

Chapter 34. Krishna Avatar

Suka said, “O King, truly, Krishna’s pranks (*leelas*) are, as you said, amazing, wondrous, and yet sweet and meaningful. They aren’t tainted by the desire to show off divine nature. The common man is drawn by external pomp and apparent motives. So he judges the divine sport (*leelas*) as common and even low. The inner meaning and purpose are not easily patent to all. But the Lord can never engage Himself in purposeless and paltry activities.

“His advent is for the uplifting of the world from the morass of wickedness and unrighteousness, for fulfilling the needs of those devoted to Him, for the reestablishment of right and morality, and for the revival of the *Vedas*; He has to take into account the merit acquired by each in previous lives and shower His Grace accordingly. He makes Himself available through the granting of boons; His Divine activities are so shaped that they suit the time, person, aspiration, and compassion that cause each shower of grace. Therefore, who can comprehend correctly and interpret aright this divine play?

All activity of an Avatar is for the good of the world

“The amazing plays (*leelas*) of Hari are known only to Hari, it is said. He can be interpreted by Him alone, not by another. However, one observation can be made with confidence. The manifest incarnations of God won’t engage in the least for their own sake or for the sake of fulfilling any personal likes! All activity is for the good of the world! Though the world cannot exist and survive without Them, They move and act as if the world has nothing to do with them. In every word and deed of Theirs, one can observe the underlying current of total renunciation. For Them who hold the worlds in the palm of Their hands, what can the world give or withhold? They can shape it as they like.

“Fools, people without faith, persons who deny God, people caught in the coils of ignorance, those who don’t learn anything—these may see the plays (*leelas*) of God as self-centred and even motivated by delusion, like the actions of ordinary mortals. But genuine spiritual devotees (*bhaktas*) will cherish them as significant and sustaining examples of grace. How can that (*Thath*) be grasped by those who are engrossed in you (*thwam*)?

Divine love for devotees prompted Krishna’s leelas

“King, you should remember that the actions of Rama and Krishna are wide apart. When the wicked and cruel enemies of righteousness were about to overwhelm the good, the two brothers Krishna and Balarama were born, the one black and the other white (as a head of hair, both black and white), and by their acts that transcended the comprehension of man and astounded the world.

“Krishna’s divine miraculous pranks (*leelas*) are beyond the comprehension of anyone, however scholarly or wise. His movement, his walk, his talk, his smile, his laughter, his gesture, his speech, his song—each is charming with a unique artistry.

“Wherever He went, He created some strange mischief or other. Like a typhoon sweeping over the land, He left behind a series of upheavals, quarrels, wailing, and tears in every home that He visited!

“There was no need to invite Him ceremoniously into any house; He would enter, uninvited, unannounced.

Every house belonged to Him; He would go in and take whatever He wanted from wherever it was hidden and eat to His heart's content.

“He was everyone's dearest kinsman and fastest comrade, so He could take anything from any house with impunity. But He wasn't content with that. He took away much more than His own need, for He gave away large quantities to His companions. And they were quite a large number! The owners might bewail the loss and condemn the theft, but He didn't care; He gave the things away as if they were His own! No one could hinder His sport; no one could go against His word. If any dared oppose or threaten, the sufferings heaped on his head would be indescribable.

Krishna's smallest act was saturated with sweetness

“But the truth must be told. The smallest act of His was saturated with supreme sweetness. Even the sufferings He inflicted on those He wanted to punish were sweet. So no one felt the least anger toward Him. Instead, they yearned to meet Him more often, to play with Him longer, to talk with Him and stay with Him as much as possible. Whatever His pranks and practical jokes, the victims never felt annoyed at Him.

“The reason was the undercurrent of spiritual love (*prema*), that motivated all His words and acts. The cowherd maids rushed toward Him with sticks to beat Him off, but when they neared Him and cast their looks at Him, their hearts were filled with divine love, and they came away with a prayer on their tongues. Whatever He did appeared as divine sport (*leela*).

“And the manner of His speech! It was so pleasing and so clever. It was mostly intended to mislead! He put sand into His mouth before all His companions, but when His mother took Him to task for it, He denied it and put out His tongue to prove His denial! He rendered true statements false and false statements true!

