

# Fight between Narakāśura and Satyabhāmā in Harivaṁśa and Southern Performance Tradition

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## Abstract

The episode of Satyabhāmā fighting Narakāśura appears in the Narakāśuravadha section of the Southern manuscripts of Harivaṁśa. First, we compare the Narakāśuravadha sections of the Citraśāla edition and the Southern manuscripts of Harivaṁśa. Next, the latter is compared with the episode of Narakāśuravadha in Bāṇayuddham, the sixth play of Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam, a temple art form performed at the Kṛṣṇa Temple in Guruvayur, Kerala as a votive ritual offering. The occurrence of Narakāśura-Satyabhāmā fight in medieval texts in Sanskrit and South Indian languages are also cited for comparison.

## 1 Preamble

*Time: Sometime around midnight.*

*Place: Krishna Temple, Guruvayur, Kerala.*

*Bāṇayuddham of Kṛṣṇa's Play (Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam [1, 2]) is in progress. Kṛṣṇa has become unconscious while fighting with Narakāśura. Then Satyabhāmā takes up bow and arrow and fights against Narakāśura. Meanwhile, Kṛṣṇa wakes up, rewards Satyabhāmā with a necklace, resumes fighting and eventually kills Narakāśura with his cakṛa.*

In the text *Kṛṣṇagīti*, which is the sanskrit kāvya with śloka and padams which is sung in the background by musicians, there is no mention of Satyabhāmā fighting with Narakāśura. To the best of our knowledge, this episode cannot be located in the popular recensions of *Bhāgavata*, *Mahābhārata* and the Citraśāla, Calcutta and the Critical Editions of *Harivaṁśa*. This episode occurs in the Southern version of *Harivaṁśa* [3], which is included in the appendix to the Critical Edition of *Harivaṁśa* [4] by BORI. There are other texts where one can find this episode. It occurs in Madhvācārya's *Mahābhārata Tātparyanirṇaya* [5], the earliest known commentary on *Mahābhārata*. It also occurs in *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caritam Manīpravālam* which is a kāvya in Malayalam ascribed to Kuñcan Nambiar from Kerala in 18<sup>th</sup> century. The relevant passages are quoted in Section 4. The incident occurs also in some Telugu texts as summarized in the Section 4. The most detailed account of Narakāśura's story occurs in *Kālikā Purāṇa* [6]. There Satyabhāmā does not fight Narakāśura, but there are indeed some very curious śloka which are quoted in Section 4.

A cursory search on the internet reveals that in a popular legend associated with Dīpāvali (Narakacaturdaśi), it is Satyabhāmā herself who kills Narakāsura because of the boon obtained by Naraka that he can be killed only by a woman. We, however, have not been able to locate a purāṇic source for this, yet.

## 2 Narakāsuravadha in the Citraśāla edition and Southern manuscripts of Harivaṁśa

### 2.1 BORI critical edition

For this study, our singular access to the Southern manuscripts of *Harivaṁśa* is through the appendices of the BORI Edition. For completeness, let us first look at the BORI critical edition of *Harivaṁśa*. *Harivaṁśa* edited by P.L. Vaidya and published by BORI (1971) has two volumes [4]. First volume is the critical edition and second volume contains appendices. Section 28A of volume II (pages 209-212) is titled *narakasatyabhāmāyuddham* and has a detailed description of the fight between Satyabhāmā and Naraka (pages 210-211) [7]. According to the editor, this episode occurs in all southern recensions, that is, four Telugu manuscripts, four Malayalam manuscripts and three Grantha manuscripts. In addition, it occurs in two Devanagari manuscripts not from the south.

Interestingly, the editor has spent an entire paragraph (page XLIV) of the Introduction to comment about the incident and his reasons to omit it in the critical edition. He says ... *he (Kṛṣṇa) was accompanied by Satyabhāmā. Instances of women accompanying their husbands on similar occasions are known to Purāṇic literature. .... I think there are no other instances of women actually fighting on the battle field in the Purāṇa literature.*

### 2.2 Location of the Appendices

sa babhau mūrtiliṅgasthaḥ sarvadaivatabādhitā |  
 ṛṣiṅām mānuṣāṅām ca pratīpamakarottadā || 91.6 (BORI)

Appendix No.25 is after 91.6

sa babhau mūrtiliṅgasthaḥ sarvadevādhībādhitā |  
 devatānāmṛṣiṅām ca pratīpamakarottadā || 2-63-6 (Citraśāla)

The one who affected all the devas lived in mūrtiliṅga (prāgyotiṣa - see Nīlakaṇṭha commentary). He worked against the gods as well as the sages.

tadvadhārtham mahābāhuḥ śāṅkhachakraḡadāsibhṛt |  
 jāto vṛṣṇiṣu devakyām vasudevājjanārdanaḥ || 91.21 (BORI)

