

Chapter 37. The Fate of Demons

Indeed, recollecting Krishna’s boyish pranks and enabling others to listen to their descriptions gave Suka great delight! Therefore, as soon as he was asked, he began. “O King, there is no higher course for you during the few remaining days of life than contemplation of God, is there? The doings of the Lord are drops of nectar. Every one of them is a fountain of spiritual bliss (*ananda*). Tell me which of them you wish to hear about, and I’ll describe the truth of each to you and the glory that I saw.”

King Parikshith replied, “Master! I want to hear of the wondrous way in which Gopala moved among the cowherd boys. That will give me such joy that I can liberate myself from the hold of death and birth.”

The Lord eats the leavings of his companions

So, Suka said, “King! Gopala woke early, during the hours from 4 to 6 (*Brahma-muhurtha*). Soon, He finished bathing and went into the cowshed to select and separate the cows and calves that had to be taken to the pastures that day. He gave them water to drink and heaped grass before the animals that were to be left behind, so that they could feed their fill. He loosened the ropes from the posts to which the cows to be taken with him were tied and drove them out of the shed into the area in front of his home. Then, he went inside the house and collected ‘his cold rice and curds packet, with a bit of pickles in it.’ He cautioned his elder brother that it was time to start; and, in order to alert his companions to be ready to join him, he blew a horn, standing on the road. On hearing the call, the cowherd boys quite hurriedly finished their allotted tasks at home, picked up the bundles of noontime food packets, and hastened to Yasoda’s house, ready for the task for which Krishna called.

“Then the boys went, playing on flutes and singing melodious tunes. Some of them responded to the cuckoos that sang on trees with echoing songs of their own. Others ran along the shadows of the birds that flew above. Some lay flat on the backs of the cows and sang their favourite songs merrily, all the while watching with eagerness what Gopala was doing. Thus, they moved on into the forest.

“Gopala would then place the flute tight in his loins. Holding the noon-day meal packet in his left hand and raising His lovely silver voice, He would sing a charming song and slowly walk along. The cows stepped in unison with the song, as if their feet kept time and delighted in doing so. They pointed their ears to listen to the divine melody. They raised their heads in silent admiration and adoration. At last, they reached the banks of the tank.

“By then, it would be time eat. They sat under the trees and untied the cloth bundles, which contained cold rice mixed with curds, cream, and milk and other items, according to the taste and need of each. The boys waited until Gopala opened his packet and started eating. As soon as Gopala had taken a mouthful, each boy began eating.

“Once in a while, Gopala would give his companions a handful of food from his packet and receive from each of them a handful from out of their stock! He went to everyone and asked for a share from his packet. The boys were reluctant and even afraid to give Gopala the handful of food he asked for from their plates, for it had been rendered ceremonially impure by their eating out of them. Seeing this, Gopala assured them that the One resides in all of them, so they shouldn’t feel that He was separate from them. ‘How could ceremonial impurity arise when all are one?’ He asked. Then he took the half-bitten pickle-fruit that they had kept aside and bit off a portion

for his own chew. How could the Lord, who ate with relish the leavings of Sabari from her plate, in the Rama incarnation, desist from eating the leavings of the cowherd companions? Both were so intimately devoted to Him.

Krishna smashes a wicked ogre to bits

“One day, sitting on the rocks in the shadow of the hills, they ate their meal and washed their hands. Gopala then ran toward the group of cows grazing in the open pasture. His companions wondered what the matter was. They noticed a huge, beautiful calf among the herd. Gopala went straight toward that animal, lifted it, holding both its hind legs, and rotated it fast over his head and finally brought it heavily down on a rock, smashing it. It made a terrific noise and turned into an ogre (*rakshasa*), spouting blood and breathing its last. The boys were amazed; they ran in hot haste toward Gopala and asked him to tell them what the mystery was.

“Gopala beamed with a radiant smile on his lips. ‘A wicked ogre assumed this form and came here, enjoined by Kamsa to kill me. He mingled among our herd of cows and was enacting this role in the drama he had decided on. I gave him due punishment.’

“The boys extolled Gopala’s strength, bravery, and foresight. ‘Gopala! You gave him what he deserved!’ They jumped around him excitedly, in great joy. They searched among the herd for any other strange calf or cow, suspecting other ogres who might have come in that disguise.

“They were also worried that their own cows might have come to harm or might have been swallowed alive by some wicked ogre in some shape. They vigilantly examined their own herds to discover, before it was too late, any sign of danger.

