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The Glorious Life of Kunti Devi

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LIFE OF KUNTI DEVI

His Divine Grace

A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

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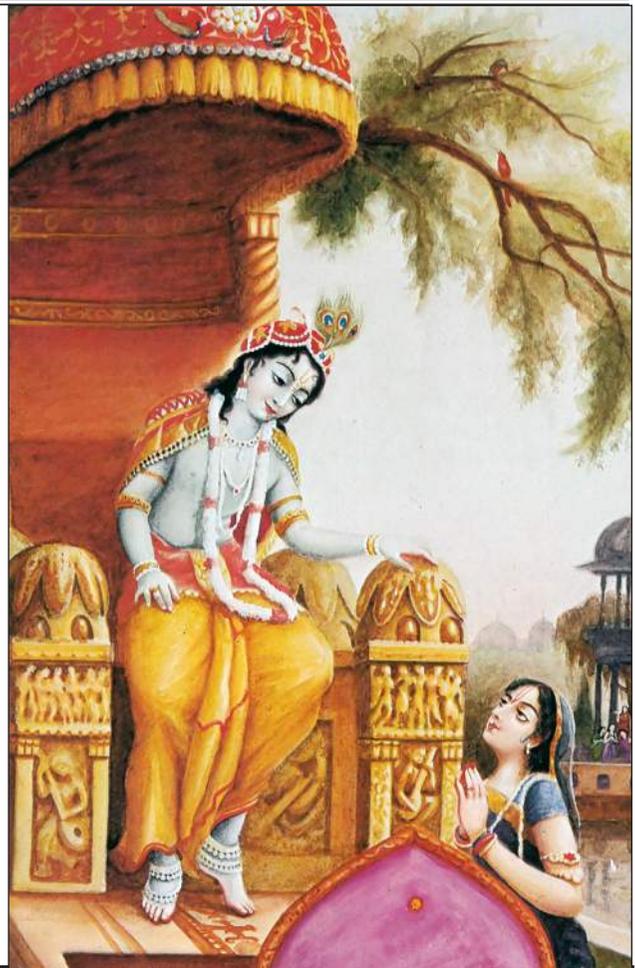
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LIFE OF KUNTI DEVI*His Divine Grace**A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada*

The Daughter of Maharaja Surasena and sister of Vasudeva, Lord Krishna's father, was adopted by Maharaja Kuntibhoja, and hence she is known as Kunti. She is the incarnation of the success potency of the Personality of Godhead. The heavenly denizens from the upper planets used to visit the palace of King Kuntibhoja, and Kunti was engaged for their reception. She also served the great mystic sage Durvasa, and being satisfied by her faithful service, Durvasa Muni gave her a mantra by which it was possible for her to call for any demigod she pleased. As a matter of inquisitiveness, she at once called for the sun-god, who desired couplement with her, but she declined. But the sun-god assured her immunity from virgin adulteration, and so she agreed to his proposal. As a result of this couplement, she became pregnant, and Karna was born by her. By the grace of the sun, she again turned into a virgin girl, but being afraid of her parents, she quitted the newly born child, Karna.

After that, when she actually selected her own husband, she preferred Pandu to be her husband. Maharaja Pandu later wanted to retire from family life and adopt the renounced order of life. Kunti refused to allow her husband to adopt such life, but at last Maharaja Pandu gave her permission to become a mother of sons by calling some other suitable personalities. Kunti did not accept this proposal at first, but when vivid examples were set by Pandu she agreed. Thus by dint of the mantra awarded by Durvasa Muni she called for Dharmaraja, and thus Yudhishthira was born. She called for the demigod *Vāyu* (air), and thus Bhima was born. She called for Indra, the King of heaven, and thus Arjuna was born. The other two sons, namely Nakula and Sahadeva, were begotten by Pandu himself in the womb of Madri. Later on, Maharaja Pandu died at an early age, for which Kunti was so aggrieved that she fainted. Two co-wives, namely Kunti and Madri, decided that Kunti should live for the maintenance of the five minor children, the Pandavas, and Madri should accept the sati rituals by meeting voluntary death along with her husband. This agreement was endorsed by great sages like Satashringa and others present on the occasion.

