the battlefield, even though the downpour of weapons hurled by Śālva's commanders tormented them.

Text 26:

Śālva's minister Dyumān, previously wounded by Śrī Pradyumna, now ran up to Him and, roaring loudly, struck Him with his club of black steel.

Text 27:

Pradyumna's driver, the son of Dārūka, thought that his valiant master's chest had been shattered by the club. Knowing well his religious duty, he removed Pradyumna from the battlefield.

Text 28:

Quickly regaining consciousness, Lord Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna said to His charioteer, "O driver, this is abominable — for Me to have been removed from the battlefield!

Text 29:

"Except for Me, no one born in the Yadu dynasty has ever been known to abandon the battlefield. My reputation has now been stained by a driver who thinks like a eunuch.

Text 30:

"What will I say to My fathers, Rāma and Keśava, when I return to Them after having simply fled the battle? What can I tell Them that will befit My honor?

Text 31:

"Certainly My sisters-in-law will laugh at Me and say, 'O hero, tell us how in the world Your enemies turned You into such a coward in battle.'"

Text 32:

The driver replied: O long-lived one, I have done this knowing full well my prescribed duty. O my Lord, the chariot driver must protect the master of the chariot when he is in danger, and the master must also protect his driver.

Text 33:

With this rule in mind, I removed You from the battlefield, since You had been struck unconscious by Your enemy's club and I thought You were seriously injured.