

## Chapter 42. Consummation in Nanda-Nandana

“Meanwhile, the seventh pregnancy came! And surprisingly, it was aborted in the seventh month! Should they inform Kamsa? If yes, how? They couldn’t find the answer. When Kamsa learned about this, he suspected that the sister was capable of some stratagem to deceive him, so he put her and her husband in a closely guarded prison.”

The sage Suka started telling about the most glorious event, which revealed the reality of Krishna incarnation.

### **Krishna is born to Devaki in prison**

“Devaki and Vasudeva, who spent their days in prison, were indistinguishable from mad people. They sat with unkempt hair, lean and lanky through want of appetite and the wherewithal to feed their bodies. They had no mind to eat or sleep. They were slowly consumed by grief over the children they had lost. When their prison life entered its second year, Devaki conceived for the eighth time! It was wondrous! What a transformation it brought about! The faces of Devaki and Vasudeva, which had drooped and dried up, suddenly blossomed like lotuses in full bloom. They shone with a strange splendour.

“Their bodies, which were reduced to mere skin and bone, as if they had been dehydrated, took on flesh, became round and smooth, and shone with a charming golden hue. Devaki’s cell was fragrant with pleasing aromas. It cast a wondrous light and was filled with inexplicable music and the jingle of dancing feet. Amazing sights and sounds indeed! Devaki and Vasudeva became aware of these happenings but were afraid to inform Kamsa, lest he hack the womb into pieces in his vindictive frenzy. They were anxious about the strange future of the son that would be born and restless with weird foreboding.

“And what of Kamsa? He knew his time was fast rushing toward its end. He was torn by the greed to continue as unquestioned emperor of the realm. He was overcome by conspiratorial inclination. He overran the territories of the Yadu, Vrishni, Bhoja, and Andhaka and added them to his domain. He was so intent on establishing his dictatorial regime that he threw his own aged father, Ugrasena, into prison. Thereafter, his will was sovereign.”

### **Goal is determined by last thoughts of the dying**

When Suka told this story, Parikshith interrupted, “Alas! What folly is this? Knowing full well that his end was near, knowing that in the eighth pregnancy, the person who was to destroy him was growing fast, knowing that the voice that spoke from the sky could not be untrue, Kamsa still resolved upon these acts of inordinate greed and unspeakable wickedness! This is unbelievable!”

Suka burst into laughter. “*Maharaja!* Evidently, you think that all those who know their end is drawing near will, like you, utilise the time at their disposal in seeking to realise the vision of Him who is the embodiment of time! But such yearning as yours can arise only as a consequence of a favourable balance of merit, acquired in previous lives. It cannot arise all of a sudden.

“Consider the vast difference between what you did when you knew that the allotted span of life was hastening to its end and Kamsa’s undertakings when he knew that his end was in sight! These two attitudes are named god and demon, divine and demonic. Only thoughts of God and urges to do sanctifying deeds will emerge dur-

ing the last days for those who are equipped with divine virtues of eagerness to do good acts and to have good thoughts, faith in God, compassion toward all beings, contrition for swerving from the straight path, truth, non-violence, and love.

“On the other hand, those who are immersed in selfishness, egotism, greed, vice, violence, and unrighteousness will suffer in their last days from evil urges and will destroy themselves. The former attain beatitude (*kai-valya*); the latter achieve only hell (naraka).

“The onlooker sees the same consummation —death. But the goal reached is distinct and is invisible to those around them. The goal is determined by the thoughts that arise in the mind of the dying. Destruction of life is common; the sight (*darshan*) of God is something to be won, to be earned. That is unique. Hence the proverb,

When disaster is imminent, the intellect is perverted.

*Vinaasha kaale, vipareetha buddhih.*

“Only those who are about to be destroyed will get and welcome evil intentions. Those who are to be blessed with the vision of God will hold fast in their last thoughts to the pure and elevating.”

When Suka spoke thus, in all sincerity, Parikshith said, “No, this isn’t the result of my effort or the consequence of merit acquired by me in previous lives. The fruit of the goodness of my grandfathers and father is directing me along the correct path. More than all, the illumination shed by gems of wisdom like yours and the consecrating effect of the grace of Krishna —these are heightening the devotion and dedication that rise within me. Of course, the association one is privileged or compelled to share has a promotional (or adverse) effect.

