



SANDARSHAN

odev108@gmail.com
www.shriradharaman.com

Monthly Newsletter
May 2018
Issue No. 5

A Perfect Devotee

There are lovers who have the means to make everything "perfect" for the one they love. They will try to impress their beloved in ways only wealthy people can afford. But those who are not so wealthy accept their reality. Instead of trying to perfect their situation and become rich so they can buy their beloved expensive gifts, they perfect their love to win their beloved's heart.

Some teachers of *bhakti* place a lot of emphasis on how you should work on yourself and become a perfect devotee before offering your heart to Radha and Krishn. Using the example of the finest devotees who were completely immersed in *bhakti*, they ask you to become like them by following certain rules, regulations and strict practices.

But we have to understand that every devotee has a different lifestyle. Prahlad lived in *asur lok*, the abode of the demons. He didn't have any devotee association, and his own family members were trying to kill him. But still, he was able to dedicate himself completely to the Lord.

The Pandavs were always engaged in various duties and responsibilities, yet Krishn was at the centre of their lives. They always turned to him for guidance, love and support.





And the greatest devotees, the *gopis* themselves, were householders. Even though they spent each day doing heavy chores from morning to night, they were completely absorbed in Krishn's love.

So everyone's situation is different. From the examples of the devotees given so far, no one left everything to try to become perfect. But yes, internally they had completely surrendered themselves unto Krishn's lotus feet and they tried to love him in the most perfect way.

As devotees, we have read the stories of our masters, the great saints who attained perfection and pleased Krishn with their deep *bhajan* and extreme *vairagya* (worship and renunciation). For example, Raghunath Das Goswami drank only one small bowl of buttermilk and performed *bhajan* for over 23 hours a day, but can we do the same?

Some teachers will give you practices similar to what these great souls performed. This needs a lot of sacrifice and has a limited success rate. But the Gaudiya way is to honour the great masters, while understanding and accepting ourselves the way we are. Instead of trying to become perfect, we should instead try to perfect our love, just as Prahlad, the Pandavs and the *gopis* did.

Vaisnavacharya Chandan Goswami

How Radha and Krishn First Met



अखिल-रसामृत-मूर्तिः
प्रसूमर-रुचि-रुद्ध-तारका-पालिः
कलित-श्यामा-ललितो
राधा-प्रेयान् विधुर् जयति

*akhila rasāmṛta murtiḥ, prasrmara ruci ruddha tārakā pāliḥ
kalita śyāmā lalito, rādhā preyān vidhur jayati*
(Bhakti Rasamrta Sindhu, verse 1)

"Shri Krishn is the form of all *ras*. He brings the *gopis* like Tara and Pali under his control, and accepts the *sakhis* like Lalita and Shyama as his equals. But he lives to give pleasure to Radha - all glories to him!"

Jeev Goswami gives a second meaning to this verse in the same commentary:

"All glories to Vaishakh Purnima, the full moon joined with Radha (Vishakha) constellation. Its radiance destroys suffering and gives delight. Full of nectar, it outshines the all the stars, and merges in the playful romance of the night."

Vaishakh Purnima is Radharamanji's Appearance Day, and it is also the day when Radha and Krishn first met around five thousand years ago. The story of their first meeting is told by Roop Goswami in his play *Vidagdh Madhav*.

The place where Radha and Krishn met for the first time is called Praskandan Tirth. Prasakandan Tirth lies on the bank of the Yamuna River at the bottom of Dwadash Aditya Tila, the hill where the ancient temple of Madanmohan stands today.

Here the Dwadash Adityas (twelve forms of the Sun god) dried Krishn after he defeated the serpent Kaliya in the Yamuna River. Today the river has moved far away and most of this sacred place is now buried under the *parikrama marg*. But during Radha and Krishn's *prakat lila*, the whole area was a garden of hibiscus flowers.

Even before Radha and Krishn met, they fell in love just by hearing each other's names. Radha also saw a painting of Krishn, and when he played the flute in longing for her, the sweet melody drove Radha mad with love.

Radha told her closest friends, "A young man, dark and beautiful like a sapphire, with a peacock feather in his hair, came out of the picture and laughed at me, with his eyebrows dancing naughtily. Since then I have gone insane. Now even the moonlight burns me, and flames feel cool and soothing."

Lalita and Vishakha offered to help her meet that boy, but Radha confessed:

"O my dear friends, I wish I could die. I have fallen in love with three different boys. The one who plays the flute maddens me, the one in the picture has stolen my heart, and the one whose name is Krishn has captured my soul!"

"O Radhe!" said Lalita, "Those are not three different boys. The boy named Krishn is the one who plays the flute, and he is also the boy in the picture!"

Feeling a little relieved, Radha wrote a love letter to Krishn on a *karnikar* flower petal. Then she sent Lalita and Vishakha to deliver it, along with the gift of a *gunjamala*.

Just as Radha suffered in Krishn's separation, Krishn longed for Radha too. But Krishn is very naughty. Although his heart was filled with joy when he read Radha's love letter, he decided that he would play hard-to-get. So he started to tease them badly.

