

Chapter 36. Comrade and King

The pranks of Krishna the toddler

“Master! I’m eager to hear about the boyish pranks, games, and adventures of Krishna, as the cowherd lad (Gopala), and His comrades of the Vraja community in the groves and wilds during his eleven years in Brindavan —after reaching there from the Mathura Prison, where He chose to be born.”

Suka was very happy. He smiled and said, “It’s not possible for me to describe to you all the pranks (*leelas*) of that divine Gopala, each of which fills the mind with sweetness. The Vraja cowherd boys who shared that joy were really blessed. The Lord doesn’t pay any attention to external distinctions —an individual’s name, nationality, caste, profession, attitude, etc. Whatever the attitude with which a person approaches Him, He will welcome him, draw him near, fulfil his wishes, and confer happiness. That was Gopala’s nature.

“Ever since His father, Vasudeva, left Him in Nanda’s home, Krishna granted great joy to Nanda, and grateful shouts of ‘victory’ echoed and reechoed in that home as a result of the child’s divine prowess. He grew day by day, with increasing charm. He shone as the most endearing treasure of the mother and played on her lap. He toddled and crossed the doorstep. Holding His father’s and mother’s finger, He venturesomely walked a few steps —although the parents tried their best to hide Him from view so that the many ambassadors of death that Kamsa despatched without respite could not get at Him, He would somehow make Himself available. He used to go forward to meet them and introduce Himself to them. Who could keep Gopala, the provider and protector of the universe, hidden —and where? Who could carry Him off —and how? O, Parikshith, it is all divine sport.

Cows and calves are entranced by Krishna’s melody

“Growing day by day, He started going to the sacred sandbanks of the holy Yamuna river to play with children of His age from the homes of the cowherds. The parents tried to stop Him but couldn’t. Like His comrades, He drove cows to the pastures.

“Really, the eyes that saw the entrancing scene —when Gopala was in the midst of the herd of clean sleek happy cows and calves— are worthy to be called so, for they saw the sight of all sights. Picture to yourself, Oh King! The spotless white herd of calves and cows, and the dark divine boy! They were drawn close to Him, and they would not leave Him and stray away. Nor could Krishna, for He loved them as His own brothers and sisters —or as His own children! Let His hand touch their backs ever so lightly, and the calves and their mothers forgot all about themselves, opened their mouths, raised their tails, hung out their tongues, and lovingly licked His face and hands.

“Gopala often clasped their necks and swung to and fro, in great joy, with His eyes closed and His face beaming with a radiant smile. The calves playfully butted His soft body with their just-emerging horns. On the ever-fresh, ever-spring sands of the cool Yamuna, He played about gracefully and gladly, regardless of night and day, with His friends: the calves and the cowherd boys. The parents had to send servants to find them and bring Him with His followers, willy nilly, to their home.

“As the days passed at home and outside, He grew up into a charming boy. Though the parents didn’t want

Him to, He unleashed the cows and calves of the stall, drove them along the route taken by the village cattle, and put them also on the common road to the verdant pasture ahead. Like the other boys, He had a stick on His shoulder and a length of cloth around His head. Walking along with supreme self-confidence, He appeared as magnificent as a royal lion cub.

“He played in fun with His companions. He sang the sweetest tunes aloud, with the left palm covering the left ear. At this, the cows who were voraciously munching the green grass would stop as if too entranced to continue; they stared delightedly, listening to the divine melody. They stood with ears alert, lest they miss the message calling them to bliss, and with eyes half closed, as if immersed in the depths of meditation (*dhyana*)! The calves that had been nuzzling at the udders, eager to have their fill, stood still, drinking instead the divine strains of Krishna’s song. It was a thrilling scene for all who witnessed it.

Krishna’s divine sports are full of spiritual bliss

“O King, I cannot tell you the number or nature of Gopala’s divine plays (*leelas*). All were wondrous and awe-inspiring, all were full of spiritual bliss (*ananda*) and conferring bliss. Sometimes, He would challenge His comrades and swing the stick in His hand so fast that the eye couldn’t see it! At this, the comrades, gathered around Him and prayed to be taught how to swing it also. For Him who turn the universe with all its contents so fast around, turning a stick is no special accomplishment; it is a feat that no teaching can impart. The poor fellows did not grasp this reality behind their playmate.