“Luckily, since the moment of birth, God’s grace has been my guide and guardian. I was shaped and sustained by association with good men, comradeship with just and moral people, acquaintance with great scholars, and inspiration of the magnanimous deeds of my illustrious grandfathers. I also acknowledge the help rendered by wise and discriminating ministers, who served as my right hand and earned and enjoyed the love and reverence of my subjects. This could never be the consequence of my efforts.

“However excellent the seed, if the field is infertile can the harvest be plentiful? However high my ideals are, if my kingdom had no high tradition laid down by my ancestors, no sages and scholars to instruct and inspire, no ministers to execute and elaborate in action, no subjects to appreciate and act the ideals, they could only be like the vessel of milk spoiled by drops of acid curd, right?

“Had it not been for them, my ideals would have evaporated, and I would have imbibed the vices of people who flatter me and become another hardhearted Kamsa! So, I conclude that Kamsa’s sinful acts have to be attributed, to a certain extent, to the vices inherent in the scholars, elders, ministers, and subjects of Kamsa’s kingdom.

### **Parikshith yearns to hear of Krishna’s birth**

“Of course, you are most competent to pronounce upon the correctness of this inference. Well, why should I waste the few remaining hours of my life in seeking faults in others or analysing their causes and consequences? It is best that I sanctify every second. Tell me, Master, about the holy moment of birth, when my very breath, Gopala, appeared upon the earth.” Praying thus, Parikshith fell at Suka’s feet and sat up, with eyes closed, eager to listen. He was yearning in happy expectation to learn from Suka the amazing mystery of the birth.

Suka told the story “*Maharaja!* The foetus of the seventh pregnancy was taken and transferred to the womb

of Vasudeva's other wife, Rohini by name, who was in Gokula under the protection of Nanda. This was done so that the child could grow into a companion and helpmate for Gopala. Rohini gave birth to a son, who was named Balarama by Garga, the family preceptor, since the child was extraordinarily strong in body and charmed everyone by his innocence and intelligence. Since he was transferred from Devaki's womb to Rohini's, he was also named Samkarshana (he who was attracted, drawn).

“Meanwhile, the nine months of the eighth pregnancy were completed. Devaki and Vasudeva held their lives in the grasp of their palms, for they were agonising over what might happen any moment —when would the delivery take place? What would Kamsa do to punish them or to destroy the enemy he feared? They sat helpless, in great anguish, without food or sleep. When Kamsa learned that the nine months had passed, he took extra precautions to see that the child did not escape him. He ordered Vasudeva and Devaki to be shackled with chains on hands and feet. He locked the doors of the prison with even more formidable contrivances. He placed larger numbers of even more alert and able guards around the prison. He arranged that, once every five minutes, the guards must check and satisfy themselves that the inmates were within the prison walls. Kamsa was ceaselessly worried and anxious about the birth and what might happen to him.

“But who can hinder the inscrutable operation of the will of God? Can the divine mystery be penetrated and unraveled? Fools who cannot grasp the truth, who cannot recognise Divinity and measure the power of God, who have no faith in God, live in the delusion that their petty plans will save them and that they can triumph through their own efforts! The fact is that not even the smallest success can be won without God's grace.

“Though true, we shouldn't sit with folded hands, believing that a thing will accomplish itself if and when God wills. Human effort is essential, and man himself must make a trial. He must use the strength and skill with which he is endowed and resolve to go ahead with the work, laying the responsibility for success on God. For without the grace of God, every effort will be fruitless.

### **God enters Devaki as an orb of light**

“One night, lying on the floor of the prison room, Devaki developed labour pains. She fixed her mind on God and looked intently at the flame of the little oil lamp, anxiously asking herself, ‘What will happen to me? What lies in the future for me?’

Suddenly, the flame went out and darkness filled the cell. She beheld an effulgent form, casting a strange splendour, standing before her. She wondered who it might be. She called on Vasudeva, afraid that it might be Kamsa in that shape. She was lost in confusion and doubt about the identity of the phenomenon before her.

“Suddenly the form became clear! It was armed with the conch, discus, the mace. The fourth hand was held in the have-no-fear (*abhaya*) pose. It said softly and sweetly, ‘Don't grieve. I am Narayana. I am to be born in a few moments as your son, with the intent to wipe away all your travails, in answer to the promise I made when you visualised Me as a result of your earnest asceticism. Don't be anxious about Me. Be but witnesses of the drama that is about to be staged. In all fourteen worlds, there is no one born or to be born who can inflict on Me the least harm. Be assured of that. Even when some little anxiety affects you as a consequence of affection for the child you bore and of delusion fogging the mind, you will be able to witness immediately miracles that will reveal My nature.

