

## CHAPTER 35

### GOPALA, GOPAS AND GOPIS

**S**age Suka was keen on King Parikshit's seeing the divine sports of the Lord in their proper perspective. He said: "Maharaja! Parikshit! Who can describe the supreme supraworld charm of Krishna, whose lovely Form was the very embodiment of sweetness? How can anyone describe it in words? You want me to relate to you stories of Krishna; but they belong to a realm, beyond the reach of human vocabulary. God has incarnated often and demonstrated during each advent, many supraworldly miracles; but in this Krishna incarnation, He exhibited a unique attraction. Did He but smile once, revealing the pearly line of teeth? Those who had the spring of love in their hearts, those who had the spell of devotion in their hearts, and even those who had mastered their senses and overcome their inner reactions, felt an upsurge of emotion rising in

them, an upsurge of affectionate adoration! Did He but touch them softly with His tender Hand? They lost all consciousness of their bodies, they were so immersed in bliss that thenceforth they lived in tune with Him! Now and then, He used to make fun, relate humorous tales. On those occasions, the listeners felt that there were few more fortunate than they, few superior to them in the entire world!

"The gopas and gopis, the men and women of Vraja, might be engaged in their daily avocations; but let them but see Krishna once, while so engaged—they stood entranced by His Loveliness, rooted to the spot, like images carved in stone. The women of Vraja had surrendered their minds, their very breath to Krishna, whom they recognised as love and compassion personified. No scholar, however high his attainments, can find language adequate to describe their nature and experience. In fact, language has to be dumb; it can only fail.

"The devotion and dedication of the gopas and gopis, filled with elevated emotions knew no limits or bounds. No less a person than Uddhava exclaimed on seeing them 'Alas! I have laid waste all these years of my life, isn't it? Having been in the cool comforting presence of Krishnachandra so long, so near Him in fact, I have not gained access into His Love and His Glory. My heart is not yet illumined by even a fraction of the devotion and love that these gopis have for the Lord. Verily, if one has to take birth, one must be born as a gopa or gopi! Why be born otherwise and live a life

sans meaning, sans significance? If I have no luck to be born as a gopa or gopi, let me become a green floral bower in Brindavan, or a jasmine creeper there or, if I do not merit that fortune, let me at least grow as a blade of grass on the lawns frequented by the gopas, gopis and Krishna.’ Uddhava lamented thus. He yearned in devoted anguish. His heart was filled with yearning. In fact, he was saved by that very anguish.

“To state that this relationship between Krishna and the gopis was low and lascivious is, therefore, only to reveal that the person is too easily led into wrong conclusions. Such statements are not worth attention.

“Maharaja! None but the pure in heart can understand the sport of Krishna.”

Parikshit was very happy when he heard this. He asked the sage with a smile on his lips, “Master! When did Uddhava proceed to Brindavan? Why did he go there? What was the reason that prompted him to leave Krishna’s presence and go? Please describe the incident to me.”

Suka began the description, as desired “Oh King! Uddhava can never be away from Krishna, even for a moment. He can never leave the Presence. But Krishna Himself sent him to Brindavan, in order to communicate his message to the gopis; so, he had no option. He had to go. The separation became inevitable. But Krishna gave him just one day to fulfil his mission. He directed that he should

not stay there longer than a day. In spite of this, that one day of separation seemed an age for Uddhava when he proceeded to Brindavan.

“However, on reaching Brindavan, Uddhava was sorry that the hours were flying fast and that he had to leave the place so soon. ‘Alas, that I have to go away from these people so quickly? How happy would I be if all my life were spent in their company. I have unfortunately not acquired that merit’—these were the sad thoughts that worried Uddhava.

“Did you note, Maharaja, that there is really no difference between the Lord and the Bhaktha? Uddhava felt more anguish when he had to leave the presence of the gopis, than when he had to leave the presence of Krishna Himself! His Ananda in both places was the same. There is really no distinction between gopi and Gopala, the Bhaktha and Bhagavan. The hearts of the gopis had got transformed into altars where He was installed. Their inner cravings were satiated by drinking the nectar of Krishnarasa. Uddhava was able to realise their agony at the separation from Krishna, the sincerity of their affectionate attachment to Him, their eagerness to hear about Him, their anxiety about Him, and their earnestness to hear and obey His Message. The gopas and gopis never for a moment allowed their attention to wander away from stories of Krishna, from descriptions of the sport of Krishna and from the narratives of His activities and achievements. The splendour of the sweetness of

Krishna cast such powerful influence on Vraja that the living appeared lifeless and the lifeless appeared living! Uddhava saw with his own eyes the boulders of Govardhanagiri melt in tears of joy. He saw also the gopis transfixed like stone images, when their hearts were filled with Divine joy. He took these experiences of his as wonderful and illuminating.”

