

5. Madhura bhakthi

THE Yamuna bank: calmness.....charm... inspiration thrill. The cool breeze brought soft and sweet strains of Divine music from the Flute of Krishna to the ear. Raadha came down from the high sand dune towards the waterline, with a big pot on her hip. Half way through she stopped short, for she heard her name wafted on the wind from where Krishna stood, 'Raadha, Raama.' With eyes wide open she looked on all the four sides. No one was to be seen anywhere. And no habitation around. Krishna was ever thus.

Raadha went off in a faint and fell down, the pot still in the fold of her arm. Then she suddenly awoke to the Reality: "There is no place where You are not," she said in her heart, addressing Krishna. "The call surely came from You, none else could be so soft. and sweet, so sincere and compelling. But let me ask just for one boon of You. You made us all act our roles; we played our parts as best as we could. You urged us to laugh and to weep, and enjoyed both to your heart's content. I have had enough. Please, please let me go back to where I belong. I addressed myself in desire and in disappointment, in anger and anticipation, in anxiety and aspiration. I fed myself with sensual thrills---melodious sound, smooth touch, ambrosial taste, bewitching sight, and bewildering fragrance. I had on my ankles the jingle of illusion. I met both the applause and the jeering of the world. When I sang, delusion marked time in accompaniment. The *thaamasik* (quality of inertia) and *raajasik* (quality of passion) encouraged me to dance with their background melody. Now my limbs fall. I am sick of the whole affair. May the play end. Please, please agree to this my prayer."

Raadha and Krishna were indivisible

But Krishna did not agree. He approached nearer and nearer. The Lord is a clear mirror wherein the pure heart is reflected clear. Raadha was His image, the embodiment of His ecstasy. Raadha was the *Aahlaadini Shakthi* (Gladdening Power) of Krishna, and so the two were inseparable, indivisible. That is why Krishna called out Raadha, Raadha, when she made her appearance on the Yamuna bank.

Raadha continued, "This is the best chance for me to lay the gem of my devotion at Thy Feet. Alas, it is still uncut and dull. I was misled for so long into the belief that the world is only sweet, but it is bitter as well. I have had enough. I am, as You know, *prakrithi dhaara* (uninterrupted flow of objective world), called Raadha. So I am burdened with three *gunas* (qualities)--the *sathwa*, *rajas* and *thamas* (goodness, passionate and dullness). Since *Prakrithi* (Nature) is feminine, I too, perforce am feminine."

Prakrithi is feminine and so its representative, Raadha, is also a *sthree* (woman). The Samskrith word *sthree* has three consonants - sa, *tha* and *ra*. These consonants signify the three *gunas* in that order - sa meaning *sathwa guna* (pure and good), *tha* meaning *thamo guna* (dull and ignorant qualities) and *ra* meaning *rajo guna* (passionate and aggressive qualities). Women have *sathwa guna* in ample measure. They are by nature helpful, tender, compassionate, humble and trustful. Next, they have also a good measure of *thamo guna*. They are timid, shy and unenterprising. It is good that women are such. They have been endowed by nature with only a small measure of *rajo guna*. Of course, this is only the general truth; there may be exceptions where the *rajo guna* predominates and the *thamo guna* recedes into the background. *Rajo guna* make women aggressively bold, adventurous and desirous of freedom from restraint. The day *rajo guna* is accepted as a mark of womanhood will mark the beginning of the end of femininity.

A woman is the first teacher of her children

Man has only one home, but a woman has two homes to guard from ill fame---the home where she was born and brought up and the home where she marries. When she breaks all rules and runs unbridled into freedom, she becomes dangerous to the reputation and good name of both families---that of her parents and that of her parents-in-law. Indian culture and spiritual traditions have always awarded a high place to women, since upon her rested the strength of the entire social fabric. She is a companion and guide of her husband and the first teacher of her children---an example for their social attitudes, a model for their speech and a guardian of their health and mental happiness. She is called the ardhagini (half body) of the husband. There are many temples where God is worshipped as *ardhanaareeshwara* (half woman and half man)---the right half being male and the left half female. The honour and glory of a country is held to be in the hands of the woman.