Later on, when the Pandavas were banished from the kingdom by the intrigues of Duryodhana,

*Queen Kunti with Maharaja Pandu*

Kunti followed her sons, and she equally faced all sorts of difficulties during those days. During the forest life one demon girl, Hidimba, wanted Bhima as her husband. Bhima refused, but when the girl approached Kunti and Yudhishthira, they ordered Bhima to accept her proposal and give her a son. As a result of this combination, Ghatotkacha was born, and he fought very valiantly with his father against the Kauravas. In their forest life they lived with a brahmana family that was in trouble because of one Bakasura demon, and Kunti ordered Bhima to kill the Bakasura to protect the brahmana family against troubles created by the demon. She advised Yudhishthira to start for the Panchaladesh. Draupadi was gained in this Panchaladesh by Arjuna, but by order of Kunti all five of the Pandava brothers became equally the husbands of Panchali, or Draupadi. She was married with five Pandavas in the presence of Vyasadeva.

Kunti devi never forgot her first child, Karna, and after Karna's death in the Battle of Kuruksetra she lamented and admitted before her other sons that Karna was her eldest son prior to her marriage with Maharaja Pandu. Her prayers for the Lord after the Battle of Kurukshetra, when Lord Krishna was going back home, are excellently explained. Later she went to the forest with Gandhari for severe

penance. She used to take meals after each thirty days. She finally sat down in profound meditation and later burned to ashes in a forest fire.

—*Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.13.3-4, Purport* ❁

AKRURA'S MEETING WITH KUNTI DEVI

Sri Krishna-dvāipayana

Lord Krishna's father, Vasudeva, had sixteen wives, and one of them, named Pauravi or Rohini, the mother of Baladeva, was the sister of Vidura. Vasudeva, therefore, was the husband of Vidura's sister, and thus they were brothers-in-law. Vasudeva's sister Kunti was the wife of Pandu, Vidura's elder brother, and in that sense also, Vasudeva was brother-in-law to Vidura. Kunti was younger than Vasudeva, and it was the duty of the elder brother to treat younger sisters as daughters. Whenever anything was needed by Kunti, it was munificently delivered by Vasudeva, due to his great love for his younger sister. He had special attention for Kunti also because she became a widow at an early age..



Krishna and Balarama meeting Vasudev and Devaki after killing Kamsa

Vasudeva had been imprisoned by the wicked King Kamsa. This powerful monarch had been viciously terrorizing Brahmins and other kings. Hearing a divine prophecy that Vasudeva's eighth child would kill him, Kamsa imprisoned both Vasudeva and his wife Devaki. He then killed their first six children at birth. But somehow, despite Kamsa's vigilance, the seventh and eighth children, Balarama and Krishna, had escaped death. By some mystical arrangement Krishna had been carried away from Mathura and raised in Vrindavana, a small village of cowherds, by its leader, Nanda. The great *ṛṣis* said that Krishna was in fact the Supreme Lord and that it had been by His own divine arrangement that He had gone to Vrindavana. The Kurus were amazed to hear from the sages that God Himself had appeared in the neighboring kingdom of the Yadus.

When He became a youth, Krishna had returned to Mathura and killed Kamsa with His bare hands. This tremendous deed astonished all those who saw it and confirmed for them Krishna's divine identity. Kamsa had struck fear even into demigods' hearts. There had been no earthly king capable of standing against Him. But young Krishna, still only a boy, and His brother, Balarama, had overpowered Kamsa's troops and generals, finally killing the king along with his evil ministers. The two brothers then became chiefs of the Yadu dynasty. They maintained a friendship with the Kurus in Hastinapura, taking a special interest in the welfare of their Aunt Kunti and her five fatherless sons.

Balarama, also said by the *ṛṣis* to be a manifestation of the Supreme Godhead, became famous as a peerless mace fighter. At Drona's request, He agreed to train Bhima and Duryodhana in the skills of handling a mace. Thus Balarama spent time in Hastinapura. While there, He learned of the fierce rivalry and envy the Kauravas felt toward their cousins. When Krishna heard this, He became concerned for Kunti and her sons. Therefore He asked one of His advisors, Akrura, to visit Hastinapura and assess the situation, and to see if He could be of any help. The Kurus received Akrura in friendship. Kunti was overjoyed to see him. She inquired about her kinsmen and friends in Mathura. Kunti especially wanted to know everything about Krishna, whom she accepted as the Supreme Lord. "Does my nephew Krishna think of me and my sons?" she asked. "Does He know how I am suffering in the midst of my enemies, like a doe in the midst of wolves?" Akrura asked her to tell him more about the situation in the city and she began explaining everything.

