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# **A Portrait of Lord Shree Krishna**

**Rupa Goswami**



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*The back cover image is a gunja berry necklace, the kind that  
Radharani enjoys making for Shree Krishna.*

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**RUPA GOSWAMI**

**A PORTRAIT OF LORD SHREE KRISHNA**

*A drama in seven acts*

TRANSLATED FROM THE SANSKRIT  
BY ARJUNDAS ADHIKARI

# INTRODUCTION.

Written in 1532 CE, the same period as Martin Luther, and just prior to colonial rule in India, *A Portrait of Lord Shree Krishna*, (for which the Sanskrit is *Vidagdha Madhava*) is a romantic drama, retelling the youth-hood of Lord Shree Krishna, the favourite divinity of the Indian sub-continent, who lived in Uttar Pradesh c. 1000 BCE, or earlier.

## 1. RUPA GOSWAMI

Rupa Goswami was born into a scholarly brahman family in Bengal in 1489 CE. He became learned in Sanskrit, Arabic and Persian, and was enlisted as chief secretary to sultan Alauddin Husein Shah, whereupon he found himself shunned outright by the orthodox Hindu community. On meeting the charismatic Shree Chaitanya in 1514 CE, however, he was inspired to give up his government position, and he became an ardent devotee of Shree Krishna. Rupa Goswami's writings are many, and *A Portrait of Lord Shree Krishna* is the first of two plays written at the behest of the illustrious Chaitanya. Rupa Goswami passed over in 1564 CE.

## 2. THE IMPORTANCE OF SHREE KRISHNA TODAY

It is well worth a look at some of the ways in which the phenomenon of Shree Krishna bears relevance to today, beginning with His role as divine vigilante, relieving the earth-goddess of the burden of being exploited by the largely irresponsible leaders of the time. The impact of the exploitation of the earth by corporate greed on

its wholesome condition today, would also appear to warrant heroic activism to set it right, on the part of the conscientious. The backdrop of the play is the luxuriant, exotic Forest of Vrindavan flourishing under the care of its eponymous overseer, Vrindadevi, and the story conveys a fond regard for nature as the true resource of value. Metaphors for beauty consistently employ the excellences of natural phenomena, such as luminaries, forest-flowers, scents, lightening, clouds, deer, sunset, water, etc.

Regarding *ahimsa*, or non-violence, Krishna's realm, Vrindavan, is a micro-kingdom in which the main source of livelihood is cow-keeping, where the idea of cow-slaughter is completely unheard of. The prosperities freely afforded by cow and bull, such as milk, milk-products, agricultural power and fertilizer, engender a deep appreciation from the cow-folk, and to kill their gentle benefactors for their meat would never be tolerated.

The dominant theme of the drama, whilst unorthodox, gives a clear vision of the dramatic power-play between fabulous blue-blackish Shree Krishna, and the fabulous cowherd girls of His village. The give and take is shared, but predisposes in favour of the cowherd girls. Krishna is a great hero, defending His kingdom against formidable antagonists, but He Himself is governed by the love of Shrimati Radharani. Radharani's epithet *Madana-mohana-mohini*, lauds Her as the 'Enchantress of the enchanter of Cupid.' The narrative comprises a timeless exposition of power-sharing among genders.

Rupa Goswami's celebrated detachment from worldly affairs - he owned literally nothing more than a water pot and a waistcloth - is attributed to his great devotion to Krishna. Indeed, meditation on Krishna, Krishna's insights, and the directives upheld by Him, is common practise among those seeking transcendence, and millions regard it not only as a profoundly spiritual affair, but as the easiest, most effective path to mindfulness. A recent



newspaper article in which the last surviving member of Hilary and Tenzing's Everest expedition expressed anxiety about lack of snow on Mount Everest, reminded me of Krishna's statement in *Bhagavad-gita*: 'Of immovable things I am the Himalayas.' Likewise, the, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of the worlds,' quote, used by Robert Oppenheimer when he first witnessed the detonation of the atomic bomb, is also derived from Krishna's *Bhagavad-gita*. No one can argue that Krishna's claims are not arresting and altogether extraordinary.

### **3. SANSKRIT DRAMA.**

*A Portrait of Lord Shree Krishna* follows the structure of a 'Comprehensive Play,' or *maha-nataka*, as delineated in sage Bharata's handbook to dramaturgy, known as the *Natyashastra*, compiled in the 1st century CE. The main source of reference for this translation is Vishvanatha Chakravartin's invaluable commentary, *Vidagdha-madhava-vivriti*.