“He went daily to Vrishabhendrapura, the village where Radha lived. Many people saw Him on the road while going and returning. His mother accosted and challenged Him, ‘Why do you trek such long distances every day? Don't you have comrades here to play with?’ He replied, ‘I don't know that road at all!’ He caused confusion in every home, created factions between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, setting them one against the other, and enjoyed the fun. He was seldom stationary in one place, from dawn when He rose from bed till the hour when He went to sleep. This little bundle of mischief roamed from house to house, without rest.

“In spite of all this, the villagers couldn't bear His absence, even for an instant! If He didn't put in His appearance any day, the milkmaids watched for His visit, peeping at the road through the windows or looking into the distance from the terrace. Such was the charm of the divine love that Krishna showered on them and the love that the people had toward Him. His pranks were so heart warming, so inspiring and meaningful.

Even as an infant, Krishna was the protector

“The blue Boy was the master of subterfuge and diplomacy. He saw through every artifice, however cleverly camouflaged. When the ogress Puthana approached Him as mother to feed Him at her breast, He pretended to be taken in by that stratagem; He sucked her life out and felled her to the ground. Many a demon (*asura*) came near Him to destroy Him, some assuming the familiar forms of the cowherds and milkmaids of the village, but He discovered their identity and despatched them to the city of death. One demon took the form of a calf and moved among the calves and cows that Krishna was tending, waiting for an opportunity to kill Him. But the three-year-

old divine infant saw through the device. He caught him by the tail, raised him, swung him around, and beat him on the ground, so that he breathed his last.

“Such strength and skill were quite out of proportion to that infant form. He demonstrated His divinity in a million ways, in order to convert and convince men. He taught everyone, whether they were elders, women, crooks, His own kinsmen, or well-wishers. He advised them into good ways. He entangled some of them in dilemmas. His maternal uncle, Kamsa, was drunk with imperial power and heroic audacity. He caught him by the tuft of hair, pulled him down from the throne, fisted him to death, and dragged the body along the main thoroughfare right down to the bank of the Yamuna! The entire population of the city of Mathura saw in every act of His a wondrous mixture of the amazing, the astounding, the sweet, the charming, the enticing, the beautiful, and the simple.

“While yet an infant, He ended the lives of Puthana, Thrinavartha, and Sakatasura, even though He was just a tiny thief in search of butter in every home! When His mother tied Him to a wooden mortar, He dragged it behind Him and, with it, pulled down two giant trees that were growing together. He curbed the conceit and fury of the serpent Kaliya, who had poisoned the waters of the Yamuna and made them disastrous for men and cattle. When His mother attempted to tie Him up with a rope round His waist, he revealed His universal form to her, the form in which the entire universe was found to be but a part of Him. His parents and the people of Gokula were wonder-struck at the remarkable experience of His divinity. Through His yawn, He showed them both the macrocosm and the microcosm!

“He showed His dear cowherd comrades His paradise, which knew no grief or loss. He persuaded Nanda to stop the usual ritual worship (*puja*) for the rain god Indra and instead to worship the Govardhana Hill. When Indra, stung by this neglect, poured terrible rains on the village, Krishna held aloft the Govardhana Hill on his little finger, inviting the entire village to take shelter under it!

Krishna’s play with the cowherd maids was divine

“He raised the cowherd boys and maids into ecstatic moods by His playful pranks and melodious music on the flute. To interpret this as low and sensuous is a sign of foolishness.

“Krishna’s dancing in the moonlight with the maids, each maid having a concrete Krishna by her side, is interpreted by low-minded persons as laxity of morals and a vulgar pastime. There is no basis at all for such inference. Krishna was only five or six years old when these miraculous incidents took place, so how can the experience be condemned as lascivious? The Lord has no attributes or qualities. The moonlight divine dance of Krishna (*rasa-kreedā*), as this incident is called, is but a means of rendering the cowherd maids (*gopis*) worthy of grace, an example of devotion and the fruit of devotion, dedication. The Lord was showering on them the grace they had earned by their meritorious acts. It was a boon, a blessing.

