

NOT LIKE THIS ...

Braja Sevaki Devī Dāsī

THE GIRL LOOKED UP AT the sky – dark clouds spilled their first drops as the boat pulled into the *ghat* to unload its passengers. She looked fearfully up at the sky, saying to herself, “So much rain, it never stops...the flooding, always flooding.” She slipped as she stepped from the boat, sliding in the mud, grasping at the air to maintain her footing, managing just to do so. A frightened yelp escaped her. “It can’t be like this in the spiritual world.”

The voice was gentle, quiet: “Śrī Gaṅgā-devī allows herself to be lifted up into the clouds that move to and fro, freely across the land, pouring her mercy on those who are far from her banks. Her waters carry love of God, Kṛṣṇa-prema, and those who bathe in her are guaranteed to return to the Lord. How fortunate to be rained on by Śrī Gaṅgā-devī!”

Absorbed in her misery and bewildered by the cacophony of village sounds, the girl didn’t hear the voice. The loudspeaker from a nearby temple screamed to life over her head. She thought to herself, “So much noise. Why is there no peacefulness? Don’t these people know anything about noise levels? Surely they realize this is a sacred place.” She hurried her pace, trying to put distance between herself and the noise. “It’s not like this in the spiritual world.”

The voice followed the girl, gently, sweetly: “All the residents of the dhāma are constantly chanting the name of Kṛṣṇa; the sound of His flute from the temple compound draws the minds of His dear devotees once again to His lotus feet. Kṛṣṇa says, “Always chanting My glories, endeavoring with great determination, bowing down before Me, these great souls perpetually worship Me with devotion.” How fortunate to be in a place where His name and pastimes are constantly sung!”

Her desire to escape the noise and rain pushed her on; muttering to herself, she drew the stares of the people milling around the street. Some children pointed; “*Pāgali!*” they cried, and ran off laughing. *Crazy woman!* She hurried on, wondering at these undisciplined children. “Where are their parents?

Why do they let them behave like this...and what are all these people doing here anyway?” Her anxiety increased as a bus full of people blasted its way noisily through the crowded street. She cursed the driver silently, keeping her steady pace. “So many tourists, it’s so crazy...it’s not like this in the spiritual world.”

The voice could not be heard above the busy street noises, but it spoke softly near the girl’s ear: “From so far, so many come – is there any obstacle great enough to stop the devotees seeing their Lord? Taking refuge at His lotus feet in places of pilgrimage is their only happiness in life. Nothing can keep them from their Lord. “Paṅguṁ laṅghayate girim.” By the mercy of a great soul, they can cross mountains. Such is the desire of Kṛṣṇa’s devotees.”

The girl finally reached the sanctuary of the *mandir*, its large gates blocked by hundreds of visitors. She pushed her way through the crowd, blindly shoving people carelessly out of the way, her desperation to get inside so much greater than anyone’s. As she reached the temple doors, she pushed her way through another crowd, wondering why the guards didn’t do something about these people, they were so out of control, couldn’t they see she wanted to get in? Completely absorbed in her misery, she made her way to the altar. “It’s not like this in the spiritual world.”

The voice followed her into the temple; she might have heard it, but she wasn’t listening: “One whose mind is fixed in reaching their worshipable Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa, has understood that the devotees are his only hope. One who knows Kṛṣṇa, knows that His devotees are more dear to Him than anyone. How fortunate to feel the touch of the bodies of the devotees of the Lord!”

