

CHAPTER FOUR

The Atrocities of King Kaṁsa

This chapter describes how Kaṁsa, following the advice of his demoniac friends, considered the persecution of small children to be very diplomatic.

After Vasudeva bound himself with iron shackles as before, all the doors of the prison house closed by the influence of Yoga-māyā, who then began crying as a newborn child. This crying awakened the doorkeepers, who immediately informed Kaṁsa that a child had been born to Devakī. Upon hearing this news, Kaṁsa appeared with great force in the maternity room, and in spite of Devakī's pleas that the child be saved, the demon forcibly snatched the child from Devakī's hands and dashed the child against a rock. Unfortunately for Kaṁsa, however, the newborn child slipped away from his hands, rose above his head and appeared as the eight-armed form of Durgā. Durgā then told Kaṁsa, "The enemy you contemplate has taken birth somewhere else. Therefore your plan to persecute all the children will prove futile."

According to the prophecy, the eighth child of Devakī would kill Kaṁsa, and therefore when Kaṁsa saw that the eighth child was a female and heard that his so-called enemy had taken birth elsewhere, he was struck with wonder. He decided to release Devakī and Vasudeva, and he admitted before them the wrongness of his atrocities. Falling at the feet of Devakī and Vasudeva, he begged their pardon and tried to convince them that because the events that had taken place were destined to happen, they should not be unhappy for his having killed so many of their children. Devakī and Vasudeva, being naturally very pious, immediately excused Kaṁsa for his atrocities, and Kaṁsa, after seeing that his sister and brother-in-law were happy, returned to his home.

After the night passed, however, Kaṁsa called for his ministers and informed them of all that had happened. The ministers, who were all demons, advised Kaṁsa that because his enemy had already taken birth somewhere else, all the children born within the past ten days in the villages within Kaṁsa's kingdom should be killed. Although the demigods always feared Kaṁsa, they should not be treated leniently; since they were enemies, Kaṁsa should try his best to uproot their existence. The demoniac ministers further advised that Kaṁsa and the demons continue

their enmity toward Viṣṇu because Viṣṇu is the original person among all the demigods. The brāhmaṇas, the cows, the Vedas, austerity, truthfulness, control of the senses and mind, faithfulness and mercy are among the different parts of the body of Viṣṇu, who is the origin of all the demigods, including Lord Brahmā and Lord Śiva. Therefore, the ministers advised, the demigods, the saintly persons, the cows and the brāhmaṇas should be systematically persecuted. Strongly advised in this way by his friends, the demoniac ministers, Kāṁsa approved of their instructions and considered it beneficial to be envious of the brāhmaṇas. Following Kāṁsa's orders, therefore, the demons began committing their atrocities all over Vrajabhūmi.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: My dear King Parīkṣit, the doors inside and outside the house closed as before. Thereafter, the inhabitants of the house, especially the watchmen, heard the crying of the newborn child and thus awakened from their beds.

Text 2:

Thereafter, all the watchmen very quickly approached King Kāṁsa, the ruler of the Bhoja dynasty, and submitted the news of the birth of Devakī's child. Kāṁsa, who had awaited this news very anxiously, immediately took action.

Text 3:

Kāṁsa immediately got up from bed, thinking, "Here is Kāla, the supreme time factor, which has taken birth to kill me!" Thus overwhelmed, Kāṁsa, his hair scattered on his head, at once approached the place where the child had been born.

Text 4:

Devakī helplessly, piteously appealed to Kāṁsa: My dear brother, all good fortune unto you. Don't kill this girl. She will be your daughter-in-law. Indeed, it is unworthy of you to kill a woman.

Text 5:

My dear brother, by the influence of destiny you have already killed many babies, each of them as bright and beautiful as fire. But kindly spare this daughter. Give her to me as your gift.

Text 6:

My lord, my brother, I am very poor, being bereft of all my children, but still I am your younger sister, and therefore it would be worthy of you to give me this last child as a gift.

Text 7:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: Piteously embracing her daughter and crying, Devakī begged Kaṁsa for the child, but he was so cruel that he chastised her and forcibly snatched the child from her hands.

Text 8:

Having uprooted all relationships with his sister because of intense selfishness, Kaṁsa, who was sitting on his knees, grasped the newborn child by the legs and tried to dash her against the surface of a stone.