While describing these characteristics of the devotion of the gopis, the sage Suka was so overcome with joy that teardrops fell from his eyelids and he lost awareness of all external things and entered Samadhi so often, that the holy men and rishis who were listening to him and watching him were filled with ecstasy and an irrepressible yearning to visualise the Krishnachandra who thrilled Suka so deeply.

Meanwhile, Suka opened his eyes. He said, “Maharaja! How lucky was this Uddhava! While showing him the places where they sported with Krishna, the gopis took him to Govardhanagiri also. When he saw the place the wonder of Uddhava increased even more. For, he could see on the rocks and the hard ground the footprints of Krishna, the gopas and the gopis, as clear as when they walked long ago in that area. When they neared the Govardhanagiri, the gopis felt the agony of separation from Krishna so poignantly that they broke into sobs. They were aware of Him only. They merged in thoughts of Him only. When all of them called out in one voice ‘Krishna!’ the trees that stood around were thrilled into exhilarated horripilation. They swayed their arms and began to moan in sadness. Uddhava observed with his

own eyes how separation from Krishna had affected and afflicted, not only the gopas and gopis of Brindavan, but even its hills and trees. Maharaja! What shall I say more? Uddhava saw scenes that transcend belief. He was overwhelmed with amazement. He was also humbled.”

At this, the King was eager to know further. He said, “Master, how did that happen? If there is no objection, please enlighten me on that point also.” When he prayed thus, Suka answered, “Raja! the awareness of the gopis had become one with the consciousness of Krishna. So they noticed nothing else, none else. Every stone, every tree they saw, they saw as Krishna. They held on to it calling out ‘Krishna, Krishna.’ That made the stones and trees feel the agony of separation from Krishna, and they too melted in the heat of that grief, so that teardrops fell from the points of the leaves. The stones softened with the tears they exuded. See, how amazing these scenes must have been! The axiom, ‘All is alive’ (*Sarvam Sajivam*) was proved true, in this manner, to him. The stones and trees of Brindavan demonstrated to Uddhava that there is nothing that is devoid of consciousness and life.

“Those who are unable to grasp the glory of the gopis, the Bhakthi that melted stone and drew sobs of grief from the trees, have no right to judge and pronounce a verdict. If they do, they only reveal that their intelligence is more inert than rocks and boulders. Inert minds can never grasp the splendours of the Krishnachandra, who is the sovereign of

the Universe, who captivates the Universe by His Beauty and Power. Only the clearest and the purest Intelligence can grasp it.

“Similarly, Uddhava noticed at Brindavan that evening a novel feature. As Brahmins and the other twice-born persons engage at sunset in the worship of Fire through ceremonial ritual, the gopis lit the hearths in their homes, bringing cinders or live flames from neighbouring houses in shells or plates of clay. But Uddhava noticed that the first house to light the lamp and hearth was the house of Nanda, the house where Krishna grew and played. He saw that as soon as the light shone in Nanda’s house, the gopis went to that place, one after the other, with lamps in their hands, to have them lit auspiciously therefrom. They carried the lamps thus lit, to their own homes. Uddhava sat on the step of the village hall and watched the lamps go by.

“Meanwhile, one gopi took too long a time to light her lamp at the house of Krishna. The others who came behind her got impatient. They had no chance to have their lamps lit. Yasoda who was in the inner apartments came out and seeing her, cried out, ‘Oh, what calamity is this!’ and tried to awaken her with a pat on the back. But she did not open her eyes. Those around her dragged her gently away from the lamp and laid her down so that she may rest a while. Her fingers had got badly burnt and charred. With great effort, she was brought back into consciousness. On inquiry, she revealed that she saw Krishna in the flame of the lamp, and

in that joyful experience, she did not know that her fingers were in the flame and were being burnt. She felt no pain at all.

“Uddhava was astounded at this incident, which was another wonderful instance of the devotion of the gopis.”