

## Fourth Canto “Rape” Controversy

In the Fourth Canto of *Srimad-Bhagavatam* (4.25.41), we find the following paragraph in the purport: “In this regard, the word *vikhyatam* [famous] is very significant. A man is always famous for his aggression toward a beautiful woman, and such aggression is sometimes considered rape. Although rape is not legally allowed, it is a fact that a woman likes a man who is very expert at rape.”

These few sentences have caused no little consternation among both devotees and nondevotees alike, since they appear to sanction what is considered a heinous and vicious crime. Taken out of context and without regard to the word’s intended usage, it does appear to be a reprehensible sentiment. However, if the use of the word is analyzed in the context of the above verse and purport, the succeeding verse and purport, other lexical usages, as well as other of Srila Prabhupada’s statements, it becomes clear that nothing heinous or vicious is being advocated.

First, let us look at the verse and first paragraph of the above verse’s purport:

*ka nama vira vikhyatam  
vadanyam priya-darshanam  
na vrinita priyam praptam  
madrishi tvadrisham patim*

### SYNONYMS

*ka*—who; *nama*—indeed; *vira*—my dear hero; *vikhyatam*—famous; *vadanyam*—magnanimous; *priya-darshanam*—beautiful; *na*—not; *vrinita*—would accept; *priyam*—easily; *praptam*—gotten; *madrishi*—like me; *tvadrisham*—like you; *patim*—husband.

### TRANSLATION

“O my dear hero, who in this world will not accept a husband like you? You are so famous, so magnanimous, so beautiful, and so easily gotten.

### PURPORT

“Every husband is certainly a great hero to his wife. In other words, if a woman loves a man, that man appears very beautiful and magnanimous. Unless one becomes beautiful in the eyes of another, one cannot dedicate his whole life to another. The husband is considered very magnanimous because he gives as many children to the wife as she likes. Every woman is fond of children; therefore any husband who can please his wife by sex and give her children is considered very magnanimous. Not only does the husband become magnanimous by begetting children, but by giving his wife ornaments, nice food, and dresses, he keeps her completely under submission. Such a satisfied wife will never give up the company of her husband. *Manu-samhita* recommends that to keep a wife satisfied a husband should give her some ornaments because women are generally fond of home, ornaments, dresses, children, etc. In this way the woman is the center of all material enjoyment.”

In the above verse, we encounter the sentiments of a woman who is attracted by the charisma, beauty, wealth, and fame of a great hero. She expresses her attraction straightforwardly, and Srila Prabhupada observes in the purport: “[I]f a woman loves a man, that man appears very beautiful and magnanimous.” When there is such attraction, there will also generally be sexual attraction. When there is mutual sexual attraction, it is often found that a man will behave aggressively toward a woman, but that aggression is not unwelcome when the attraction is reciprocated. The woman will actually encourage the aggression. In the next verse (4.25.42) we find in the Sanskrit the term *ghrina-uddhata*, meaning “aggressive mercy.” In this verse, the woman is expressing her attraction even more openly: “O mighty-armed, who in this world will not be attracted by your arms, which are just like the bodies of serpents? Actually you relieve the distress of husbandless women like us by your attractive smile and your aggressive mercy. We think that you are traveling on the surface of the earth just to benefit us only.” Aside from *ghrina* meaning “mercy” or “compassion,” which are not the primary meanings, the dictionary also defines it as “ardor,” “heat,” and the tenderness one feels when basking in the sun. *Uddhata* includes the ideas of pride, arrogance, but also excitement and agitation. The dictionary includes the idea of striking – as in a finger striking a lute. In this case the woman is considering the aggression of the man both welcome and merciful.

Therefore, we are not seeing the term “rape” being used in the ordinary sense here, since the aggression is welcomed in these verses. There is no question of nonconsensual sex. Srila Prabhupada appears to be using the word “rape,” in this context, according to a dictionary meaning not in such common use in the twenty-first century.

In many American English dictionaries the more unusual usages of “rape” are no longer found. However in British English dictionaries (with which Srila Prabhupada would have been more familiar) we do find alternate meanings. For example, in the *Chambers English Dictionary* we find the following:

**Rape** *rāp*, (noun) rapine, plunder, seizure (obsolete); unlawful sexual intercourse (by force) with another person without that person’s consent; violation, despoliation, – *verb transitive* to seize and carry off (obsolete); to commit rape upon; to ravish or transport, as with delight (obsolete); to violate, despoil. (*adjective*) **rā’ping** tearing prey (heraldry); ravishing, delighting (obsolete).

