

A Comparative Analysis of the Kāmsavadha Episode Across Various Purāṇic Texts

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Abstract

The Kāmsavadha episode, a crucial narrative in the Kṛṣṇāvatāra, varies significantly across different purāṇic texts. This paper attempts a comparative analysis of the episode as depicted in several significant Purāṇa-s, including the *Bhāgavatam*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Harivaṃśa*, *Brahma Purāṇa*, *Padma Purāṇa*, *Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa*, *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and *Garga Saṃhitā*. Though the last mentioned work is not a Purāṇa per se, it has been included in this study because of its Purāṇic narrative style. By examining the space allocated to key events and the thematic differences in dealing with the Kāmsavadha episode across these texts, this study reveals the diverse narrative strategies and interpretative traditions within the broader Kṛṣṇāvatāra corpus.

Keywords: *Bhāgavatam*, *Viṣṇu Purāṇa*, *Harivaṃśa*, *Brahma Purāṇa*, *Padma Purāṇa*, *Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa*, *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *Garga Saṃhitā*, *Kāmsa*, *Kāmsavadha*, *Krishna*, *Kubjā*, *Narrative*, *Retelling*, *Poetic Borrowing*, *Embellishing*, *Interpreting*, *Re-fashioning*.

Introduction

The Kāmsavadha episode, a pivotal narrative from the tenth skandha of the Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa, has inspired a rich collection of literary interpretations across centuries. This paper explores the diverse retellings of the Kāmsavadha story in eight Purāṇa-s, each contributing unique perspectives possibly inspired by diverse cultural, regional, and emotional impulses. These works include: Bhāgavatam (B), Viṣṇu Purāṇa (VP), Harivaṃśa (H), Brahma Purāṇa (BP), Padma Purāṇa (PP), Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa (BVP), Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa (DBP), and Garga Saṃhitā (GS).

In these narratives, the central plot revolves around Kaṁsa's apprehension of a prophecy that foretells his death at the hands of his nephews, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Kaṁsa's devoted minister, Akrūra, is tasked with bringing the brothers to Mathurā under the pretence of attending a bow festival (dhanur-yāga). The journey, marked by divine encounters and miraculous visions, unfolds over various episodes, including interactions with the Gopī-s of Gokula, inhabitants of Mathurā, the confrontation with wrestlers in the wrestling arena and the eventual subduing of Kaṁsa. Each work employs distinct narrative elements, explores diverse emotional strategies, and offers myriad devotional perspectives, enriching the overall understanding of this timeless story.

The episode of Kaṁsavadha has been a matter of great interest for poets since the earliest known times. It is known to have been explored by Pāṇini¹ more than two millennia² ago. Patañjali (2nd century BCE)³ in his Mahābhāṣya (3.1.26) discusses the dramatic representation of the slaying of Kaṁsa, with one party painting their faces red and the other black⁴. This theme has piqued the curiosity of many poets, so much so that a battery of them has explored it up to this day⁵.

The story-line from Bhāgavatam⁶ (B)

The narrative from B unfolds over three days in 217 verses from chapters 39 to 44 of the 10th skandha of the total 12 skandha-s of Bhāgavatam. The demon king Kaṁsa, living in Mathurā, asks his faithful minister and elder relative Akrūra to fetch his (Kaṁsa's) nephew-brothers Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma who live in Gokula, in the the name of dhanur-yāga (the bow-festival), either convincingly or by deceit, who have been prophesied to kill Kaṁsa. Kaṁsa, now worried, wishes to make the move before they do and finish them off instead.

Akrūra, a pure hearted soul and a devotee jumps at the opportunity to fulfil his own great fortune of having an audience with Śrī Kṛṣṇa (whom he knows to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu) & Balarāma and begins his journey towards Gokula thanking his good fortune.

Akrūra reaches Gokula and receives the respect, love and affection of the cowherd chief Nandagopa (father of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma), his sons and other cowherd men. After a while, post his ablutions and sumptuous meal that he was fed on, he relates the reason for his arrival and details both the

apparent and real intention of Kaṁsa towards Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Though pained at first, Nandagopa orders all cowherd men to pack and start for Mathurā along with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accepting the invitation of king Kaṁsa for the dhanur-yāga.

Hearing the news of Kṛṣṇa's departure by the chariot, the Gopī-s of Gokula lamented uncontrolled following the chariot until the distance they could, notwithstanding separation from Kṛṣṇa. They were vying for Kṛṣṇa's love alongside the damsels of the city of Mathurā and labelled Akrūra as an ill omen in their lives.

Akrūra the charioteer, after finishing his morning sandhyāvandanam, with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma as the driven, whirred the chariot towards Mathurā. Akrūra stopped at noon and got down to perform his mādhyāhnikā-anuṣṭhāna, leaving Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma seated behind in the chariot and plunges into the Yamunā waters. Lo and behold, he sees Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma inside the water too. Astonished, he emerges out of the water to find Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma sitting as he left them in the chariot. He takes a plunge again and this time sees Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu and Balarāma as Ādiśeṣa who were surrounded by sages and gods. Horripilating due to such a divine vision, Akrūra sings praises on his vision of Lord Nārāyaṇa and feels his life's goal has been met. He then emerges out of the water still in divine astonishment and comes to the chariot where Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are seated. Kṛṣṇa playfully asks what makes him emerge from the river with wonderment as if he saw something miraculous. Akrūra then eulogises Kṛṣṇa.

Then they resume their journey towards Mathurā. They reach in the evening. People of Mathurā are delighted to behold the two new resplendent visitors. Meanwhile all those who had started along with Nandagopa had already reached a garden near the city and were awaiting Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's arrival. Alighting the chariot, Kṛṣṇa suggests Akrūra that he may enter the city and go home while himself and all the cowherds will spend time in the garden and then visit the city after taking some rest. Akrūra invites the brothers to visit his abode and sanctify it by their presence. Kṛṣṇa assures that they would visit once Kaṁsa is slain. Akrūra takes their leave.