Sl. No.	BORI Volume I Chapter 91	BORI Volume II Appendices	Citraśāla Viṣṇuparva Chapter 63
1	śloka 1 to 6	Appendix No. 25	śloka 1 to 6
2	śloka 7 to 21	Appendix No. 26	śloka 7 to 20
3	śloka 22 to 24	Appendix No. 27	śloka 21 to 23
4	śloka 25 to 43		śloka 24 to 43
	Foot Note 1046		śloka 44 to 46.1
5	śloka 44.1		śloka 56.2
6	śloka 44.2		śloka 46.2
8	śloka 45.1		śloka 56.1
9	śloka 45.2 Foot Note 1049 Foot Notes 1050 and 1051		śloka 57.1 śloka 47 to 55 śloka 57.2 to 71.1
10	śloka 45.3 Foot Note 1052		śloka 71.2 śloka 72 to 74
11	śloka 46 to 49 Foot Note 1056		śloka 75 to 78 śloka 79 to 85
12	śloka 50 to 52	Appendix No.28	śloka 86 to 89.1
13	śloka 91.53  Foot Note 1058	Appendix No.28 A	śloka 89.2, 90.1  śloka 90.2 to 109.1
14	śloka 54		śloka 19.2, 110.1
15	śloka 55 Foot Notes 1059 and 1060		śloka 110.2, 111.1 śloka 111.2 to 120.1
16	śloka 56		śloka 120.2, 121.1
17	śloka 57 Foot Note 1061		śloka 121.2, 122.1 śloka 122.2 to 123
18	śloka 58,59		śloka 124 to 126

Table 1: The general correspondence of śloka between chapter 91 (harivaṁśa, vol I, BORI) and chapter 63, viṣṇuparva (Citraśāla edition). (Note that the śloka may differ in some words.)

Appendix No. 26 is after 91.21

tadvadhārthaṃ mahābāhuḥ śāṅkhachakraḡadāsibhṛt |  
jāto vṛṣṇiṣu devakyāṃ vasudevājjanārdanaḥ ||2-63-20 (Citraśāla)

Janārdhana (Kṛṣṇa), having great arms, with conch (śāṅkha), discus (cakra) and mace (gada), was born, among the vṛṣṇis, to Devakī and Vasudeva to kill him (Naraka).

tasyāṃ devapurābhāyāṃ sabhā kāñcanatorañā |  
sudāsārḥīti vikhyātā yojanāyutavistṛtā || 91.24 (BORI)

Appendix No. 27 is after 91.24

tasyāṃ devapurābhāyāṃ sabhā kāñcanatorañā |  
sā dāsārḥīti vikhyātā yojanāyāmavistṛtā || 2-63-23 (Citraśāla)  
In that city, shining like a divine city, there is an assembly, named dāsārḥī made of gold, decorated with arches, with an area, extending over a yojana (= 9 miles).

nihatya puruṣavyāghraḥ prāḡjyotiṣamupādravat ||  
taṃ ca pañcjanaṃ ghorāṃ narakasya mahāsuram | 91.52 (BORI)

Appendix No.28 is after 91.52

nihatya puruṣavyāghraḥ prāḡjyotiṣamupādravat || 2-63-88.2  
hatvā pañcanadaṃ nāma narakasya mahāsuram | 2-63-89.1 (Citraśāla)  
(After) killing (eight hundred thousand asuras), the tiger among men (Kṛṣṇa) quickly rushed towards the city of prāḡjyotiṣa. He (Kṛṣṇa) killed the great asura of Naraka, named Pañcanada.  
tataḥ prāḡjyotiṣaṃ nāma dīpyamānamiva śriyā ||  
puramāsādayāmāsa tatra yuddhamabhūnmahat| 91.53 (BORI)

Appendix No. 28 A is after 91.53

tataḥ prāḡjyotiṣaṃ nāma dīpyamānamiva śriyā ||2-63-89.2  
puramāsādayāmāsa yuddhaṃ tatrābhavanmahat | 2-63-90.1 (Citraśāla)  
Then he (Kṛṣṇa) went near the city named prāḡjyotiṣa which was sparkling with prosperity and there was a great battle.

It is interesting to note that in the Citraśāla edition, Vaiśampāyana does say  
yatsamānena vaksyāmi tanme nigadataḥ śṛṇu 2-63-110.1  
I shall tell you briefly (about the battle.) Hear what I am saying.

## 2.3 Summaries of the appendices

### Appendix No. 25

The demon Naraka attacks heaven along with his army. A terrible battle takes place. The battle is described in detail. In the fierce battle, Naraka defeats Indra along with other devas.

amarāvatiṁ tadā daityaḥ praviśya ca mahāsuraiḥ | (132)

urvaśīm ca samāhūya vacanaṁ cedamabravīt || (133)

The demon Naraka along with other great Asuras, entered the residence of Indra, Amarāvati and summoned Urvaśī and told her as follows:

bhaja māmihā vāmoru nirjitaḥ śakra āhave | (134)

ahamindro yamo rājā varuṇo yādasām patih | (135)

ahameva sadā bhadre rājarājo.asmi suprabhe || (136)

O beautiful woman! Gratify me! I have defeated Indra in the battle. Now I am Indra, Yama and Varuṇa the Lord of the waters. O auspicious one! O radiant one! I am the only king of kings.

urvaśyuvāca

ṛṣayo yadi te rājan yakṣyanti kratubhiḥ sadā | (137)

tadā bhajāmi daityendra nātra kāryā vicāraṇā || (138)

Urvaśī said: O king! If the sages offer sacrifice to you, then, O the Indra of demons, I shall gratify you. Have no doubts.

