

23. The glory of Krishna Avathaar

EMBODIMENTS of love! It was the middle of the *Dhvaapara Yuga*. Unable to bear the atrocities committed on good people by demonic rulers, the Goddess of Earth prayed to the Lord in many ways. Offering solace to the grief-stricken Goddess, the Lord said; "Dhevi! You may return to the earth. I shall do what needs to be done. You will be relieved of your Burden." Encouraging her in this way the Lord sent Mother Earth back to the world.

Thereafter, the Lord summoned all the Dhevas (denizens of the celestial world) and directed them to take birth as Yaadhavas. The originator of the Yaadhava clan is Yayaathi. His eldest son was known as Yadhu. The descendants of Yadhu came to be known in course of time as Yaadhavas. Among the yaadhavas, there was a chief known as Aahuka, who was a righteous person, wedded to truth. The characters figuring in the Krishna legend belong to Aahuka's lineage. Aahuka had two sons Dhevaka and Ugrasena. Kamsa was the son of Ugrasena. Dhevaki was the daughter of Dhevaka. Kamsa had no sister of his own. He had great affection for his cousin Dhevaki, whom he treated as his own uterine sister.

The warning to Kamsa from the ethereal voice

In the Yaadhava clan, there was one Vasudheva, the son of Shura. Vasudheva was one of the satraps in the Yaadhava kingdom. He was known as one who stood by his plighted word. Ugrasena and Kamsa, after a great deal of search, picked upon Vasudheva as a suitable bridegroom for Dhevaki. Vasudheva already had a wife by the name Rohini. In those rimes, there were no restrictions regarding polygamy. Because he had no child through Rohini, Vasudheva agreed to marry Dhevaki.

After the marriage, Kamsa got ready his chariot to take Vasudheva and Dhevaki to their home. Kamsa drove the chariot himself with a heavy heart, overwhelmed by the prospect of separation from his beloved cousin. Dhevaki was as dear to Kamsa as his life-breath. At the time of her leaving her paternal home, Dhevaki was presented with many precious gifts by Ugrasena, besides a retinue of elephants, horses and guardsmen.

While the chariot was proceeding in a grand manner, all of a sudden a loud voice was heard from the sky: "You fool! You do not know what is in store for you. The one who will slay you for all your misdeeds will be born as the eighth child of your sister." After saying this, the ethereal spirit vanished.

The moment Kamsa heard these words, he flew into a rage. He jumped down from the chariot, seized Dhevaki by the hair, unsheathed his sword to cut off her head.

Vasudheva, who was the very embodiment of peace, truth and righteousness, held Kamsa's hands and asked him why he was worried so much over the prospect of death. "Death is inevitable, whether today or in time to come. Whatever you may do to protect yourself, death will come in its own time even if you hide yourself in a forest. All beings that are born are destined to die. Kamsa! The ethereal voice declared that death will come to you from the hands of the eighth child (of Dhevaki) and not immediately. There are many years ahead before the eighth child. It is not proper that you should lose your temper. Release the girl whom you had loved as your sister. I shall hand over to you every child that is born to her." When Vasudheva gave his pledge, Kamsa realised the truth of his words and released Dhevaki from his hold. Kamsa returned to his palace without getting back into the chariot.

Sage Naaradha's advice to Kamsa

Vasudheva and Dhevaki reached their home with heavy hearts. As days passed by and Kamsa was immersed in worry about the prospect of death, Sage Naaradha came to him one day. After talking about world affairs in general, before leaving, Naaradha told Kamsa-"You are verily a fool. You are not aware of your real plight. The ethereal voice said that (Dhevaki's) eighth child will be your slayer. But you cannot know from which of her children death will come to you. You cannot take a chance with any of them."

From that moment Kamsa's distress and fear increased. He commanded Vasudheva to hand over to him every child. He killed six of the newborn children as they were handed over to him.