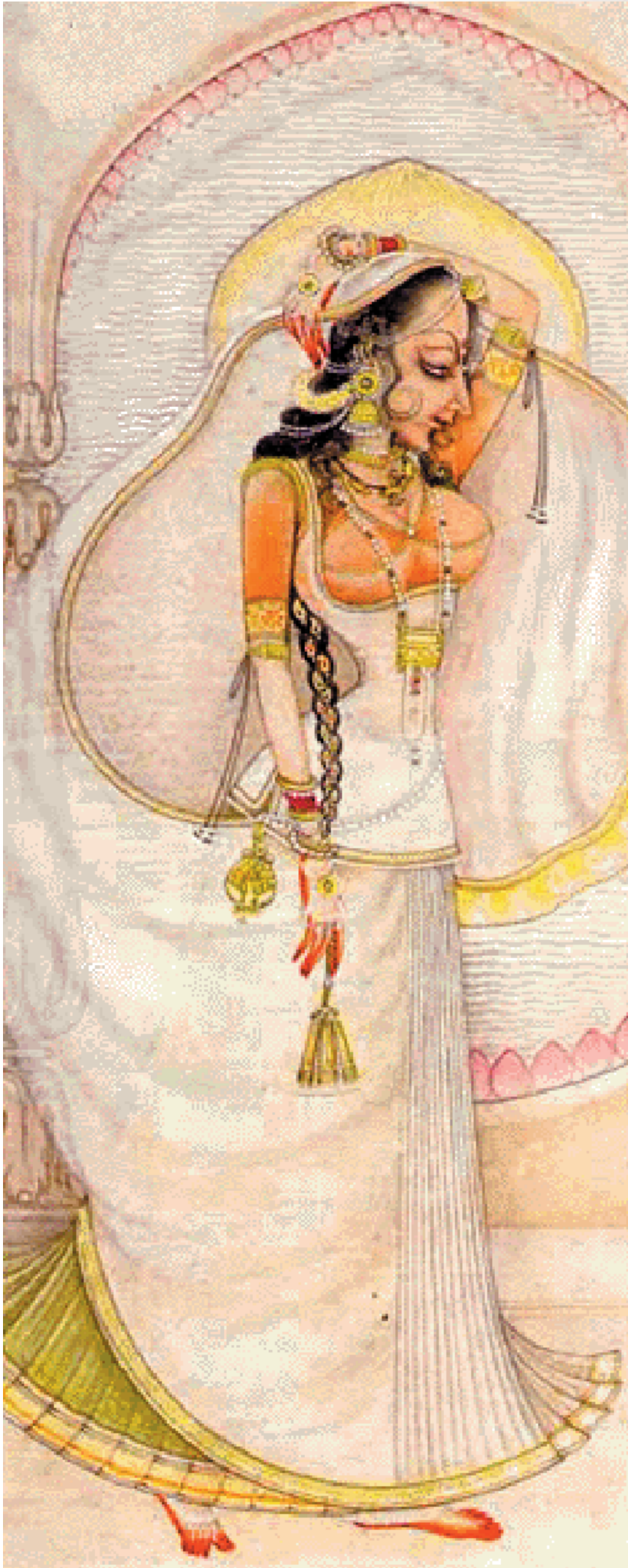
As the girl reached the altar, she looked up at the beautiful forms of Śrī Śrī Rādhā Mādhava, and sighed in relief. “The things I have to do just to see You. It’s worth it of course, but my God! The hassles of living here! I can’t wait to be with You, Kṛṣṇa. I’m sure it’s not like this in the spiritual world...”

The voice was clear, and all other noises around the girl ceased as it caressed her ears: “My dear child, what do you know of the spiritual world?” She paused, and the girl turned, stunned by the vision before her, speechless at her beauty, awed by her presence...

“Wh...who...who a-are y-you?” she stammered.

Turning her face from Mādhava’s beautiful form, she looked at the girl with such a loving glance, the girl almost fainted – never before had the girl felt the presence of such love. “Why, I am Bhakti Devī, the goddess of devotion.”

The girl was too stunned to move, wrapped in a



dream-like covering. “B-b-but...I can see you! How is this possible?”

Bhakti Devī spoke softly: “My child, as the Supreme Lord independently appears to the *jīvas* by His own sweet will, so I am also self-manifest and fully independent, appearing in any place of my choice. I am free to appear at will, and for the *jīvas* to perceive me with their senses.”

The girl spoke, her voice unsteady, “But surely I do not deserve such mercy! What is it I have done, that brings me this great fortune of having you manifest before me?”

Bhakti Devī answered, “As long as one has this material body, accidents may occur, and thus one may commit sins inadvertently. When that happens, I appear and incinerate those sins to ashes, allowing the sincere devotee to continue on their path back to our Supreme Lord, Śrī Kṛṣṇa.”

Bhakti Devī tilted her head slightly, and glanced around the temple. Her hand moved slowly and languidly, its graceful movements sweeping across the crowded temple, “My dear child, these devotees here, all have come to seek the mercy of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.” Bhakti Devī rested her gaze on the girl, and her long, lotus eyes filled with tears. The girl was mesmerized by the lilting beauty of the soft voice as she continued; “My only ornaments are the wondrous qualities of the Vaiṣṇavas, who gather wherever the sound of the Lord’s holy name is heard, to relish its sweetness.”

Bhakti Devī’s eyes slowly moved towards the form of Śrī Mādhava, whose beautiful lotus face beamed down on the hundreds of devotees filling the temple. The temple bell rang loud and clear, without ceasing, and the sound of the Hare Kṛṣṇa *maḥā-mantra* filled the air. Bhakti Devī looked back at the girl; she leaned in slightly, a single teardrop hovering at the corner of her eye. “My dear child, your feet tread the holy ground of Śrī Māyāpur *dhāma*, yet you curse the rain for making the ground wet; the sound of Kṛṣṇa’s flute reaches your ears without cessation, yet those ears are unable to drink the nectar of the holy name; you are surrounded by the devotees of the Lord, yet you cannot appreciate their longing for Kṛṣṇa; and now, you stand before Kṛṣṇa, yet you do not understand that all these transcendental activities are quite befitting the pure devotees of the Lord, who reside with Him eternally in the spiritual world.”

Bhakti Devī looked kindly into the girl’s eyes, and said, “I have but one question to ask of you: *Where are you, my child, if not the spiritual world?*” ❀