Then the best of demons, Naraka, took away divine trees and eight thousand divine women from heaven.

### Appendix No. 26

Then Naraka, the best of demons, entered the human world and troubled the men, sages and brāhmins. Then Kṛṣṇa at Dvāraka was protecting the earth.

tataḥ kadācit daityendra urvaśīvacanaṁ smaran | (6)

badaryām hi mahārāja yaṣṭum muniganāmstadā | (7)

Then some time, remembering the words of Urvaśī, the Indra of demons went to Badari to ask the sages there to worship him. He said:

provāca vacanaṁ kāle yaṣṭavyo.asmi munīśvarāḥ || (10)

asminkāle jagannātha indro.ahaṁ vibudhādhipaḥ | (11)

jitaḥ śakro raṇe viprā lokapālaiḥ sahāmaraiḥ | (12)

tata ijyo namaskāryo vandyo lokahitāya vai || (13)

O lord sages! I deserve to be offered sacrifice. I am the lord of the world. I am Indra, the king of devas. I have defeated Indra in the battle along with the protectors of the world and other devas. Hence for the welfare of the world, offer me sacrifice, pay obeisance to me and bow to me. Hearing his words, the sages said :

yakṣyāmo na vayaṁ daitya dānavo.asi durātmavān | (16)

indraṁ devagaṇaiḥ sārdaṁ yakṣyāmo vigatajvarāḥ || (17)

O demon! We shall not offer sacrifice to you. You are a demon, having a wicked soul. Hearing this, the demon threatened to kill the sages and destroy the place of sacrifice. Yet the sages refused to offer sacrifice to the demon. The demon, Naraka became angry and

he destroyed the sacred places. All the sages ran away. The demon took away the women. When the army of demons left Badari, the sages decided to inform Kṛṣṇa about the deeds of the demon. The sages

vasiṣṭho vāmadevaśca jābāḷiratha kāśyapaḥ | (48)

kaṇvo dhūmro bṛhaddurgo bharadvājaśca gālavaḥ | (49)

kavaṣo dhūmraketuśca kāśyaḥ kāpilakastada || (50)

left in the southern direction, bathed in Gaṅga and proceeded to Dvāraka. The sages arrived at Dvāraka and requested the palace guard to inform Kṛṣṇa about their arrival. Kṛṣṇa invited the sages to the sabha.

### Appendix No. 27

Kṛṣṇa welcomed the sages and offered hospitality to them. The sages told Kṛṣṇa about the terrible deeds of the demon Naraka. Then the sages praised Kṛṣṇa with a hymn. Kṛṣṇa told the sages that he will slay Naraka with his discus and protect the sages. Then the sages returned to Badari.

### Appendix No. 28

Kṛṣṇa blew his conch. Hearing the conch, the powerful Naraka came out for battle.

keśavaṁ purato dṛṣṭvā gadināṁ śārṅgiṇāṁ tathā | (5)

uvāca narako daityaḥ ko bhavān kimihāgataḥ | (6)

Seeing Kṛṣṇa before him, with his mace and bow, the demon Naraka asked: who are you? Why have you come here?

ko.ayaṁ pakṣī sthitaḥ pārśve kaiśā te vada sāmpratam | (8)

Who is the bird? Who is this standing by your side?

evamukto jagannāthaḥ prahasya suchiraṁ tadā | (10)

ālokya satyabhāmāṁ tu vacanaṁ cedamabravīt || (11)

The lord of the world (Kṛṣṇa) who was asked thus, laughed for a while. He looked at Satyabhāmā and spoke the following words:

vāsudevo.asmi daityendra yadi te śrutimāgataḥ | (12)

eṣā satrājitaḥ putrī bhāryā mama yavīyasi || (13)

O the Indra of demons! I am the son of Vasudeva. Hearing about you I have come now. This is the daughter of Satrājit, my younger wife.

eṣa tārksyo garutmāṁstu vāhanaṁ mama daityapa | (14)

tvāṁ hantumiha saṁprāpto vadāmi kimataḥ param || (15)

O demon! This is Tārksya (Garuḍa) my vehicle. I have come here to slay you. What else I need to say?