The next afternoon, both Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter the grand Mathurā to have a look at the city. People of the city looked ecstatic by the two young lads walking the streets. The women of the city stood stupefied wherever

they were, either on their mansions or on streets, enraptured at the sight of Kṛṣṇa.

On the way, the brothers asked a washerman, who was carrying a load of beautiful and colourful clothes, if they could have some to wear, promising him a suitable reward. The washerman happened to be in the service of Kāṁsa. Arrogantly and mockingly, he dismissed the idea of even being asked such a question, asserting that they were just cowherds who didn't deserve the fine clothes meant for the best of men. Provoked by the taunt, Kṛṣṇa severed the head of the washerman and took a set of clothes for himself and Balarāma. The other cowherds also chose clothes to their liking and wore them.

A weaver then adorns the brothers Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma with beautiful patterns and colourful clothes, receiving blessings from Kṛṣṇa.

They then proceed to a florist named Sudāma, who respectfully adorns both of them with the choicest flowers. In return, Sudāma is rewarded with unwavering devotion (bhakti) towards Kṛṣṇa, a boon he had requested.

They see a hunchbacked woman called Trivakrā who was carrying scent-potions for Kāṁsa's use. Approaching her, Kṛṣṇa asks her for some scent to wear on his person and Balarāma's, which, she with all happiness gives them. Kṛṣṇa rewards her by straightening her body from the three deformations she had who now stands up as a charming and beautiful damsel. Smitten by the touch of Kṛṣṇa and kindled with love, pulling his upper garment towards herself asks Kṛṣṇa to come to her home. Kṛṣṇa, laughingly glancing once at Balarāma, tells her that he would visit her after finishing the chore that he has come for after which Trivakrā takes his leave carrying the honey like words of Kṛṣṇa in her heart.

Inquiring about the location where the dhanur-yāga was scheduled to take place, Kṛṣṇa enters the yāga-maṅṭapa where the bow is placed and lifts it against the wishes of the attendants. After stringing it, the twang created by Kṛṣṇa sent tremors even up to Kāṁsa's ears. He then bends the bow by pulling the string, causing it to break into two pieces. The guardians or watchmen of the bow confront the brothers for such an act, and the brothers quickly overpower and finish them off. After spending some more time strolling around the city at will, they returned to their encampment at sunset, enjoyed a delicious meal, and spent the night happily.

King Kaṁsa finds no sleep and observes evil omens around him. Even when he falls asleep, he experiences ominous dreams foretelling his impending death.

The wrestling arena was all set for the bout. Kaṁsa's renowned wrestlers—Cāṇūra, Mūṣṭika, Kūṭa, Śāla, and Tośāla—entered the arena. Nandagopa and the cowherds, specially invited and seated by Kaṁsa, took their places. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma arrived at the arena's entrance, where they encountered an elephant named Kuvalayāpīḍa, provoked by its mahout. Kṛṣṇa, angered, asked the mahout to let them pass or face consequences. Enraged, the mahout directed the elephant towards them.

Kṛṣṇa skillfully evaded, tired, and confused the elephant before finally seizing its trunk, bringing it to the ground, and killing it. Stepping on the defeated elephant, he extracted its tusks. Holding one tusk each, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entered the arena. Kaṁsa was terrified to learn that Kuvalāpīḍa had been defeated by these young warriors. The audience began discussing among themselves the beauty and valour of the brothers.

After a brief exchange of words, the two brothers locked hands: Kṛṣṇa with Cāṇūra and Balarāma with Muṣṭika. The women in the assembly spoke among themselves, questioning the apparent imbalance in the match, as young lads were pitted against the trained, mountain-like wrestlers of Mathurā. Both brothers engaged with their respective opponents according to the rules of malla-yuddha for quite a while, keeping the audience captivated.

Then, Kṛṣṇa lifted Cāṇūra into the sky, swirling him around, and then dashed him to the ground, causing Cāṇūra's life to depart. Similarly, Balarāma struck Muṣṭika with his mighty palm, causing Muṣṭika to die while spitting blood. Kūṭa, another wrestler who entered the arena, was slain by the left fist of Balarāma. Two other wrestlers, Śāla and Tośāla, met their end at the hands of Kṛṣṇa—Śāla by having his head knocked off and Tośāla by having his body split into two halves. All the people present rejoiced at the victory and celebration of the lads, except for Kaṁsa.

Angry at the recent events and what was unfolding, Kaṁsa issued an order to drive out the 'ill-behaved' brothers, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. He commanded the seizure of the wealth of the cowherds, the imprisonment of Nandagopa, and the execution of the vile Vasudeva. Additionally, he ordered the killing of his own father, Ugrasena, who had sided with the enemy. Upon hearing this, an enraged Kṛṣṇa leaped and landed on the elevated dais where Kaṁsa was seated. Before Kaṁsa could fully rise and

draw his sword and shield, Kṛṣṇa seized him by the hair, threw him to the arena floor, and jumped upon him with such force that Kāmsa's life ended.

Burning with rage over Kāmsa's death, the eight brothers of Kāmsa advanced to kill the victorious brothers. Balarāma swiftly made short work of them with a bludgeon.

A broad classification of episodes has been made of the instances for ease of discussion with approximate number of verses in the Bhāgavatam for each of these instances as follows:

Day 1 -

1. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's travel begins to Mathurā from Gokula with Akrūra as the charioteer (1 verse)
2. Gopī-s lamenting the departure of Kṛṣṇa (4 verses)
3. Stop at Yamunā and Akrūra's Vision (55 verses)
4. Landing at the outskirts of Mathurā (12 verses)

Day 2 -

5. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entry into the city of Mathurā (13 verses)
6. The haughty Washerman (8 verses)
7. The Florist (10 verses)
8. Trivakrā, the scent maker (also known as Kubjā) (13 verses)
9. Dhanuryāga-maṅṭapa & Dhanur-bhaṅga (8 verses)

Day 3 -

10. Kuvalayāpīḍa, the tusker at rut (15 verses)
11. The wrestlers Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika (40 verses)
12. Kāmsa's injunction (3 verses)
13. Killing of Kāmsa (8 verses)
14. Kāmsa's brothers (1 verse)

The following works are compared against these and analysed.

