

CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

The History of Pradyumna

This chapter tells how Pradyumna was born as the son of Lord Kṛṣṇa and then kidnapped by the demon Śambara. It also describes how Pradyumna killed Śambara and returned home with a wife.

Kāmadeva (Cupid), an expansion of Lord Vāsudeva, had been burned to ashes by Lord Śiva's anger and was reborn as part and parcel of Pradyumna from the womb of Rukmiṇī. A demon named Śambara, thinking Pradyumna his enemy, kidnapped Him from the maternity room even before He was ten days old. Śambara threw Pradyumna into the ocean and returned to his kingdom. A powerful fish swallowed Pradyumna and was caught by fishermen in a net. They presented the huge fish to Śambara, and when his cooks cut it open they found a child within its belly. The cooks gave the infant to the maidservant Māyāvatī, who was astonished to see Him. Just then Nārada Muni appeared and told her who the infant was. Māyāvatī was actually Kāmadeva's wife, Ratidevī. While waiting for her husband to be reborn in a new body, she had taken employment as a cook in the household of Śambara. Now that she understood who the infant was, she began to feel intense affection for Him. After a very short time, Pradyumna grew to youthful maturity, entrancing all the women with His beauty.

Once, Ratidevī approached Pradyumna and playfully moved her eyebrows in a conjugal mood. Addressing her as His mother, Pradyumna commented that she was putting aside her proper maternal mood and behaving like a passionate girlfriend. Rati then told Pradyumna who they both were. She advised Him to kill Śambara, and to help Him she instructed Him in the mystic mantras known as Mahā-māyā. Pradyumna went to Śambara and, after angering him with various insults, challenged him to fight, upon which Śambara angrily took up his club and marched outside. The demon tried various magic spells against Pradyumna, but Pradyumna fended off all of them with the Mahā-māyā mantras and then beheaded Śambara with His sword. At that moment Ratidevī appeared in the sky and took Pradyumna away to Dvārakā.

When Pradyumna and His wife entered the inner chambers of Lord Kṛṣṇa's palace, the many beautiful ladies there thought He was Kṛṣṇa

Himself, so much did His appearance and dress resemble the Lord's. Out of shyness the ladies ran here and there to hide themselves. But after a little while they noticed small differences in Pradyumna's and Kṛṣṇa's appearances, and once they understood that He was not Lord Kṛṣṇa, they gathered around Him.

When Rukmiṇī-devī saw Pradyumna, she felt overwhelmed with motherly love, and milk began to flow spontaneously from her breasts. Noting that Pradyumna looked exactly like Kṛṣṇa, she became eager to find out who He was. She remembered how one of her sons had been abducted from the maternity room. "If He were still alive," she thought, "He would be the same age as this Pradyumna standing before me." While Rukmiṇī reflected in this way, Lord Kṛṣṇa arrived in the company of Devakī and Vasudeva. Although the Lord understood the situation perfectly well, He remained silent. Then Nārada Muni arrived and explained everything. Everyone was amazed to hear the account and embraced Pradyumna in great ecstasy.

Because Pradyumna's beauty so closely resembled Kṛṣṇa's, the ladies in a maternal relationship with Pradyumna could not help thinking of Him as their conjugal lover. He was, after all, the exact reflection of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and therefore it was natural for them to see Him in this way.

Text 1:

Śukadeva Gosvāmī said: Kāmadeva [Cupid], an expansion of Vāsudeva, had previously been burned to ashes by Rudra's anger. Now, to obtain a new body, he merged back into the body of Lord Vāsudeva.

Text 2:

He took birth in the womb of Vaidarbhī from the seed of Lord Kṛṣṇa and received the name Pradyumna. In no respect was He inferior to His father.

Text 3:

The demon Śambara, who could assume any form he desired, kidnapped the infant before He was even ten days old. Understanding Pradyumna to be his enemy, Śambara threw Him into the sea and then returned home.

Text 4:

A powerful fish swallowed Pradyumna, and this fish, along with others, was caught in a huge net and seized by fishermen.

Text 5:

The fishermen presented that extraordinary fish to Śambara, who had his cooks bring it to the kitchen, where they began cutting it up with a butcher knife.

Text 6:

Seeing a male child in the belly of the fish, the cooks gave the infant to Māyāvatī, who was astonished. Nārada Muni then appeared and explained to her everything about the child's birth and His entering the fish's abdomen.

Texts 7-8:

Māyāvatī was in fact Cupid's renowned wife, Rati. While waiting for her husband to obtain a new body — his previous one having been burnt up — she had been assigned by Śambara to prepare vegetables and rice. Māyāvatī understood that this infant was actually Kāmadeva, and thus she began to feel love for Him.

Text 9:

After a short time, this son of Kṛṣṇa — Pradyumna — attained His full youth. He enchanted all women who gazed upon Him.

Text 10:

My dear King, with a bashful smile and raised eyebrows, Māyāvatī exhibited various gestures of conjugal attraction as she lovingly approached her husband, whose eyes were broad like the petals of a lotus, whose arms were very long and who was the most beautiful of men.

Text 11:

Lord Pradyumna told her, “O mother, your attitude has changed. You are overstepping the proper feelings of a mother and behaving like a lover.”