śrutvaitaddānavo ghorō vihasya suchiraṁ tadā | (16)

vāsudevo.asi saṁprāpto māṁ hantum kila yādava || (17)

Hearing this, the terrible demon laughed for a while. The son of Vasudeva, the yādava has come to kill me.

diṣṭyā saṁprāptavānadya cintaniyaḥ sadā mayā | (18)

kadāsau dṛśyate yuddhe haniṣyāmiti me mati || (19)

What I have always pondered, by good fortune, I have obtained now. I think that once I face him in war, I will kill him.

kṣaṇaṁ tiṣṭha yadushreṣṭha kuru yuddhaṁ yadicchasi | (20)

hatvā tvāmadya samprāptamānayāmi puram mama | (21)

enām padmapalāsākṣīm yudyatām kim vilambase |(22)

icchātaḥ prahasveti provāca yadunandanaḥ || (23)

O the best among yādavās! Stay for a moment. If you wish you can fight. Slaying you, I will take this beautiful woman to my city. Why delay the fight.

Kṛṣṇa replied, let us fight.

### Appendix No. 28 A

The translation here is taken from the complete English translation of Appendix 28A by Satya Chaitanya available on the internet [8].

The battle between the demon Naraka and Kṛṣṇa is described in detail. The demon sent several sharp arrows at Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa shot arrows at the demon.

vivyādha garuḍam rājan nārācena mahāmatih ||(18)

vivyadhe garuḍastasya nārācena samāhataḥ |(19)

susrāva rudhiram ghoram vāsudevasya paśyataḥ |(20)

pakṣe samāhataḥ pakṣhī cacāla ca punaḥ punaḥ ||(21)

In the meanwhile, the very intelligent dānava pierced Garuḍa with nārācas. When Garuḍa became wounded all over by a nārāca of the dānava, blood started spurting out from every part of his body right before the eyes of Kṛṣṇa. The deeply wounded bird began flapping its wings again and again.

tato roṣasamāviṣṭo garuḍaḥ pakṣipuṅgavaḥ |(22)

pakṣeṇa pakṣiṇām śreṣṭha pothayāmāsa dānavam ||(23)

Then, furious with anger, Garuḍa, the best of birds, attacked the dānava with his wings.

A terrible battle took place. The demon Naraka shot sharp arrows at Kṛṣṇa.

visamjñāśca tato bhūtvā rathopasta upāviśat ||(31)

Kṛṣṇa, swooning, sank down to the floor of the chariot.

satyabhāmā ca tam dṛṣṭvā vāsudevam tathāgatam |(32)

cāmarairvijayamāsa pakṣābhyām pakṣipuṅgavaḥ ||(33)

Seeing Vāsudeva in that condition, Satyabhāmā fanned him with chamaras and Garuḍa, with his wings.

āśvastho.atha hr̥ṣhīkeśaḥ samjñam prāpya ca keśavaḥ | |(34)

dhanustasyai tato dattvā śārṅgam bhārasahe raṇe |(35)

yudhyasva narakam devī śrānto.asmi yudhi pīḍitaḥ ||(36)

Kṛṣṇa gave the heavy bow Śārṅgam to Satyabhāmā and said: O Devi! fight with Naraka. I am tired, tormented in the battle.

evamuktā tadā devī satyā satyavatām varā |(37)

tadā yuddham samārebhe narakeṇa durātmanā || (38)

Kṛṣṇa, finding relief and regaining consciousness, gave Satyabhāmā his bow Śārṅga, which can be wielded in battle only with difficulty due to its great weight, and told her: "Devi, battle now with Naraka. I am suffering and I am tired from the fighting." When Devi Satyabhāmā was told thus, she, the noble one who always spoke the truth, began to battle

with the evil Naraka.

### 3 In the Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam performance

Among the many temple arts of Kerala, Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam [1, 2] (also known as Kṛṣṇāṭṭam) deserves special attention. The creator of this art is Mānavedan, the Zamorin (Sāmūtiri) King, who lived in Kerala in the seventeenth century. Mānavedan has composed two great Sanskrit works, *Pūrvabhārata Campu* and *Kṛṣṇagīti*. Inspired by Ānantabhaṭṭa's *Bhārata Campu*, the former work completed in 1644 A.D. deals with the incidents in *Mahābhārata* from the early history of Lunar dynasty upto the birth of Dhṛtarāṣṭra, Pāṇḍu and Vidura. Hence *Pūrvabhārata Campu*, themewise, is a prequel to Ānantabhaṭṭa's work.

*Kṛṣṇagīti* (completed in 1654 A.D.) deals with the life of Kṛṣṇa told in eight cantos: Avatāram, Kāliyamardanam, Rāsakrīḍa, Kāmsavadham, Svayaṁvaram, Bāṇayuddham, Vividavadham and Svargārohaṇam. It consists of ślokas and gītīs set to appropriate rāgas and tālas. The ritual performance Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam, a votive offering at the famous Kṛṣṇa Temple at Guruvayur in Kerala is based on *Kṛṣṇagīti*.

*Kṛṣṇagīti* integrates incidents from *Bhāgavata*, *Mahābhārata* and *Harivamśa*. Two important sections of Bāṇayuddham (the sixth canto of *Kṛṣṇagīti*), the granting of salvation to Ghaṇṭākarna and meeting of Kṛṣṇa and Śiva in Kailāsa are based on *Harivamśa*.

