

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Previous Life of Satyabhāmā

Sūta said:

1. When the excellent Celestial Sage took leave of the husband of Śrī and went away, Satyā (i.e. Satyabhāmā) spoke to Vāsudeva with her face full-blown due to delight.

Satyabhāmā said:

2-3. I am blessed. I am contented. My life has become fruitful. I have (surely) done something good formerly by way of charitable gifts, holy rites or austerities, whereby, O Lord, I have become your

wife, though born of mortals. In the previous birth, what had been my conduct? Who was I? Whose daughter? (How) did I become your beloved? Recount everything to me.¹

Śrīkṛṣṇa replied:

4-6. O beloved, listen with concentration how you observed meritorious holy rites in your previous birth. I shall narrate everything to you.

There was an excellent Brāhmaṇa named Devaśarmā in Māyāpurī² towards the end of Kṛtayuga. He belonged to the Ātreya Gotra. He was master of Vedas and Vedāṅgas. When he had become pretty old, he begot a daughter named Guṇavatī.

7. He had no son. He gave his daughter (in marriage) to his disciple named Candra. He considered him his son and the disciple of perfect self-control (honoured him) like his own father.

8. Once those two went to a forest in order to bring Kuśa grass, sacrificial twigs and fuel. They were killed by a Rākṣasa as hideous in form as the god of Death.

9-11. Both of them went to the world of Viṣṇu due to the power of their respective merits.

On hearing that both of them had been killed by a Rākṣasa, Guṇavatī became extremely distressed, having been separated from her husband as well as her father. She lamented in a pitiable manner. She quickly sold all the furniture, utensils etc. and performed according to her capacity their obsequies and other holy rites for (their) happiness in the other world. Living like a dead person, she continued to stay in the same city.

1. Rebirth, curses, boons etc. have been favourite motifs with ancient Indian story-tellers. For example, *Jātaka Tales* in Pali connect some incident in the previous birth of the Buddha or rather the Bodhisattva (*Atīta-Vatthu*) with a similar incident in his present birth and the identification of the persons in the previous birth with those in the present birth of Buddha (*Paccupanna Vatthu* and *Veyyākaraṇa*), explaining or justifying the present happening, has been a special characteristic of those tales. Thus in *Makhādeva Jātaka* (1.1-9) King Makhādeva of the previous birth was the Buddha, the barber Bhikku Ānanda and Makhādeva's prince was Rāhula, the son of Buddha. Jain Tales (both canonical and non-canonical) use the device of *Jāi-Saraṇa* (recollection of the previous birth) for the same. These ancient story-writers insisted on establishing the principle of justice in *Karma-vāda*.

Brahmanical Purāṇa-writers followed the same norm and sometimes invented stories of previous birth to establish the law of Karma. In this story 're-birth' is used as the motif in the life of the Jīva which came to be called Satyabhāmā and became the spouse of Kṛṣṇa. More authentic Purāṇic accounts of Kṛṣṇa as in Mbh or BhP do not necessarily support these late Purāṇic stories.

2. Region including modern Haridwar, Māyāpurī and Kanakhala (De 129).

12. Two Vratas were perfectly observed by her throughout her life till death, viz. the Vrata of Ekādaśī and the holy rite of Kārttika.

13-14. Thus Guṇavatī performed the Vratas every year. Once that slender-bodied one became afflicted with fever. She was in great physical pain. O my beloved, with great difficulty she went slowly to Gaṅgā for taking her bath. When she entered the water, she became distressed with chillness. She shivered.

15-16a. By that time the lady in distress saw an aerial chariot that had come from the sky. She got into that aerial chariot and went to the world of Vaikuṇṭha. Thanks to the merit of Kārttikavrata, she came to my presence.

16b-17. When I came to the earth at the request of the Devas headed by Brahmā, all those groups (of Devas) also came along with me. O beautiful lady, all these Yādavas are my own attendants.

18. Your father Devaśarmā now has the name Satrājīt. He who had been called by the name Candra is Akrūra now and you are that splendid Guṇavatī.¹

19-23. You gave me great delight, thanks to the merit of the Kārttikavrata.