"I am the most chaste boy in the whole world!" said Krishn. "Your friend Radha is so shameless, and so are both of you. I am going to tell her parents about this letter."

Shocked by Krishn's response, Lalita, who is usually very strong and bold, started to cry. Hoping to melt his heart, Vishakha placed Radha's *gunjamala* around Krishn's neck.

Pretending not to care, Krishn said, "I don't want this silly *gunjamala*. It is dirty and hard like the hearts of young women," He started to give it back, but instead of removing the *gunjamala* from his neck, Krishn took off his *rangan-mala** (garland of *rangan* flowers) instead and gave it to Vishakha.

[**Rangan-mala* is also the nickname of Roop Manjari, the *gopi* form of Roop Goswami (the writer of the play).]

This was a sign of Krishn's love, but Lalita and Vishakha thought he had given them the wrong garland by mistake. They left to give Radha the terrible news that Krishn had rejected her.

Krishn's friend Madhumangal said, "O Krishn! This is not going very well!"

"I thought it would be funny," said Krishn.

"It is not funny," said Madhumangal. "Now Radha will think you have rejected her. What will we do?"

Krishn thought for a moment and said, "Let's reply to her letter."

"Do you really think that will help?" asked Madhumangal.

"Well, if we write it with hibiscus flower juice, maybe it will put a spell on her!" said Krishn.

Madhumangal agreed, and the two went off to Praskandan Tirth to pluck hibiscus (*jaba*) flowers for the spell. Meanwhile, Radha also arrived at Praskandan Tirth, wearing Krishn's *rangan-mala* on her neck, with Lalita and Vishakha at her side.

As Krishn and Madhumangal plucked hibiscus flowers, they did not realise that Radha and her friends were doing the same thing. Radha offered the flowers she gathered to her *isht-dev*, the Sun god, and said:

"O my friends! Now I will bathe in the Yamuna for the last time. But promise me one thing before I go. When I die, please bind my dead body to a *tamal* tree. The *tamal* is dark like my Beloved, and if you do this for me, it will be like I'm embracing him forever in Vrindavan."

Then Radha thought, "If I die, I will never see Krishn again." And so she asked to see his picture one last time, but Vishakha had left the picture at home. So Radha tried to see him in meditation.

Radha closed her eyes, and when she opened them again, there was Krishn standing in front of her.

With tears flowing from his eyes and voice trembling with love, Krishn smiled and said, "O beautiful thief, I have been looking for you everywhere. You have stolen my *rangan-mala*!"

Radha could only smile in reply - she was lost in the ocean of her Beloved's *darshan*.

Radharaman Appeared to Gopal Bhatt Goswami

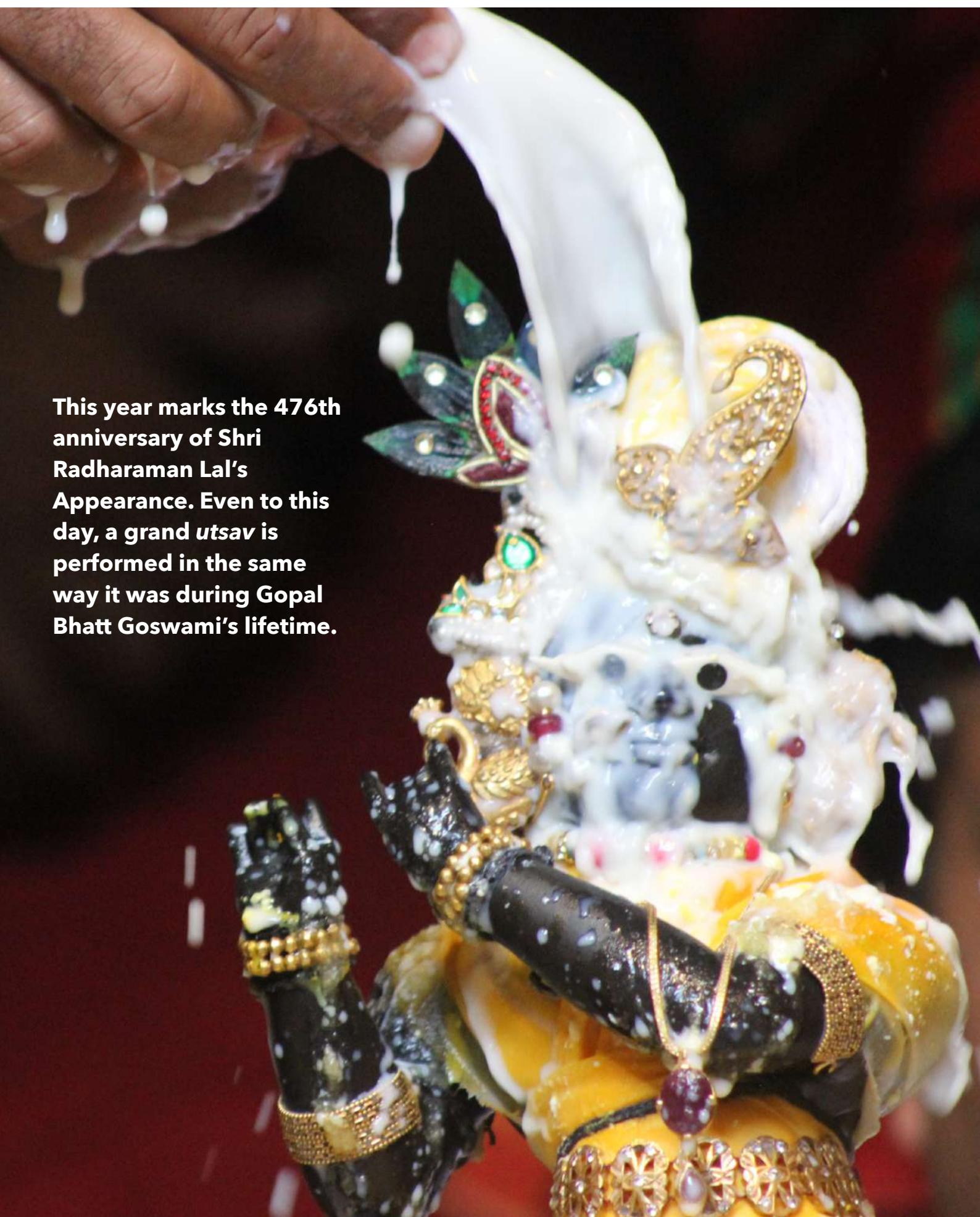
Shri Gopal Bhatt Goswami was a Vaishnav from Shri Rangam in South India, who served Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in his childhood. Filled with Mahaprabhu's blessings, Gopal Bhatt came to Vrindavan where he worshipped Radha and Krishn with pure love. There he wrote books that became the foundation of the Gaudiya Vaishnav path.