As already mentioned, Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam takes place in Guruvayur Temple as a votive offering. The performance begins in the temple after the last pūjā (tṛppuka) is concluded and sanctum sanctorum is closed for the day (usually after 10 PM). Preliminary rituals involve placing of musical instruments (*Ceṅgila*, *Ilattālam*, *Śuddhamaddalam* and *Toppimaddalam*) on the ground, lighting of the big lamp (*Kalivilakku*) which itself is a representation of the deity, a few beats on the Maddalam invoking Śabdabrahma, recitation of a *maṅgala śloka* and the performance of the auspicious dance *Toṭayam* behind the hand-held curtain. It is to be noted that there is no special stage set for the performance and the audience sit on the ground in front of the lamp and the performance takes place behind the lamp. The statue of Mānavedan with his folded hands offering *praṇāma* to the diety is a permanent witness to the performance (see Fig. 2) which takes place for about three hours. Towards the end, the actors perform the auspicious dance *Dhanāśi*. They offer *praṇāms* to the sacred ground, to the flames of the sacred lamp and finally to the deity in the sanctum sanctorum. A few beats on the musical instruments conclude the play.

As noted by Rustom Bharucha [9], divinity pervades Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam which the devotee witnesses as a *Cākṣuṣa Yajña*. In the long period at night when sanctum sanctorum remains closed, Kṛṣṇa's play affords the devotee a vision of the deity in all His splendour [10].

The episodes of Bāṇayuddham are killing of Murāsura, Killing of Narakāsura, meeting with Ghaṇṭākarna, Kṛṣṇa's meeting with Śiva at Kailāsa and war with Bāṇa. Even though the text (*Kṛṣṇagīti*) has no mention of it, the events surrounding Satyabhāma's fight with Naraka as performed (see Figs. 3, 4) follows the text of *Harivamśa* in surprising details.

- (1) Garuḍa striking Naraka with wings: Fig. 1.  
 (2) Satyabhāmā fights with Narakāsura: Figs. 3, 4.  
 (3) tatra prīto mahāviṣṇuḥ pariṣvajya ca tām vibhuḥ (65)  
 śramāmbhaścāpi tasyāstu mārjayāmāsa keśavaḥ  
 tasyāstu kaṅṭhābharaṇam dadau prītau janārdanaḥ

Kṛṣṇa, the Glorious One, then became delighted and hugged her and wiped off the perspiration on her born of battle strain. Kṛṣṇa, the Great Soul, then, pleased with her, gave her a necklace: Figs. 5, 6.

We do note one difference in details: In the performance, Kṛṣṇa faints and Satyabhāmā picks up bow and arrow on her own, whereas in the *Harivaṁśa* text, Kṛṣṇa becoming exhausted requests her to do so. As detailed in the appendices, Madhvācārya's text *Mahābhārata Tātparyanirṇaya* and Kuñcan Nambiar's text *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caritam Maṇipravāḷam* agrees with the performance in this case.

### 3.1 Narakāsuravadham Kathakaḷi

In Narakāsuravadham Kathakaḷi also Satyabhāmā takes up arm against Narakāsura [12] even though there is no mention of it in the text (āṭṭakkatha). Following is the quote from the book, describing the action on stage.

page 98, scene 7 (last scene).

valiya Narakāsuran, bhīru, Kṛṣṇa, Satyabhāmā, Garuḍa.

(Fight. In the fight, as Kṛṣṇa gets tired and falls down, Satyabhāmā takes up the bow. Seeing this, Naraka, abandons his weapons, specially, the Nārāyaṇa astra. Kṛṣṇa gets up and kills Naraka by his cakra.)

## 4 Narakāsura-Satyabhāmāyuddham in medieval texts

Naraka-Satyabhāmāyuddham whose first appearance in a text seems to be in the Southern *Harivaṁśa* in the early epic-purāṇic times, has also survived in the South of India in textual traditions.

### 4.1 From Mahābhārata Tātparyanirṇaya of Madhvācārya

The twentieth chapter of *Mahābhārata Tātparyanirṇaya* of Madhvācārya titled khāṇḍavavanadāhaḥ contrains the Narakāsuravadha episode. Here we quote the relevant ślokas. The English translation[13] quoted is by Harshala Rajesh based on the Kannada text with editing, translation and explanation by Dr. Vyasanakere Prabhanjanacharya.

*jaghne senām garudaḥ pakṣapātaiḥ  
pādam śeṣām keśavaḥ sāyakaughaiḥ  
athā'sasādā'su bhaumo.cyutam tam  
muñcañcharānastrasammantritān drāk  
viyātha tam keśavaḥ sāyakaughair-  
bhaumaḥ śataghninī brahmadattāmamuñcat (20.98)*

*acchedyo'bhedyo nityasamvitsukhātmā  
nityāvyayaḥ pūrṇaśaktiḥ sa kṛṣṇaḥ  
nigīrya tām devavaraḥ śataghnim  
nityāśrānto'darśayacchrāntavaccaḥ (20.99)*