Text 12:

Rati said: You are the son of Lord Nārāyaṇa and were kidnapped from Your parents' home by Śambara. I, Rati, am Your legitimate wife, O master, because You are Cupid.

Text 13:

That demon, Śambara, threw You into the sea when You were not even ten days old, and a fish swallowed You. Then in this very place we recovered You from the fish's abdomen, O master.

Text 14:

Now kill this dreadful Śambara, Your formidable enemy. Although he knows hundreds of magic spells, You can defeat him with bewildering magic and other techniques.

Text 15:

Your poor mother, having lost her son, cries for You like a kurarī bird. She is overwhelmed with love for her child, just like a cow that has lost its calf.

Text 16:

[Śukadeva Gosvāmī continued:] Speaking thus, Māyāvatī gave to the great soul Pradyumna the mystic knowledge called Mahā-māyā, which vanquishes all other deluding spells.

Text 17:

Pradyumna approached Śambara and called him to battle, hurling intolerable insults at him to foment a conflict.

Text 18:

Offended by these harsh words, Śambara became as agitated as a kicked snake. He came out, club in hand, his eyes red with rage.

Text 19:

Śambara whirled his club swiftly about and then hurled it at the wise Pradyumna, producing a sound as sharp as a thunder crack.

Text 20:

As Śambara's club came flying toward Him, Lord Pradyumna knocked it away with His own. Then, O King, Pradyumna angrily threw His club at the enemy.

Text 21:

Resorting to the black magic of the Daityas taught to him by Maya Dānava, Śambara suddenly appeared in the sky and released a downpour of weapons upon Kṛṣṇa's son.

Text 22:

Harassed by this rain of weapons, Lord Raukmiṇeya, the greatly powerful warrior, made use of the mystic science called Mahā-māyā, which was created from the mode of goodness and which could defeat all other mystic power.

Text 23:

The demon then unleashed hundreds of mystic weapons belonging to the Guhyakas, Gandharvas, Piśācas, Uragas and Rākṣasas, but Lord Kārṣṇi, Pradyumna, struck them all down.

Text 24:

Drawing His sharp-edged sword, Pradyumna forcefully cut off Śambara's head, complete with red mustache, helmet and earrings.

Text 25:

As the residents of the higher planets showered Pradyumna with flowers and chanted His praises, His wife appeared in the sky and transported Him through the heavens, back to the city of Dvārakā.

Text 26:

O King, Lord Pradyumna and His wife resembled a cloud accompanied by lightning as they descended from the sky into the inner quarters of Kṛṣṇa's most excellent palace, which were crowded with lovely women.

Texts 27-28:

The women of the palace thought He was Lord Kṛṣṇa when they saw His dark-blue complexion the color of a rain cloud, His yellow silk garments, His long arms and red-tinged eyes, His charming lotus face adorned with a pleasing smile, His fine ornaments and His thick, curly blue hair. Thus the women became bashful and hid themselves here and there.

Text 29:

Gradually, from the slight differences between His appearance and Kṛṣṇa's, the ladies realized He was not the Lord. Delighted and astonished, they approached Pradyumna and His consort, who was a jewel among women.

Text 30:

Seeing Pradyumna, sweet-voiced, dark-eyed Rukmiṇī remembered her lost son, and her breasts became moist out of affection.

Text 31:

[Śrīmatī Rukmiṇī-devī said:] Who is this lotus-eyed jewel among men? What man's son is He, and what woman carried Him in her womb? And who is this woman He has taken as His wife?

Text 32:

If my lost son, who was kidnapped from the maternity room, were still alive somewhere, He would be of the same age and appearance as this young man.

Text 33:

But how is it that this young man so much resembles my own Lord, Kṛṣṇa, the wielder of Śārṅga, in His bodily form and His limbs, in His gait and the tone of His voice, and in His smiling glance?

Text 34:

Yes, He must be the same child I bore in my womb, since I feel great affection for Him and my left arm is quivering.

Text 35:

As Queen Rukmiṇī conjectured in this way, Lord Kṛṣṇa, the son of Devakī, arrived on the scene with Vasudeva and Devakī.

Text 36:

Although Lord Janārdana knew perfectly well what had transpired, He remained silent. The sage Nārada, however, explained everything, beginning with Śambara's kidnapping of the child.

Text 37:

When the women of Lord Kṛṣṇa's palace heard this most amazing account, they joyfully greeted Pradyumna, who had been lost for many years but who had now returned as if from the dead.

Text 38:

Devakī, Vasudeva, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma and all the women of the palace, especially Queen Rukmiṇī, embraced the young couple and rejoiced.

Text 39:

Hearing that lost Pradyumna had come home, the residents of Dvārakā declared, “Ah, providence has allowed this child to return as if from death!”

Text 40:

It is not astonishing that the palace women, who should have felt maternal affection for Pradyumna, privately felt ecstatic attraction for Him as if He were their own Lord. After all, the son exactly resembled His father. Indeed, Pradyumna was a perfect reflection of the beauty of Lord Kṛṣṇa, the shelter of the goddess of fortune, and appeared before their eyes as Cupid Himself. Since even those on the level of His mother felt conjugal attraction for Him, then what to speak of how other women felt when they saw Him?