

Chapter 41. The Message about Krishna's Advent

Living in Krishna consciousness

The King, who had achieved the destruction of the agitations caused by desire and thus succeeded in eliminating the “mind”, folded his palms together and prayed, with just one last desire urging him. “Master! Time is fast nearing its end, as far as this body is concerned. The culmination of the curse of the sage is rushing fast toward me. Of course, I’m prepared in every way to welcome it most gladly. Nevertheless, as long as I am resident in this physical habitation, I have vowed to engage myself in divine thoughts, in recapitulation of the divine, and in listening to the divine. Let that vow not be broken to the slightest degree.

“May the short balance of the allotted time be spent in imprinting the charming lotus face of Nandanandana on my heart—the lovely divine child that illumined the Nanda’s home. May that sportive form fill my consciousness and overflow, conferring on me immeasurable spiritual bliss (*ananda*).

“Describe to me the shower of auspiciousness that must have marked the hour when He was born. What miraculous events and happenings revealed to the world that God had come to earth? How did Kamsa develop the cruel determination to kill the divine child, and how was this determination fanned into a raging flame as days passed? Tell me the stories of the births of Kamsa and the Lord as Krishna. May the final hour be blessed by that sacred story. It will certainly render my breath so holy that it will find consummation in Gopala.”

Suka became even more happy. “*Maharaja*. I’m also filled with joy at the prospect of spending the few remaining hours in reciting the wondrous birth and divine sports of Gopala. Gopala took birth for the sake of establishing righteousness (*dharma*). That birth is fraught with great mystery. Only those who have become ripe in wisdom, through the chastening process of divine activity, can unravel that mystery and grasp its meaning. For others, the world is a whirlpool of vile sin. They revel in its depths. They sink and float and finally dissolve themselves in it. We’re under no compulsion to spend a thought on such people.

Krishna's parents get married

“*Maharaja!* Long, long ago, the world was ruled by a king of the Yadu dynasty, named Ahuka. A large band of feudatories surrounded his throne and awaited his orders and paid him reverential homage, seeking peace and prosperity through his beneficent overlordship. He had two sons, Devaka and Ugrasena. When they grew old enough to assume the responsibilities of administration, the king had them married and placed a share of his own burden on their heads. Years slipped by. Devaka had seven daughters and Ugrasena had nine sons. Devaki is the eldest of Devaka’s daughters, and Kamsa is the eldest of Ugrasena’s sons. These two play vital roles in the story in which we’re interested.

“In olden days, Mathura was the capital city of the Yadu dynasty. Within the precincts of this city lived a tributary ruler of Yadu, Prince Surasena by name. He had ten sons and five daughters. Vasudeva was his eldest son and Kunthi his eldest daughter. These princely families lived side by side, and the children grew. The flow of time sped fast, and, urged by the force of historic cause, produced epoch-making consequences.

“Devaki, the daughter of Kamsa’s paternal uncle, was given in marriage to Vasudeva. The marriage was

celebrated on a grand scale. Rulers, kings, emperors, scholars, sages, and saints assembled in large numbers. The city was packed with distinguished princes and personages. Kamsa took special interest in dealing out prolific and pompous hospitality to everyone. He had no sisters of his own, and he loved Devaki as his dearest self, so he dowered her with costly raiment, precious jewels, and all the paraphernalia of regal glory. Everyone was delighted at the grandeur of the festival.

Kamsa's death by his sister's eighth child predicted

“On the third day, the bride had to be sent to the groom's home with all the customary presents and gifts. So, Kamsa himself drove the newlyweds in a magnificent chariot. When they were driving in a colourful procession through the decorated streets of the city, suddenly there was a brilliant lightning flash over the chariot. There was a blast of terrific sound, as if the world was being destroyed by a deluge all in one gulp. The flash and the blast stunned prince and peasant into pillars of immobility. All music was silenced that very moment. That instant, the silence was broken by a few clear words exploding through the sky.

“The words were: ‘O, Emperor Kamsa! You are behaving like a fool, unaware of coming events. This very sister, whom you love as your own self, whom you are now taking so affectionately in this chariot with so much pomp and pleasure, will bear as her eighth child the person who will deal you death! Reflect on that coming calamity.’

Frightened Kamsa tries to kill his sister

“The shining figure that spoke these ominous words disappeared from the sky. The populace, princes, and scholars who listened to the dreadful news of doom lost all trace of joy. Kamsa, on the chariot, was filled with the fury of fire. He lost control of himself and was overcome by confusion; the reins fell off his grasp. His heart was aflame with hate. His thoughts fled fast into fiercer and fiercer fears. At last, they took a decisive turn. With the sister alive, the killer would be born; if the sister's life were cut, she couldn't bring forth the person who would deal him death! Thinking in this strain, he lifted the sister from her seat at the back of the chariot, grasping her plaited hair. Forcing her to stand up, he pulled his sharp sword from its scabbard with the vile intention of slicing off her head.

“Even the hardest heart recoiled from the awful sight. What a frightful thing this was. It was such a stunning contrast for him to try to kill the very sister whom he loved so long and so deeply and whom he was escorting with such gusto, No one could do anything to avert the disaster.