*bahūn varān brahmaṇo'nveṣamoghān  
moghikṛtān vikṣya parātpareśaḥ  
bhavet kathañcit bahumānena yukta  
ityeva kṛṣṇo'darśayacchrāntavat svam (20.100)*

*tadā dr̥ptaṁ narakam vikṣya devī  
satyā"dated karmukam śārṅgasamjñam  
cakāra tam yatamānam ca bhaumam  
nirāyudham viratham ca kṣaṇena (20.101)*

*ālīngya kṛṣṇaḥ satyabhāmām punaśca  
rathāntare samsthitaṁ bhaumamugram  
sr̥jantamastrāṇyarinā nikṛtta-  
kandham mṛtyorarpayāmāsa śīghram (20.102)*

“Garuda killed one part of the army with the blow of his wings. Remaining army was killed by Śrī Kṛṣṇa's arrows. Later Narakāsura rushed and faced Acyuta (Śrī Kṛṣṇa) with arrows that were empowered with astras. Śrī Kṛṣṇa was hit with shower of arrows. Narakāsura used the Śataghnī given by Brahma. Śrī Kṛṣṇa who is non cleavable, unbreakable, who is the personification of eternal knowledge and bliss, he who is always complete, he who never deteriorates, he who has immense strength, he who is the best among the deities, swallowed the Śataghnī. Though he is never ever tired, he pretended to be tired just to cause illusion to ignorant people. Śrī Kṛṣṇa who was THE best among the best, pretended to be tired because he wanted to make sure that Narakāsura does not look down upon Brahmadeva, whose precious boons never went waste in the case of many others. Looking at Narakāsura who was beaming with pride, Satyabhāmādēvi took Śrī Kṛṣṇa's bow named Śārṅga in her hands. Despite of Narakāsura's attempts, she rendered him weaponless and drove him out of his chariot in a fraction of a second. Śrī Kṛṣṇa hugged Satyabhāmā. He thrust his discus towards violent Narakāsura who had recovered and got on his chariot and showering

weapons, which beheaded him and Narakāsura was killed instantaneously.”

## 4.2 From *Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caritam Maṇipravālam*

*Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caritam Maṇipravālam* is a kāvya in Malayalam ascribed to Kuñcan Nambiar from Kerala in 18<sup>th</sup> century. The episode of Satyabhāmā fighting Narakāsura occurs in this work.

*pintiriñṅu Garuḍan tadantare  
hanta! kiñcana mayañni Mādhavan  
Satyabhāma tarasā dhanussumā-  
yettināḷamaravairi sannidhau*

Garuḍa turned back  
Thereafter Mādhava fainted a little  
Quickly, Satyabhāmā came with the bow  
To Naraka’s presence.

*Satyabhāmayuṭe śastramēlkkayāl  
kṛttamāyi Narakanre vighram  
mattakēśinikalōṭu tōlkkumō  
mattanākiya mahāsurōttaman?*

Hit by the arrows of Satyabhāmā  
Naraka’s body was shattered, yet  
Is the arrogant, mighty, great Asura  
To court defeat at the hands of women?

*nillu nillu capalē ninakkahō  
villetukka yudhi yōgyamalletō  
collu kēlppatinasādhyamenkil ṅān  
kolluvānini matikkayilletō*

“Hold it, hold it, you frivolous!  
It doesn’t befit you  
To take up arms in the war.  
If you are not willing to listen  
I wouldn’t hesitate to kill”

*itthamuddhatamuraccu satvaram*

*yuddhamāśu Narakan tuṭan̄ninān  
kruddhanāmasuravairi cakrama-  
n̄nuddhariccu samarē vilān̄ninān*

Saying thus,  
Naraka restored to fight.  
Angered,  
Holding the Cakra  
The enemy of Asura (Kṛṣṇa) outshone in the war.

### 4.3 From the Narakāsura episode in Kālikā Purāṇa [6]

Chapter 40, sloka 68. The English translation quoted is by Prof. B.N. Shastri.

*āruhya garuḍam kṛṣṇaḥ satyabhāmādvitīyakaḥ  
prāgjyotiṣamuhkogacchad vāsavastrīdivam̄ yayau*

“Kṛṣṇa accompanied by Satyabhāmā, mounted Garuḍa and had gone to the city of Prāgjyotiṣa, while Śakra (Indra) returned to heaven.”

*sa yuddhyat kṛṣṇanikaṭe kālikām̄ kālikopamām̄  
raktāsyānayanām̄ dīrghām̄ khadgaśaktidharā tadā (102)  
apaśyāj jagatām̄ dhātrīm̄ kāmākhyam̄api mohinīm̄ (103)  
savīsmīstathā bhītastām̄ drṣṭvā jagatām̄ prasūm  
yoddhvyamityeva tadā yuyudhe narakāsuraḥ (104)*

“While fighting, he observed tall Kālikā by the side of Kṛṣṇa, similar to Kālikā, with red face and red eyes, wearing sword and śakti (lance), and Kāmākhyā, the protectress of the world, the enchantress.

