

19. Bamboo Bower

Here was an occasion when Krishna laid His flute aside and declared that He would not play it again. It is a long story, not found in books. I alone must tell you about it, for only the Person who has experienced it can describe it. A bride called Neeraja came to Gokulam as the daughter-in-law of a Gopa family. Her husband and parents-in-law warned her against Krishna and His pranks and threatened her, on pain of dire punishment, to keep away from Him and to avoid Him by every possible means.

It was Govardhana Worship day, and all the cowherd boys and maidens (*gopas* and *gopis*) had to go beyond the village limits to circumambulate and worship the Govardhana Hill, a festival they celebrated every year. Neeraja went with the others, and in spite of the severest warning, she peeped into a crowd of enthusiastic *gopis* watching the dance of Radha with Krishna in a flower bower near the hill. She was so captivated by the divine Presence that she was no longer the same person.

Another day, while on the Yamuna river bank, she saw Krishna fashioning a flute from a reed taken out of bamboo bower, and she heard Him play! Oh, it was overwhelmingly ecstatic! It was a call to transcend the material bonds to free oneself from the trammels of earthly endeavours. Neeraja did not care for anyone now. She became God-mad. In fact, she was the first to hold the reins of Akrura's chariot when he was taking Krishna to Mathura away from Gokulam and try to push the vehicle back!

Well, she was driven out of her house by the mother-in-law for that. She was an outcast. The whole village rose up against her. She spent her days in the bamboo bower, her whole mind fixed on the Lord whom she had installed there.

Krishna responds to the call of yearning

Years passed. Nanda, Yasoda, and Radha left the world. Neeraja was now 52 years old. One day, she prayed desperately to Krishna, "I can no longer bear this forlorn life. My eyes have gone dry, they have no more tears to keep this love green. My heart is fast turning into a wasteland. Come, O Lord, come and save me, take me unto yourself."

Krishna heard the prayer. He responded to her yearning and called her by name so sweetly that His very voice filled her with new life. The bamboo bower was fragrant with divine glory. Krishna came near and took Neeraja's palm In His Hand. "What do you desire?" He asked.

She asked "What is the purpose of life?"

"To merge In God."

"Well let me merge in You ... but before that, before my love merges in yours, let me hear you play on that flute for a short while."

Krishna smiled and gave the excuse that He had not brought His flute. But seeing Neeraja's yearning, He plucked a reed from the bamboo bower and broke it right and in a trice converted it into a flute. With Neeraja on his lap, Krishna played so melodiously on the flute that the entire Gokula and even the whole world was bathed in ecstatic joy. When He stopped, Neeraja had attained final beatitude and was no longer a limited individual *gopi*

separate from Him.

Krishna laid aside His flute and said He would not play on it again. That is the story of one *gopi*. The story of every *gopi* will be interesting, each in its own way, for they were all so transmuted by the devotion they bore toward the Lord. The *gopis* were declared by Narada in the *Bhakthi Sutras* (aphorisms on devotion) to be the greatest among the devotees).

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In your daily affairs, do not create factions or revel in hatred. See the good in others and the faults in yourselves. Revere others as having God installed in them. Revere yourself also as the seat of God. Make your heart pure so He can reside therein.

Sathya Sai Baba