Vasudeva promises to give his children to Kamsa

“The bridegroom, Vasudeva, rose and held Kamsa's hands tight in his grasp. ‘Dear brother-in-law! I also heard the voice from the sky. If harm comes to you, we too are sharers, for we don't like any harm to affect you. We pray for your welfare, without intermission. We shall never seek to inflict injury on you. It's not proper for a brother like you to indulge in grievous disaster when everyone is reveling in joy. Release your sister! If you have such firm faith in the voice that declared that you would suffer death from the child that is to be born, I solemnly assure you that I'll entrust every child that is born of her to your care. I swear I shall do so. Let me tell you that this will solve your fear. On the other hand, if you become a party to the slaughter of your sister, while my offer

is here, it will bring about disaster to you and the kingdom as a reaction to this monstrous sin.’

“When Vasudeva pleaded thus most piteously, Kamsa felt a little relieved, realising that there was some validity in what his brother-in-law was saying. He loosened his hold and let Devaki fall into her seat. He said, ‘Well! Be warned. Keep your word, which you just gave me.’

Kamsa told his younger brother to take charge of the reins and returned to his palace. Of course, he returned. But he was torn between fear of death and affection for his sister. Though his bed was a soft bed of feathers, he suffered as if he lay on a bed of hot cinders. He had no appetite, no inclination to sleep. He was plunged in the terror of death. Kamsa spent one full year in this state. The brothers-in-law were in constant contact with each other.

The fate of the first six sons

“Meanwhile Devaki became pregnant, and the nine months drew to a close. She delivered a son. ‘I gave my word to save your life,’ said Vasudeva to Devaki, when he handed over the new born babe, rolled in warm clothing, to the tender mercies of Kamsa.

“However Kamsa had no mind to kill the tender baby and was delighted that his brother-in-law had kept his word. He said, ‘My dear brother-in-law. this babe can cause me no harm! The voice from the sky warned me only against the eighth child! Therefore, take back this child.’

Thus, Vasudeva got the baby alive and placed it in Devaki’s hands. The mother was happy that her firstborn was restored to her. She poured out her heart in gratitude to God for this blessing. She conceived again, and the parents were afflicted with grief at the fear of Kamsa and what he might do to the child. They wanted children but dreaded the fate that might befall them.

Narada warns Kamsa of his impending death

“Meanwhile, the sage Narada, who roams wide from world to world singing the praise of the Lord, appeared in Kamsa’s court. He asked the emperor whether he was well and whether the kingdom was safe and prosperous. During the conversation, Naarada revealed that the Yadavas were gods come as men and that Kamsa was an incarnation of Kalanemi, a famous demon. He said that Devaki’s eighth son would undermine the brood of demons and be the destroyer of Kamsa’s life. This was pouring oil onto on fire. Not content with this, he said, while taking leave of Kamsa, ‘Take every day that you manage to live as equal to a decade or more. Don’t regard death only as a distant contingency!’

“Hearing this warning, Kamsa was plunged into deeper anxiety. He feared that even little babes might bring about his death, and he sent word for Vasudeva to come to him. Poor Vasudeva came shivering in mortal dread, lest some dire calamity might descend upon his head. When he put in his appearance, Kamsa flew into a rage and roared the question at his face, ‘How many children do you have now?’

“Vasudeva had no tongue to answer. He was overpowered by the fear that something terrible might happen if he answered. His lips quivered as he replied, ‘Now, I have six.’

“Kamsa yelled, ‘Well, tomorrow morning, at dawn, you better bring all six and hand them over to me!’

“Vasudeva uttered no reply. He had to honour his word. But attachment to his offspring drew him back. He moved as if he was but a corpse that had managed to be alive. He came to Devaki, who was fondling the six sons

on her lap. When he told her that Kamsa had asked for the sons to be given over to him, she held them in fast embrace and suffered agony that passes imagination.

The agony of Devaki and Vasudeva

“*Maharaja!* For the sake of prolonging one single life, see how many innocent lives are sacrificed! You may wonder why this horrid sin! But who can unravel the mystery of the divine? To the outward eye, it appears to be unpardonable infanticide. The inner eye may perceive in it the fruition of the sins committed by those very babes in the past, or the culmination of some curse! It may well be their passing into a superior level of birth. Who knows what lies in the recesses of their past or the caves of their future? Who knows why they were born, why they live, and why they die? The world observes only the interval between birth and death, only with that limited period. But the master and sovereign of all the worlds —past, present and future— doesn’t do that. He has more compassion than all men. He showers grace, weighing the three tenses of time, the three tiers of space, and the three traits of character. He knows best, more than any person, so the only recourse for people is to believe that everything is His will, to be at peace, and to immerse themselves in the contemplation of His glory and grace.

“*Maharaja!* The next day, as soon as the sun rose, Vasudeva took the children most unwillingly, with the help of attendants. With eyes firmly closed, he gave them to Kamsa and burst into tears. The ego-centred maniac caught hold of each of them by the leg and beat them out of shape on the hard floor! Helpless to interfere and prevent the killing, the unfortunate Vasudeva retraced his steps home with a heavy heart, lamenting over the gigantic sin that brought about this woeful recompense. The royal couple were wasted in body through the terrific agony they underwent and bore it silently together. Every moment of living was an unbearable burden. ‘God’s will must prevail; one has to live as long as life lasts,’ they consoled themselves. Toughened by this feeling, they were dissolving their strength and physique in the streams of tears that grief engendered.”