

CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

The Killing of Kaṁsa

This chapter tells how Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma killed the wrestlers, how Kṛṣṇa killed Kaṁsa and consoled Kaṁsa's wives, and how the two Lords were reunited with Their mother and father.

Deciding to wrestle, Lord Kṛṣṇa faced off against Cāṇūra, and Lord Baladeva took on Muṣṭika. Battling arm to arm, head to head, knee to knee and chest to chest, the opponents attacked each other so fiercely that they appeared to be harming even their own bodies. The ladies in the arena, seeing the violent battle, began to condemn the King and all the members of the assembly: "A respectable audience should never have allowed a wrestling match between such huge wrestlers, whose limbs are as tough as lightning bolts, and such tender young boys, who are just entering youth. An intelligent person should never enter an assembly if he sees injustice being done there." Because Vasudeva and Devakī did not fully understand the power of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, they became extremely unhappy when they heard the women of the audience speak these words.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa then grabbed Cāṇūra's arms, whirled him around several times and threw him to the ground, killing him. Muṣṭika met a similar fate: after being struck powerfully by Lord Baladeva's palm, he began vomiting blood and then fell down dead. Thereupon the wrestlers named Kūṭa, Śala and Tośala came forward, but Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma easily killed them with the blows of Their fists and feet. The remaining wrestlers, fearing for their lives, all fled.

Except for Kaṁsa, everyone present cheered Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. The King, in a rage, stopped the festive music and ordered that Vasudeva, Nanda, Ugrasena and all the cowherds be severely punished and that Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma be driven from the assembly. Kṛṣṇa became furious when He heard Kaṁsa speak this way, and He instantly leapt onto the lofty royal dais. He grabbed Kaṁsa by the hair, hurled him down onto the floor of the wrestling ring and threw Himself on top of him. In this way, Kaṁsa met his death. Because out of fear Kaṁsa had always thought of Kṛṣṇa, after his death he gained the liberation of having a form like the Lord's.

Kaṁsa's eight brothers then attacked Kṛṣṇa, but Balarāma easily killed each of them with His club, just as a lion kills defenseless animals. Kettledrums resounded in the sky as the joyful demigods rained down flowers and chanted the glories of Lord Kṛṣṇa and Lord Balarāma.

The wives of Kaṁsa, grieving for their husband, lamented that he had died because of his violence toward other living beings and his lack of respect for Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Soul, who creates, maintains and destroys the entire universe. The Lord consoled the widows, had the funeral rites performed for Kaṁsa and his brothers and then released His mother and father from bondage. Kṛṣṇa offered obeisances at His parents' feet, but they, now understanding Him to be the Supreme Personality of Godhead, did not embrace Him.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Thus addressed, Lord Kṛṣṇa made up His mind to accept the challenge. He paired off with Cāṇūra, and Lord Balarāma with Muṣṭika.

Text 2:

Seizing each other's hands and locking legs with each other, the opponents struggled powerfully, eager for victory.

Text 3:

They each struck fists against fists, knees against knees, head against head and chest against chest.

Text 4:

Each fighter contended with his opponent by dragging him about in circles, shoving and crushing him, throwing him down and running before and behind him.

Text 5:

Forcefully lifting and carrying each other, pushing each other away and holding each other down, the fighters hurt even their own bodies in their great eagerness for victory.

Text 6:

My dear King, all the women present, considering the match an unfair fight between the strong and the weak, felt extreme anxiety due to compassion. They assembled in groups around the arena and spoke to one another as follows.

Text 7:

[The women said:] Alas, what a greatly irreligious act the members of this royal assembly are committing! As the King watches this fight between the strong and the weak, they also want to see it.

Text 8:

What comparison can there be between these two professional wrestlers, with limbs as strong as lightning bolts and bodies resembling mighty mountains, and these two young, immature boys with exceedingly tender limbs?