The demon Naraka having seen Kāmākhyā, the mother of the world siding Kṛṣṇa was surprised and frightened, he then fought the battle for its sake as the fighting was the only course left.”

### 4.4 Instances from Telugu Tradition

*The following information is from Prof. Velcheru Narayana Rao.*

There are three Telugu texts that contain the incident of Satyabhāmā fighting with Narakāsura. Two of them, *Uttara-harivamśamu* by Nacana Somanā (a.k.a Somanātha), late 13th century, (1. 149-171), and *Harivamśamu* of Errapragada, early 14th century, (Part

II, 4.125-172) describe that Satyabhāmā took the bow from Kṛṣṇa when the latter was wounded from an arrow from Naraka. Kṛṣṇa was unconscious for a while, recovered and asked Satyabhāmā to fight for him, because he was still tired.

*Bhāgavatamu* of Bammera Potana, late 15th century, (10.170-188) describes that Satyabhāmā fought Naraka but does not say that Kṛṣṇa was wounded, or, fell unconscious.

The narrative from Nacana Somana and Errapragada has gained popularity in the oral tradition. There may be other such sources.

## 5 Some Observations

Even though all the texts including *Kṛṣṇagīti* which describe the episode of Killing of Naraka explicitly mentions that Satyabhāmā accompanied Kṛṣṇa to Prāgjyotiṣapura, the domain of Naraka, the reason for it is not explained. The clue is given in the Nīlakaṇṭha commentary [11] in the Citraśāla edition of *Harivaṁśa* śloka

*tataḥ sahaiva śakreṇa śaṅkhacakraḡadāsibhṛt  
prataṣṭhe garuḡenātha satyabhāmā sahāyavān*

Nīlakaṇṭha comments: *satyabhāmā sahāyavān* iti.

*asyāḥ satyabhāmāyāḥ pṛthivyamśatvāt pṛthivyājñayaiva tasya mṛtyur vihitofṣṭīti  
satyabhāmāyājñayaiva taṁ haniṣyāmītyāśayaḥ.*

*viṣṇupurāṇa* also states that Kṛṣṇa went to prāgjyotiṣapura together with Satyabhāmā:  
*sañcityāgatamāruhya garuḡam gaganecaram |*

*satyabhāmām samāropya yayau prāgjyotiṣam puram || (5-29-14)*

whereas bhāgavata just mentions wife:

*sabhāryau garuḡārūḡaḥ yayau prāgjyotiṣam puram || (10-59-2)*

The identification of Satyabhāmā with Goddess Earth appears elsewhere also. For example, *Kṛṣṇopaniṣad* [14] explicitly identifies Satyabhāmā with Earth: *satyabhāmā dharēti vā*. The text *Gargasamhita* or *Garga bhāgavatam* [15] also makes this identification: *satyabhāmā vasuṁdharā* (goloka khaṇḡam, adhyāya 4).

The active role of Garuḡa in the performance of Killing of Naraka in Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam is also worth mentioning. Especially in the light of the description of Garuḡa in Kailāsayātrā section of Bhaviṣya Parva of *Harivaṁśa* [16].

In Kālikā Purāṇa where we find the detailed account of Naraka's life that befits a tragic hero who was a victim to the circumstances, the role of his parents Viṣṇu and Pṛithvī (Goddess Earth) are elaborated. Further we note that in Kālikā Purāṇa, the Book of the Goddess, all manifestations of the Goddess in various forms are amalgamated. Not too surprisingly, in Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam, the *veṣam* of Goddess Earth, Satyabhāmā and Pārvatī are very similar. Only distinguishing feature of Goddess Earth is the crown.

A more detailed, in-depth study of this subject might reveal many enriching and enlight-

ening surprises. However, at present we are handicapped by two major factors. Firstly, the only printed edition of the southern recension of *Harivaṁśa* available to the BORI editor was in Grantha lipi. This may partly account for the ignorance prevalent in *Mahābhārata* scholarship regarding many gems [17] in the southern recension of *Harivaṁśa*. In the light of its extreme importance, it is mandatory to have a printed edition of this text in Devanāgarī lipi. We hope that *Mahābhārata* scholars will initiate an effort towards this goal. Secondly, the *āṭṭaparakāram* (performance manual) of Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam which was prepared many years back, remains unpublished. We hope the Guruvayur Devaswom will initiate project to publish this work.

Salutations to Vyāsa (whom Mānavedan extolls in the maṅgala śloka of his *Pūrvabhārata Carṁpu* [18]) who elaborated on the episode of *Naraka-Satyabhāmāyuddham* in *Harivaṁśa*, the supplement to *Mahābhārata* (*śrīmahābhārata khileṣu harivaṁśe*). Salutations to Mānavedan who instead of summarising the episode in the text (*Kṛṣṇagīti*) elaborated on it in the performance text thereby etching it permanently in the mind of the *prekṣaka*.

