

Krishna's Secret

Once Arjuna asked Krishna to tell him about his divine Rasa Leela. 'What is this place of eternal happiness and love? And what is the nature of your divine sport? Please tell me its secret.'

'This sport cannot be perceived by anyone—not even Brahma, and I don't reveal its secrets, even to those who are very dear to me.' Krishna replied. 'Dear one, don't ask me about it.'

Arjuna fell at Krishna's feet in anguish. 'Please Lord, tell me. I long to know.'

Krishna affectionately raised Arjuna by the shoulders. 'Go then to the goddess Tripurasundari, in whom everything merges. She is the only one who can grant you divine sight.'

When Arjuna worshipped the goddess, she bestowed upon him a vision of Vrindavan where Krishna is constantly engaged in Rasa Leela with the gopis. The sight of the divine dance of love was so overwhelming that Arjuna was rendered unconscious. When he regained his senses, the goddess took him to a lake in the east that was in the midst of a flower garden, where Krishna celebrated the spring festival in honour of Kamadeva. The lake itself was in the shape of a thousand-petalled lotus with a bud in the centre. It was fed by four waterfalls and four streams; the southern stream was of honey and liquor distilled from the madhuka tree. The water of the lake was speckled with pollen from white, red, and blue lotuses and also lotuses that bloomed at night. It rippled with gentle breezes, and its waves caressed the wings of swans, as they swam across.

As soon as Arjuna plunged into this lake, the goddess vanished, and from the lake emerged a smiling young maiden. This was Arjuna himself—transformed. Gone were his rock-hard muscles, bowstring-calloused hands, and high-cheek-boned warrior's face. This maiden had a slim and fair body, like rays of pure gold. Her face shone like the autumn moon and her hair was glossy, dark and curly, with jewels woven into it. Her eyebrows resembled Kama's bow, and her eyes were the colour of rain clouds. Jewelled earrings brushed against her soft, round cheeks and ornaments sparkled around her neck and wrists, from which her delicate hands sprouted like lotuses. There was a golden girdle around her hips and golden anklets at her feet. So caught up was Arjuna in this splendid illusion created by the goddess that seeing himself in this form of Arjuni, he forgot his earlier form.

Stepping out of the lake, Arjuni stood bewildered, not knowing what to do. Then she heard a grave voice from heaven: 'O beautiful lady. Go down this easterly path and you will achieve your desire.' As she walked along that path, the tinkling of girdle and anklet bells reached her ears, and she saw a bevy of beautiful young women, shining with ornaments, laughing and engaging in amorous play, coming towards

her. Seeing them, Arjuni stood shyly with her head bowed, etching mindless patterns in the ground with a big toe.

‘Who are you?’ one of the women, whose name was Priyamuda, asked.

‘I don’t know,’ Arjuni replied. ‘I don’t how I got here or who brought me here. Perhaps, it was the goddess. Who are you?’

‘We are the beloved of Krishna,’ Priyamuda said. ‘We are the self-delighted gopis with whom the lover of gopis, the Moon of Vrindavan, sports.’ Then Priyamuda introduced Arjuni to all the other maidens, and, together, they brought her to another lake in the east, where they anointed her with flowers and fragrance and taught her a special hymn honouring the goddess Radhika. Arjuni then joined the gopis in worshipping the goddess, whose body is like heated gold, whose face is like a full autumn moon, and who illuminates all three worlds with her lustre.

‘What my friends have told you is true,’ Radhika said to Arjuni. ‘Come with me and I’ll help fulfil the desire in your heart.’

Arjuni’s body began to tremble in anticipation and her eyes filled with tears. She was so overcome, she could hardly stand. Then one of the other gopi, Priyamvada, took her hand and brought her to Radhika, who taught her how to draw a magical eight-petalled yellow lotus made of saffron and sandal, and how to offer worship to Krishna so that he would grace it.

Pleased with her devotions, Krishna said to Radhika, ‘Bring her here quickly.’ And Sharada, another gopi, brought Arjuni to the Playful One. Suddenly finding herself standing before him, who was her heart’s desire, Arjuni could not bear it and collapsed on the ground like melted gold. Slowly, her heart fluttering and her body perspiring, she raised herself and looked around. Under a desire-yielding tree was a golden temple with a golden throne. On either side of it were two treasures of Kubera—Sankha and Padma. In the four directions were desire-yielding cows, and around the temple was the full bloom of Nandan garden, fragrant with sandalwood and honey. Bees were humming and sounds of cuckoos, pigeons, sarikas and parrots were everywhere. Peacocks, intoxicated with the season, danced in this environment that was slightly shadowed, as though smeared with collyrium, like a maiden’s eye.

Shyly, Arjuni dared to look at Krishna himself. He was shining like the petals of a blue lotus. His curly hair was glossy, dark, and fragrant. A peacock feather adorned his head, his cheeks were lustrous, and his nose was like the sesame flower. His lips were the red of bimba fruits, and his gentle smile, a sharp arrow in the heart. Around his neck was a garland of wild flowers, and his chest displayed the Kaustubha gem and the mark of Srivatsa. His waist was slim and his navel deep, and his hips were covered with pitamber,

which also partly covered his front. Every part of his body exuded the arrogance of kama, as he reclined on the throne, tired from dancing and sporting.

As Arjuni watched, Radhika offered him a betel leaf, and he accepted it, and Arjuni felt her own heart overwhelmed with ardour. Seeing her in that state, Krishna, who knows everything, seized her hand and took her to the solitude of the forest of passion and revelry.

Afterwards, supporting her with his arm around her shoulders, Krishna brought her to Sharada. 'Bathe this beautiful lady in the western lake,' he instructed.

As soon as Arjuni stepped into the lake, he became Arjuna again, and found himself back in Vaikuntha, where he and Krishna had been talking. But now his heart ached and his mind was dejected. Knowing his state, Krishna touched him with a magical hand, and Arjuna finally came back into his own nature again. 'O Dhananjaya,' Krishna said to him. 'You are very dear to me, and there is none equal to you. No one in the three worlds knows my secret except you. Know that you will curse me if you reveal it to anyone.'

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