

CHAPTER 39

THE OMNISCIENT AS STUDENT

“Great Master! I do not get satiated, however many stories I hear about the boyhood sport of Krishna! Really, this lovely boy Krishna is the Divine, who had within Him everything that exists, but nevertheless, He played about as if He was an ordinary human child! Oh, what good fortune is mine! When I think of it, I feel that it has accrued to me, not as a result of the merit earned in this life. Ah! I am spending these last days of mine in listening to the exploits of Him, who has the hooded Sesha as His couch! The curse of that sage has helped to cleanse me of the sin, through this means! I offer once again a thousand prostrations to the sage’s ire, for affording me this beneficent opportunity!

“As the final moment draws nearer and nearer, my yearning centres in the joyful quaffing of the sweet narrative

of Krishna’s sport. It intoxicates me. It makes me ‘Insane.’ Give me, who is burning with that desire, the cool comforting drink, throughout the few hours that are left of the allotted span of my life.”

Parikshit, the King, fell at the feet of Suka, overwhelmed by the burden of devotion in his heart, and prayed for more stories of the Boy Krishna. The spring of compassion in the sage, welled forth, at this prayer. He asked, “Oh King! Which among the countless delightful divine incidents do you desire to hear from me? Their number is so large, that even if they are told continuously for millennia, many will remain untold. No one, however proficient, can compress the narration, into a few hours.”

At this, Parikshit replied, “Master! I have heard that our dearly beloved Krishna learnt many skills and subjects, with Balarama as His companion, from a very fortunate preceptor Saandeepini. Does this mean there was the need for an unlearned person, to instruct Him who is the Master of all branches of knowledge, the Master and Sovereign of All? It must have been His Play. Only that great Play Director Gopala knows who has to be blessed and saved, by which means and when. He should have enacted this play, in order to liberate Saandeepini from the shackles of birth and death, through the merit of association with the Lord. Let me hear the incidents of the play, centring round Saandeepini. I will be saved, by listening to it.” Suka said, “Oh King! What you said is the indisputable Truth. Yes, all is His play. For the Drama which Krishna directs, the Universe is the stage,

there are countless screens (curtains), stage appurtenances, shelves and compartments, for enacting His various plots, devised to save and to liberate. Since the propitious destiny of Saanddeepini had ripened. He gave him that great chance and blessed him in that manner. Listen! I shall relate to you that Divine Drama.

“Balarama and Krishna, the Divine Brothers, grew like the Sun towards the zenith, and shone with increasing splendour. The parents, Nanda and Yasoda were concerned about their future, since they were befogged by natural delusion; they decided that the children must be taught the arts and sciences, the skills and attainments appropriate to their status and condition. The family priest, Garga, was called in and in consultation with him, an auspicious day and hour were fixed for the necessary rites. They celebrated with great pomp and ceremonial, the rite of initiation into Brahmic wisdom, called *Upanayana* or ‘the rite of leading the pupil to the preceptor.’ That day, numerous acts of charity were done and many valuable things given away, according to Sastric injunctions. The people of Gokula were rendered happy by folk entertainments that were provided for them.

“Then the parents invited many Pundits and conferred with them and Garga to discover the preceptor who was most proficient and desirable for the education of the children. The family priest Garga thought for a while and declared that it was best to send the children to the great

Saanddeepini, a pundit from Avanthi, living in Kasi the Holy City on the sacred Ganga.

“Saanddeepini, he said, was a saintly person. The parents could not send their loved ones, to such a distant place; but they were aware of the truth, learning without a preceptor is only blind learning. So they agreed, and themselves journeyed to Kasi with Balarama and Krishna. Reaching the holy place, they entrusted the brothers to Saanddeepini and made arrangements for their stay with the famous preceptor. They returned soon after, with a heavy heart, to Gokula.

“From that day, Balarama and Krishna studied under Saanddeepini, offering him the tribute of fear and reverence. Oh King, thousands, tens of thousands, millions of children there are, who study under teachers. But students who behave in a manner that gives satisfaction and joy to the teacher are very rare, not even one in a hundred! Satisfying the teacher, studying well what has been taught, avoiding the pursuit of sensory pleasure and attaching oneself only to the pursuit of knowledge, ever in the consciousness that study is the task and study is the duty. That is how a student should be. That is what Balarama and Krishna were.