Text 9:

Religious principles have certainly been violated in this assembly. One should not remain for even a moment in a place where irreligion is flourishing.

Text 10:

A wise person should not enter an assembly if he knows the participants there are committing acts of impropriety. And if, having entered such an assembly, he fails to speak the truth, speaks falsely or pleads ignorance, he will certainly incur sin.

Text 11:

Just see the lotus face of Kṛṣṇa as He darts around His foe! That face, covered with drops of perspiration brought on by the strenuous fight, resembles a lotus covered with dew.

Text 12:

Don't you see the face of Lord Balarāma, with its eyes copper-red from His anger toward Muṣṭika and its beauty enhanced by His laughter and His absorption in the fight?

Text 13:

How pious are the tracts of land in Vraja, for there the primeval Personality of Godhead, disguising Himself with human traits, wanders about, enacting His many pastimes! Adorned with wonderfully variegated forest garlands, He whose feet are worshiped by Lord Śiva and goddess Rāmā vibrates His flute as He tends the cows in the company of Balarāma.

Text 14:

What austerities must the gopīs have performed! With their eyes they always drink the nectar of Lord Kṛṣṇa's form, which is the essence of loveliness and is not to be equaled or surpassed. That form is the only abode of beauty, fame and opulence. It is self-perfect, ever fresh and extremely rare.

Text 15:

The ladies of Vraja are the most fortunate of women because, with their minds fully attached to Kṛṣṇa and their throats always choked up with tears, they constantly sing about Him while milking the cows, winnowing grain, churning butter, gathering cow dung for fuel, riding on swings, taking care of their crying babies, sprinkling the ground with water, cleaning their houses, and so on. By their exalted Kṛṣṇa consciousness they automatically acquire all desirable things.

Text 16:

When the gopīs hear Kṛṣṇa playing His flute as He leaves Vraja in the morning with His cows or returns with them at sunset, the young girls quickly come out of their houses to see Him. They must have performed many pious activities to be able to see Him as He walks on the road, His smiling face mercifully glancing upon them.

Text 17:

[Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued:] As the women spoke thus, O hero of the Bhāratas, Lord Kṛṣṇa, the master of all mystic power, made up His mind to kill His opponent.

Text 18:

Out of affection for the two Lords, Their parents [Devakī and Vasudeva] became overwhelmed with sorrow when they heard the women's fearful statements. They grieved, not knowing their sons' strength.

Text 19:

Lord Balarāma and Muṣṭika, expertly displaying numerous wrestling techniques, battled each other in the same way that Lord Kṛṣṇa and His opponent did.

Text 20:

The harsh blows from the Supreme Lord's limbs fell like crushing lightning bolts upon Cāṇūra, breaking every part of his body and causing him more and more pain and fatigue.

Text 21:

Furious, Cāṇūra attacked Lord Vāsudeva with the speed of a hawk and struck His chest with both fists.

Texts 22-23:

No more shaken by the demon's mighty blows than an elephant struck with a flower garland, Lord Kṛṣṇa grabbed Cāṇūra by his arms, swung him around several times and hurled him onto the ground with great force. His clothes, hair and garland scattering, the wrestler fell down dead, like a huge festival column collapsing.

Texts 24-25:

Similarly, Muṣṭika struck Lord Balabhadra with his fist and was slain. Receiving a violent blow from the mighty Lord's palm, the demon trembled all over in great pain, vomited blood and then fell lifeless onto the ground, like a tree blown down by the wind.

Text 26:

Confronted next by the wrestler Kūṭa, Lord Balarāma, the best of fighters, playfully and nonchalantly killed him with His left fist, O King.

Text 27:

Then Kṛṣṇa kicked in Śāla's head and tore Tośāla in half, and both wrestlers fell down dead.

Text 28:

Cāṇūra, Muṣṭika, Kūṭa, Śāla and Tośāla having been killed, the remaining wrestlers all fled for their lives.

