

CHAPTER EIGHT

*Kapāleśvara*¹

Śrī Rudra said:

1-7. O Pārvatī, know that the eighth deity is named Kapāleśvara. Merely by seeing it, the sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter vanishes.

Formerly in Vaivasvata Kalpa at the advent of Tretāyuga, O beloved one, a divine Yajña was in progress in Mahākālavana under the guidance of Brahmā. As the Brāhmaṇas were seated all round and the Homa was being performed in the sacrificial fire, I assumed the guise of a Kāpālīka and went to the assembly there.

O goddess, I had shaved off the hair and was clad in tattered rags and held a Khaṭvāṅga (a skull-topped club). The ash of the cremation ground had been smeared on my limbs. I was in an ugly state with a loathsome face. Skulls formed my ornaments and a skull was held by me in the hand.

On seeing me in the habit and dress of a rustic rogue with a skull held (in a hand), all of them censured me and frequently hurled on me abuses and words like "Fie upon you," "O sinner, O sinner," "Be gone," "Away," "We have been ridiculed," "How can the Homa be performed when the Kāpālīka

1. The story illustrates the efficacy of this Liṅga to redeem the sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter. This is repeated elsewhere in SkP.

is standing in front? It is loudly proclaimed in the Vedas that skulls are not pure. The sacrificial altar is not suitable unto you who hold a human bone (in hand)."

8-19. I told those Brāhmaṇas: "May this be heard, O excellent Brāhmaṇas. All of you are kind and merciful. You are worried over other's miseries. Mercy should always be shown by good people to all embodied beings. A Brāhmaṇa is said to be friend of all creatures. I am a Kāpālika Brāhmaṇa with my body embellished with holy ash. I roam about on the earth after having duly adopted Kapāla Vrata. I always propitiate Mahādeva, the Lord of the universe. This holy vow is for the destruction of the sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter. It is to be continued for twelve years. This holy rite undertaken by me is famous in the world as destroyer of sins, O Brāhmaṇas. The aim is expiation. If purified, I will attain beatitude."

On hearing my explanatory statement those excellent Brāhmaṇas said: "O base one, you are excessively sinful. So you speak thus. One embellished by skulls is despicable, especially a slayer of a Brāhmaṇa. Mahādeva was not invited in the great festival of Dakṣa's sacrifice, wherein Ādityas, Vasus, Viśvedevas, Maruts, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Indra, Varuṇa, Vāyu, Kubera, all the oceans, rivers, all the lakes, Suparṇas, mountains and all the serpents had been invited. They came with all their followers and wives. So also Brāhmaṇas who are masters of the Vedas, illustrious Brāhmaṇa-sages and the pure celestial sages." After saying this, they continued: "Even after knowing that Mahādeva embellished with human bones, is impure, how dare you say, 'Let admission be given to me,' particularly when you are also a Brāhmaṇa-slayer?"

20-27. When I was told thus by the Brāhmaṇas, I spoke these words: "Wait for a short while; I shall go off after taking food." When these words were spoken, O fair lady, I was beaten severely with sticks, kicked with feet and hit with fists. Lumps of clay were hurled on me. Thereupon, I laughed and threw the skull down on the altar which was spread over with Kuśa grass. Thereafter I vanished (like the flame of a lamp) without being known by the excellent Brāhmaṇas. After I disappeared they threw the skull out of the pavilion. O lady of renown, another skull of the same colour and form cropped up there.

Thus hundreds, thousands, millions and trillions of skulls appeared and were thrown out and yet cropped up. They were wonderstruck. All the wise ones among them said: "This is not the work of anyone other than Lord Mahādeva having Gaṅgā and crescent moon as his crest jewels." Thereupon, I was eulogized severally by the Brāhmaṇas by means of different kinds of prayers. They performed Homas in the fire uttering the Mantras of Śatarudriya. Then I was pleased, O goddess, and said out of sympathy to the Brāhmaṇas: "O ye Brāhmaṇas, may a boon desired mentally be chosen."

28-36a. Then those Brāhmaṇas said: "Unwittingly we had made deadly attack on you. Thereby, O Lord of the universe, a Brāhmaṇa's slaughter has been committed by us. In order to eradicate that sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter, O Lord, extend your grace unto us. We request for this boon alone. No other boon is desired."

Thereupon, I said thus to those Brāhmaṇas: "There was a primordial Liṅga where you all hurled the skulls into a heap. It has become hidden due to the efflux of time. May the Brāhmaṇas see that Liṅga that rids one of the sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter.

O eminent Brāhmaṇas, Brāhmaṇa-slaughter was committed by me too formerly, when I severed the fifth, excessively luminous head of Brahmā. Thereupon, extremely unbearable sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter was incurred by me. The skull too stuck to my palm and became acutely painful. I was overwhelmed by the sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter and was well nigh burnt thereby. I went on a pilgrimage to the holy spots in order to eradicate it immediately. I had visited all the Tirthas but was never released by that sin. This resulted in my misery and torments and I did not get any happiness anywhere. In the meantime an unembodied divine voice said:

36b-45. 'O Lord, go to Avantī. Why do you suffer the misery unnecessarily? It was by you, O Lord, that the sacred Mahākālavana was created, wherein Rudra of miraculous vision is installed with the skull in his hand. How is it that you do not know that the holy spot is destructive of great sins? In that holy spot, there is a great Liṅga in the vicinity of the deity in the form of an elephant. See it, O Lord of Devas. The sin of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter will get destroyed.'

On hearing those excellent words, I hastened to this place.

The great Liṅga stationed with the skull in the hand was seen. Then, O Brāhmaṇas, the skull (got unstuck and) fell into the ground from my hand. The name was assigned by me (to it) saying, 'This is the deity Kapāleśvara Deva.' O Brāhmaṇas, may all of you see the Lord named Kapāleśvara. Merely by the sight thereof you all will become free from ignominy."

Thereafter, the Liṅga was seen by them. It was covered by many skulls. By visiting that Liṅga they became blessed and contented. Hence this Liṅga named Kapāleśvara has become famous on the earth. O great goddess, those who worship the deity named Kapāleśvara become men of meritorious deeds and attain the greatest goal. Even after perpetrating terrible sins, including that of Brāhmaṇa-slaughter, if a man sees that Liṅga, those sins get destroyed. This deity, worshipped on the fourteenth lunar day, destroys all sins committed mentally, verbally and physically.

46-49. Those who worship it even incidentally, O lady of excellent countenance, do obtain all their desires whatever they may be, even if they are inaccessible. He obtains prosperity, unparalleled piety, longevity, good health, freedom from ailments, incomparable riddance (elimination) of enemies and the like. O my beloved, even the worst of sinners, men engaged in ruthless activities, become rid of sins. They will turn out to be leaders of my Gaṇas. O my beloved, those who regularly visit the deity for a year, will see my favourite abode after casting off their mortal bodies.

Thus, O fair lady, the sin-destroying power of Kapāleśvara Deva has been spoken to you. Now listen to the account of Svargadvāreśvara.