“They never, on any single occasion, interrupted the discourse of the preceptor or interposed their will against his. They did not overstep his will or direction in any instance. They never challenged his authority or dared disobey his instructions. Though they were the repositories of Supreme authority over Earth and Heaven, they gave

their preceptor the respect and obedience, that was due to his eminence and position.

“They were full of earnestness and devotion. They did not allow anything to distract from their lesson. Observing their discipline and their enthusiasm to learn, Saandeepini felt great joy surging up in his heart. When he saw them, he got irrepressible yearning to train them in many more branches of learning. He made them masters of the four Vedas, the Vedantas, the science of logic, grammar, jurisprudence, and economics. He taught them all that he knew. King, what can I say? How can I describe them? The world may have known of geniuses who can master one subject in five years or in one year or in a single month; but listen, Balarama and Krishna were with Saandeepini for only sixty-four days, and in that short time, they mastered the sixty-four arts and sciences! That was how they enacted this drama of study. It was just a sport for them. How can we explain this amazing make-believe, this Divine histrionic Leela? Can ordinary mortals learn so quick? Can they master so much in so few days?

“While exulting over the humility and loyalty of the brothers, while accepting their salutations and homage so genuinely offered, and while engaged in delightful conversation with them, Saandeepini used to shed tears, in spite of his persistent efforts to curb the grief that was surging within him. Balarama and Krishna observed this and long hesitated to question him, about the reason. At last, one day, Krishna stood before the preceptor with folded hands

and addressed him, ‘Oh greatest of teachers! While we are conversing with you, we find your eyes are occasionally filled with tears, whenever you contemplate some incident. If you consider it appropriate that we can be told the reason for this grief, please tell us.’

“When he heard this prayer, the pent-up sorrow in his heart gushed forth. Overcome by unbearable grief he clasped Krishna with both hands and wept aloud in uncontrollable anguish. Krishna knew the whole story. He pretended not to. He said, ‘Guruji! tell us the reason for this agony. We will try our best with all our strength and skill to alleviate it. No mission can be so holy and so important for us as this—to restore joy in the heart of the Guru. Inform us without entertaining any doubt. Do not consider us as boys, and hesitate.’ When Krishna remonstrated with him thus, Saandeepini was much relieved. He recovered himself, and drew the brothers near, making them sit close to him on his right and left.

“He said, ‘Dear ones, it is indeed my good fortune that I secured you. I already derive from your very words the joy of realising my desire. My conscience is telling me that you are no ordinary children, I feel that it may be possible for you to fulfil this mission. That faith is prompting me. Sometimes, I am shaken by doubt. I do not know what is in store for me.’ Saying this, he stopped and the tears flowed again. At this, Balarama fell at his feet again, saying, ‘Guruji! why do you doubt us and refrain from trusting us? We are

as your own sons. To give you Ananda, we are prepared to sacrifice our very lives.’ The earnestness of the boys and the firmness of their resolution caused a sense of shame in the preceptor, that he kept back from them the reason for his sorrow. ‘Children, I got a son, after many years of married life. I brought him up lovingly and with as much care, as I guarded my own life. One day, he went to Prabhasa-kshetra, on the sea, and while taking the holy dip in the waves, he was drowned. I was deriving great consolation and even joy, looking at you two and watching your humility and sense of discipline. I almost forgot the loss. You have learnt all that has to be learnt, very quickly. Now, even you cannot stay with me any longer. Whom am I to watch and love, after your departure?’ The preceptor burst into inconsolable sobs.