“When that superhuman divine manifestation is taken to be merely human, lasciviousness and thievishness may be attributed to it, but what human can achieve even an iota of what He did? He saved the world from the harassment of such monstrous evildoers as Pralamba, Dhenuka, Kesi, Banasura, Arishta, Mushtika, Kuvalayapida, Kamsa, Naraka, Paundraka, Vividha, Jarasandha, Dantavakra, Kambhoja, Kuru, Matsyasura, Kalayavana, and many such powerful persons. Can it be said that all this is within the capacity of a mere man?

In Krishna Avatar, every act was an amazing miracle

“In this unique *Avatar*, every act is an amazing miracle. Even when angry, He could not but evince His overflowing love (*prema*). In Love, His compassion flowed unhindered. Through His sight, touch, and conversation (*darshan*, *sparshan*, and *sambhasan*), one could earn liberation. He granted immortality to those who remembered His name. The cowherds, among whom He lived and moved, tasted the nectar of ecstasy whenever they witnessed His deeds or remembered them.

“O King! The *Bhagavatha* is not merely the narrative of the Lord’s story, in the background of Mathura, Brindavan, Gokula, the banks of the Yamuna, Nanda-Yasoda, Vasudeva-Devaki and others. *Bhagavatha* includes the stories of all the incarnations of the Lord (*Bhagavan*). All incarnations were the manifestations of the selfsame Gopala, or Krishna, from Vishnu’s heaven (Vaikunta). The story of each is but the story of Vaasudeva, emerging from Him and merging in Him. That Divine Power is the sustaining factor for all incarnations as well as all living beings.”

The sage’s eyes closed. He was in a state of transcendent spiritual bliss (*samadhi*), tasting the sweetness of the Krishna incarnation. A beautiful smile beamed on his lips. Parikshith was astounded at the sight of the waves of joy that overpowered the great sage whenever he allowed his mind to dwell on Krishna’s divine career. He too yearned with enthusiastic impatience to listen to the enrapturing incidents and activities of the Lord.

When Suka resumed, Parikshith lost all consciousness of his surroundings. He was so struck with wonder that he couldn’t believe that some of the incidents had ever happened! He got immense pain and unbearable agony at the thought of his own inconstancy. So he placed his problem before the sage and won peace of mind from his explanation and elaboration.

While proceeding thus, on one occasion the king developed serious doubts about the devotion (*bhakti*) of the cowherd maids (*gopis*). He argued within himself and sought remedial assurances through his own understanding and faith. But the doubts wouldn’t vanish. Nor had he the courage to ask the sage, who might consider them to be too childish. So, he was suffering and smothering the suffering.

This became evident to the sage, who asked the king with a smile, “Evidently some insane idea is distracting you. In this crisis, it is not beneficial to suffer from repressed emotions. If some doubt is simmering in you, or if a thirst to know about something is hurting you, don’t hesitate to ask me. I’ll resolve the doubt, I’ll quench the thirst and ensure joy and contentment of mind.”

Thus encouraged, the king spoke. “Master! You know the past, present, and future. You have the vision and the capacity to cure me of the doubt that is pestering me. Therefore, please don’t misunderstand me. Hear me and resolve the doubt. Cure me of the anguish I have on account of it. Restore the peace of mind I had before the doubt entered my heart.”

The king fell at the sage’s feet and continued, “Master! I have heard much, in various versions, of the sport and pranks, of Krishna’s Rasa Dance (*rasa-kreeda*) with the cowherd maids (*gopis*) of Brindavan. They appear to be sensual pastimes of ordinary mortals. If such incidents did indeed happen, how can they be interpreted as divine? Aren’t they disapproved by the world? These incidents at Brindavan, on the Yamuna banks, where such loose sensual lascivious play was enacted, besmirch Krishna’s divine nature, I am afraid. It is said that ultimate release (*moksha*) can be attained only by those who transcend the qualities (*gunas*). These cowherd maids were afflicted with qualities and the desires born out of them, mostly sensual and objective. It amazes me to hear that the maids were able to attain freedom (*moksha*). Indeed, it appears ridiculous! However, if these immoral activi-

ties have some inner significance that justifies their being accepted as praiseworthy, please enlighten me.”