When Dhevaki was enceinte for the seventh time, Sriman Naarayana made all arrangements to carry out His promise to Mother Earth. To promote the welfare of the world, to establish *Dharma* among mankind, to uphold truth and to instill devotion to God in humanity, the Divine process had to be set in motion. The Dhevas took birth as Yaadhavas. Vishnu summoned His all-pervading *Yoga Shakthi* (The Cosmic Energy), and said "Go forth immediately and enter the womb of Yasodha." Summoning Aadhisessa (the Divine Serpent) the Lord directed him to go to Gokulam and enter the womb of Rohini (Vasudheva's elder wife). "I shall be entering the womb of Dhevaki."

Krishna's birth in prison

In Dhevaki's seventh pregnancy, the Lord had the foetus transferred to Rohini's womb and Kamsa was informed that Dhevaki had an abortion. Krishna made His advent in her eighth pregnancy. Apprehending danger from Kamsa, Vasudheva arranged to send Rohini to Nandha's home. Rohini was a sister of Yasodha.

Expecting mortal danger to himself from the eighth child of Dhevaki, Kamsa kept Vasudheva and Dhevaki in a heavily guarded prison. He kept the key of the' prison lock with himself.

Dhevaki gave birth to a son on an *Ashtami* (eighth day after the New Moon) in the asterism Rohini. The Child that was born was the Lord Himself with all His effulgence and all the insignia of Vishnu. On the child's chest was the Srivathsa mole. The Kausthubha ornament shone brilliantly. Dhevaki and Vasudheva folded their hands in adoration, blinded by the effulgence of the Divine Child. They felt that their lives had been redeemed by the birth of the Lord, whom they saw with their own eyes. Approaching the baby and caressing his palms and feet, they prayed to the Lord: "Thanks to our good fortune, you have taken birth as our son. But we are not in a position to protect you. You must use your divine potency to get away from this prison by any means.

The ways of the Divine are marvellous and mysterious

Vasudheva sat beside the child and started praying. Immediately a basket appeared before him. Placing the Divine child in the basket he looked at the prison door. He saw that it was open. The ways of the Divine are marvellous and mysterious, felt Vasudheva. He stepped out of the prison. He found all the guards sound asleep. As he came out, there was a heavy downpour. The Yamuna was in spate. He prayed to Naarayana to see that there was no impediment in the way of his mission to protect the Divine child. The Yamuna gave him passage. He reached Nandha's house.

The same day Yasodha had given birth to a child. Yasodha was unconscious. The child was none other than Maayaadhevi. When she was born, both Nandha and Yasodha were in a state of trance. Leaving the infant Krishna by the side of Yasodha, Vasudheva returned to Mathura with the other child. When Vasudheva left Nandha's house, the child left beside Yasodha uttered a cry. Yasodha and Nandha did not know whether the newborn was a boy or girl. On hearing the child's cry, Yasodha looked at it and found that it was a boy.

Vasudheva took the female child back to his prison. There the child started crying. On hearing the cry, all the guards woke up. They found the prison gates closed. They informed Kamsa about the birth of the child. Kamsa, who had been anxiously waiting for the news, rushed to the prison. Seizing the new-born child from Dhevaki's hands, he flung it up in the air to slay it with his sword. The child, Maayaadhevi, spoke from above, "You fool! The boy who is going to slay you is already born. He is growing up in a certain place. You cannot escape your destined end." Saying this, Maayaadhevi vanished.

Kamsa's nightmare about his killer

From that moment, Kamsa was engaged in finding out the whereabouts of the child that was to be his slayer. He released Vasudheva and Dhevaki from prison.

Once, Vasudheva and Nandha, as satraps in Kamsa's kingdom, came to Mathura to pay their annual tribute to him. While they were returning, Vasudheva and Nandha were lamenting over their plight. Vasudheva observed that in Repalle (Nandha's place) some inauspicious events seemed to be impending. "In Gokulam also some untoward events are likely to happen. Nandha, do not stay in Mathura for long. Leave the place immediately:"

On hearing this warning, Nandha immediately returned to Repalle. In Repalle, demoniac elements were all the time moving about actively. The first of them was Puuthana. She lost her life while giving suck to Krishna. This Puuthana in a previous life was Rathnaavali, the daughter of Emperor Bali. The Lord as Vaamana appeared as an extremely handsome young lad at the sacrifice being performed by Bali. Rathnaavali was charmed by the beauty of Vaamana and felt how much she would have enjoyed rearing him if he had been her son. As she was having these thoughts, she found that Vaamana had placed his foot on Bali's head (after he had measured two footsteps).