The wife can veritably make the home a temple

Whenever a religious rite is performed or the Gods or Goddesses propitiated by some ritual, the wife must sit by the side of the husband or else the rite or ritual is ineffectual. This is the high status given to the wedded woman in the Indian religious scriptures. No charitable gift can be valid without the wife's assent. Of course, she has no authority to perform these rites by herself, and so she is called *abala* (one without strength or power). The power implied here is "spiritual power over rites." Unfortunately, the use of this word has become so widespread that women themselves have come to believe that they are fundamentally weak and powerless in all fields. This is a big mistake; women are not weak, only authorisation to perform rituals is denied.

When Raama decided on performing the *Ashwamedha yaaga* (horse sacrifice), the objection was raised that Seetha was in exile in the forest, and so without his spouse he was not entitled to perform the *yaaga*. Some sages thought that a golden idol of the absent wife could be had by the side of the principal officiator, and so a golden idol of Seetha was made and placed in position by the side of Raama before the *yajna* (sacrificial rite) began. *Abala* does not mean lack of physical or mental strength. The wife can veritably make the home of her husband a temple, a school, a council-chamber or a hermitage.

Six streams of *bhakti* that flow towards God

Raadha lived the life of an ideal woman in accordance with the standards set by the *Sanaathana Dharma* (Eternal Universal Religion) and kept her thoughts fixed all the time on the Lord in pure, unremitting devotion, and so she secured the bliss of merging with Him. This is the type of *bhakti* (devotion) referred to in the scriptures as "*madhura bhakti*" (mellifluous devotion). There are six streams of *bhakti*, all flowing towards the Lord and characteristic of six different types of spiritual attitudes. They are *shaantha*, *sakhya*, *dhaasya*, *vaathsalya*, *anuraaga* and *madhura*.

Madhura is the highest of the six, since it gives the maximum bliss. Milk is curdled and churned, and butter produced and clarified into ghee. Ghee is the end, the final stage. So, too, *madhura bhakti* is the last stage in the experience of merging in the Lord. The journey ends and the feet stop when the goal is reached. When the *madhura* (sweet) experience is achieved, there is nowhere else to go to, nothing more to do. The totality of God is experienced in *madhura bhakti*, His Poorna (full) aspect, His *Prema* (love) aspect.

In *shaantha bhakthi* (calm devotion), the aspirant practises equanimity and considers all that happens to him as a gift of the Grace of God. Therefore he is unaffected by success or failure; he is ever grateful for whatever God grants him. In *saakhya bhakthi* (friendly devotion), the aspirant takes God as his constant counsellor, confidante, companion and mate. He feels the constant Presence of the Lord and is never unaware of Him. In *dhaasya bhakthi* (servitude of devotion), the aspirant feels that he is the servant, the instrument of the Lord, and revels in the role that God gives him on the stage of life. In *vaathsalya bhakthi* (devotion of parental love), the aspirant loves the Lord as the mother loves her child---with tenderness, anxiety, compassion and vigilance. In *anuraaga bhakthi* (devotion of deep affection), the aspirant is deeply attached to the Manifestation of the Lord, to all emanations of Divinity, and he is highly pleased when he gets a chance to serve them.

Since man has, as his essential characteristic, the quality of love, he has only to foster it and attend to it so that he might love the Lord to the fullest, by loving the Lord's Creation as much as the Lord Himself. Then the tree of life will yield the sweet fruit of *madhura bhakthi* (intimate loving devotion). The fruit will have the bitter skin of I-ness and My-ness, which has to be removed. Certain egoistic desires and attributes might persist as 'seeds' which, too, have to be removed before the sweet pulp of love is offered to the Lord. When Raadha said that she had the vesture of desire and anger, she meant that she was unaffected by them. When she said that she was wearing the five elements contacted by the five senses in five distinct ways---sight, smell, taste, touch and sound---as a 'garland' round her neck, she meant that she was not contaminated by their contact. Naturally, the Lord knew that she was completely dedicated to Divinity, that hers was *madhura bhakthi*, that her *prema* had no blemish. So He granted the final consummation of *bhakthi* to Raadha.

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