Viṣṇu Purāṇa⁷ (VP)

The VP comprises of six aṁśa-s of which the current narrative is from the 18th to 20th adhyāya of the fifth aṁśa in 166 verses, offering intricate details in many episodes, spanning 2 days.

On the first day, the brothers, along with Nandagopa and the cowherds, prepare for the journey. During this time, the Gopī-s, grief-stricken, leave for Mathurā. The lamentation of the Gopī-s due to Kṛṣṇa's departure is captured in 19 verses, wherein they express their sorrow and even criticise the city women of Mathurā due to their unbearable separation from Kṛṣṇa.

The party halts at Yamunā, where Akrūra plunges into the water for his mādhyāhnikā and has a divine vision, recorded in 34 verses. He hails Lord Nārāyaṇa, whose vision Akrūra witnessed inside the water, recognizing Him as Brahma, Viṣṇu, Śiva, and seven other gods:

प्रसीद सर्वं सर्वात्मन् क्षराक्षरमयेश्वर ।
ब्रह्मविष्णुशिवाद्याभिः कल्पनाभिरुदीरितः ॥

5.18.51

Akrūra concludes by eulogising Kṛṣṇa as Vāsudeva, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna and Aniruddha:

ॐ नमो वासुदेवाय नमस्संकर्षणाय च ।
प्रद्युम्नाय नमस्तुभ्यमनिरुद्धाय ते नमः ॥

5.18.58

The group reaches Mathurā in the evening. Akrūra advises the brothers to enter the city by foot while he leaves in the chariot. He cautions them against going to Vasudeva's house, anticipating trouble from Kaṁsa, who is angered by Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter the city of Mathurā, described in 2 verses. The encounter with the washerman is detailed in four verses, followed by the visit to the florist's house, narrated in 11 verses.

The chance meeting with Trivakrā, the Kubjā, is described in 13 verses. Kṛṣṇa differentiates between perfumes made for King Kaṁsa and those for commoners like himself, ensuring the appropriate perfume for himself and Balarāma. Trivakrā bashfully invites Kṛṣṇa to her house, making Kṛṣṇa smile and glance at Balarāma.

Kṛṣṇa then inquires about the location of Yajñasālā and the bow. The episode where Kṛṣṇa breaks the bow into two while stringing it is described in 4 verses.

Learning of these events, Kaṁsa instructs Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika, and with deep concern, he goes to sleep anticipating the next day's events.

The narrative, however, does not explicitly mention where Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma camped, nor does it provide details about their sleeping arrangements for the night.

The second day begins with the description of the design and placement of the boxing ring in the quadrangle, accompanied by the playing of musical instruments to encourage the wrestlers.

The fight against Kuvalayāpīḍa is described in 9 verses, wherein Kṛṣṇa kills the elephant. Interestingly, even after its demise, in a fit of rage, Balarāma also jumps and lands a blow with his left hand on the head of the elephant:

ततस्तूत्प्लुत्य वेगेन रौहिणेयो महाबलः ।
जघान वामपादेन मस्तके हस्तिनं रुषा ॥

5.20.40

People present at the boxing arena are described in 6 verses. Devakī and Vasudeva become emotional with the entry of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Women from the antahpura and the city engage in conversations about the entering brothers in nearly 10 verses.

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter the ring, described in 16 verses, where Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika are slain. Kaṁsa stops the playing of drums, but the devatas in the sky continue their musical celebration:

बलक्षयं विवृद्धिं च दृष्ट्वा चाणूरकृष्णयोः ।
वारयामास तूर्योणि कंसः कोपपरायणः ॥

5.20.71

मृदङ्गादिषु तूर्येषु प्रतिषिद्धेषु तत्क्षणात् ।
खे सङ्गतान्यवाद्यन्त देवतूर्याण्यनेकशः ॥

5.20.72

Kṛṣṇa then defeats another wrestler called Tośala, who enters in fury. The Gopa-s merrily rejoice in the victory of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, a celebration the brothers join with equal enthusiasm.

ववल्गतुस्ततो रंगे कृष्णसङ्कर्षणावुभौ ।
समानवयसो गोपान्बलादाकृष्य हर्षितौ ॥

5.20.81

Kamsa issues an injunction to kill the brothers, Vasudeva, the cowherds who were dancing, iron-chain the Nandagopa, punish the elder-enemies, and plunder all the belongings of the cowherds. This is described in 4 verses.

Finally, Kṛṣṇa finishes Kamsa, depicted in 5 verses. Kamsa's brother Sumālī who attacks them is killed by Balarāma:

कंसे गृहीते कृष्णेन तद्भ्राताऽभ्यागतो रुषा ।
सुमाली बलभद्रेण लीलयैव निपातितः ॥

5.20.90

Brahma Purāṇa⁸ (BP)

The BP is made up of 138 chapters. Our current narrative is from the 84th and the 85th chapters, which unfolds over two days in 153 verses.

On the first day, Akrūra, along with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, leaves Gokula for Mathurā.

Upon reaching the Yamunā, Akrūra bathes and performs Ācamanam:

तथेत्युक्ते ततः स्नातः स्वाचान्तः स महामतिः ।
दध्यौ ब्रह्म परं विप्राः प्रविश्य यमुनाजले ॥

84.35

He then experiences a divine vision in 26 verses, including 11 verses of his stuti. He sees Balarāma surrounded by serpents with a thousand hoods, eulogised by them. In Balarāma's lap, Akrūra perceives Kṛṣṇa, who appears as a cloud adorned with Indra's rainbow and lightning. Divine beings, including sages and gandharvas, mediate and praise Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma.

