

Verses filled with nectar

Lila Sukha's "Krishna Karnamritam" is a beautiful garland of poems. LAKSHMI DEVNATH elaborates...

CAPTIVATING, CHARMING, fascinating, enchanting... adjectives do seem to fall short while describing the personality of Krishna. His life too was a kaleidoscopic one brimming with incidents, varied and colourful. At Gokulam and Brindavan, where he grew up as one among simple cowherds, he charmed the girls with his quaint pranks, delightful barbs and above all with the magic of his flute and graceful dance.

Years rolled by. The Supreme Lord played diverse roles to fulfil the purpose of his incarnation. He was supremely affable and divinely charming. "This is indeed the most complete avatar," raved philosophers and litterateurs.

In subsequent centuries, Krishna became the central theme of many a story, poem, drama, song and so on. It was thus that, in the 13th century, a beautiful ode was created on Him. It focussed predominantly on the childhood phase of Krishna.

The author Lila Suka titled his creation, "Krishna Karnamritam. True to its name, its verses, when read or heard indeed fill the ears with nectar.

"If you place just one per cent of the love you have for me on the Lord, your future is guaranteed." Bilvamangala's ladylove Chintamani rebuked her paramour. This sharp remark spurred him on to the spiritual path. Krishna enveloped him completely. His unbridled passion for the lila-s (divine sport) of Lord Krishna struck a chord in the minds of people. "Ah, isn't his devotion reminiscent of the legendary Suka's (composer of the Srimad Bhagavatam) devotion to the same Lord?" the transformation was now complete and Bilvamangala attained fame as Lila Suka. Authentic details about his life are not available and whatever has been chronicled has been pieced together by inferences. Kerala was his home town. Along the way, Lila Suka also equipped himself with a deep knowledge of the Sanskrit language and it is said that in his later years he even adopted the ascetic order.

Scanty details about his life notwithstanding, his work —

the Krishna Karnamritam — is fortunately available with us in its entirety. It is made up of three portions that are referred to as Aashvasah. Three hundred and twenty eight slokas, all strung together by the thread of love for Krishna go to make up an odoriferous and colourful garland fit to be offered to the Lord. The beauty of this poem captivated the attention of the great Krishna Chaitanya, during his south tour, and he took back a copy of the manuscript and wrote a commentary on it. Interestingly the Bengali version has only one asvasah of the verses. The composition for the major part focuses, on the early life of Krishna and his delightful exploits at Gokulam and Brindavan. Krishna as Parthasarathy and as the beloved of Rukmini, Satyabhama and Radha are very briefly touched upon.

Dark and magnetic

Krishna — a more apt name could not have been chosen for the foster son of Yashoda and Nanda. The word can be interpreted to mean both darkness and the ability to draw people. The Sanskrit interpretation of the word is *Karshati iti Krishna* — one who pulls other to him is Krishna. Dark as the rain bearing clouds, Krishna exuded a magnetic charm that, true to his name, instantly captivated all those who came in contact with him.

Centuries later poet Lila Suka relived the era and burst into rhapsody over the luminous dark complexion of Krishna, "herds of thirsty cows approach him thinking him to be the Yamuna, peacocks eagerly look up to him under the impression that he is a rain-bearing cloud, the Gopis (cowherd girls), desirous to adorn their hair with the Tamala flower, pinch him thinking that he is a black blossom. May this black lustre that has destroyed the pride of the snake Kaliya protect us (2.2)."

However, let us enter the world of Krishna Karnamritam through the main doorway. Lila Suka begins his ode to Lord Krishna by paying his respects to his guru Somagiri whom he describes as the Chintamani gem that has the power to grant one's desires. He also pays his obeisance to Lord Krishna



whom he addresses as his siksha guru (teacher of knowledge) saying that Goddess Lakshmi always dwells with those who worship his Lord. Having thus started off on an auspicious note Lila Suka, with gay abandon, plunges deep into

the ocean of Krishna and emerges with a myriad variety of gems. It is significant that, while Lila Suka revels on the child Krishna, he never forgets his divinity. In the very second verse, Lila Suka states that Krishna is the Supreme Brah-

man incarnated in the hamlet of Gokula albeit as a child.

Mesmerising

Incomparable Krishna was in more ways than one. His looks were undoubtedly charming but his music was absolutely

mesmerising. His chosen instrument was the flute and when he breathed air into it, it came out in the form of ethereal music. It is said that, when the music drifted into the air, the wind stopped blowing, the cows stopped grazing and the gopis stood transfixed. Lila Suka while he is lulled into deep reverie by this magical music, is also envious of the good fortune of the flute. "Will I ever earn that much merit so as to be born as a flute on the banks of the Yamuna for, it is the Lord's instrument that occupies an exalted position near his beautiful lips."

Stories of the gopis' love for Krishna and his reciprocal grace are too many to be recounted. But there can be no doubt that the flute player was the darling of the cowherd girls and their love for Krishna was harmless. The Lord, in response to their devotion, danced with each one of them. The Rasakrida, as the dance is popularly known, has been extensively dealt with in cantos 29-33 of the tenth book of the Bhagavatam. Lila Suka in his inimitable style describes the dance thus: "Madhava stood between two gopis; there was one girl between two Madhavas. In this kind of arrangement, Krishna also stood in the middle and played the flute melodiously." But let us move on from Krishna the beloved of the Gopis to Krishna the incorrigible tease.

It was a daily ritual for Yashoda to listen to the complaint of the gopis about Krishna stealing butter or curds, untying calves on the sky and so on. Lila Suka describes such episodes in a delightful manner. But lest anybody be under the delusion that Krishna was an ordinary butter thief Lila Suka, in several verses, unfolds the Supreme nature of the child. The meaning of one of them runs as follows:

"Oh yogis, you who tired by searching for Him in the forests of the Vedas, listen to my valuable advice.

Search for the meaning of the Upanishads in the houses of the gopis. You will find it tied to the mortar!"

Thus, Lila Suka revels in the Lord and regales us too with his descriptions of the Supreme Brahma who lived as one amongst the simple cowherd folk of Gokulam and Brindavan. The Krishna Karnamritam indeed offers a lavish and delectable feast both to the intellect of the litterateur and to the heart of the devotee.