“Often, He played the game of the hunt for the thief in the trees! When the pursuers climbed behind Him, He took refuge on the topmost branch, a branch so thin and weak that it would swing when a squirrel walked on it! He couldn’t be captured! Yes, indeed! How could He be caught by one and all? Only the pure heart could capture Him.

“To all appearances, Gopala would be with His comrades in the woods and groves. He would be playing with them, making them happy with many a practical joke and hilarious game; He would move with them, His hands placed endearingly on their shoulders. But in a moment, he would disappear and be away from sight. Meanwhile, He would confront His companions in a clever disguise, so perfect that they would deem Him to be a stranger with whom they shouldn’t talk. Then He would surprise them with a burst of laughter and the exclamation, ‘It’s Me, It’s Me, you couldn’t discover Me.’ This threw the boys into amazement—and sometimes, even fright.

“The day passed thus. When dusk fell, He returned to the village with His friends, quite innocently, as if nothing had happened to disturb His equanimity. On certain days, the mother insisted that He stay at home and not go to the pastoral groves. Then, the cowherd boys and cows and calves would walk slowly to the grove, heavy with grief. They would lay under the trees, listless and alone, not caring to eat or drink, but with eyes longing for the arrival of Bliss Krishna, who alone could put life into them.

Amazing feats of protection by boy Krishna

“Many a day, the wicked uncle, Kamsa, sent his emissaries, the ogres, in disguise, with playthings and delicious sweets. The boys gathered round the peddlers and asked the cost of the things they wanted. But the ogre was intent on the chance to catch Krishna; he was looking out for the moment when He would come near. Krishna did not cast his glance at the toys and sweets. Krishna used to wait until evening and then approach the wicked

men, allowing them to believe that He had fallen into their trap but only to fall upon them, pull them to pieces, and throw the carcasses afar! Such adventures filled the village people with amazement, fear, and wonder, besides delighting them at the happy escape from danger.

“Another day, the village was packed with carts full of mangos! Krishna knew that this was another evil plan of the ogres, the emissaries of Kamsa. So, He took the fruits and killed those who brought them. He felt that it was not proper to refuse the fruits that the uncle had sent, so He accepted them. But He did not send anyone back alive to inform him what had happened. That was the fate of all whom the uncle despatched on his evil mission.

Krishna lifts the Govardhana peak

“O, King! From the day the Lord took residence in the Vraja region, the place was changed into a treasure house of Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and welfare. It appeared as if She was scattering Her graceful smiles all over the place. There were thousands upon thousands of cows; there was no shortage of curds, milk, or butter. In fact, there was such a plenty that they didn't know how to consume all they had or how to preserve them for future consumption. Gopala loved the cows so much that He could not tolerate any idea of throwing away the precious gift. That is why He was pleased to receive them into His own stomach. This act of grace is the basis for the appellation Milk and Butter Thief!

“Observing that He was being named as such, Indra decided to demonstrate to the world that Krishna was indeed God come on earth. So he manipulated a situation where Indra worship (*puja*) was canceled by the people of Vraja, where Indra retaliated with heavy downpours of rain, and where Krishna lifted up the Govardhana Peak in order to shelter the cowherds and cows from the onslaught of the downpour! It was all part of a play. Indra had no anger; nor did he entertain any idea of revenge or retaliation! Nor would Krishna ever advise people to give up worship (*puja*). Such miracles were decided upon in order to make them identify the Divine already amidst them. Such incidents confirm the view that nothing can happen without an underlying purpose.”

Parikshith intervened with his joyous exclamation. “O, how sweet are the sport and pranks (*leelas*) of the divine boy, Gopala! The more we hear, the greater grows the appetite. Master! Let me listen to a few more and attain the state of liberation.”