Boy Krishna destroys ogre Bakasura in disguise as a huge crane

“By noon, they reached a hill rich in pasture. The cows were driven into the shade, under the overhanging rocks, to be free from the scorching sun, and the boys rested a while, stretching themselves on the grass. It was soon afternoon, and when evening came on, one boy rose and approached the herd to collect the cows for the return to the village. He saw there a giant crane, picking up the animals and gulping them whole into its cavernous stomach. He cried out, ‘Krishna! Gopala!’ Hearing his desperate cry for help, Gopala reached there in a trice. He caught hold of the beak of that crane (which he knew was the ogre Bakasura in disguise), pulled the upper and lower parts apart, and tore the crane in two. The cows inside the stomach were freed.

“Thus, Gopala destroyed the messengers dispatched by Kamsa. Each day a new miracle, a novel wonder! The cowherd boys came to feel it as supreme sport. They were no longer amazed. They realised deep in their hearts that His skills and powers were superhuman and incomprehensible, so they were ready to accompany Him anywhere, at any time, without any fear.

“Hearing that Gopala had killed his brother, who had planned to get near Him and swallow Him whole, Bakasura’s brother got so incensed that he swore revenge and came as a python into the forest where the pastures lay. It lay across the jungle track, with wide open mouth, scheming to swallow the cows and the cowherd boys whole, as well as Balarama and Krishna. To all appearances, it looked like a long cave. Unaware of this, the cows and cowherds walked into it. Gopala recognised it as another wicked ogre. He also entered the python’s body, only to hack it open and save the lives that had been entrapped. The boys lost all fear and moved on to their homes, secure under Gopala’s protection.

“From that day, the cowherds had no trace of fear. They believed that Gopala would certainly safeguard them against all danger, for He was omnipotent. So they cared for nothing on the way. They never watched the sides of the road, but walked confidently on in whatever direction Krishna took.

“The sport of the boy Krishna was every moment a wonder, a miracle, an amazing event, an heroic adventure. What can I describe about them? Can ordinary humans perform such wonders? Those who don’t have faith, in spite of seeing such events, are but burdening the earth; they are fruits that have no taste and no kind of use.”

Suka’s face was lighted by a deep inner smile as he said this. His eyes shone as if he saw the vision of the resplendent One, as he fixed them intently for a long time on one spot.

Krishna is not a cowherd boy but the world protector

Parikshith asked him, “Master! while even subhuman monsters (*danavas*) develop faith in God and worship him, how can human beings forget Him and neglect to worship Him? They put trust in the ears that hear rather than eyes that see. I consider this to be the consequence of some great sin they have committed. Or, it may be the effect of some curse.”

Suka replied, “O King, your words are true. Monstrous individuals like Kamsa, Jarasandha, Salya, and Sisupala saw evidence of Krishna’s superhuman powers with their own eyes, but the falsehood that he was just a cowherd boy echoed so overpoweringly inside their ears that they were always aware only of the voice they heard from the sky rather than what they saw with their eyes. As a consequence they ignominiously lost their lives. They ignored the miracles, the wondrous events, the amazing achievements that they witnessed, and the successive defeats that their emissaries suffered at His hands, so they neglected the duty to the God before them. What other explanations can we give for this, except that they were cursed so to behave. And that curse must have fallen upon them as a result of sin.

“Gopala is the protector of the world (*Loka-pala*), and not a cowherd boy. (*Go* means cow; *paala*, he who fosters and protects; *loka*, the world). The form he assumed is human, that of a cowherd boy; that is all. But, really speaking, He is the most auspicious form who liberates from bondage, having in His hands power (*sakthi*), means of attainment (*yukthi*), and freedom from bondage (*mukthi*).”

Parikshith was supremely delighted at Suka’s words. “My grandparents had the unique good fortune of being in Gopala’s divine company. They played with Him, talked with Him, and had the bliss of His company and presence. Well, I am able to listen to the description of at least a fraction of His glory and enjoy the bliss (*ananda*) therefrom. This too is great good fortune. This chance of hearing about it from such a celebrated sage as you is also due to the blessings of those grandparents. Can such a chance be won without special good luck,” said Parikshith, with tears of joy flowing down his cheeks.

He said, “Master! I have heard that Gopala trampled on the serpent Kaliya and humbled its pride. What is the inner meaning of this sport? What great truth underlies this miracle? Why was it considered to be an amazing sign of His glory? Please tell me and remove the doubt that afflicts me,” he prayed.