Enraged at this sight, she was filled with desire to kill him. Because she desired at first to fondle Vaamana as a child and later to kill him, she was born as Puuthana and came to Krishna to feed him and kill him. In the end, she lost her life. The Lord has His own ways of fulfilling the desires of people. Hence, it is essential to have good thoughts and good desires.

Child Krishna proves that He is Divine

When Krishna was three years old he saw an old lady carrying a basket of fruits from the jungle. Krishna told her he would like to have some fruits. The old woman said he could get them only if he paid the price Krishna innocently asked the meaning of the word price. The woman said that something should be given in return for the fruit. Krishna went in and brought a palmful of rice. The woman placed the rice in her basket and gave Krishna some fruits. She was charmed by the beauty of the child. As she was returning to her cottage, she felt that the basket was getting heavier. When she placed it down in her hut, she was amazed to find that all the rice grains had turned into precious gems! She thought the child must be divine. Otherwise how could the rice

turn into gems? Considering herself supremely lucky, she invited her neighbours to see the miracle.

Krishna was pleading with Yasodha that he should be allowed to go to the forest with other cowherd boys. Thinking that if he was put to sleep he would forget his desire to go to the forest, Yasodha gave him milk. Krishna was no ordinary child. While drinking the milk, he pretended as if he was sleepy. He made a pretence of yawning to indicate his drowsiness. In that wide open mouth of Krishna, Yasodha saw all kinds of things---all the worlds in motion and many deities. She could not make out what it meant. "Is it a dream or Vishnu's *Maaya* (illustrious power)? Or is it some fantasy of mine? Or is it real? Am I Yasodha? Have I gone somewhere?" These thoughts racked her mind. "My son is an infant. How can all the worlds appear in his tiny mouth? It must be my imagination." Such doubts arise in the minds of those who are caught up in the delusions of the body complex.

How child Krishna fought with the demons

Yielding to his entreaties Yasodha allowed Krishna to go to the forest with the cowherd boys. Almost every day Krishna encountered some ogre or ogress and slayed them. His playmates used to describe to their elders these exploits of Krishna, how he fought with the demons and finished them off.

Yasodha, however, used to say: "God is taking care of my child. Otherwise how could he overcome these encounters?" The cowherd boys observed: "When he himself is God, why does he need anybody's protection, oh mother!" Yasodha felt that the boys were naive in their judgment. "Will God come to one's rescue so easily? It is only because of my prayers, my child is protected." With this belief, Yasodha used to perform various rites, when Krishna returned from the forest, to express her gratitude to Providence for saving him from the evil eye and other dangers.

There was great rejoicing among the Dhevas (celestial beings) when they heard about the slaying of many demons on earth by Lord Naarayana in His incarnation as Krishna. On hearing these stories, Brahma wanted to verify the truth about Krishna's prowess and the miracles attributed to him.

Brahma verifies Krishna's prowess

That same night Krishna gave a directive to his maes. "Today do not rake the cows for grazing. Let us rake the calves. Come with the calves together with your respective musical instruments. We must spend the day with music." Most of them came with flutes on which they could play well, holding a stick in one hand and a flute in the other. Only two boys brought two mud-pots to be used as drums. Playing on the mud-pot is known today as *Ghatavaadhyam*. This art is as ancient as the *Dhvaapara Yuga*.

The cowherd boys gathered on the bank of the Yamuna with calves. Some of them played on their flutes, some drummed their mud-pots while Krishna danced to the music. When Krishna stopped dancing, others started dancing. After sometime, Daama, one of the two intimate friends of Krishna (the other being Subaala), told Krishna that he was feeling hungry and would like to have some palm-fruits from palm trees a little far away. Balaraama, who was close by, said he would fetch the fruits. Balaraama went near the trees and shook them. All the fruits dropped brown. At the time of the naming ceremony of the child Balaraama, the sage Garga referred to

the strength of the baby and said that the name Balaraama would be appropriate for him. At that time, a huge donkey appeared there. All were frightened. The donkey was getting bigger and bigger. Balaraama seized the donkey by the forelegs and dashed it to the ground. It died on the spot. The cowherd boys hailed Balaraama as a hero and danced in joy.

