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You Matter to Me by Vaisnavacharya Chandan Goswami

The poet Percy Bysshe Shelley once said, "Familiar acts are beautiful through love." In India, we have two approaches to worshipping God. The first involves repeating worship patterns that have been passed down to us from our forefathers. In this type of worship, we make our offerings systematically. Love or emotion does not have much place in this type of worship. Ultimately, our attention becomes more focussed on the actions themselves than on the object of our worship.

In contrast, the other path of worship is that of love. In this path, we build a relationship with the object of our devotion; God becomes our son, brother, beloved or friend. The God of love, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, emphasised this second form of worship, asking us to adore the Lord by making him our own.

It's like the difference between serving our relatives out of mere duty, and taking care of them lovingly with a heartfelt connection. When we serve with love, all the boredom vanishes from our relationships. People are not boring, but we tend to get bored with them because our attention wanders, and this creates disconnection between us. But when we offer our full love and attention to the object of our love, our attitude says clearly: "You matter to me. You have my respect. I love you."



Gulab Sakhi: The Brajwasi Muslim in Service of Radharani



There once was a man named Gulab who lived in Barsana. Although he was born to a Muslim family in Braj, by living in constant association with Radharani's devotees, he developed a deep attachment towards her. He treasured the dust of Braj and during the Holi festival, he would joyfully sweep Barsana's Rangeeli Gali, revelling in the *prasadi* colours and dust that came from the feet of the devotees.

Though he was poor and uneducated, Gulab was a humble and kind soul. He was also a talented musician, who played the *sarangi* (a special stringed instrument) with great depth of emotion. Every day, both morning and night, he would offer his melodies to Radharani in her temple on top of Barsana's big hill, Brahmachal Parvat.

In appreciation of his heartfelt Raag Seva, the temple Goswamis used to give Gulab Radharani's *prasad* every day, and once a month they gave him a small sum of money. This was enough to sustain his life and his *seva*, and Gulab had no further desires.



Gulab and his daughter



Whenever Gulab would play *sarangi* for Radha and Krishn, his young daughter, whose name was also Radha, would dance beautifully. He felt that his daughter's contribution made his *seva* for his beloved Queen complete.

But eventually, his daughter came of age, and the time came for her to get married. The thought of losing his daughter broke Gulab's heart – not for his personal happiness, but because he felt that his *seva* for Radharani would suffer without her. Yet, the day came and she was married. Accepting Gulab and Radha as true servants of Radharani, the temple Goswamis paid for all the expenses of the wedding from their own pockets.

After his daughter's wedding day, Gulab stopped eating. He didn't even drink a sip of water. He simply sat at the door of Radharani's altar, sobbing and crying out "Radha! Radha!" The Goswamis were very concerned for him. They tried to calm Gulab, but his streaming tears would not subside. This continued for three whole days and nights.

At midnight of the third night, Gulab suddenly heard the voice of his daughter saying, "Father! Here I am! Please don't cry anymore. Just play the *sarangi* and I will dance." Gulab's eyes ached so much from crying that he could barely open them, but somehow he composed himself enough to pick up his *sarangi*.

Radha danced as Gulab played, just like she always had – but this time, her dance was far more spellbinding; the jingling of her anklets and bangles completely captured his heart. Suddenly, Gulab saw the truth – it was not his daughter dancing, but Radharani herself.



Gulab Sakhi goes with Radharani

With eyes wide open and flowing with tears, Gulab's heartbeat seemed to stop as he tried to absorb Radharani's *darshan*.

Longing to share a few words with her, to somehow offer her his love and *seva*, Gulab took a step forward. As he did so, Radharani turned away and disappeared inside her altar. Gulab followed swiftly after her.

From then on, nobody saw Gulab again. Rumour spread that perhaps Gulab had taken his own life, unable to bear the sorrow of his daughter's absence.

One night, after putting Radharani to rest with Shri Lalju, a Goswami of Radharani's temple was walking home alone. Suddenly, he heard a voice from behind the trees saying, "Goswamiji! Goswamiji!"

"Who's there?" Goswamiji asked.

"Your Gulab," replied the voice.

Goswamiji was shocked when Gulab appeared from behind the trees. "We all thought you were no more!" he exclaimed.

Gulab told Goswamiji the truth about how Radharani had given him her *darshan*. He then went on to say, "After that, Shri Priyaju mercifully accepted me as her eternal maidservant. Just now I was playing *sarangi* for her as she drifted off to sleep with her Beloved. See! Here is her *prasadi paan*."

As Goswamiji received the *prasadi paan* from Gulab's hand, he was astonished to realise that it was the exact same piece of *paan* that he had just offered to Radharani in the temple. From this day forward, Gulab became known as Gulab Sakhi.

