

The Heart of a Gopi.*

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महानामशनिर्घ्नां नरवरः स्त्रीणां सरो मूर्तिमान्
गोपानां स्वजनोऽसतां क्षितिभुजां शास्ता स्वपित्रोः शिशुः ।
मृत्युर्भोजपतेर्विराडविदुषां तत्त्वं परं योगिनां
वृष्णानां परदेवतेति विदितो रङ्गं गतः साम्बजः ॥

“To the wrestlers He appeared fierce and furious as a thunderbolt; to ordinary men He was a wonderful specimen of perfect manhood; to women He was the beautiful Eros incarnate; to the cowherds He was a playmate full of fun and frolic; to the vicious kings assembled there, He was a heroic chastiser of the wicked; to His parents He was a mere child—an object of compassion; to Kāṁsa He was terrible death; to foolish men He was a mere human being (disgustingly stained with the stains of battle); to *yogis* He was the highest Truth—the embodiment of peace and the object of single-minded devotion; and to His own kinsfolk He was an idolized personal deity and the object of their whole-hearted affection.”

Thus appeared Śrī Kṛṣṇa, differently in the eyes of different persons, when He entered the arena of the tournament wickedly arranged by Kāṁsa for His murder. In this one *śloka* the author has indicated that all the Rasas were fully and simultaneously manifested in Him, though the assembled people could see only the broken gleams and stifled splendour of the Perfect Person, because their individual vision was conditioned by their own minds and attitude towards Him.

To the women who saw Him entering the arena, He appeared the highest embodiment of Love, as Cupid incarnate. Saints and sages, friends and foes alike, with one voice praised the transcendental beauty of that divine personality. No praise is supposed to be too high for the charm that He radiated and with which He captivated everyone. Poetry seems to have found its fulfilment in attempting, however vainly, to catch a vision of that glory which brought the heaven upon earth by its presence. These women could see only the beauty of His person and were charmed. But to the Gopīs of Vṛndāvana He was something different and very much more. He was all-in-all to them, and they were fortunate, as none else was, to comprehend the divine personality more fully than others whose glimpses were fragmentary and hopelessly incomplete. It is a sad mistake, so often committed, to bring down the Gopīs to the level of these women. The episode of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and His Līlā with the Gopīs has often been described as ‘amorous, sensuous and meltingly voluptuous’. Utterly wrong notions about Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the Gopīs are responsible for the great mischief. How do some revilers present Śrī Kṛṣṇa to us? Let us see. No man we know of has ever been so misunderstood and misinterpreted, and even maligned, as He is today in the world. Great men are condemned to explain themselves; and prophets, if they are

* Though this article was written at our special request for the Sri Krishna Number, we regret that as it was received rather too late it could not be included in that number. —Editor.

to be accepted, must produce their credentials. And therefore, the critics argue, Śrī Kṛṣṇa's life and personality must lend themselves to a rational exposition before He can be accepted. But they make one serious blunder in forgetting that when Divinity is revealed in man, its complete purpose cannot be comprehended by mere man, and his judgment is likely to be vitiated by his incomplete knowledge. Then we find that the most fantastic theories have been woven round His name. Some scholars would have us believe that He was not a historical person; and others maintain that the common name of two or three persons has caused confusion in identification. "The story of Kṛṣṇa," writes Professor Jacobi "being the son of a knight Vasudeva, is not true; and the name of father seems to have been developed from his (Kṛṣṇa's) very name Vāsudeva." Another scholar Professor Winternitz, maintains that there must be more than one person of Kṛṣṇa's name. "It is difficult to believe", writes he, "that Kṛṣṇa the friend and counsellor of Pāṇḍavas, the herald of the doctrine of the Bhagavadgītā, the youthful hero and demon-slayer, the favourite lover of the cowherdesses, and finally Kṛṣṇa, the incarnation of God Viṣṇu, was one and the same person." He emphatically asserts—"In any case it is a far cry from Kṛṣṇa, friend of the Pāṇḍavas to the Kṛṣṇa of Hari-vaṃsa and the exalted God Viṣṇu." Sir R. G. Bhandarkar also expresses a similar opinion when he says, "The story of the Vṛṣṇi prince Vāsudeva being brought up in a

cow settlement is incongruous with his later career as depicted in the Mahābhārata." Then, there are critics who say that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was a non-Aryan. "The name" (of Kṛṣṇa) says Rev. Tisdall, "which signifies 'black' probably shows that he was originally a deity worshipped by the aboriginal inhabitants of India and borrowed from them by their Aryan conquerors." Dr. Lorinser develops a no less interesting theory that Kṛṣṇa-idea is a plagiarism from Christianity. For him Kṛṣṇa is simply a corruption of the name of Christ, and he safely concludes that the Gītā is a Hindu rendering of the Christian Gospels. Volney held quite the opposite opinion when he asserted in 1791 that Christ-worship in Europe was nothing but a poor imitation and a foreign adaptation of the Kṛṣṇa-cult in India. These theories and wild notions, however, do not help us much in understanding the great personality, its message to humanity, or the purpose of the Avatāra. Nor can they explain the reason of the most astonishing hold which Śrī Kṛṣṇa has had for ages on the Hindu mind. They only confuse the inquirer and obscure a personality already difficult to comprehend and baffling to the human intellect. But the worst offenders are those popular poets who drag the names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their amatory compositions, charged with human passion, and devoid of spiritual vision, ethical value and devotional fervour. Critics feel justified in holding up to ridicule Hindu morality and ideals of religion.