Text 9:

The child, Yoga-māyā-devī, the younger sister of Lord Viṣṇu, slipped upward from Kaṁsa's hands and appeared in the sky as Devī, the goddess Durgā, with eight arms, completely equipped with weapons.

Texts 10-11:

The goddess Durgā was decorated with flower garlands, smeared with sandalwood pulp and dressed with excellent garments and ornaments made of valuable jewels. Holding in her hands a bow, a trident, arrows, a shield, a sword, a conchshell, a disc and a club, and being praised by celestial beings like Apsarās, Kinnaras, Uragas, Siddhas, Cāraṇas and Gandharvas, who worshiped her with all kinds of presentations, she spoke as follows.

Text 12:

O Kaṁsa, you fool, what will be the use of killing me? The Supreme Personality of Godhead, who has been your enemy from the very beginning and who will certainly kill you, has already taken His birth somewhere else. Therefore, do not unnecessarily kill other children.

Text 13:

After speaking to Kaṁsa in this way, the goddess Durgā, Yoga-māyā, appeared in different places, such as Vārāṇasī, and became celebrated by different names, such as Annapūrṇā, Durgā, Kālī and Bhadrā.

Text 14:

After hearing the words of the goddess Durgā, Kaṁsa was struck with wonder. Thus he approached his sister Devakī and brother-in-law Vasudeva, released them immediately from their shackles, and very humbly spoke as follows.

Text 15:

Alas, my sister! Alas, my brother-in-law! I am indeed so sinful that exactly like a man-eater [Rākṣasa] who eats his own child, I have killed so many sons born of you.

Text 16:

Being merciless and cruel, I have forsaken all my relatives and friends. Therefore, like a person who has killed a brāhmaṇa, I do not know to which planet I shall go, either after death or while breathing.

Text 17:

Alas, not only human beings but sometimes even providence lies. And I am so sinful that I believed the omen of providence and killed so many of my sister's children.

Text 18:

O great souls, your children have suffered their own misfortune. Therefore, please do not lament for them. All living entities are under the control of the Supreme, and they cannot always live together.

Text 19:

In this world, we can see that pots, dolls and other products of the earth appear, break and then disappear, mixing with the earth. Similarly, the bodies of all conditioned living entities are annihilated, but the living entities, like the earth itself, are unchanging and never annihilated [na hanyate hanyamāne śarīre].

Text 20:

One who does not understand the constitutional position of the body and the soul [ātmā] becomes too attached to the bodily concept of life. Consequently, because of attachment to the body and its by-products, he feels affected by union with and separation from his family, society and

nation. As long as this continues, one continues his material life. [Otherwise, one is liberated.]

Text 21:

My dear sister Devakī, all good fortune unto you. Everyone suffers and enjoys the results of his own work under the control of providence. Therefore, although your sons have unfortunately been killed by me, please do not lament for them.

Text 22:

In the bodily conception of life, one remains in darkness, without self-realization, thinking, “I am being killed” or “I have killed my enemies.” As long as a foolish person thus considers the self to be the killer or the killed, he continues to be responsible for material obligations, and consequently he suffers the reactions of happiness and distress.

Text 23:

Kaṁsa begged, “My dear sister and brother-in-law, please be merciful to such a poor-hearted person as me, since both of you are saintly persons. Please excuse my atrocities.” Having said this, Kaṁsa fell at the feet of Vasudeva and Devakī, his eyes full of tears of regret.

Text 24:

Fully believing in the words of the goddess Durgā, Kaṁsa exhibited his familial affection for Devakī and Vasudeva by immediately releasing them from their iron shackles.

Text 25:

When Devakī saw her brother actually repentant while explaining ordained events, she was relieved of all anger. Similarly, Vasudeva was also free from anger. Smiling, he spoke to Kaṁsa as follows.

Text 26:

O great personality Kaṁsa, only by the influence of ignorance does one accept the material body and bodily ego. What you have said about this philosophy is correct. Persons in the bodily concept of life, lacking self-realization, differentiate in terms of “This is mine” and “This belongs to another.”

Text 27:

Persons with the vision of differentiation are imbued with the material qualities lamentation, jubilation, fear, envy, greed, illusion and madness. They are influenced by the immediate cause, which they are busy counteracting, because they have no knowledge of the remote, supreme cause, the Personality of Godhead.