After Mahaprabhu's disappearance, Gopal Bhatt was heartbroken, and longed to see him again. He also yearned for a deity of Shri Krishn to love and serve as his very own. To fulfill these two wishes of Gopal Bhatt's pure heart, on Vaishakh Purnima of 1542 AD, Radharamanji appeared in his thrice-curved pose from a *shaligram shila*. This is why Radharamanji is known as *swayambhu* (self-manifest).

You can read the full story of Radharamanji's miraculous appearance in the book *Sri Radharaman Gita* by Vaisnavacharya Chandan Goswami. More information is also available online at www.shriradharaman.com.



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Radharamanji's Appearance Day



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The festival begins early in the morning, when a group of Goswamis leaves the temple holding huge silver pots. A devotee plays the *kartals* and sings *Harinaam* as they make their way to the Shri Yamuna River to collect water to bathe Radharamanji during his *maha-abhishek*.

Meanwhile, inside the temple, a special space has been created for the ceremony. A colourful canopy shines over the place where Radharamanji will sit, and auspicious banana trees and flower decorations grace the *jagmohan* (outer altar).

All the sevatis of Radharaman make every effort to participate in his appearance day rituals, and so the altar is full of Goswamis dressed in colourful silks. The temple courtyard too is completely filled with Radharamanji's devotees who have been waiting for this moment all year.

The *abhishek* itself lasts two hours, with thousands of litres of milk, water, honey, ghee and so forth being poured over Radharamanji's body in celebration.

To keep him from catching a cold, the Goswamis apply a special Ayurvedic blend of herbs on his body before the ceremony. And afterward, he is offered a special *bhog* of sweetened sesame seeds.

When the *abhishek* is over, Radharamanji is dressed in his finest clothes and the Raj Tilak ceremony is performed. The Goswamis and all the devotees raise their hands to bless Radharamanji in a perfect gesture of Vrindavan's pure sweetness. Though he is eternal, in love they pray that he may live a long and healthy life, and that he may remain in Vrindavan forever, playing with his beloved Shri Radha.

And as Radharamanji smiles down on them, filled with joy on his birthday, the devotees find the perfect moment to ask for a blessing of their own:

बधाई में दीजे श्रीबनवास ।
 तुमरे श्री राधारमण प्रगट भये पूनो माधौ मास ॥
 सुनिये श्रीमद् भद्र गुसाई मेरी यह अभिलाष ।
 जुगलदास के पास रहों नित गावों तव गुण रास ॥

*badhāī mē dījē śrī-banvās
 tumare śrī rādhāraman̄ pragat̄ bhaye pūno mādhau mās
 suniye śrīmad bhaṭṭ gusāī merī yah abhilāṣh
 jugaldās ke pās rahō nit gāvō tav guṇ rās*

O Shri Gopal Bhatt Goswami! Please bless me to live in Vrindavan forever. Today is Vaishakh Purnima, that special day when your beloved Radharaman appeared, so please listen to my prayer. Let this be your gift to us on his Appearance Day. I long to live close to you as your servant, and sing Shri Radharamanji's glories forever.