Bishop Caldwell indignantly remarked: "The stories related of Kṛṣṇa's life do more than anything else to destroy the minds and corrupt the imagination of the Hindu youth."

Śrī Kṛṣṇa's life as it is known to us today may be a blend of history and mythology, of allegory and symbolism; but to deny its historicity seems untenable. Those who desire to have a human biography of Him, brushing aside all symbolical and allegorical significance, may find their task well-nigh impossible. Who can paint Him in whom all contraries are harmonized, and Love, Beauty, Bliss and Power attain their highest manifestation? For a devotee all other considerations and cobwebs of criticism have no significance whatever; he longs to visualize and realize as a physical entity the radiant divine personality which is as supreme a reality to him as his own existence. The devotee knows that He is life itself, and in order to instal Him permanently in his heart, the abode must be purified by the quest of Truth and Knowledge, and it should be consecrated by the power of supreme devotion to Him. Those who become Gopīs, they alone can know Him, possess Him and eventually get lost in Him in supreme ecstasy. Thus the *Bhakta* does not trouble himself with the problems about Śrī Kṛṣṇa's life. He knows a truth which his heart feels, though the rational mind may fail to perceive it.

But, then, how to become a Gopī? The Gopīs of Vraja were different from

other women. It must be clearly understood that the Gopīs are not merely symbols to represent the feeling of devotion in the human heart. If they are symbols, they are also as real as living men and women, because *Gopī-bhāva* can be attained by devotees even now. As Sri Aurobindo says, these Gopīs are "embodiments of a spiritual passion extraordinary by their extremeness of love, personal devotion and unre-served self-giving."* He alone who can follow the path of the Gopīs can reach Śrī Kṛṣṇa. If we can attain their emotional force and passion for beauty and cultivate the soul-thirst for Him, the transcendental dignity and beauty of Śrī Kṛṣṇa can become objective realities for us. Arjuna had to be given the power of vision before he could see the glory of the Lord, but the Gopīs brought the divine vision upon this earth and enjoyed it with their physical eyes, and remained in blissful companionship of the idol of their heart. If we can believe the authentic testimony of Bhaktas, their emotional and spiritual experiences, we should not find it difficult to believe also that the object of our devotion can assume any form, and does reveal itself to us in a physical body as He did to the Gopīs of Vraja.

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa is so much maligned for His Līlās, the Gopīs cannot escape all sorts of uncharitable criticism. But for those who care to know and are interested to understand the significance and value of Vraja-Līlā, the whole episode has been presented in an acceptable form by a cultured

* *Suryamukhi* by Dilip Kumar Roy.

Muslim lady.* Though her own religious culture is different, she has visioned the truth and has unexpectedly received the grace of Lord Kṛṣṇa. "Those of us" writes she, "who have come in contact with this altogether Perfect Person, whose lives and natures have been utterly transformed by Him, begin to divine the truth behind the symbolism of those ancient poets and chroniclers."† Her own direct experience has been something like a revelation and Kṛṣṇa's light has made her flower into a remarkable composer and poetess. She writes to a friend: "The Gopīs did surrender to Kṛṣṇa and were made all over new, as thousands of Gopīs are being made today." By the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the process of spiritualization of men and women, who surrender to Him, is always going on. Therein lies the hope of mankind. So far she has been content with her Kṛṣṇa, but now she desires to make Him more universally accepted, and, therefore, desires to share her joy and light with others, and proclaim to all what the transforming influence of His beauty can do for us. In another letter she opens her heart which is irresistibly drawn towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa. "For I love Kṛṣṇa," she writes, "not because I am loving, but because Kṛṣṇa is supremely lovable: how can I help it, He being what He is? I feel, it matters nothing, less than nothing, what I am: Kṛṣṇa being Kṛṣṇa, I must be a Gopī. I simply can't help myself. If I were a stone, a sword, a tiger, a piece of dried hide, a very ghoul, I must still love Him

* Raihana Tyabji.

† *Suryamukhi*.

because He is heart-bewitching, *manamohan*, first, last and every time, all the time. And herein lies for me His greatness: the Gopīs are Gopīs because Kṛṣṇa is Kṛṣṇa." This is the true *bhāva* of a Gopī beautifully described by a lady whose heart has been divinely touched to music. She has heard the music of the flute, and now she yearns that others or all may hear it and be lost in the beauty and rapture of its love.

And with this purpose in view she has recently published a book entitled *The Heart of a Gopī*. The history of the book is interesting and let us read it in her own words.