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### References

- [1] Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam is a votive ritual theatre offering at Guruvayur temple, Kerala, India. For more information, visit the site:  
<http://www.dvaipayana.net/krishnanattam>
- [2] *Krishnattam*, Martha Bush Ashton-Sikora and Robert P. Sikora, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co. Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi (1993). ISBN 81-204-0769-5
- [3] We thank Prof. Velcheru Narayana Rao for helpful communications.
- [4] *Harivaṁśa* being the *Khila* or Supplement to *Mahābhārata*, edited by Parashuram Lakshman Vaidya, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune. Vol. I, Introduction, Critical Text and Notes, (1969). Vol. II, Appendices (1971).

- [5] Madhvācārya, *Mahābhārata Tātparyā Nirṇaya*, available on the internet at <http://www.dvaita.org/sources/mbtn>.
- [6] *The Kālikā Purāṇa*, Text, introduction and translation in English by Prof. B.N. Shastri, Nag Publishers, Delhi. (First edition 1992).
- [7] The entire narakāsūravadhā related BORI appendices are available on the internet at <http://mahabharata-resources.org/harivamsa/southern/hv-southern-vp.html>
- [8] <http://mahabharata-resources.org/southern/satyabhama-naraka-fight-trans.html>
- [9] Rustom Bharucha, *Preparing for Krishna*, chapter ten of *Theatre and the World - Performance and the Politics of Culture*, first published by Manohar Publications, India (1990). Reprinted by Routledge, London (1993).
- [10] *guruvāyūmandira virociṣṇuḥ sa viṣṇuḥ svayam* as Mānavedan says in the *maṅgala śloka* of *Kṛṣṇagīti*.
- [11] *śrīman mahābhārata*, Part VII, *harivamśa parva* with bhārata bhāvādīpa commentary by Nīlakaṇṭha. Edited by Pandit Ramachandrashastri Kinjawadekar. Printed and Published by Shankar Narhar Joshi, Citraśāla Press, 1026 Sadashiv Peth, Poona City. First Edition AD 1936.
- [12] *Kathakalippadaṅṅal*, part 1, Vellinezhi Achyutan Kutty, Published by Tiranottam, Dubai (2009).
- [13] <http://www.mahabharatatatparyanirnaya.com/>  
Also at <http://mahabharata-resources.org/mbtntrans/mbtntrans.html>
- [14] *Kṛṣṇopaniṣad*, available on the internet at [http://sanskritdocuments.org/doc\\_1\\_index.html](http://sanskritdocuments.org/doc_1_index.html).
- [15] *Gargasamhita* or *Gargabhāgavatam*, in Malayalam script with Malayalam commentary by V. Nilakanthan Nampisan and M.N. Narayanan Namputiri, published by Kairali Press and Books, M.G. Road, Trichur-1, Kerala (1986).
- [16] *yajñamūrtiḥ purāṇātmā sāmamūrdhā ca pāvanaḥ*  
*ṛgvedapakṣavānpakṣī* (3-76-3)
- [17] See, for example, *kṛṣṇaduṣeṣṭitakathanam* in *Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam*, A. Purushothaman and A. Harindranath, published in *Vyāsa Smṛti*, vol 3., Issue 1, April - June 2009).
- [18] The following is the maṅgala śloka of *Pūrvabhārata Caṃpu* by Mānavedan. Published with the commentary *Kṛṣṇāyām*, by Dr. K. Raghavan Pillai, Kerala University, Anantaśayana Saṃskṛta Grandhāvali, No. 209. Published by Sriramavilasam Press, Kollam (1963).

lakṣmīmātanutāt sa vo munivaro vyāsābhīdhānonīśam  
yaḥ prāleyagirāvapāntaratamorūpēṇa nityam tapah  
tanvānasya kalā harēravikalā lokopakārodyatā  
drāgasamdyata bhāratāmṛtajharī yasyeyamāsyēndutaḥ

*May that best among the sages, manifesting as Vyāsa,  
who, in the form of Apāntaratamas [19],  
is eternally engaged in austerities in the snowy mountain (Himalaya),  
whose body is the faultless and complete portion of Viṣṇu,  
who is always engaged in deeds that are beneficial to the world,  
from whose moon-like face quickly rushes forth the nectar stream of Bhārata,  
always bestow propitiousness and prosperity upon us.*

[19] The reference is to the previous birth of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa as the sage Apāntaratamas. See Chapter 349 of the Śāntiparva, *The Mahābhārata* with the Bhārata Bhāvadīpa Commentary of Nīlakaṇṭha, edited by Pandit Ramachandrashastri Kinjawadekar, reprinted by Oriental Books Reprint Corporation, Second Edition (1979).

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Figure 1: Kṛṣṇa unconcious, being attended by Satyabhāmā and Garuḍa. Narakāsura jubilant. Note the statue of Mānavedan behind Garuḍa.



Figure 2: Garuḍa attacking Narakāsura.



Figure 3: Satyabhāmā takes up bow and arrow while Kṛṣṇa sits unconscious.



Figure 4: Satyabhāmā fighting Narakāsura.



Figure 5: Kṛṣṇa appreciates Satyabhāmā's action.



Figure 6: Kṛṣṇa presents a necklace to Satyabhāmā.