Arriving in Mathurā in the evening, Akrūra advises Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to proceed on foot while he continues by chariot. He also warns them against visiting Vasudeva's house.

On the second day, the encounter with the haughty washerman is described in 4 verses. When Kṛṣṇa requests clothes for the Gopa-s, the washerman insults them, questioning their civility and ancestry. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, along with the Gopa-s, take clothes left behind by the fleeing assistants of the washerman. Passers-by also take garments.

The interaction with the florist, Sudāma, is detailed in 12 verses. The florist dresses Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma and is blessed with a form similar to Kṛṣṇa's and enriched with strength and prosperity by Balarāma.

Kubjā, also known as Trivakrā, is featured in 12 verses. She offers sandal paste to Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Kṛṣṇa laughs at Balarāma's reaction when Kubjā invites them to her home, differing from other texts where Balarāma laughs at Kṛṣṇa's response:

आयास्ये भवतीगेहमिति तां प्राह केशवः।
विससर्ज जहासोच्चै रामस्यालोक्य चाननम् ॥

85.12

The Dhanuryāga-maṅṭapa and Dhanur-bhaṅga episode is summarised in 3 verses. After breaking the bow, Kāmsa instructs Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika to kill Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma by any means necessary.

Kāmsa then commands the mahout to intoxicate the tusker, Kuvalayāpīḍa, and direct it against the brothers. The wrestling arena is described in 7 verses, including the sorrow of Devakī and her longing to see her sons, which causes her breasts to exude milk due to affection.

In the wrestling arena, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma carry the tusks of Kuvalayāpīḍa. People discuss Kṛṣṇa's pastimes and Balarāma in 11 verses, and a woman criticizes the unfairness of pitting Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma against giants like Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika in 9 verses.

The wrestling match is detailed in 18 verses. Kṛṣṇa uses various techniques, including Sannipāta-s, Avadhūta-s, Kṣepaṇa-s, Muṣṭi-s, and Kīlavajranipātana, to defeat Cāṇūra:

संनिपातावधूतैश्च चाणूरेण समं हरिः ।
क्षेपणैर्मुष्टिभिश्चैव कीलावज्रनिपातनैः ॥

85.55

Cāṇūra is whirled and dashed to death. Tośalaka, another wrestler, is killed by a single blow from Kṛṣṇa. The remaining wrestlers flee in terror, and Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, in a celebratory mood, drag their age-mates onto the stage.

Kaṁsa's injunctions are conveyed in 3 verses. Kṛṣṇa, with immense force, kills Kaṁsa, whose body is dragged across the stage, showing the disfiguring impact of Kṛṣṇa's might.

Sunāma, Kaṁsa's brother, described in 1 verse, angrily approaches Kṛṣṇa after Kṛṣṇa is playfully thrown to the ground by Balarāma.

Padma Purāṇa⁹ (PP)

The PP is made up of seven khaṇḍa-s. The current narrative is from the 245th adhyāya of the 6th khaṇḍa in 93 verses.

The events unfold over two days. On the first day, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accompanied by Akrūra, depart from Gokula. The Gopī-s, heartbroken over Kṛṣṇa's departure, follow the chariot carrying curd, ghee, and fruits, but Kṛṣṇa sends them back with reassurance of his return. Their lamentation is recounted in 1.5 verses.

The group reaches the Yamunā, where Akrūra performs a ritual bath and Ācamanam. He then experiences a vision in which Kṛṣṇa appears as Viṣṇu on the milky ocean with Lakṣmī:

पुनरप्यत्र निर्मज्ज्य जपन्मंत्रद्वयं हरिम्।
सुधाब्धौ शेषपर्यंके रमया सहितं हरिम्॥

6.245.303

This vision, including 11 verses of stuti, reveals Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma surrounded by sages and celestial beings. After emerging from the water, Akrūra continues his praise of Kṛṣṇa in another 6 verses. He returns to the chariot, only to dive back into the water upon seeing Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma still present.

Arriving at the city gate of Mathurā, Akrūra informs Kaṁsa of their arrival. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter Mathurā in the evening, holding hands, and begin their exploration of the city.

Their first encounter is with the haughty washerman, described in 5 verses. The washerman, who is busy dyeing garments while wearing

divine attire, insults Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. This leads to a confrontation where Kṛṣṇa subdues the washerman, all take the garments they desire, and passers-by also take the beautiful clothes left behind.

Next, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma meet the florist in 2 verses and then Trivakrā (Kubjā), the scent maker, in 3 verses.

The Dhanuryāga-maṅṭapa and Dhanur-bhaṅga segment is described in 2 verses. Kāṁsa stations intoxicated elephants and powerful wrestlers at all gates of the city and prepares for battle.

On the second day, the encounter with Kuvalayāpīḍa, the tusker at rut, is detailed in 4 verses. Kuvalayāpīḍa, stationed at the entrance to Kāṁsa's palace, is defeated by Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, who extract the tusks and Kṛṣṇa kills some fleeing wrestlers.

The wrestling arena, described in 7 verses, is prepared for the match. Kāṁsa promises half of his kingdom to Cāṇūra if he defeats Kṛṣṇa:

अस्मिन्नवसरे मल्ल जहि गोपालबालकौ।
विभज्य तव राज्याद्धमहं दास्याम्ययत्नतः॥

6.245.362

Vasudeva, Akrūra, and Nanda watch from a higher palace, while spectators view from various buildings. The devatās and Maruts encourage Kṛṣṇa to defeat Kāṁsa, implying divine support:

तुष्टुवुर्जयशब्देन पुंडरीकाक्षमच्युतम्।
जहि कंसमिति प्राहुरुच्चैर्देवा मरुद्गणाः॥

6.245.369

The wrestling match is detailed in 18 verses. Kṛṣṇa displays his strength, defeating Cāṇūra and other wrestlers. Cāṇūra is whirled in the air and dashed to the ground, resulting in his death. Kṛṣṇa kills Tośalaka with a single blow, and the remaining wrestlers flee in terror. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma then celebrate by dragging Gopa boys onto the stage.