"Sometime in 1926, I suddenly felt a tremendous, an irresistible urge to write—to write what? That I do not know. I only felt it must be about Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But what could I write about Śrī Kṛṣṇa? I had read nothing about Him, save what singing Bhajans had taught me. Since childhood the name Kṛṣṇa had had a strange fascination for me, and my own instinctive interpretations of the Bhajans I sang had created for me a Personality which I deeply loved and revered. But—write about Him? That was unthinkable! And here was this urge, and what was I going to do about it? I sat at my desk with sheets of foolscap and poised pen, and the story of Sharmila came pouring out at the end of it almost faster than the ink would flow. For three days I was literally possessed. And so was the heart of a Gopī revealed to my own astonished and enraptured gaze—enraptured, because

the revelation of that heart brought with it the revelation of Kṛṣṇa's." She knows that rationalists would smile or sniff at her, but she has no other explanation to offer but that she was possessed by some outside force which compelled her to write, and to write some of the things which she could not comprehend then. In this way a great secret flashed across her mind and its inspiration bodied forth as the strange story which she herself did not write, and yet it was certainly written by her hand.

The book transports the reader to the Vraja of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's days and captures his imagination for a couple of hours and then continues to haunt it long after. The whole thing reads like a poem and describes how Sharmila, a young wife, is turned into a Gopī by surrendering herself to Kṛṣṇa, attaining to different stages, till she ultimately finds herself united with the object of her adoration. In the beginning of the story Sharmila is introduced to us as a devoted wife, dutiful and obedient to the elderly relations of her husband. She hears the name of Kṛṣṇa from the Gopīs who gather at the *ghāts* of the Jamuna and finds them always talking of Him and singing His praises. She is fascinated by the name, which appears full of colour, full of light, full of music. The holy name lingers in Sharmila's mind and casts its spell. She longs to see Him because she learns that He is only ten years in age, but in wisdom, strength and beauty, in stature, in power, He is a very God. Her quest begins and

inquiries are made. She learns that one must love Him to know and find Him. She meets Rādhā and learns the first lesson of true *Bhakti*. But her husband and other relations become suspicious and she is torn by a sense of divided loyalty to Śrī Kṛṣṇa and her own husband. She hears the flute and receives His message of love through music. And all her doubts are set at rest and her surrender becomes complete. But the husband grows jealous and he questions her. She explains that the Gopīs love their lords, but they adore Kṛṣṇa. "The two loves differ in kind and are entirely separate, and the one doth in no way interfere with the other." Her love for Kṛṣṇa but intensifies her love for her lord, and her pure love for her lord increases her *Bhakti* for Kṛṣṇa. She confesses: "I know not how this may be, yet so it is, and that I could swear." Her love for Kṛṣṇa grows and the music of the flute throws her into ecstasy. But He would not appear yet to her eyes. His pranks begin and when her heart has become a fit temple for His image, He appears. She describes the marvellous divine vision to her lord. Now Kṛṣṇa's image shines eternally in Vraja, because Sharmila has accepted Him for her Bhagavān. All is Kṛṣṇa, all is Kṛṣṇa now. She learns that to be a *Bhakta* one must renounce all things, even his Jñāna. And another great truth which she learns is to find Him in all things and everywhere. All appearances are but His disguises.

In the course of all these experiences, Sharmila recalls the words of

wisdom which her *guru* had taught her before she came to Vraja. Then it was all a meaningless jargon, but now the light of love illumines wisdom. Without the feeling of devotion, Knowledge has little value. Thus there is, first, "the hearing of the name, followed by a curiosity that rapidly deepens into attraction. Then comes the contact with a true *Bhakta*, and then a gradual and ever-deepening sense of His presence, an intense desire for direct communion with Him. Whereupon the soul turns into a *Gopī*, sees Him, and lives in *Bṛndāban*, near His feet, for ever afterwards".

Sharmila became a *Gopī* herself and initiated her husband and other relations, who at first created trouble for her, including *Mālatī*, the villain of the piece; and she made them all *Bhaktas* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Even so does Miss Raihana, who has amply received His grace, desires all to enjoy His blissful adoration. "The more I adore Kṛṣṇa," says she, "the more doubtful I become whether, really, there can be any worship at all outside of Kṛṣṇa-worship, whatever names and forms we may choose to give to its various aspects. He is so extremely everywhere!"*



Obeisance to that *Puruṣa*, the best among stealers, who steals all possessions of those taking shelter under His feet, who stole Śrī Rādhā's heart as well as the hue of the blue lotus.

Let the child of cowherd Nanda, playing on the banks of the Jamuna in a bower humming with the soothing music of bees amidst a ring of *Gopīs* enchanted by the sweet notes of His flute, protect us.

Let the child *Gopāla*, adorned with a garland of lotuses of golden colour, who was Death to Keśī, Kaṁsa and other evil-doers, a terror to warriors in the field of battle, the swan in the pond of Love, sustainer of all, new leaf of the creeper of virtue, come and take possession of my heart.

I bow before Śrī Govinda, child of Nanda, Lord of the abode of Fortune, friend and protector of the good, who is like a cloud that showers supreme bliss.

—*Nārāyaṇadāsa Kavirāja.*



* *Suryamukhi.*

Kumari Raihana Tyabji is the daughter of the famous Mussalman patriot, the late Mr. Abbas Tyabji Sahib of Baroda.

—*Editor*