

18. The Love Of The Cowherd Maids

Kompella Subbaraya Sastry spoke about the coming on earth of the incarnation of Krishna and read extracts from the *Bhagavatham* describing the antecedents of the birth. All of you enjoyed listening to him, though many of you listened to the story for the hundredth time. The story of the Lord does not lose its sweetness when repeated.

Knowledge of supreme Self, meditation, and selfless action are, each one of them, hard to go through, but like chutney, which is salt, chilly, and tamarind in the right proportion ground to a paste, devotion that consists of these three in the correct proportion is bound to be appetising to all tongues.

The grace of the Lord is a subject dear to everyone. The subject is within the grasp of all. The Lord also can be addressed by any Name that tastes sweet to your tongue or pictured in any form that appeals to your sense of wonder and awe. You can sing of Him as Muruga, Ganapathi, Saradha, Jesus, Maithreyi, Sakthi, or you can call on Allah or the Formless, or the Master of all Forms. It makes no difference at all. He is all names and all forms. He is the beginning, the middle, and the end; the basis, the substance, and the source. So, any story that brings His glory, His grace, and His beauty into your consciousness, must perforce appeal to you.

Every thought sets up a function, agitating all around

Believe Me, all mental modes or functions are impermanent. A mental mode is a circle, like the circle that emanates from the place where a stone falls into the still water of a lake. The water gets agitated, and the circle affects the water up to the farthest end. Every thought acts like the stone on the stillness of the mind; it sets up a mental mode. It agitates all round. The path of attachment multiplies these circular waves and seeks to create further and wider agitations. But the path of detachment aims at stilling the waters. No agitation at all. Preserve the calmness, even the level. Keep the agitating thoughts away.

Concentration on the name and form of Krishna tends to calm the waves of mental modes. When E.M. Forster came to India, for some time he was with the Thakore of Rajkot, and when he found the Thakore engaged in meditation before the image of Radhashyam (Krishna), he wondered at first what it was all for! The Thakore had no wants to fulfil —what could he pray for? One day, he asked the Thakore, “Why?” He replied that for him, Krishna was the embodiment of love, beauty, and bliss (*prema, sundaram, and anandam*), so when he meditated on that form he was filled with love, beauty, and joy. The senses, intellect, and emotions all get purified and clarified by dwelling on the pure and the splendid.

Forster was induced to try the first steps, and though he found it rather difficult at first, the thrill engendered by the strange calm egged him on to persist. He found meditation good and useful.

Krishna’s pranks reveal His divine essence

Krishna was only a few weeks old when a certain ascetic came into the house of Nanda; Yasoda had the baby in her lap. Of course this is an incident not found in any book —I have Myself to tell you this. The maids ran in, for they were afraid the child might start weeping at the sight of the uncouth individual. Nevertheless, the individual walked in, and Yasoda found that when he was sent away, the baby raised a cry —not when he was

approaching! The sage also announced himself as having come to see Krishna, the Supreme Self (*Krishna Paramatma*), a name that was new to the entire family. No wonder the baby cried when that distinguished visitor was asked to go! Devaki had been given the vision of Krishna being the Lord Himself, but this sage had discovered the arrival of the *Avatar* by the grace of the Almighty. It was Baba who had invited the sage for His *darshan* (sight of a holy person).

The replies that Krishna gave when the cowherd maids (*gopis*) complained to His mother about His mischievous pranks and thefts of milk, butter, etc., also reveal, by the inner meaning they convey, the divine essence that He was.

“Why did you drink the milk from the pot she was carrying?”

“She was taking it to be offered to God, perhaps, God might have drunk it up.”

“Where had you run away?”

“I was always with you, is it not?”

“Why do you hold that butter pot in your clasp?”

“So that others may not eat it!”

“Why do you put your hand into that butter pot?”

“I am looking for a lost calf.”

These were the types of answers with which He taught them. He was the Ancient One in the new garb. His words came from the beginning of time.

Radha's love was pure without egoism

The Radha Principle (*Thathwam*) is also a deep, inscrutable one. She was ever in contemplation of the Lord and His Glory. She too saw the child Krishna as the divine manifestation, separate from the human form.

One day, Yasoda was searching for Krishna, who had strayed away. She looked almost everywhere, and at last she went to the house of Radha. Radha just closed her eyes and meditated on Krishna for a while, and when she called “Krishna,” Krishna was there. Yasoda shed tears of joy. She said, “I love Krishna as a mother; I have a sense of egoism in me that He is my son and that I must save Him from harm and seek to give Him guidance and protection. Your love is pure; it has no egoism prompting it.”

The *gopis* (cowherd maidens) had that one-pointed love (*prema*), unwavering, clear, and pure. The relationship between the *gopis* and Krishna as depicted in the *Bhagavatham* has been unfortunately judged by persons who have not regulated and controlled the agitations of their minds. This subject is beyond the comprehension of such people. Only celibates (*brahma-charins*) of the most ardent and ascetic type like Sukha Maharishi, who described it to King Parikshith, and in recent years Ramakrishna Paramahansa, can appreciate that relationship and pronounce upon its uniqueness. All the rest are apt to see in it only the reflection of their own failings and feelings. The language of worldly life is the only language they know; the regions of *thuriya*—beyond the regions of wakefulness, dream, and deep sleep—to which those experiences relate are not within their reach. So they drag the subject down to their own level and claim that they have mastered their mystery.