Text 29:

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma then called Their young cowherd boyfriends to join Them, and in their company the Lords danced about and sported, Their ankle bells resounding as musical instruments played.

Text 30:

Everyone except Kāṁsa rejoiced at the wonderful feat Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma had performed. The exalted brāhmaṇas and great saints exclaimed, “Excellent! Excellent!”

Text 31:

The Bhoja king, seeing that his best wrestlers had all been killed or had fled, stopped the musical performance originally meant for his pleasure and spoke the following words.

Text 32:

[Kāṁsa said:] Drive the two wicked sons of Vasudeva out of the city! Confiscate the cowherds’ property and arrest that fool Nanda!

Text 33:

Kill that most evil fool Vasudeva! And also kill my father, Ugrasena, along with his followers, who have all sided with our enemies!

Text 34:

As Kāṁsa thus raved so audaciously, the infallible Lord Kṛṣṇa, intensely angry, quickly and easily jumped up onto the high royal dais.

Text 35:

Seeing Lord Kṛṣṇa approaching like death personified, the quick-witted Kāṁsa instantly rose from his seat and took up his sword and shield.

Text 36:

Sword in hand, Kāṁsa moved quickly from side to side like a hawk in the sky. But Lord Kṛṣṇa, whose fearsome strength is irresistible, powerfully seized the demon just as the son of Tārksya might capture a snake.

Text 37:

Grabbing Kaṁsa by the hair and knocking off his crown, the lotus-naveled Lord threw him off the elevated dais onto the wrestling mat. Then the independent Lord, the support of the entire universe, threw Himself upon the King.

Text 38:

As a lion drags a dead elephant, the Lord then dragged Kaṁsa's dead body along the ground in full view of everyone present. O King, all the people in the arena tumultuously cried out, "Oh! Oh!"

Text 39:

Kaṁsa had always been disturbed by the thought that the Supreme Lord was to kill him. Therefore when drinking, eating, moving about, sleeping or simply breathing, the King had always seen the Lord before him with the disc weapon in His hand. Thus Kaṁsa achieved the rare boon of attaining a form like the Lord's.

Text 40:

Kaṁsa's eight younger brothers, led by Kaṅka and Nyagrodhaka, then attacked the Lords in a rage, seeking to avenge their brother's death.

Text 41:

As they ran swiftly toward the two Lords, ready to strike, the son of Rohiṇī slew them with His club just as a lion easily kills other animals.

Text 42:

Kettledrums resounded in the sky as Brahmā, Śiva and other demigods, the Lord's expansions, rained down flowers upon Him with pleasure. They chanted His praises, and their wives danced.

Text 43:

My dear King, the wives of Kaṁsa and his brothers, aggrieved by the death of their well-wishing husbands, came forward with tearful eyes, beating their heads.

Text 44:

Embracing their husbands, who lay on a hero's final bed, the sorrowful women loudly lamented while shedding constant tears.

Text 45:

[The women cried out:] Alas, O master, O dear one, O knower of religious principles! O kind and compassionate protector of the shelterless! By your being slain we have also been slain, together with your household and offspring.

Text 46:

O great hero among men, bereft of you, its master, this city has lost its beauty, just as we have, and all festivity and good fortune within it have come to an end.

Text 47:

O dear one, you have been brought to this state because of the terrible violence you committed against innocent creatures. How can one who harms others attain happiness?

Text 48:

Lord Kṛṣṇa causes the appearance and disappearance of all beings in this world, and He is their maintainer as well. One who disrespects Him can never prosper happily.

Text 49:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: After consoling the royal ladies, Lord Kṛṣṇa, sustainer of all the worlds, arranged for the prescribed funeral rites to be performed.

Text 50:

Then Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma released Their mother and father from bondage and offered obeisances to them, touching their feet with Their heads.

Text 51:

Devakī and Vasudeva, now knowing Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to be the Lords of the universe, simply stood with joined palms. Being apprehensive, they did not embrace their sons.