Suka laughed heartily. “O King! Don’t think that you are afflicted by a doubt; it is much worse! For those who have realised that Krishna is the Lord Himself won’t entertain such doubts. This is the final period of the *Dwapara* Age, and the *Kali* Age is beginning soon. The Spirit of the Age of Wickedness (the *Kali* spirit) has entered into you and has prompted you to lodge such ideas in your mind. Or else, you would have unshaken faith that Krishna is the sovereign supreme God.

Every incident in His career shines in your heart with divine brilliance. The moment you recollect His name, you are overcome by joy and your thoughts merge in Him. So these doubts can’t arise in such as you! You are defiling your personality by them.

Exuberance of divine intoxication of gopis

“Consider what type of a person I am. You know that there is no place in my heart for activities born out of qualities (*gunas*) or the impulses created out of these qualities. Just consider how such a one as I is overpowered with supreme joy when I contemplate Krishna’s divine sport with the cowherd maids (*gopis*)! Consider how I praise the good fortune of these maids, who had His precious companionship. Can this be ordinary sensual sport? Or is it the pure and genuine exuberance of divine intoxication?

“Think a while. Sensual exultation and divine exhilaration might appear the same in their external manifestations to the untrained eye. But when the senses are transcended, when the individual and Universal have merged into one thought and consciousness, when all awareness of the body has been negated —then to interpret these activities as objective and sensual is sheer stupidity, to say the least.

“A knife in the hands of a murderer is fraught with danger to all, and a knife in the hands of a surgeon confers freedom from pain. In both cases, a hand holds the knife. So too, the acts of one whose self is centred in the body are to be condemned, while those of one whose self is centred in the *Atma* or Inner Reality are highly beneficent and praiseworthy.

“It all looked so peculiar, so extraordinary. Very often, it resembled lawlessness and sheer mischief. While walking in the eastern direction, his attention was fixed in the western direction! He conversed through His eyes; the flash of His eye spoke out His plans and intentions. He didn’t care for human limitations and disciplines. He didn’t recognise the distinction between new and old acquaintances —He treated both alike. He didn’t respect kinship or yield to the demands of convention.

Krishna’s form was bliss personified

“Next, the mystery of the Krishna incarnation! That embodiment of sweetness is most captivating! Exquisite charm, unrivaled sweetness, incomparable love —the Krishna form was the concretisation of all these! That form was the treasure house of bliss, the Ocean of Virtue. Oh, what innocence! What superhuman excellence! The mere sight of Him is enough; listening to His words is enough; merely touching Him is enough —one’s life will find its goal! All rituals, all sacrifices, all scriptural ceremonies have as their goal only this: this sight, this listening, this touch. The gain that accrues from rites are nothing compared to the gain from the sight and the touch and the listening to His voice. No, they are nothing at all. Ah! What immeasurable sweetness!” Contemplating on that form, recollecting the charm and the loveliness, the sage started shedding profuse tears of joy. He was so full of

inward bliss that he stopped narrating and lost all consciousness of himself and his listeners.

The ascetics around him and the king himself were overcome with wonder at the rare sight of the sage's transcendental state (*samadhi*). The illumination on his face had an overpowering impact on all. They sat like statues, afraid to disturb the sage and immersed in their own amazement and joy.

The fruit of good deeds done in previous lives

After some time, Suka opened his eyes and exclaimed, “How fortunate were the herdsmen and maids (*gopas* and *gopis*) who lived then. How their bodies must have shone with the divine joy they experienced when they moved in His company, played with Him, talked with Him, sang with Him, and shared supreme bliss (*ananda*) with Him! Gods envied their luck, for it was a chance they could not secure. Those simple illiterate folk had the singular good fortune as a consequence of the merit acquired in many previous lives. Those herdsmen and cow maids weren't just common men and women. No. At first sight they struck one as simple, unlearned folk, that was all. But they had a vast treasure of revealed wisdom, which only a few could appreciate and understand. Or else, how could they have secured the bliss of the Lord's touch, which even Rukmini and Sathyabama couldn't win so easily! The herdsmen and maids can be said to be more fortunate than those queens. Their good fortune was the fruit of the good deeds done by them during not one but three previous lives!”