“No sooner am I born than the shackles will fall off your hands and feet. The doors of the prison will open

by themselves. Take Me from here without anyone's knowledge to Nanda's home in Gokula and place Me by the side of his wife, Yasoda, who is having labour pains this very moment. Bring back to the prison the baby girl that she has delivered and keep her with you. Then send word to Kamsa. Until he gets the news, no one either in Mathura or Gokula will notice you or apprehend you; I shall arrange it.' He shone in divine splendour. Blessing Devaki and Vasudeva, He entered Devaki's womb as an orb of light. Within minutes, the child was born.

### **Switching Krishna with Yasoda's stillborn**

"The time was 3:30 a.m., the auspicious hour of Brahma, Brahma's period (*Brahma-muhurtha*). The divine power to delude brought sleep, sudden and log-like, on all the guards and on all the watch. They fell in their places and were caught in sleep. The thick iron chains that bound Vasudeva's hands and feet fell off in a trice. The doors and gates flew open. Though it was the darkest hour of the night, the cuckoo cooed with a sudden spurt of joy; parrots announced the heavenly happiness they felt. The stars twinkled, for each of them was smiling in inner joy. The Rain God showered flower drops of rain on the earth below. Around the prison, flocks of birds clustered in happy song, twittering sweet melody.

"Vasudeva realised that all this was the manifestation of the charm of God. He turned toward the newborn child and was astounded at what he saw. 'Was it true?' he asked himself. 'Or was it a mental illusion?' He was fixed to the spot, like a pillar. For, *Maharaja!* Encircling the babe was a brilliant halo of light! The babe laughed outright, seeing the mother and father. It appeared that the babe was about to speak! Yes. They heard the words, 'Now, without delay, take Me to Gokul.'

"Vasudeva did not tarry. He spread an old *dhoti* on a bamboo mat and placed the babe on it. He tore the scarf of an old sari of Devaki and covered the babe with it. Then, he moved out of the open doors and gates, past the sleeping guards.

"He noticed the little drops of rain that fell from the sky, and he was sad that the newborn child would soon be soaked. But when he turned back, he found the snake, Adishesha, following his footsteps, preventing the rain from wetting the babe, holding the ribbed umbrella of its broad hoods over the child! At every step along the road, Vasudeva noticed auspicious and favourable signs. The sun had not yet risen, but the lotuses bloomed in all the tanks and leaned toward Vasudeva on their stalks. Though it was a night, with no expectation of moonlight, perhaps through the yearning to have a look at the divine babe, the full moon peeped through the clouds, its cool rays illumining only the bamboo mat on which the babe lay, along the entire route! The babe that attracted all this auspiciousness was placed in Nanda's home, and the child that had just been born there was brought and placed into Devaki's hands. No sooner was this done than Vasudeva burst into tears. He couldn't stop crying."

### **Parikshith dies of snake bite with Krishna's name on his lips**

Even while these words came from his lips, Parikshith exclaimed, "Krishna! Krishna!" Everyone turned and hastened toward him. They saw a snake crawling away fast, after biting the *Maharaja's* right toe.

It was clear to all that the end had come. Everyone echoed Parikshith's words and repeated, "Krishna! Krishna! Dwaraka-vasa! Brindavana-vihara!" The vast gathering had no other thought than that of God, no other word than the name of God.

The *Maharaja* fell on the ground, repeating "Krishna! Krishna!" Men who were learned in the *Vedas* recited

*Vedic* prayers. Devotees sang the glory of God in chorus. Ascetics and sages were sunk in repetition of the name and meditation.

Suka shed tears of inner bliss. He said, “The *Maharaja* has reached Gopala!” He asked for the funeral rites to be undertaken and went away, without being noticed.

The word Suka means a parrot. Yes; he was the parrot that plucked the ripe, nectar-filled fruit called *Bhagavatha* from the tree of the *Vedas* and enabled the world to taste it and be nourished by it. May the world relish the fruit, strengthen itself through it, and derive the *Atmic* bliss that it can confer.

May humanity attain the Lord (Nandanandana).