

CHAPTER 36

COMRADE AND KING

“Master, I am eager to hear about the boyish pranks, games and adventures that Krishna, as the cowherd lad, (Gopala), did engage Himself in with His comrades of the Vraja community in the groves and wilds during the eleven years He spent in Brindavan, after reaching there, from the Mathura Prison, where He chose to be born.”

When Parikshit prayed thus, Suka was rendered very happy. He smiled and said, “It is not possible for me to describe to you all the 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 will not pay any attention to external distinctions, the name of the individual, his nationality, his caste, his profession, his attitude. Whatever may be the attitude with which a person

approaches Him, He will welcome him, draw him near, fulfil his wishes, and confer happiness. That was the nature of Gopala.

“Ever since He was left in the home of Nanda by His father, Vasudeva, Krishna granted great joy on Nanda and the grateful shouts of ‘Victory’ echoed and re-echoed 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; toddled and crossed the doorstep. He held the finger of His father or mother, and venturesomely walked a few steps. Though 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? Oh, Parikshit, it is all Divine Sport.

“Growing day by day, He started going to the sacred sand banks of the holy Yamuna river with children of His age from the homes of the cowherds, and play. The parents endeavoured to stop Him but could not. 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, the dark Divine Boy! They were drawn to Him, close. 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 but His hand touch their backs ever so lightly, 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 too, often clasped their necks and swung to and fro, in great joy—His eyes closed. His face beaming with a radiant smile. The calves playfully butted at His soft Body with their just-emerging horn-ends. 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 seek them out and bring Him with His followers, willy nilly, to their home.

“As the days passed thus at home and outside, He grew up into a charming boy. Though the parents did not 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 too, on the common road to the verdant pasture ahead. Like the other boys, He had a stick leaning on His shoulder, a length of cloth wound round 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 aloud the sweetest tunes, 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; with eyes half-closed, as if they were immersed in the depths of Dhyana! The calves that had nuzzled 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.

“Oh King, I cannot tell you the number or nature of the Leelas of Gopala. All were wondrous and awe-inspiring, all were full of Ananda, conferring Ananda. Sometimes, He would challenge His comrades and swing round the stick in His hand, so fast that the eye could see no stick! At this, the comrades gathered around Him and prayed that they may be taught how to turn it so. For Him who turns 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 times, He played on trees, the game of ‘hunt for the thief’! When the pursuers climbed behind Him, He took refuge on the topmost branch, a branch so thin and weak, that it will swing when a squirrel walks on it! He could not be captured at all! Yes, indeed! How can He be caught by one and all? Only the pure heart can capture Him.

“To all appearance, Gopala will be with His comrades, in the woods and groves. He will be playing with them,

making them happy with many a practical joke and hilarious game. He will move with them, His hands placed endearingly on their shoulders; but in a moment, he will disappear and be away from sight. Meanwhile, He would confront His companions in a clever disguise, so perfect that they will deem Him to be a stranger, with whom they shall not talk. But He will surprise them with a burst of laughter and the exclamation, 'It is I, It is I, you couldn't discover Me.' This threw the boys into amazement, or 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 should stay at home and not go into the pastoral groves. Those days, the cowherd boys and the cows and calves walked heavy with grief, slowly to the grove. They lay under the trees listless and alone, not caring to eat or drink, but with eyes longing for the arrival of Ananda-Krishna, who alone can put life into them.

"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 enquired the cost of the things they desired. But the ogre was intent on the chance to catch Krishna. He was looking out for the moment when He will 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 people of the village with amazement, fear and wonder, besides delighting them at the happy escape from danger.

"Another day, the village was packed with carts full of mangoes! 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.

"Oh, King, from the day the Lord took residence in the Vraja region, the place was changed into a treasure house of the Goddess of Wealth and Welfare, Lakshmi. 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 did not know how to consume all they had or how to keep or 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 the reason 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 Puja was cancelled by the people of Vraja, where Indra retaliated with heavy downpours of rain, and where Krishna had to lift 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 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.”

Meanwhile Parikshit intervened with his joyous exclamation, and said, “Oh, how sweet are the Leelas, the sport and pranks 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.”