“Krishna stood before him, strong and straight. He said, ‘Oh best of masters! We have to offer you gratitude for teaching us in an incomparable manner all the rare arts and sciences. That is only our Dharma, isn’t it? We will proceed immediately and fight against the sea that swallowed your precious Son, and recover him. We shall bring him back to you and give you joy. Let us dedicate this act as our Guru *Dakshina* (ceremonial presents made to the preceptor, by the pupil) Bless us, so that we can start on this expedition. Bless us and give us leave to start.’ They fell at his feet, rose and stood expectant. Saanddeepini was confident that the Boys were not of ordinary mould. He had faith that they would succeed. He embraced them,

stroked their hair and blessed them.” The King said “Master, Oh, how fortunate are my grandparents that they could witness these! Krishna was the Divine which was acting the role of a human being, though he had immanent in Him, all that there is, was and will be.”

“Oh King, receiving the acceptance and blessing of the Preceptor, Balarama and Krishna hastened to the sea and standing majestically on the shore, commanded in a compelling voice, ‘Ocean! Give back the son of our Guru! Do this immediately or suffer the punishment we intend to give you.’ The ocean shook in fear, as soon as he heard these words. He touched the Feet of Balarama and Krishna, and said, ‘Pardon! It is no fault of mine! When the boy was bathing, destiny drew him into a vortex and brought him into the depths. Meantime, the ogre, Panchajana, who has been living in the caverns there swallowed him and had him in his stomach. This is the truth of what has happened. I leave the rest to you.’

“When the sea spoke thus, Krishna nodded, ‘Right! I have heard your account,’ and plunged into the depths of the sea, to the cavern of that ogre. He attacked him in mortal combat. The ogre handed over the boy to the God of Death before he himself died. So, Krishna could not recover him, when He tore open the stomach. While searching his intestines in great anger to discover whether the boy was anywhere there, a huge Conch came into His hands. Securing this, Krishna emerged from the sea, and went straight to the City of Death. Standing at the entrance, Krishna blew the

Panchajanya conch that he had got from Panchajana. The sound it produced was as a thunderbolt to the ear.

“Yama, the God of Death, rushed up to the gate, in terror. He saw Balarama and Krishna and queried, politely, the reason why they had come so far. The Brothers commanded him to bring the ‘son of the Guru’ and place him in their custody. ‘As you order,’ replied Yama, with folded hands. He directed his minions, and within seconds, the consecrated son of the preceptor was placed in the Divine hands. They brought him, immediately, to the hermitage and placing him by the side of Saandeepini, stood on one side, ‘This is our Guru-Dakshina, please accept this act as such,’ appealed Krishna.

“The joy of the parents was beyond words. They were overcome with the sudden gush of happiness. No one who contemplates such divine achievements—the bringing back into life the son of the Guru, who was in the arms of Death and similar miracles—can entertain the belief that they are mortal and not Divine. What then are we to speak of Saandeepini? He knew; he realised that they are the twins, Nara-Narayana.

“He was overwhelmed with exhilaration, when he reminded himself that he had the fortune to have such Divine beings as his pupils and that he could call himself their Guru. He prostrated mentally before them. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he embraced them and arranged for their leave-taking from the Ashram.

“Balarama and Krishna rode on their chariot, after taking leave of the Guru and his wife and reached the city of Mathura. The inhabitants of that City, on hearing how the brothers demonstrated their gratitude to their Guru, extolled them for their Divine compassion and capabilities. They felt immensely happy that they had come back among them.

“Oh King, reflect for a while how inspiring was the example of Gopala Krishna while he was undergoing his education and how much his conduct and earnestness contributed to the joy of the elders. Every act of Krishna, however tiny and unimportant on the surface, had a deep significance and meaning. Fools cannot discover it so they treat these acts as insignificant. Is there in this world anyone who can affirm that he can teach the art of swimming to the fish? Similarly, who can teach and become the preceptor of God? Though all learning emanates from Him and is to be earned through His Grace, He plays the role of a pupil, as a representative of the ideal pupil, in order to show the world, by His own example, the way in which a Guru is to be chosen and served, the quality of humility that education must instil, and the gratitude and respect that the pupil has to offer to the teacher. It is with the intention of guiding and prompting the students of today that Krishna Himself went through the educational process and lived the ideal. Notice how subtle is the mystery of God and His Leelas!” While Suka was repeating these words, tears of joy flowed down his cheeks in streams.