

## CHAPTER 41

### THE MESSAGE OF KRISHNA'S ADVENT

**T**he King who had achieved the destruction of the agitations caused by desire and thus succeeded in the elimination of “mind” folded his palms together and prayed, with just one last desire urging him, “Master, time is fast nearing its end, so far as this body is concerned. The culmination of the curse of the Sage is rushing fast towards me. Of course, I am prepared in every way to welcome it, most gladly. Nevertheless, so long as I am resident in this physical habitation, I have vowed, I will engage myself in thoughts divine, recapitulation of the divine, listening to the divine. Let that vow be not broken to the slightest degree. May the short balance of the allotted time be spent in imprinting on my heart the charming lotus face of Nanda-nandana, the lovely Divine Child that illumined

the home of Nanda. May that sportive Form fill my consciousness and overflow, conferring on me immeasurable Ananda. Describe to me the shower of auspiciousness that must have marked the hour when He was born. What were the miraculous events and happenings that revealed to the world at that time that God had come to earth? How did Kamsa develop the cruel determination to kill the Divine Child and how was that determination fanned into a raging flame as the days passed? Tell me the story of the birth of that Kamsa and of 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.”

At this, Suka became even more happy. “Maharaja,” he said, “I am also filled with joy at the prospect of spending the few remaining hours in reciting the wondrous birth and the divine sports of Gopala. Gopala took birth for the sake of establishing Dharma or Righteousness. It 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 itself is a whirlpool of vile sin. They revel in its depths, they sink and float and finally dissolve themselves in it. We are under no compulsion to spend a thought on such persons.

“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 he placed on their heads a share of his own burden. 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 the sons of Ugrasena. These two play vital roles in the story in which we are both interested.

“In olden days, Mathura was the capital city of the Yadu dynasty. Within the precincts of this city, there lived the tributary ruler of Yadu, Prince Surasena by name. He had ten sons and five daughters. The eldest son was named Vasudeva. Kunthi was 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 and 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, 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. On the third day, the bride had to be sent to the groom's home with all customary presents and gifts. So, Kamsa himself drove the newlyweds in a magnificent chariot. When they were proceeding 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 that exploded through the sky.

“The words were: ‘Oh, 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—she will bear as her eighth child the person who will deal you death! Reflect on that coming calamity.’

“The shining figure that spoke these ominous words disappeared from the sky. The populace, the princes and the 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. He was overcome by confusion. The reins fell from 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 will be born. When the sister's life is cut, she cannot bring forth the person who can 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 out of its scabbard with the vile intention of slicing off her head.

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

“Meanwhile, the bridegroom, Vasudeva, rose and held both the hands of Kamsa tight in his grasp. ‘Dear brother-in-law! I too heard the Voice from the sky. If harm comes to you, we too are sharers, we do not like any harm affecting you. We pray for your welfare, without intermission. We shall never seek to inflict injury on you. For a brother like you, it is not proper to indulge in grievous disaster, when everyone is revelling in joy. Release your sister from the hold. If you have such firm faith in the Voice which declared that you will suffer death from the child that is to be born, I solemnly assure you that I shall entrust to your care every child that is born of her, I swear I shall do so. Let me tell you that this will solve your fear. If on the other hand, you become a party to the slaughter of your sister, while this my offer is there, it will bring about disaster to you and the kingdom, as 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 the word that you have now given me.’ With this, he directed 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.

“Meanwhile Devaki became enceinte, and the nine months drew to a close. She delivered a son. ‘I have given 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. He 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 hands of Devaki. 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.

“Meanwhile, the sage Narada, who roams wide from world to world, singing the praise of the Lord, appeared in Kamsa’s Court. He inquired from the Emperor whether he was well and whether the kingdom was safe and prosperous. During the conversation, Narada revealed that the Yadavas were the gods come as men, and that Kamsa was an incarnation of Kalanemi, a famous Asura. He also said that the son to be born as the eighth son of Devaki will undermine the brood of Asuras and be the destroyer of the life of Kamsa himself. This acted like the pouring of oil or fuel 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. Do not disregard death, 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 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 have you now?’ Vasudeva had no tongue to answer; fear that something terrible may happen if his answers overpowered him. His lips quivered, as he replied, ‘Now, I have six.’ Kamsa yelled, ‘Well, tomorrow morning, at dawn, you must bring all the six and hand them over to me!’ He uttered no word in return. 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 where Devaki was fondling the six sons on her lap. When he told her that Kamsa had asked that the sons be given over to him, she held them in fast embrace and suffered agony that passes imagination.

“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 that was pronounced on them! It may well be their passing into a superior level of birth. Who knows what lies in the recesses of their past, or in 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; they concerned themselves only with that limited period. But the Master and Sovereign of all the Worlds, past, present and future, does not do like 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 man; so, the only recourse for man is to believe that everything is His Will and be at peace, and immerse himself in the contemplation of His Glory and Grace.

“Maharaja, next day, as soon as the sun rose above the horizon, Vasudeva took the children most unwillingly,

with the help of attendants, and with eyes firmly closed, he gave them over 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 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. They felt every moment of living as an unbearable burden. ‘God’s Will must prevail. One has to live, until life lasts’ they consoled themselves. Toughened by this feeling, they were dissolving their strength and physique in the streams of tears that grief engendered.

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