



## The Playful Killings of Asuras by Bala Krishna & the inner meaning

When we think of Krishna, we get reminded of Diwali, an occasion to get new clothes and have fun and Krishna's slaying of the demon Narakasura that is the cause of the celebration. This leads us to the adventures of Bala Krishna, Krishna during his childhood days. When we read the exploits of Balakrishna, it may appear like a kid's play or like the killing of a random sequence of asuras or demons. On the surface of it, all this may look trivial and may cause one to wonder what is the big deal in glorifying this as an epic or something Godly. But, if you go a little deeper into these seemingly childhood pranks or the apparently mindless slaying of demons – especially the *sequence* in which Krishna performs these slayings – these reveal deeply significant lessons and truths that can be a panacea or ambrosia to relieve us of the cycle of births and deaths. Let us taste some of that ambrosia in this article!



The first demon that Krishna slayed was Bhoothana. She took the form of a beautiful maiden and came to feed Krishna poisoned milk. When she fed Krishna this poisoned milk from her breasts, Krishna took not only the milk, but also her life with it. When she fell down dead, she assumed her scary form of a demon but her body became fragrant with the smell of sandalwood and other perfumes.

The first bondage that we human beings develop in this world is for the food symbolized by mother's milk. We first cry for food and we spend rest of our lives in search of relieving ourselves of hunger and other desires. We forget our main and ultimate purpose of our birth – namely communion with the *Paramatma* or God. May be just to reiterate to us that we have to give up our desire for food right up front, Bhootana became Krishna's **first** victim.

Even though Bhootana came with a wrong (or evil) intent, she assumed the guise of a mother. The greatest and most unparalleled position in this earth is that of a mother. Even if we do a good act with bad thoughts, it may yield good results. Even if you take a medicine with no belief it will cure you, doesn't it do its job? To highlight the importance of the high altar on which the status of mother is placed, Krishna blessed Bhootana with something that no one else got – the special fragrance to her dead body. By demonstrating the need to control our craving for food and at the same time highlighting the stature of motherhood, Krishna has literally started with a bang, killing two birds in one stone. Rather, he has enlightened us on two counts in one scoop!

The next demon whom Krishna slayed was Sakatasura, who came in the form of a wheel of a cart. May be Krishna wanted to tell us that once we are born and take the affinity towards food, we get into the vicious Samasara Chakra! Again He has to break the cart and free us from this wheel!



The next asura that Krishna killed was Dhruvavartha. This demon came in the form of a typhoon-like wind and tried to kill Krishna sleeping in the cradle. He picked up Krishna and swopped up in the sky. But, as he flew, Krishna kept becoming heavier and heavier to the extent that the demon could no longer bear it. The demon just fell down and died while the playful Krishna was found



by the concerned parents cheerfully smiling in his cradle amidst all the noise and confusion.

Krishna says in Bhagvad Geetha (6:35) that it is very difficult to control the wandering mind which flows freely like the wind. He gives two tools in this sloka to achieve this control: **abhyaasa** and **vairaagya**. Abhyaasa means practice and vairaagya means determination. If you have determination and constantly practice, you can certainly achieve control of the wandering mind. How do you achieve this dual tool of practice and determination? The ultimate solution is that Krishna's figure and thoughts should inundate our entire self. Only to prove this, Krishna overpowered the demon Dhruvavarta who came in the form of wind. For us to come out of the craving for food and then from the wandering mind, thoughts of Krishna form the only solution.



As Krishna grew up, the community belonging to Nanda left for Brindavan. Krishna now "graduated" to taking care of the calves of the cows of the community. At this time, the next Asura to attempt killing Krishna came. His name was Vatsasura. True to his name, he came in the form of a calf. Krishna immediately spotted him, held him by his tail, swung him innumerable times in the air, threw him up and killed him. In our lives too, we will find evil people who come clothed as "one of us". May Krishna help us identify such traitors and ill-wishers amongst us and throw them out and protect us from such people!