Kunti knew that Duryodhana and his brothers were always intriguing against her sons. The Kauravas could not tolerate the Pandavas' superior prowess. The humiliation they had recently received at Kampilya had made them even more keen to dispose of Pandu's sons. Kunti spoke to Akrura with tears in her eyes, "Will Krishna come here to console me? I always pray to that all-powerful protector of the universe. Indeed, I see no other shelter for myself and my sons." Kunti cried out to Krishna in front of Akrura. He gently reassured her that Krishna was often speaking about her and had sent him to analyze the situation. Both Akrura and Vidura comforted Kunti and reminded her about her sons' extraordinary birth. The Pandava boys were expansions of the gods. There was no way that the evil Kaurava princes could overcome them.

Akrura remained in Hastinapura for several months. Then, when he felt he had understood the situation fully, he decided it was time to return to Mathura. Before leaving, however, he met with Dhritarashtra to offer some advice. Ultimately the blind king was responsible for his sons' acts and he could certainly check their behavior if he chose. Akrura said, "My dear King, you have obtained the throne only because your brother Pandu passed away prematurely. Therefore Pandu's sons have first claim on the throne. You should not discriminate against them in favor of your own sons."

—From the book 'Mahābhārata' retold by Krishna Dharma Das

CONVERSATION BETWEEN KUNTI AND LORD KRISHNA

Srila Vishvanatha Chakravarti Thakur

Lord Sri Krishna caused three well-performed *Aśvamedha-yajñas* [horse sacrifices] to be conducted by Maharaja Yudhisthira and thus caused his virtuous fame to be glorified in all directions, like that of Indra, who had performed one hundred such sacrifices. Lord Sri Krishna then prepared for His departure. He invited the sons of Pandu, after having been worshiped by the brahmanas, headed by Srila Vyasa-deva. The Lord also reciprocated greetings. As soon as He seated Himself on the chariot to start for Dwaraka, He saw Uttara hurrying toward Him in fear.

Uttara said: O Lord of lords, Lord of the

universe! You are the greatest of mystics. Please protect me, for there is no one else who can save me from the clutches of death in this world of duality. O my Lord, You are all-powerful. A fiery iron arrow is coming towards me fast. My Lord, let it burn me personally, if You so desire, but please do not let it burn and abort my embryo. Please do me this favor, my Lord.

Suta Gosvami said: Having patiently heard her words, Lord Sri Krishna, who is always very affectionate to His devotees, could at once understand that Ashwatthama, the son of Dronacarya, had thrown the *brahmāstra* to finish the last life in the Pandava family. O foremost among the great thinkers [*munis*] [Saunaka], seeing the glaring *brahmāstra* proceeding towards them, the Pandavas took up their five respective weapons. The almighty Personality of Godhead, Sri Krishna, having observed that a great danger was befalling His unalloyed devotees, who were fully surrendered souls, at once took up His Sudarshana disc to protect them. The Lord of supreme mysticism, Sri Krishna, resides within everyone's heart as the *Paramātmā*. As such, just to protect the progeny of the Kuru dynasty, He covered the embryo of Uttara by His personal energy.

Although the supreme *brahmāstra* weapon released by Ashwatthama was irresistible and without check or counteraction, it was neutralized and foiled when confronted by the strength of Vishnu [Lord Krishna]. The Lord, seeing the danger to the Pandavas who were dedicated only to him, protected them with his own weapon - the Sudarshana. The *brahmāstra* cannot be counteracted by any weapon except another *brahmāstra*. Arjuna had counteracted one *brahmāstra* with one of his previously. Now Ashwatthama had released five separate *brahmāstras* for each of the Pandavas. This was difficult to counteract because it would take time to release five *brahmāstras*. Considering the unavoidable danger, though the Lord had renounced all weapons, he protected his devotees, even if He had to break His own promise, in order to preserve His unique quality of having affection for His devotees.

As the *Paramātmā* Krishna was situated within Uttara already, but by the power of his yoga he entered as Krishna and covered the embryo. "Covered" means he protected it, for continuation of the Kuru family. He used his yoga-maya potency so that even Uttara was unaware of what he did. Though the *brahmāstra* is effective and cannot be prevented from acting, on meeting the weapon of Vishnu, it became completely ineffective. You should



not consider this so surprising for Krishna who is full of all wonderful powers. He creates, maintains and destroys this universe by His power of *Māyā-devī*. The devotee Kunti, along with Draupadi and her sons who were saved from the fire radiation of the *brahmāstra*, then spoke to Krishna as He was about to depart for Dwaraka.

Understanding everything that Krishna had done recently, Kunti was unable to tolerate the agitation caused by the great respect that arose in her heart. Thus she began praising Krishna. I offer my respects to you, the Supreme Person, the original one, the controller, beyond the control of *prakṛti*, unseen by material senses, and existing inside and outside of all living beings.

“But I am your nephew. Why are you offering respects?”

