

CHAPTER 37

THE FATE OF DEMONS

Indeed, recollecting the boyish pranks of Krishna, and enabling others to listen to descriptions of those pranks were assignments that gave great delight to Suka! Therefore, as soon as he was asked, he began, “Oh King, there is no higher course for you during the few remaining days of life, than devoting them to the contemplation of God. Is it not? The doings of the Lord are drops of Nectar. Every one of them is a fountain of Ananda. Tell me which of them you wish to hear about. I shall describe to you the truth of each, and the glory I saw.”

At this, King Parikshit said, “Master! I desire 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.”

So, Suka said, “King, Gopala woke early, during the *Brahma Muhurtha* (the hours from 4 to 6). He finished wash quite soon and went into the cowshed, to select and separate the cows and calves that had to be taken to the pastures that day and gave them water to drink. He heaped grass before the animals that were to be left behind, so that they can feed their fill. He loosened the ropes from the posts to which the cows he wanted to take 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 that call the cowherd boys were activated quite suddenly. They finished their allotted tasks at home hurriedly. They bore the bundles of noontime food packets, and hastened to the house of Yasoda, the mother, ready for the task for which Krishna called.

“Then the boys proceeded, playing on flutes, singing melodious tunes. Some of them responded to the kokils 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 merrily their favourite songs, all the while watching with eagerness what Gopala was doing and where He was. Thus, they moved on into the forest.

“Gopala will then place the flute tight in his loins: he holds the noon day meal packet in his left hand; and raising His lovely silver voice, He will sing a charming song and slowly walk along. The cows too 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 for partaking food. 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, to take the first morsel themselves. As soon as Gopala took a mouthful, each boy began eating. Once in a while, Gopala used to give his companions a handful of food from his packet and receive from each of them a handful from out of his 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 and so, they should not feel He was separate from them. How can 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 can 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.

“One day, sitting on the rocks in the shadow of the hills, they ate their meal, and washed their hands. Gopala then ran towards the group of cows grazing in the open pasture. His companions wondered what the matter was. They noticed among the herd a huge, beautiful calf. Gopala went straight towards that animal. He lifted it, holding both its hind legs, and rotated it fast over his head until he brought it heavily down on a rock, to smash it; but it made a terrific noise and turned into a *Rakshasa* (Ogre), spouting blood and breathed its last. The boys were amazed at this. They ran in hot haste towards Gopala and questioned him, to tell them what the mystery was. Gopala beamed with a radiant smile on his lips, he said, ‘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 have given him due punishment now.’

“At this, the boys extolled Gopala’s foresight, bravery and strength, and exclaimed, ‘Gopala! You have given 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 apprehensive 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 becomes too late, any sign of danger.

“Meanwhile, they reached a hill rich in pasture, by noon. The cows were driven into the shades, under the overhanging rocks, to be free from the scorching sun, and the boys too rested a while stretching themselves on the grass. It was afternoon soon 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 an ogre, by name Bakasura come in that disguise) and pulling the upper and lower parts apart, he 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 at any time to accompany Him anywhere without any fear.

“Hearing that Gopala had killed his brother who had planned to get near Him and swallow Him whole, the brother of Bakasura got so incensed that he swore revenge and

came into the forests where the pastures lay, as a python. It lay across the jungle track, with wide open mouth scheming to swallow whole, the cows and the cowherd boys, as well as Balarama and Krishna. To all appearance, it looked like a long cave and, unaware of the fact that it was a trap, cows and cowherds walked into it. Gopala recognised it as another wicked ogre. He too entered the python’s body, only to hack it open and save the lives that had been entrapped. They 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 will 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 the 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 do not 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 had his face 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 long on one spot.

Parikshit asked him, “Master, while even Danavas (subhuman monsters) develop faith in God and worship him, how is it that 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.”

At this, Suka said, “Oh King, your words are true. Monstrous individuals like Kamsa, Jarasandha, Salya and Sisupala saw with their own eyes evidence of Krishna’s suprahuman powers, but the falsehood that he was just a cowherd boy was so overpoweringly echoing inside their ears that they were always aware only of the *Akashvani* they heard from the sky, rather than what they saw with their eyes. As a consequence they lost their lives, ignominiously. They ignored the miracles, the wondrous events, the amazing achievements that they witnessed, the successive defeats that their emissaries suffered at His hands and 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 *Lokapala*, and not a cowherd boy. (*Go*—means cow; *pala* means—he who fosters and protects. *Loka*, means the World). The Form he has 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, *Sakthi*, (power) *Yukthi* (means of attainment), and *Mukthi* (freedom from bondage).”

Parikshit was supremely delighted at these words of the sage; “My grandparents had the unique good fortune of being in the divine company of Gopala. They played with Him. They talked with Him. They 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 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 Parikshit, 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 that sport? What great truth underlies that miracle? How was it considered to be an amazing sign of His glory? Please describe these to me and remove the doubt that afflicts me,” he prayed.