Biding his time, Brahma created at that moment a huge cave. He took into the cave all the calves, while the cowherd boys were immersed in merriment. Missing the calves, the boys started searching for them, shouting "Krishna! Krishna!" Krishna knew what was afoot and directed his mates to search for the calves in the cave nearby. They all went into the cave. Immediately the mouth of the cave closed in. The boys and the calves were caught inside. They were there for a whole year.

Brahma realises the inscrutable ways of the Lord

Krishna wanted to teach Brahma a lesson. He took the form of all the calves and all the Gopaalas imprisoned in the cave. In the evening Krishna and Balaraama took the calves and the boys back to their homes. This went on day after day for a whole year. The elders assumed that the calves and the boys were their own. Brahma wondered what was happening? Had Krishna managed to free the boys and the calves from the cave? When he went into the cave he found all of them inside. He was amazed to find that the same boys and calves were inside as well as outside. He then realised the inscrutable way of the Lord. "How can anyone know you, oh Krishna You are subtler than the atom and vaster than the vast in creation. You dwell in all the myriad species in all the world, how can anyone know you?" He prayed to Krishna to forgive him and released the calves and the boys from the cave.

This episode reveals that the Supreme Lord can assume countless forms. He can assume the form of the entire cosmos. That is why the Upanishath declared- "The entire cosmos is dwelt in by God." All are forms of the Divine.

How is this possible? By the power of the Will of God. If a man, while asleep, experiences all kinds of things in the dream, including his own movements, while in fact he is motionless on his bed, what is it that is beyond the power of the Supreme Lord? Seeing the Divine in-human form people can have doubts whether the incarnation can have such miraculous powers when he has the same body as themselves. They do not perceive the oneness of the *Aathma*. It is difficult to recognise the Divine in the human form.

Krishna's leelas were intended to reveal His Divinity

Not recognizing His Divinity many people reviled Krishna calling him a philanderer and a thief. These accusations do not detract from His greatness. They are born of delusion. Men make the same mistake about themselves, forgetting their inherent divinity and identifying themselves with their bodies. Krishna appeared in human form to teach mankind to transcend their body consciousness.

Krishna's *leelas* (sportive miracles) were intended in one way or another to reveal His divinity. Once Balaraama teased Krishna by declaring: "You are not Yasodha's son. You may ask why I say so. This is because Nandha and Yasodha are of fair complexion and you are dark. You are not their child. You must have been born somewhere else."

What Balaraama said was true and Krishna knew it. But assuming an air of innocence, Krishna went to Yasodha and complained "Mother! Balaraama is saying that I am not your son. Tell me

the truth." Yasodha replied: "Krishna! What does Balaraama know? He is an innocent boy. You are very cute. You are highly intelligent. Don't pay any heed to his words. You are truly my son. The colour given by God is permanent. Colour as such is not important. Many people paint themselves in different ways to conceal their identity. All these are momentary. The colour given by God cannot be changed by anyone. God likes the dark complexion. You have got the colour of the Divine."

Gopikas' spiritual love for Krishna

The Gopikas used to describe Krishna in many ways. Their love for Krishna was entirely spiritual. Their feelings *were* absolutely pure.

While Pareekshith was listening to Shuka's narration of Krishna's *leelas*, many doubts occurred to him. Shuka resolved all the doubts. "Pareekshith! You are viewing things from a worldly point of view and missing the truth. No one can determine the form of the Divine. He can assume any form at any time. But, when he has to demonstrate the nature of Divinity to mankind, He has to come in human form. But man, because of his polluted mind is unable to recognise the Divine in human form."

Even Yasodha, despite many occasions in which Krishna demonstrated His divinity, continued to regard him as a human child and frequently thanked the Lord for saving her child from many dangers. But Krishna tried to change her view by the words He used on different occasions.

Once when Yasodha asked Krishna whether it was true, as alleged by Balaraama, that he was in the habit of eating mud, Krishna replied: "Mother, am I a child, or a naughty boy or madcap to eat mud? People are mad about me. I am here to cure the world of its madness." From these words Yasodha began to realise that Krishna was no ordinary Child but a manifestation of the Divine.