The killing of Kāṁsa is recounted in 5 verses. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma ascend Kāṁsa's high palatial seat, where Kṛṣṇa kicks Kāṁsa, causing him to fall from the top of the palace and die on the ground:

अपातयद्भरा पृष्ठे प्रासादशिखराद्धरिः।
 स तु निर्भिन्नसर्वाङ्गो धरण्यां त्यक्तजीवितः॥
 6.245.379

Finally, Kaṁsa's brother Sunāma attacks Kṛṣṇa but is killed by Balarāma with a single blow, as described in 1 verse.

Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇam¹⁰ (BVP)

The BVP is composed of four khaṇḍa-s. The current narrative is from the 72nd adhyāya of the 4th khaṇḍa in 94 verses.

The events unfold over two days. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, along with Akrūra and their attendants, set out from Gokula to Mathurā. Their chariot, which descends from the sky, is a divine creation by Viśvakarma, highlighting the celestial nature of their journey:

आकाशात्पतितं दिव्यं मन्त्रप्रस्थापितं रथम्।
 विचित्रवस्त्रसंयुक्तं ददर्श पुरतो हरिः॥
 4.71.86

खचितं मणिराजेन रचितं विश्वकर्मणा।
 तं दृष्ट्वा मातृभवनमाजगाम जगत्पतिः॥
 4.71.87

Upon their arrival in Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter the city. Their first encounter in the city is with the haughty washerman, described in 10 verses. The washerman, disrespectful and dismissive, is killed by Kṛṣṇa. Following his death, the washerman ascends to Goloka and becomes an attendant of Kṛṣṇa, eagerly awaiting his return.

The next encounter is with the weaver, Kuvinda, detailed in 2 verses. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma then meet the florist, who is described in 3 verses. The most significant encounter on this day is with Trivakrā, also known as Kubjā, in a detailed account spanning 22 verses. Kubjā is portrayed as an elderly woman using a staff for support, carrying kasturi and saffron. She offers her devotion to Kṛṣṇa, applies sandal paste on him and his companions, and circumambulates him while offering salutations. Later, after spending the night in the weaver's house and consuming sweets, Kṛṣṇa visits Kubjā's house again. Kṛṣṇa reveals to Kubjā that she was

Śūrpaṅakhāā, Ravana's sister, in her previous birth and had performed tapas in Kṛṣṇa's previous incarnation as Rāma:

त्यज निद्रां महाभागे शृङ्गारं देहि सुन्दरि।
पुरा शूर्पणखा त्वं च भगिनीं रावणस्य च॥
4.72.56

रामजन्मनि मद्धेतोस्त्वया कान्ते तपः कृतम्।
तपःप्रभावान्मां कान्तं भज श्रीकृष्णजन्मनि॥
4.72.57

After this revelation and their union, Kubjā ascends to Goloka, where she is reborn as Chandramukhī:

सा बभूव च तत्रैव गोपी चन्द्रमुखी मुने।
गोप्यः कतिविधास्तस्या बभूवुः परिचारिकाः॥
4.72.68

Returning to the palace where Nanda is staying, Kṛṣṇa enjoys his time while Kaṁsa, who is disturbed by nightmares described in 11 verses, prepares for the wrestling match. The preparations for the match, including setting up the stage, wrestlers, and an elephant, are described in 2 verses. Kaṁsa, holding an astonishing sword, takes his seat on the stage surrounded by strong warriors and various dignitaries. The bow broken at the Dhanur-śālā by Kṛṣṇa is said to be given by Shiva.

The encounter with Kuvalayāpīḍa, the tusker, is briefly mentioned in 1 verse, though the tusker's name is not specified. The wrestlers Cāṅūra and Muṣṭika, although their names are not explicitly mentioned, are included in the wrestling arena described in 1/4 verse. People view Kṛṣṇa differently according to their inclinations in 3 verses.

The final confrontation occurs when Kṛṣṇa, after bowing to sages, Brahmins, his parents, and his teacher, drags Kaṁsa from the stage and kills him. This event is described in 1.5 verses. At the moment of Kaṁsa's death, the entire universe appears as Kṛṣṇa to him. A gem-studded plane arrives to take Kaṁsa to Goloka, where he assumes a divine form and merges his lustre with Kṛṣṇa:

राजा ददर्श विश्वं च सर्वं कृष्णमयं परम्।
पुरतो रत्नयानं च हीरकाहारभूषितम्॥

4.72.93

ययौ विष्णुपदं स्फीतो दिव्यरूपं विधाय च।
तेजो विवेश परमं कृष्णपादाम्बुजे मुने॥

4.72.94

Kaṁsa's brother Sunāma, who comes towards Kṛṣṇa in fury, is killed by Balarāma with a single fist, as mentioned in 1 verse.

Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa¹¹ (DB)

The DB consists of twelve cantos, and the current narrative is from the 4th canto and the 24th adhyāya. This section is summarised in three verses:

Akrūra, along with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, departs from Gokula for Mathurā. The text does not mention the Gopī-s lamenting Kṛṣṇa's departure, their stop at the Yamunā, or Akrūra's vision. There are no details about the landing at the outskirts of Mathurā or the brothers' entry into the city.

The haughty washerman is briefly mentioned, but interactions with the florist and the scent maker Kubjā (Trivakrā) are not detailed. The description of the Dhanuryāga-manṭapa and the breaking of the bow are also not included.