We can see that the standard meaning of “rape” is found here: “unlawful sexual intercourse (by force) with another person without that person’s consent.” But we also find other meanings. For example: “seizure” and “to ravish or transport, as with delight” and in the adjective form: “ravishing, delighting.” Ordinarily these meanings are little used, or even considered obsolete, but since the sexual activity described in *Srimad-Bhagavatam* is consensual, we are bound to find a meaning that makes sense and that portrays Srila Prabhupada for what we know him to be: an absolutely moral person who could never advocate violence on an innocent and defenseless woman.

In the eighteenth century, the English poet Alexander Pope wrote a satirical poem called *The Rape of the Lock*, poking fun at a controversy in which a lover cut a lock of

the heroine's hair without her permission. In this sense, to "seize and carry off" would be the appropriate understanding of "rape," whereas the usage in this part of the *Srimad-Bhagavatam* suggests another usage: "to ravish ... with delight." It is true that these usages are unusual, but they are certainly not unknown in the English language, even if considered obsolete in contemporary usage.

Furthermore, there are other quotes and recorded incidents that indicate that Srila Prabhupada's attitude toward rape (in the conventional meaning of the term) was complete disapproval and disgust. For example:

Intelligence is shown by self-control. The cats and dogs have no self-control. If a bull or a male cat or dog sees a female, immediately he will rape her, yet he will not be punished. But if a human being does that on the street, he will be arrested at once. The inclination to rape is there in both the animal and the human being, but a human being is supposed to control himself. Indeed, human life is meant for self-control. The more you control yourself, the more perfect a human being you become, and the more you allow your senses to run loose, the more of an animal you are. People do not know this. They want freedom, but in the name of freedom they are becoming animals. This is their so-called civilization. (*Dharma—The Way of Transcendence*, "The Sword of Remembrance")

Srila Prabhupada: Therefore, they are fools. When a man's lusty desire is very strong he commits what is called rape and he becomes implicated in criminal activities. *Kama esha krodha esha rajo-guna-samudbhavah*. Why one is forced to do that? The cause is lusty desires, anger, greediness. So we are thinking we are master of this material world, but actually you are servant of these desires, *kama, krodha, lobha, moha*. And that is *maya*. He is acting as servant, but he's thinking, "I am master." (Morning Walk, Philadelphia, July 14, 1975)

Srila Prabhupada went on, giving a Bengali saying to illuminate his point. "That is force; it is not *prema*. In Bengali it is said, 'If you catch one girl or boy,'"—he assumed an aggressive countenance—" 'You love me, you love me, you love me.' Is it love? 'You love me, otherwise I will kill you.'" Everyone was laughing at his graphic depiction of so-called love. "Is that love? So Krsna does not want to become a lover like that, on the point of revolver, 'You love me, otherwise I shall kill you.' That is not love; that is threatening. Love is reciprocal, voluntary, good exchange of feeling. Then there is love. Not by force; that is rape." (Hari Sauri's Diary, vol. 3, July 7, 1976, Washington, D.C.)

In Satsvarupa dasa Goswami's discussion of the controversial purport, he writes:

What about women and rape? It would seem that Prabhupada does not mean rape in the sense of a violent sexual attack such as is abhorred by all decent citizens. He seems to be using the word more to describe the sexual aggressiveness that a husband or paramour shows towards a woman. (*Prabhupada Appreciation*, "Appreciating Controversial Teachings, Part II")

In Kurma Prabhu's *The Great Transcendental Adventure*, he cites Caru Prabhu, who remembers an incident, that took place on April 4, 1972, when Srila Prabhupada expressed his disgust and disbelief at a televised depiction of violent rape:

Caru: We had to sit in the waiting room for a while before going on. Meanwhile, a wall-mounted television monitor was screening a movie depicting a graphic rape scene in a swamp. I was shocked. It was the most explicit material I had ever seen on television. I glanced over at Prabhupada. He watched for a few moments, then looked at us. He was smiling. It was not a smile of pleasure, though, but rather of sadness. Then Prabhupada shook his head with disbelief and looked down. Perhaps he had never witnessed such a thing before. Certainly it would have been hard to imagine the mentality that prompted broadcasting such scenes to the public. Prabhupada's look said: "This is unbelievable."

I hope it's clear that what Srila Prabhupada is describing in the Fourth Canto is the consensual attraction between lovers when aggression and even a degree of forcefulness is delighted in by both parties. He is pointing out that women enjoy this sort of aggression, although some might view it (not understanding the mentality of both parties) as rape. There is no question of rape during consensual sex, even from the standpoint of law. Certainly violent acts perpetrated on women without their consent is nowhere glorified in the *Vedas* or in Srila Prabhupada's teachings.