Text 28:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: Thus having been addressed in purity by Devakī and Vasudeva, who were very much appeased, Kāṁsa felt pleased, and with their permission he entered his home.

Text 29:

After that night passed, Kāṁsa summoned his ministers and informed them of all that had been spoken by Yoga-māyā [who had revealed that He who was to slay Kāṁsa had already been born somewhere else].

Text 30:

After hearing their master's statement, the envious asuras, who were enemies of the demigods and were not very expert in their dealings, advised Kāṁsa as follows.

Text 31:

If this is so, O King of the Bhoja dynasty, beginning today we shall kill all the children born in all the villages, towns and pasturing grounds within the past ten days or slightly more.

Text 32:

The demigods always fear the sound of your bowstring. They are constantly in anxiety, afraid of fighting. Therefore, what can they do by their endeavors to harm you?

Text 33:

While being pierced by your arrows, which you discharged on all sides, some of them, who were injured by the multitude of arrows but who desired to live, fled the battlefield, intent on escaping.

Text 34:

Defeated and bereft of all weapons, some of the demigods gave up fighting and praised you with folded hands, and some of them, appearing before you with loosened garments and hair, said, “O lord, we are very much afraid of you.”

Text 35:

When the demigods are bereft of their chariots, when they forget how to use weapons, when they are fearful or attached to something other than fighting, or when their bows are broken and they have thus lost the ability to fight, Your Majesty does not kill them.

Text 36:

The demigods boast uselessly while away from the battlefield. Only where there is no fighting can they show their prowess. Therefore, from such demigods we have nothing to fear. As for Lord Viṣṇu, He is in seclusion in the core of the hearts of the yogīs. As for Lord Śiva, he has gone to the forest. And as for Lord Brahmā, he is always engaged in austerities and meditation. The other demigods, headed by Indra, are devoid of prowess. Therefore you have nothing to fear.

Text 37:

Nonetheless, because of their enmity, our opinion is that the demigods should not be neglected. Therefore, to uproot them completely, engage us in fighting with them, for we are ready to follow you.

Text 38:

As a disease, if initially neglected, becomes acute and impossible to cure, or as the senses, if not controlled at first, are impossible to control later, an enemy, if neglected in the beginning, later becomes insurmountable.

Text 39:

The foundation of all the demigods is Lord Viṣṇu, who lives and is worshiped wherever there are religious principles, traditional culture, the Vedas, cows, brāhmaṇas, austerities, and sacrifices with proper remuneration.

Text 40:

O King, we, who are your adherents in all respects, shall therefore kill the Vedic brāhmaṇas, the persons engaged in offering sacrifices and austerities, and the cows that supply milk, from which clarified butter is obtained for the ingredients of sacrifice.

Text 41:

The brāhmaṇas, the cows, Vedic knowledge, austerity, truthfulness, control of the mind and senses, faith, mercy, tolerance and sacrifice are the different parts of the body of Lord Viṣṇu, and they are the paraphernalia for a godly civilization.

Text 42:

Lord Viṣṇu, the Supersoul within the core of everyone's heart, is the ultimate enemy of the asuras and is therefore known as asura-dviṭ. He is the leader of all the demigods because all the demigods, including Lord Śiva and Lord Brahmā, exist under His protection. The great saintly persons, sages and Vaiṣṇavas also depend upon Him. To persecute the Vaiṣṇavas, therefore, is the only way to kill Viṣṇu.

Text 43:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued: Thus, having considered the instructions of his bad ministers, Kāṁsa, who was bound by the laws of Yamarāja and devoid of good intelligence because he was a demon, decided to persecute the saintly persons, the brāhmaṇas, as the only way to achieve his own good fortune.

Text 44:

These demons, the followers of Kāṁsa, were expert at persecuting others, especially the Vaiṣṇavas, and could assume any form they desired. After giving these demons permission to go everywhere and persecute the saintly persons, Kāṁsa entered his palace.

Text 45:

Surcharged with passion and ignorance and not knowing what was good or bad for them, the asuras, for whom impending death was waiting, began the persecution of the saintly persons.

Text 46:

My dear King, when a man persecutes great souls, all his benedictions of longevity, beauty, fame, religion, blessings and promotion to higher planets will be destroyed.