The ways of the Avathaar

There are many subtle truths relating to an incarnation which cannot be easily understood. Merely to describe the various sports and exploits of Krishna as a child is only a pastime. God's ways are infinite and inscrutable. No one can determine or dictate to God how He should act. He can transform anything in a moment.

It must be clearly understood that Krishna was such a manifestation of the Divine. The name Krishna has to be properly understood. "Krish" + "Na" = Krishna. This means that He is one who cultivates (*Krish*) the heart. "Karsh" + "Na" is another derivation, which indicates that Krishna is one who attracts--*Karshathi-ithi-Krishnah*. Krishna attracts people not only by the matchless beauty of His form. He attracts people by his music, his dance, his sports and his words. Krishna, by His winsome ways, could turn the anger of the Gopis towards him because of his pranks, into an enjoyable joke.

Not was that all. Krishna, in fulfilling the pledge He had given to Mother Earth, rid the world of many wicked rulers and sought to establish the reign of Righteousness for the protection of the good.

The Divine incarnates from age to age for the purpose of protecting the virtuous, punishing the wicked and establishing *Dharma*. Krishna is said to have destroyed many wicked persons. But this is not quite correct. It is their own wickedness which destroyed these evil persons.

Today if the Divine wants to punish the wicked and protect the righteous, there will not be even one wholly righteous person. All will qualify for punishment. It is not a question of destroying the wicked. The task today is to transform *Adharma* (unrighteousness) into *Dharma* (righteousness). How is this to be done? Through love alone.

Men's thoughts determine their destiny

Krishna also changed the hearts of many people through love. It may be asked: "Is it not Krishna who killed Kamsa?" Not at all. This is the text-book version. In truth, it was Kamsa's own heated *bhrama* (delusion) which killed him. He was always haunted by the fear of Krishna. His death was a result and a reaction of that fear.

Men's thoughts determine their destiny. Hence, men should cultivate good thoughts and eschew all bad feelings.

God has no dislike for anyone. He envies no one. He has no ill-will towards anyone. Not does He have favourites. The grace one gets is the result of one's own feelings. "*Bhaavaatheetham Thriguna rahitham*" (The Divine is beyond feelings and attributes). He is "*Ekam Sathyam Vimalam Achalam*" (the One, Truth, Pure, Immovable). He is "*Sarvadhee Saakshibhuutham*" (Eternal Witness in all minds).

When devotees complain now-a-days why they are being punished by the Lord in various ways, they do not realise that it is not God who is punishing them. Their own fears and fancies are the cause of their troubles. He alone is a true devotee who recognises that his sufferings are the consequence of his own bad thoughts and actions.

One such devotee was Kunthidhevi, sister of Vasudheva (and mother of the Paandavas). She was Krishna's maternal aunt.

Kunthi's strange prayer to Krishna

Krishna was leaving Hasthinaapura for Dhvaaraka. He was bidding farewell to all his kinsfolk and taking leave of Dharmaja and others. Everyone silently accepted his decision. The chariot was ready for Krishna's departure. But the Divine can change his mind at any moment. After taking leave of all others he went to Kunthi. Kunthi told him- "Krishna! All the troubles we experienced were due to our delusions. If Dharmaja had not been lured by the game of dice, would we have been subject to exile in the forest and all the troubles we went through? Hence my children were the root cause of all our troubles. You are always our protector. During all our troubles I always remembered you. In the world people remember God only in times of trouble and not when they are happy. Therefore, Krishna, as long as I have a body, give me always difficulties. However, having had you with us all these years, we are deeply distressed to see you part from us. I have no power to change your mind. I only pray do not forget this aunt of yours."

After that, Krishna went to Utthara (Abhimanyu's wife). Hearing that Krishna was leaving for Dhvaaraka, Utthara ran towards Krishna and fell at his feet. "Lord! Since Abhimanyu's death, I have been trying hard to bear the pain that is gnawing at my bosom. There is a fire burning in my womb. I cannot divine the reason. You should not leave at all for Dhvaaraka now. You must stay. You have been the protector of my forebears for many generations. You were the saviour of the Paandavas. The child in my womb is the only hope of the Paandava clan. If anything untoward happens to that child, the Paandava dynasty will be extinguished. Therefore, you must not leave." So saying, Utthara firmly clung to Krishna's feet.