“But you are the Supreme Lord.”

“Of course I am a man. There is no doubt about that!”

“You are the first one.”

“Well, all bodies come and go. All souls are original.”

“But You are supreme.”

“Oh, in *Svarga*, Indra and the moon god, and on earth the kings are controllers.”

“But You are superior to *prakṛti*.”

“Am I the *puruṣa* within, *Paramātmā*?”

“No, you are imperceptible. The *Paramātmā* is subject to revelation by use of intelligence and other means.”

“Am I the imperceptible brahman?”

“No, You are situated internally and externally. Since internally, You protected the child in the womb of Uttara and externally You protect us by being near us. You are covered by the curtain of *maya*.”

“Then *maya* covers me?”

“It is like the fool who thinks that the sun is covered by a cloud. I see You as covered because my vision is covered by *maya*, because You are beyond sense knowledge. Sense knowledge is situated below You. I do not have the power to contact You, since

my knowledge arises from my senses, like the knowledge of a fool. But even if despicable people like me do not know You, there is no loss for You. You remain unaffected by this".

"But you see Me directly and praise Me. You know that I am beyond *prakṛti*. Then why do you criticize yourself as being ignorant?" "Though the dancer is endowed with rhythms and dance steps suitable to the rasa, the ignorant spectator, ignorant of the scriptures delineating performance, sees only a dancer dancing. Though he sees, he does not really see. Similarly though I see You, I really do not see You. Though You protect the Pandavas, Your devotees, since You are the soul within all of us constantly, You personally counteracted a weapon of Ashwatthama meant for killing the Pandavas. Though You promised not to use weapons, You took up a weapon. Though You protect the righteous, You had Bhishma and other righteous persons destroyed. Though You are most affectionate to Draupadi and Subhadra, You let their sons be killed. I do not know the truth about Your pastimes."

—Compiled from the writings of Śrīla Prabhupada and Śārāthā-darśinī commentary on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam by Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura. Translated by H.H. Bhamu Swami & H.H. Mahamidhi Swami ॐ.

THE PRAYER FOR CALAMITIES

Satyamarayan Das

Nobody likes to be put into trouble. At least I do not know anyone who would relish being faced with misery. After the trouble is over, we may see that problematic event as an occasion for learning, though while undergoing the experience, we wish it would end as quickly as possible. Even in the midst of an unpleasant experience, we may maintain a philosophical outlook. Hardships make us strong and wise, failures are stepping-stones to success, and so on. But the fact remains that we are relieved when the hardship is over. Keeping this in view, we would not expect anyone to ask for trouble in a normal state of mind. If someone is praying for misery we would think him or her to be insane. However, there is an example in history of a perfectly sane person asking for trouble. In her prayers to Lord Krishna, Queen Kunti very explicitly wanted calamities without any break. She prayed: "O teacher of the universe (Krishna), let calamities befall on

nityam bhāgavata-sevayā

us forever." Usually people pray for health, wealth, and prosperity, which is understandable. But how to comprehend the prayer for calamities and that too for unending calamities.

What must she have in her mind? She thinks that calamities are her prosperity. Kunti Devi reveals her intention behind such a prayer. She says that whenever she has faced hardships, Krishna came to help her. Therefore she equates calamity with the visit of Krishna. And if she can see Krishna, she is most prosperous. There is no other prosperity that she would like to possess. She has experienced that in good times, Krishna does not come to visit her. And that is real misery for her. Her concept of happiness and distress is different from the concept of an ordinary person. Normally we call a situation that is favourable to our senses "happiness", and a situation that is unfavourable to our senses "misery" or "distress". But a devotee's concept is different. A devotee is happy when he or she can do favourable service to the Lord, and he or she is miserable when he or she cannot do favourable service to the Lord. He or she is not concerned about his or her personal happiness independent of the Lord's pleasure.

Whenever Kunti or the Pandavas, her sons, faced difficulties, the Lord came to their rescue. This granted them an opportunity to be with the Lord and serve Him. They relished being with the Lord and the so-called miserable condition turned into bliss. What is abhorred by people in general became a festival for Kunti. It is seen that people usually remember God when they are in difficulty. Then they visit a temple, church or mosque. But when they are in a happy situation, they forget God. They go for a picnic. For a devotee, remembrance of God is the most important principle in life. His happiness is based on the remembrance of God, which is the essence of all scriptures. If that remembrance comes when faced with a calamity, then a devotee prefers calamity to a happy situation. A devotee may seem miserable externally, but internally he is in bliss.

—An excerpt from the writings of Satyamarayan das. ॐ

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