Formerly a grove of Tulasī plants was made by you in front of my doorway. Hence, O splendid lady, the Kalpa tree (i.e. Pārijāta) has come to your courtyard. Since formerly you performed the Kārttika Vrata throughout your life till death, you will never be separated from me.

Satyā asked:

How did the month of Kārttika come to be the most excellent of all the months? O Lord of chiefs of Devas, why is it your favourite? Let the reason thereof be mentioned.

Śrīkṛṣṇa said:

O my beloved, you have asked an excellent question. Listen to me with great concentration.

I recount the dialogue between Pṛthu, the son of Vena, and Nārada, the great sage. Nārada was formerly asked in the same way by Pṛthu and he spoke thus:

1. As noted above, rebirth is used as a motif in this tale which establishes the law of Karma. This story was not traceable in Mbh and BhP. But PdP repeats not only the episode but many verses from this text.

Nārada said:

24. Formerly there was an Asura named Śaṅkha. He was the son of Sāgara (Ocean). He usurped the powers of Indra and other Guardians of the Quarters.

25. The Devas and others hid themselves in the forts of the caves of the Golden Mountain (Meru). They watched (the activities of the Asura). Then the Daitya thought thus:

26. 'Although the Devas have been vanquished by me and they have been divested of their powers, they appear to be strong. What should I do in this matter?

27. I know it now. The Devas have the power due to the Vedic Mantras. I shall take them away. Thereupon all of them will become powerless.'

28. The Daitya thought thus and, on seeing Viṣṇu asleep, he took away the Vedas from the primordial self-born Lord Brahmā from Satyaloka.

29. While they were being carried away by him, the Vedas, out of fear of him, escaped and entered the waters along with the seeds of the Yajñamantras.

30. In search of them, Śaṅkha too entered the ocean. Wandering here and there the Daitya did not find them together anywhere. Then Viṣṇu, eulogized and awakened by the Devas, spoke to them:

Viṣṇu said:

31-32. O groups of Suras, I am the bestower of boons. On the eleventh day in the bright half of the month of Kārttika, I have been awakened by you all through the auspicious sounds of musical instruments and songs.¹ Hence this Tithi (Lunar day) should be honoured much.

It is exceedingly delightful to me.

33. All the Vedas carried away by Śaṅkha now lie submerged in the waters. O Devas, I shall bring them all after killing the son of the Ocean.

34. From this day onwards forever, let the Vedas along with the mystic seeds of Mantras take rest in the waters in the month of Kārttika every year.

35. During this period (Kārttika), those excellent men who take the holy bath in the morning, will all be as though they have taken the

1. Hence this day is called *Prabodhinī Ekādaśī*.

Avabhṛtha bath (valedictory bath after a sacrifice). There is no doubt about it.

36. From today onwards I shall be in the middle of the waters. All of you along with the leading sages may also come along with me.

37. O Indra, protection should always be accorded to those who observe Kārttikavrata, by you.

After saying this, Lord Viṣṇu assumed the form of a Śapharī fish and plunged into the water from the sky even as Brahmā staying on Vindhya was watching.

38. After killing Asura Śaṅkha Viṣṇu went to the forest of Badarī. There the Lord called together all the sages and commanded thus:

Viṣṇu said:

39. O you all, do search for the Vedas scattered within the waters. Bring them quickly from the midst of the waters of the sea. Till then I shall remain at Prayāga accompanied by the groups of Devas.

Nārada said:

40-42. Thereafter those Vedas along with their *Bījas* (seeds) and the *Yajñas* were redeemed by all those sages endowed with the power of penance. O king, the number of Mantras for each (sage) was as much as he redeemed or found. Since then he came to be regarded as the sage (seer) of those Mantras. Then all the sages joined together and went to Prayāga.

43. They submitted all the Vedas they recovered to Viṣṇu accompanied by Brahmā. After regaining the entire set of Vedas Brahmā became delighted.

44. Accompanied by the groups of Celestial Sages, he performed a horse-sacrifice. At the end of the Yajña all the Devas submitted their requests immediately.

The Devas said:

45. O Lord of Devas, O Lord of the universe, listen to our prayer and submission. This is the period of delight for us. Hence be the bestower of boons.

46. With your favour, O Lord of Ramā, Brahmā regained the lost Vedas in this place. We too got back our shares in the Yajñas.