Every Godward step makes you shed all attachment

As a matter of fact, the inner eye, the inner senses are needed to grasp the meaning of this relationship. Oruganti has shown that it has eluded the grasp of most interpreters, for it is closely allied to the non-dual experience of the super-conscious state where there is no mind (*nirvikalpa samadhi*) itself. The mind has to be the master and not the slave of the senses, if the interpretation has to be just. Thoughts, wishes, deeds, and feelings—all have to be purified of the desire for gain. Egoism itself must lose all its hold on the interpreter, as it did on the *gopis*. Love toward the Lord such as the *gopis* had should make a person strong, not weak. In fact, the *gopis* were not weakened by their love; they were rendered tough. Ramakrishna also exhorted his disciples, like Narendranath, to grow strong with the cultivation of love toward the Lord.

Every step taken toward the Lord makes you shed bit by bit all attachment to the world. How then could the *gopis* retain their physical awareness? Druva went into the forest to get from the Lord the boon of sitting on the lap of his father, a very ordinary wish of a plainly earthly type. But as he advanced in penance, that wish disappeared from his mind, and his mind was elevated to great spiritual heights. How can one who has tasted nectar (*amritha*) be eager to taste water? Or crave tamarind fruits after tasting dates and having them in one's possession? Every craving will be sublimated into the higher realms of pure consciousness the moment one enters the spiritual field.

The gods came to the world as cowherd maids

And then who are these cowherd maids (*gopis*), according to the *Bhagavatham* itself? They are demi-gods who wanted to share in the glory of the *Avatar* and who came down to the world as witnesses and sharers in the divine cosmic sport (*leela*). They came for a purpose; they are not ordinary village folk, who could be dismissed as a crowd of voluptuous women. They saw the Divine, not the human at all, in every gesture and gait, every word and phrase of Krishna. They had no occasion or chance to be agitated by secular thought waves; all their thoughts were awakened by divine promptings and urges. Like the magnifying glass that catches the rays of the sun and directs them all to one spot, thus concentrating the heat on one point and helping it to ignite, the hearts of the *gopis* collected all the agitations of the mind and concentrated them and caused the illumination and the flame. The flame burnt all dross; the illumination revealed the Truth. All other interpretations are to be laid at the door of either ignorance or scholasticism, the pompous pride of mere book learning, which scorns the exercise of discipline.

Meaning of Krishna's theft of butter

Krishna is condemned as a thief who stole butter from the cowherd maidens, but the butter represents the devotion of the heart that is got after the process of churning. It is a question of a symbol being taken as literally true. He is the Stealer of Hearts (*Chitthachor*). The thief steals at night, in the darkness, without awakening the master, but when this thief steals, the master awakens; He wakes him and tells him that He has come. The victim is left supremely happy and satisfied.

Every *gopi* had the highest type of devotion in her heart. They saw only Krishna wherever they turned; they wore blue kumkum on their foreheads in order to remind themselves of Krishna. Many husbands protested against the colour of the kumkum, but they dared not wipe it off lest harm should befall them and the sacrilege recoil on them alone. [Here, Baba, who had filled his hand with petals of jasmine flowers, pulled apart by Him from garlands given to Him, showered the petals from one palm to another, and they fell in a cascade of blue gems.] Even the gems they preferred were of this type, blue, like Krishna. [He showed the gems the astounded gathering. Each

gem had Krishna's form in it, beautifully clear.]

Do not have pride in your attachment to God

There was a *gopi* named Suguna. One day, when Krishna was with Sathyabama, He pretended to have a severe stomach ache. In spite of all the remedies that she tried, she could not afford relief. Of course, it was all acting, superb acting such as the paralytic stroke I had for a week previous to Guru Purnami recently! Even Rukmini was not admitted into the house to ask about Krishna's health. But Rukmini found Suguna pining outside the door in great agony at the illness of the Lord. She gave her the articles and asked her to go in. Krishna welcomed Suguna and made her sit at His Feet and ate the fruits she had picked up from Sathyabama's own garden and suddenly, the ache had gone. It was her agony at the Lord's condition, her simple sincere devotion that was so effective.

There should be no artificiality in your attachment to the Lord, no affectation, no pride, no egoism left to soil the freshness of the flower you offer.

Sathyabama protested when Krishna accepted the fruits, for Krishna had brushed them aside as tasteless when she had herself offered them as the precious product of her assiduous gardening effort. They were tasteless because her pride had entered into them. When the simple rustic *gopi* picked them from the ground and saturated them with her devotion, they became tasty and attractive for the Lord, who cares for the inner feeling (*bhaava*), not the outer show (*bahya*)!

The only love that will not allow pride and envy to interfere with its purity is love toward God. I know that many of you who know that I have been taking only a cup of buttermilk daily for the last two months are genuinely grief-stricken, though I have been telling you that no work of Mine has been stopped or delayed as a result of what they call My "reduced intake of food". That is a sign of their love but really, I live on your bliss (*anandam*), not on this material food at all. I wish that you realised this and stopped worrying or weeping.

Krishna Janmashtami, Prasanthi Nilayam, 1963-08-12

Remember always that it is easy to do what is pleasant, but it is difficult to be engaged in what is beneficial. Not all that is pleasant is profitable.

Success comes to those who give up the path strewn with roses and brave the hammer blows and sword thrusts of the path fraught with danger.

Sathya Sai Baba