Krishna was immediately moved by Utthara's deep devotion. The journey to Dhvaaraka was given up. Krishna made a promise to Utthara. "I will not leave for Dhvaaraka till your child is born," assured Krishna. At that moment, Dharmaja and his brothers, Dhraupadhi and Subhadhra praised Utthara's devotion to the Lord. Though young in years, Utthara was pre-eminent in her devotion. This was because when she was enceinte, Krishna entered her womb to protect the foetus from the Brahmaasthra (a terrible missile) of Ashvathaama. She had a vision in a dream of Krishna entering her womb. From that moment she was ceaselessly chanting the name of Krishna and seeing Krishna in every person and every object.

Because of this, when the child was born, Krishna named him Pareekshith as he rested everyone till he recognized Krishna.

Divine madness of Gopikas has a lesson for all

It is clear that the *leelas* (miracles) of God are inexplicable and infinite. It is ludicrous to seek the whereabouts of the Divine, who is omnipresent. Utthara was one who recognised the omnipresence of God. Recognising her supreme devotion Krishna was prepared to change His plans. People should realise that God responds only to deep and genuine devotion. Verbal supplications will not suffice. The devotee must acquire the yearning that will melt the heart of God. Even butter which is so soft melts only when heat is applied. Likewise, the warmth of *Bhakthi* (love of the Lord) has to be applied to the butter of the human heart to make it melt. It was their intense devotion which made Krishna dwell in the hearts of Gopikas. They became God-intoxicate. Once when Krishna disappeared from their midst they started searching for him everywhere, among the trees and the bushes of Brindhaavan, oblivious to everything else. Their appeals to the creepers to tell them whether their Krishna was hiding amongst them night seem hysterical. But it would be a good thing if such hysterical love of God filled people's hearts today. The world will be a calmer and better place.

Craze for God removes the craze for wealth

Some people talk caustically to Sai devotees saying: "You have gone crazy over Sai Baba." This craziness is sublime madness. There are all kinds of lunatics in the mental hospital, many of whom pose difficult problems for the doctors. If some God-mad devotee sits in a corner chanting God's name, what a relief he would be to doctors! If you develop this kind of sublime madness, you will be supremely fortunate indeed! Everyone should be crazy about God. Only then they will get rid of the mad craving for wealth and the things of the world. The craze for money is the cause of all the ills in the world. With the result that the desire for God declines.

Because of the craze for riches, all other evil qualities like pride, greed, envy and hatred have grown among mankind. Wealth is, indeed, needed, but it is the wealth of Divine Grace and the treasure of Divine Love. That alone is lasting. All other things are transient.

Once Yasodha appealingly asked Krishna why he was going to the Gopika's houses to steal their butter when there was so much butter in their own house. The Child Krishna replied: "Mother, I am not stealing butter but the hearts of the Gopis." (Svaami sang a beautiful song relating to this episode). "Their hearts are pure and full of devotion," said Krishna. "Their butter is filled with the devotion with which they churn the buttermilk. Their bangles keep time as they sing Krishna's name while churning. The butter that is got contains the essence of *the Vedhas*." Krishna asked Yasodha whether this kind of churning was taking place in her house.

Krishna Avathaar is hailed as Puurna Avathaar

In this manner, every word of Krishna was replete with spiritual significance. The *Krishna Avathaar* is hailed as *Puurna Avathaar*, compared to all previous *Avathaars*.

Vyaasa could obtain peace of mind only when, on the advice of Sage Naaradha, he began to write about the glorious incarnations of the Lord (described in the Bhagavatham). All his earlier writings, including the codification of the *Vedhas* and the writing of the *puraanas*, could not confer peace on him.

Embodiments of Love! No amount of scholarship will give you peace, unless you are filled with the love of God.

Discourse on Gokulashtami Day in Sai Ramesh Hall, Brindhaavan, on 28-8-1994.