The text notes Kuvalayāpīḍa, the tusker, though it does not provide its name. The wrestlers Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika are mentioned, and the killing of Kaṁsa by Kṛṣṇa, who drags him by his hair, is described. Additionally, Kaṁsa's brothers, Śala and Tośala, are briefly mentioned in a quarter-verse.

Harivaṁśa¹² (H)

The Harivaṁśa (H), a three-part work attributed to Vyāsa, is considered the extant portion of the Mahābhārata. The current narrative is from the second portion, the Viṣṇu-parva, covering chapters 22 to 30 in 317 verses.

The story spans two days. On Day 1, Nandagopa and the cowherds set out for Mathurā without the episode of the lamenting Gopī-s. They stop at the Yamunā, where Akrūra's vision is described in 18 verses. Akrūra informs

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma that he will perform rituals to honor Ananta and asks them to stay in the chariot. Kṛṣṇa agrees, and Akrūra witnesses Ananta in rasātala and nāgaloka, where Ananta, with a svasti mark on his forehead and a white throne formed by his coiled tail, is worshipped by various serpents. Kṛṣṇa, clad in yellow, is seen sitting on Ananta, who resembles his elder brother. Overwhelmed by Kṛṣṇa's brilliance, Akrūra is unable to speak and later returns to the chariot to find Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma still there. After a second dip, he sees Kṛṣṇa on a thousand-hooded serpent, worshipped by everyone. Akrūra then returns to the chariot.

Akrūra takes Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to his house rather than the outskirts of Mathurā, advising against visiting Vasudeva's house. Kṛṣṇa responds that they will explore Mathurā and visit Kāṁsa's palace discreetly.

The haughty washerman episode is covered in 8 verses. The washerman's wives, frightened, go to Kāṁsa's palace after their husband's death to inform about Kṛṣṇa's deed and to find refuge. The florist episode spans 7 verses. The florist, Guṇaka, an expert in garland-making, suspects Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to be Yakṣas and remains mute, giving no verbal response to Kṛṣṇa's boon:

यक्षाविमाविति तदा स मेने माल्यजीवकः।
स भृशं भयसंविग्नो नोत्तरं प्रत्यपद्यत॥
(2.27.24)

Kṛṣṇa blesses him, making Guṇaka wealthy. The Kubja episode is described in 15 verses. Kubja offers perfume, and Kṛṣṇa straightens her hunchback. Smitten, Kubja asks to join Kṛṣṇa, but he and Balarāma laugh and leave.

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter Kāṁsa's palace and the armoury, observing a large bow. This episode is described in 12 verses. Kṛṣṇa breaks the bow into two halves and rejoins the cowherds. The stunned security guard rushes to Kāṁsa, recounting the event in 17 verses. Kāṁsa reflects on the event in 3 verses. The wrestling arena is detailed in 5 verses, followed by Kāṁsa's instructions to the workers in 6 verses. The arena manager invites Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika in 1 verse. Kāṁsa converses with them in 6 verses. Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika agree to wrestle and return home in 4 verses. Kāṁsa also instructs Mahāmātra, revealing his non-Ugrasena lineage in 1 verse:

न चाहमुग्रसेनेन जातः किल सुतार्थिना।
मानुषेणाल्पवीर्येण यथा मामाह नारदः॥
(2.28.38)

The mahout, surprised, asks about Kamsa's birth in 3 verses. Kamsa recounts his story in 71 verses, including the greatness of Narada (4 verses), and his real father Drumila (1 verse):

न चायमुग्रसेनः स पिता तव महाबलः।
द्रुमिलो नाम तेजस्वी सौभस्य पतिरूर्जितः॥
(2.28.54)

Drumila describing Kamsa's mother in 6 verses, and Kamsa's mother abandoning him is described in 1 verse:

यस्त्वया मम पुत्रो वै दत्तो वृत्तविनाशनः।
न मे बहुमतस्त्वेष शृणु चापि यदुच्यते॥
(2.28.107)

मातापितृभ्यां संत्यक्तः स्थापितः स्वेन तेजसा।
उभाभ्यामपि विद्विष्टो बान्धवैश्च विशेषतः॥
(2.28.116)

On Day 2, the episode of Kuvalayāpīḍa, the tusker at rut, begins. The arena is described in 1 verse, with eating and beverage stalls in 1 verse:

सौवर्णाः पानकुम्भाश्च पानभूम्यश्च शोभिताः।
फलावदंशपूर्णाश्च चार्यः पानयोजिताः॥
(2.29.11)

Kamsa instructs that Kuvalayāpīḍa stand at the entrance in 1 verse. Kamsa's appearance is noted in 2 verses, and the wrestlers make a dramatic entry in 1 verse. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma head to the arena, described in 1 verse, but are blocked by Kuvalayāpīḍa. Kṛṣṇa censures Kamsa's evil plan in 1 verse, and a fierce fight ensues in 13 verses. Unable to kill Kṛṣṇa, Kuvalayāpīḍa, bewildered and irritated, hits itself:

सोऽतिकायस्तु सम्मूढो हन्तुं कृष्णमशक्नुवन्।
गजः स्वेष्वेव गात्रेषु मथ्यमानो ररास ह॥
(2.29.31)

Kṛṣṇa extracts one tusk, pierces it, and oozes blood. Balarāma pulls it by the tail, and Kṛṣṇa kills the mahout with the tusk in 1 verse.