Before Gulab left Goswamiji to return to Radharani's *seva*, Goswamiji asked him, "So then Gulab, where do you reside now?" Gulab motioned to a forest retreat on the path between two of Barsana's holy lakes, Piri Pokhar and Prem Sarovar. There, the people of Barsana installed a *chabutra* (a special memorial) in his memory, which can still be seen today.

References

The Saints of Braj and Braj ke Bhakt by Dr. O.B.L. Kapoor



Gulab Sakhi's *chabutra* in Barsana



A Sacred Offering: The Journey of Radharamanji's Nritya Sevak by Janaki Mehta

The desire to dance for Radharamanji in his courtyard developed many years back when I saw a video of a girl dancing for him. I was struck by the spiritual atmosphere of the temple and the sincerity of the devotees watching. As a Kathak and Bharatnatyam dancer, my inclination has always been towards dancing to songs which glorify Radha and Krishn, and Vrindavan has been my "special place" since childhood. Over the years, the Shri Radharaman Temple has become my "special temple" in my "special place."

I can never forget the kindness of Vaisnavacharya Chandan Goswamiji Maharaj when he first arranged my Nritya Seva in 2015. Tears of joy fell from my eyes as I read his message confirming the date and time. I premiered a new dance piece during this trip, and I remember thinking how mystical the arrangements of Radharamanji were. The dance was all about Krishn's disappearance from the Raas Lila, and this incident practically happened at the exact spot of the Shri Radharaman Temple. I felt the dance had to be performed there before anywhere else, and Radharamanji made all the arrangements for this.



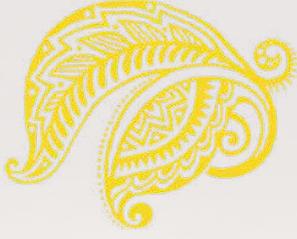
Over the years, my Nritya Seva opportunities at the temple have led to life-changing experiences. The desire to dance at other venues, even those considered prestigious by all dancers, reduced dramatically for me. I had always been fiercely ambitious with my dance career, but dancing at the Shri Radharaman Temple made me understand how my dance is never a "performance". How can I "perform" anything in front of Radha and Krishn, who are themselves the most expert dancers? They can see all my flaws; all I can do is offer my flawed dance as *seva* and pray that someday, my love for them overshadows the mistakes!

I also realised that no venue can compare to the black and white chequered floor of Shriji's courtyard, which is covered in the divine dust of Vrindavan, the original birthplace of dance. Furthermore, devotees and saints place their feet on that floor; they may even see my Nritya Seva, and perhaps, I would be lucky enough to receive their blessings!

These days, back in my hometown of London, I am faced with situations which I previously considered setbacks in my dance career. I am often not chosen for "big performances" as my repertoire is considered too traditional or religious, or more contemporary dancers are chosen even at temple events as they appeal more to the general public. However, I no longer consider these to be hindrances. Having danced in Radharamanji's personal courtyard through the mercy of Chandan Goswamiji Maharaj, I have already danced at the world's most prestigious venue in front of the most important person, Radharamanji! I have realised that my dance is only for him. In fact, I don't even identify as a dancer anymore; rather, I feel dance is an excuse to serve Radharamanji.

Through this experience, I have also realised how we must give others opportunities for *seva*. Maharajji gave me the chance to do Nritya Seva, and it changed my life forever. If somehow we are able to give someone else the opportunity to perform *seva*, we must do this; we never know just how much it may mean to them!

My desire to dance again and again at the Shri Radharaman Temple grows continually, and I beg for the blessings of the readers so that I can dance there as often as possible and always strive to improve my offering to him.



Upcoming Events: September 2019



Ganesh Chaturthi

Monday, September 2nd

In the evening, Shriji retreats into his inner chambers as it is forbidden to observe the moon on this night. For more information, please refer to the story of the Shyamantak gem.

Radhashtami

Friday, September 6th

Abhishek of Shri Radharani takes place in the morning. She is bathed before the devotees but hidden by a veil. Shriji wears yellow clothes, and in the evening, he sits on a special throne with Radharani. There is a special *bhog* of sesame fudge (*til paak*) and lightly toasted, sweetened flour (*panjiri*).

Vaman Jayanti

Tuesday, September 10th

An afternoon *abhishek* of *shaligram shila* is performed. Later that day, *panchamrit* is distributed.

Sanjhi Utsav

Saturday, September 14th until Saturday, September 28th

Sanjhi is a unique art form wherein coloured powders, gems, flower petals or cow dung are used to create intricate portrayals of scenes from the pastimes (*lilas*) of Radha and Krishn, on a canvas of raised earth. Radharamanji's Sanjhi Festival takes place at the Raas Mandap. A different *sanjhi* is made every day for fifteen days. The mood is that Shri Radharani prays to Sanjhi Devi, and artistically manifests Her various *lilas* with her Beloved, Shri Krishn, in the form of *sanjhi* pictures. The next morning, She removes the previous night's *sanjhi* and creates a new one. On the last day of the festival, there is a celebration.