Next in sequence comes the slaying of Agaasura. Agaasura came in the form of a giant python who was keeping his mouth wide open. Mistaking the mouth to be a giant cave, Krishna's play mates entered it for playing. Then they discovered their folly, realized the precarious state they were in and appealed to Krishna to save them. Krishna entered the mouth of Agaasura and started growing in size. The python's stomach could no longer take it and it burst open and the playmates walked out unharmed. Isn't this very similar to what we do in our lives? We blindly embark into risky and unholy (mis)adventures without fully assessing the situation and then realize the stupidity of the attempt. Pushed to a corner, now, we appeal to God to come to our rescue. And of course, full of karunya or kindness that He is, He comes to our help and rescues us from the mess we put ourselves into. Just like the playmates appealed to Krishna, we should also not fail to accept our complete dependence on Him at any time and seek His help. He will take care of the rest.



KRISHNA

The slaying of Kaalinga holds one of the most important lessons that we human beings can learn. Kaalinga was a giant multi-headed snake and he settled down in a lake which was out of bounds for his sworn enemy Garuda (because of a curse Garuda had got from a saint). Since he could not be caught by his *known* enemy, Garuda, Kaalinga got into a sense of



complacency nay arrogance and started tormenting everyone in that area. He crossed the line when he dared to poison Krishna's own kith and kin. Krishna decided to put an end to Kaalinga's atrocities and to save his kith and kin. Krishna jumped on top of Kaalinga from a tree and started dancing on his heads. When Krishna kept his foot on one head of Kaalinga, that head would go down. But this still did not reduce the arrogance of Kaalinga. He thought "so what of this head goes down? I will use my other heads". Thus as he raised each head, Krishna danced on that head and made it go down. Eventually Kaalinga could not withstand Krishna's onslaught; he became tired and gave up. At the same time, Kaalinga's wives pleaded with Krishna to spare him. Krishna let the entire clan go to a place where they would not cause any harm to anybody.

We are all like Kaalinga in our lives. We become intoxicated with wealth, fame, power, beauty, family and so on – the different heads -- and are led to a feeling of unreal invincibility. Just to bring us back to sanity and reality, God tests us with challenges and difficulties. Even then we don't realize our limitations and think "whatever be the difficulty I have, I will wriggle out using my intelligence, wealth, influence and physical strength (the other heads so to speak)". Eventually Krishna helps us understand our limitations, take refuge in him and help us attain salvation not only from the current troubles, but also gives us a safe haven where not only we will be happy but also we will not cause harm to others.<sup>1</sup>



the mouth of Bagaasura!

Next an asura called Bagaasura came to kill Krishna. This Asura took the form of a crane with a wide mouth. Krishna effortlessly killed Bagaasura by tearing the Asura's wide mouth. We get into trouble because of being a compulsive "big mouth" and using words indiscriminately. We tell inappropriate things to inappropriate people and get into unnecessary trouble. May be, just to tell us not be such compulsive "big mouths", Krishna tore

The last Asura Balakrishna killed before going to Madura for killing Kamsa was one called Kesi. Kesi came in the form of a wild horse to kill Krishna. Again Krishna effortlessly lifted this giant horse, threw him up and killed him. In the first of the ten Avatars, Matsya Avatar, Narayana killed a horse faced giant to rescue Vedas and restore Gnana or knowledge in the universe. In the same way, here also Krishna killed horse faced asura as the final slaying in his Balakrishna form to reiterate the importance of knowledge. The very first name of Narayana we use in our Sandhya Vandhana is "Kesava". One of the many meanings for this name is "killer of Kesi". By concluding his slayings with the very first name in his prayers and matching the achievements of his very first Avatar, Krishna has really set an example for the English phrase "last but not the least" and left the best lesson – of honoring knowledge – till the very end.

May we also get enlightened with knowledge and understand the true meaning of Balakrishna's slayings and his childhood pranks. May He give us the wisdom to peel the banana skin of ignorance and taste the sweet lessons of knowledge hidden underneath!



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<sup>i</sup> Pralambasura and Dhenukasura are not included in this as they were slain by Balarama