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma then enter the arena. Their behavior and Kāmsa's misery are described in 2 verses. Kṛṣṇa makes a dramatic entrance holding Kuvalayāpīḍa's tusk, threatening Kāmsa in 1 verse. Kāmsa directs who should fight whom in 2 verses and orders silence in 1 verse. The Yadavas discuss wrestling match rules in 6 verses, lamenting the unequal pairing. Kṛṣṇa reassures them and expresses his wish to fight despite the inequality, explaining the rules of wrestling and his actions in 8 verses. He emphasizes that wrestling should be without enmity and that Cāṇūra, who wrestles with enmity, should be killed in 1 verse. Cāṇūra is from Karuṣa-deśa:

करूषेषु प्रसूतोऽयं चाणूरो नाम नामतः।
बाहुयोधी शरीरेण कर्मभिश्चात्र चिन्त्यताम्॥
(2.30.24)

and has killed many wrestlers to showcase his prowess, bringing shame to the sport in 1 verse.

In 26 verses, the narrative continues. Kāmsa stops the music in 1 verse, and the Devas play music in the sky in 1 verse, wishing for Kṛṣṇa's victory. The Sapta-Rishis encourage Kṛṣṇa to kill Cāṇūra in 1 verse:

जयस्व कृष्ण चाणूरं दानवं मल्लरूपिणम्।
इति सप्तर्षयः सर्वे ऊचुश्चैव नभोगताः॥
(2.30.41)

Kṛṣṇa kills Cāṇūra in a gruesome fight in 5 verses, then takes on Tośalaka in 1 verse, and Muṣṭika is killed by Balarāma in 7 verses.

The angry Kāmsa's injunctions episode follows. Kāmsa's anger is described in 5 verses, followed by his injunctions in 5 verses. Kṛṣṇa's angry gaze at Kāmsa is depicted in 1 verse, and Devakī swoons, amplifying Kṛṣṇa's anger in 1 verse.

In 16 verses, Kṛṣṇa kills Kāṁsa. He leaps at Kāṁsa, landing as though from the sky in 4 verses:

सोऽपि कंसस्तथाऽऽयस्तः परीतः कालधर्मणा
आकाशादिव गोविन्दं मेने तत्रागतं प्रभुम्॥
(2.30.75)

With Kṛṣṇa's grip and Kāṁsa's uttarīya circling his neck, Kāṁsa's ornaments fall away, leading to his death. Balarāma then kills Kāṁsa's younger brother Sunāma, bringing the narrative to a close.

Garga Saṁhita¹³ (GS)

The GS composed across 8 sarga-s is attributed to Gargācārya. Our narrative spans from 4th to 8th adhyāya in the 5th sarga in 199 verses.

The Garga Saṁhita presents a detailed account spanning two days. On the first day, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accompanied by Akrūra, Nanda, and many Gopa-s, set out from Gokula to Mathurā. As they departed, the Gopī-s, anguished by the impending separation from Kṛṣṇa (in seven verses), lashed out at Akrūra's chariot, horses, and charioteer with sticks:

अक्रूरस्य रथं राजन्
निजघ्नुर्यष्टिभिर्भृशाम्।
अश्वान्स्तथा सारथिं च
भगवद्विरहातुराः॥
5.4.31

The horses bolted, causing Akrūra to fall and be hit by the Gopī-s:

अश्वान्स्तत्र समुत्पेतुस्
ताडितास्त इतस्ततः।
गोपीद्व्यङ्गुलिघातेन
सारथिः पतितो रथात्॥
5.4.32

Witnessing the turmoil, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma intervened to protect Akrūra and reassured the Gopī-s that He would return by sunset. The chariot was drawn by many, indicated by the word 'aśvāḥ', swift and handsome horses.

Upon reaching the Yamunā, Kṛṣṇa drank some of its sacred water. Akrūra then experienced a divine vision, described in 13 verses. This vision includes a stuti of four verses, in which Akrūra sees the Vṛndāvana forest, the Yamunā, Govardhana Hill, and Goloka, with Kṛṣṇa shining like countless suns and divinely dancing with Rādhā in a circle:

तस्योत्सङ्गे महालोकं
गोलोकं लोकवन्दितम्।
गोवर्धनाद्रिं यमुनां
वृन्दारण्यं मनोहरम् ॥

5.5.5

असङ्ख्यकोटिमार्तण्ड-
ज्योतिषं मण्डलं प्रभुम्।
परिपूर्णतमं साक्षाच्
छ्रीकृष्णं पुरुषोत्तमम् ॥

5.5.6

कोटिमन्मथलावण्यं
रासमण्डलमध्यगम्।
राधया सहितं देवं
तत्राक्रूरो ददर्श ह ॥

5.5.7

By evening, they arrived at a garden outside Mathurā. Kṛṣṇa instructed Akrūra to enter the city while they would follow later. Akrūra invited Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to his home after dealing with Kaṁsa. He entered the city, informed Kaṁsa of their arrival, and returned home.

On the second day, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entered Mathurā, where Nanda allowed them and the Gopa boys to explore the city, but warned them of Kaṁsa's danger. The entry into the city and the reactions of the people and women are detailed in 11 verses.

The encounter with the haughty washerman is described in 6 verses. Kṛṣṇa asked for clothes to please the Gopa-s. The washerman, insultingly questioning their civility and ancestry, humiliated them. The washerman gets killed and his assistants flee, leaving behind a treasury of garments.

Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, along with the Gopa-s and passers-by, took the clothes freely.

The weaver's episode, covered in 3 verses, depicts how Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma bestowed their forms and blessings upon him. The florist, Sudāma, is featured in 8 verses. Kṛṣṇa gave Sudāma a form similar to His, and Balarāma endowed him with strength and richness. They visit Sudāma's house.

Travelling along a different route, Kṛṣṇa met Trivakrā, also known as Kubjā, detailed in 13 verses. Kubjā, smitten with Kṛṣṇa, offered sandal paste. After applying the paste to Kṛṣṇa, she was transformed by Him. Her affection was so intense that she invited Kṛṣṇa to her home. The Gopa-s laughed at her devoted torment, and Kṛṣṇa promised to visit her after exploring the city.

On their way, Kṛṣṇa encountered a group of Vaiśya-ss who requested Him to remember them if He became king of Mathurā. They were hesitant to reveal the location of the great bow, fearing its destruction.

The Dhanuryāga-maṅṭapa and Dhanur-bhaṅga episode, described in 16 verses, details the enormous golden bow kept in Mathurā. The bow, requiring five thousand men to carry, was worshipped on every Caturdaśī in the yajna-mantapa. Given to Kāmsa by Parāśurāma:

यथैन्द्रं हेमचित्राध्यं
कोदण्डं सप्ततालकम्।
पुरुषैः पञ्चसाहस्रैर्
नेतुं योग्यं बृहद्भरम् ॥
5.6.27

अष्टधातुमयं क्लिष्टं
लक्षभारसमं परम्।
चतुर्दश्यां पौरजनैर्
अर्चितं यज्ञमण्डपे ॥
5.6.28

भार्गवेन पुरा दत्तं
यदुराजाय माधवः।

ददर्श कुण्डलीभूतं
साक्षाच्छेषमिव स्थितम् ॥

5.6.29

The bow was strung and broken by Kṛṣṇa, creating a sensation. Despite attacks by the guards, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma defeated them, causing five thousand soldiers to fall. They then returned to Nanda's place, with Kṛṣṇa pretending to be afraid. The ladies of Mathurā commented on Kṛṣṇa's valour in 6 verses.

In the sports arena described in 7 verses, wrestlers including Cāṇūra, Muṣṭika, Kūṭa, Śala, and Tośala fought among themselves. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma entered the arena. The wrestling match, detailed in 17 verses, featured Cāṇūra addressing Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, arguing that pleasing Kaṁsa would benefit them. Kṛṣṇa countered that the match should be fair. Cāṇūra acknowledged Kṛṣṇa's power, noting His defeat of the mighty elephant. The fight ensued, with women of the palace expressing concern for Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. The people of Mathurā, fearful of Kaṁsa, remained silent. Cāṇūra fell face-down, Kūṭa was killed by Balarāma, Śala by Kṛṣṇa, and Tośala was torn in two by Kṛṣṇa, with his halves thrown into Kaṁsa's box. The wrestlers who perished ascended to Vaikuṅṭha. Other wrestlers, terrified, fled the arena, while Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma played with the Gopa-s.

Kaṁsa's injunctions are summarised in 2 verses. The dramatic battle between Kṛṣṇa and Kaṁsa is depicted in 12 verses. Kṛṣṇa leaped into Kaṁsa's box, and despite Kaṁsa's attempts to defend himself with a sword and shield, Kṛṣṇa overpowered him. They fought fiercely, with Kṛṣṇa throwing Kaṁsa into the arena. After a prolonged struggle, Kṛṣṇa defeated Kaṁsa, dragging his lifeless body across the ground, as Kaṁsa attained a spiritual form similar to Kṛṣṇa.

The defeat of Kaṁsa's eight brothers is covered in 7 verses. Each brother was killed differently by Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. Their sparks of light entered Kṛṣṇa.

The narrative includes details about the previous lives of these characters, noted in subsequent chapters of the work.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of the Kāmsavadha episode across these texts reveals notable variations in narrative detail and emphasis.

The Bhāgavatapurāṇa offers an emotionally rich depiction of Kṛṣṇa's journey, emphasizing the Gopī-s' distress at his departure and the transformative nature of his interactions with the washerman and Kubjā. It delves deeply into the personal and spiritual dimensions of these encounters.

In contrast, the Viṣṇu Purāṇa situates Kṛṣṇa within a broader divine framework, accentuating his cosmic role and mission. It provides a more generalized account, focusing on the divine nature and purpose of his actions rather than personal interactions.

The Brahmapurāṇa presents a thorough narrative of Kṛṣṇa's journey, detailing the wrestling match and key events. It highlights the dramatic sequence of events while minimizing focus on personal interactions.

The Padma Purāṇa follows an episodic structure, spotlighting dramatic highlights like the breaking of the bow. It covers major events and their outcomes with less detail, focusing on prominent moments rather than intermediate episodes.

The Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa emphasizes Kṛṣṇa's miraculous actions and divine interventions. It provides detailed descriptions of his extraordinary deeds and transformations, underlining their exceptional nature.

The Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa offers a concise summary of key divine events and moments, emphasizing significant elements of Kṛṣṇa's divine purpose without extensive exploration of personal interactions or episodic details.

The Harivaṃśa features unique elements such as Akrūra's vision, interactions with the haughty washerman, and the florist Guṇaka. It also includes distinct dramatic episodes like the tusker Kuvalayāpīḍa and the wrestling match, providing details not found in other texts.

The Garga Saṃhita integrates miraculous elements with detailed narratives of Kṛṣṇa's interactions, including Kubjā's transformation and the bow-breaking incident. It maintains a focus on the divine and

miraculous aspects of Kṛṣṇa's journey while offering a detailed narrative approach.

This diversity in presentation underscores the richness and complexity of the Kṛṣṇāvātāra narrative, offering valuable insights into the narrative tradition of Sanskrit literature that revels in borrowing, embellishing, interpreting, and refashioning existing narratives.

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¹ "To Pāṇini are ascribed the plays Kāmsavadha and Balibandha", pg.535, M. Kṛṣṇamachariar (2016).

² “Panini's grammar; his proximity to the Vedic language as found in the Upanisads and Vedic sutras suggests the 5th or maybe 6th c. B.C.”, pg. 88, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag (1977)

³ ‘The Denotation of Generic Terms in Ancient Indian Philosophy: Grammar, Nyāya, and Mīmāṃsā’, pp. 1 with footnote 2, Peter M. Scharf (1996).

⁴ “History of Classical Sanskrit Literature”, pg.535, M. Kṛṣṇamachariar (2016).

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⁶ Pg. 298-323, verses 10.39.10-10.44.38, Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa, C. L. Goswami (2023). 20th reprint, Gita Press, Gorakhpur.

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