In his introduction to Oxford World's Classics' English edition of the drama *The Recognition of Shakuntala*, by Kalidas, Dr. WJ Johnson advocates a performance-based approach to translating Sanskrit drama: 'The fact that Kalidas was also a great poet should not seduce us into treating his plays as simply anthologies of poetry ... [his works] like those of any other great playwright only come alive on stage: the words on the page are the beginning of the process, not its culmination. This is even more the case when they have been translated into another language.' Professor Arthur Berriedale Keith comments in a similar way in his definitive work on the genre, 'The Sanskrit drama ... despite its complexity, is essentially intended for performance, nor is there the slightest doubt that the early dramatists were anything but composers of plays meant only to be read. They were connoisseurs, we may be certain, in the merits which would accrue to their



works from the accessories of the dance, music, song, and the attractions of acting.’<sup>1</sup>

With this in mind, this rendering of *A Portrait of Lord Shree Krishna*, while performance-oriented, aspires to be true to the original flavours of a unique and relatively unexplored area of classical drama.



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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Berriedale Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama, its Origin, Development, Theory and Practice*, 358

## **DRAMATIS PERSONAE.**

NANDA MAHARAJA, king of Vrindavan.

LORD SHREE KRISHNA, son of Nanda.

BALARAMA, son of Nanda.

MADHUMANGALA, brahman boy.

SUBAL, cowherd boy.

SHRIDAMA, cowherd boy.

ABHIMANYU, cow-lord.

RUPA GOSWAMI, play's author.

STAGE MANAGER

YASHODA, queen of Vrindavan. PAURNAMASI,  
wise-lady of Vrindavan. SHRIMATI RADHARANI,  
'bride' of Abhimanyu. LALITA, handmaid to  
Radharani.

VISHAKHA, handmaid to Radharani.

CHANDRAVALI, cowherd girl.

PADMA, handmaid to Chandravali.

SHAIVYA, handmaid to Chandravali.

NANDIMUKHI, cowherd girl.

SARANGI, cowherd girl.

VRINDA, guardian of the forest.

JATILA, Abhimanyu's mother.

MUKHARA, Radharani's grandmother.

KARALA, Chandravali's grandmother.

*A Portrait of Lord Shree Krishna*

---

Kakhati (a female monkey), Rangini (Radha's pet),  
Suranga (Krishna's pet), Maina Bird, Parrot.

SCENE: *Vrindavan: India.*



# EULOGIUM.

Come celebrate a wonder that can mitigate life's woes,  
A draught of fabled nectar of the kind that heaven knows,  
That all may come to know - that is available for free -  
The magic of the love between Krishna and Radharani!

Bounds of Radharani's love so transcend any limit,  
That Krishna once embraced Her mood to try and  
comprehend it,  
Incarnating incognito - as the Golden Avatar - May  
He also enter in your heart - jai Sachi-nandana!

# PROLOGUE.

*A stage, in Gokoola Vrindavan.*

*Enter RUPA GOSWAMI.*

*Rupa G.* And now, straight to the point, kind ladies  
and kind gentlemen -

Point being, the commission that the good Lord Shiva's  
given:

Was in a dream he came to order me - said he - 'Director! In  
this forest of Vrindavan – by the ghat, 'longside the river,  
Please note there has arrived a very focussed coalition -  
Who've journeyed to the forests here in long-standing  
tradition -

Upheld by all devotees of the darling boy of Nanda - Nanda  
Maharaja's son - the Supreme Lord Shree Krishna: He  
who's the complexion of dark rain-clouds rumbling  
thunder;

Known to all the cowherd girls as Kanha, or, Kanhaiya;  
In whom those gopis' hearts play just like dolphins in the  
sea;

The unequalled professor of flute-playing mastery;

The gem-like youth, who's fragrance never fails to  
fascinate;

More charming than a dove in an intoxicated state;

Who revelled in these groves here on the banks of the  
Yamuna,

Beside the hill of Govardhan, in ways that conjure wonder!  
'But,' said he, 'how're they to cope? Who'll bring these  
pilgrims cheer?

The woods the gopis searched when Krishna disappeared,  
are here!

The river banks where all the gopis danced with Him, are  
there!

Such recollections make pure pilgrims miss Him, in  
despair!

It's down to you - I give you all the blessings that you need!  
To spare them, you present your show, sir! So – do please  
proceed!'

So here we are - to execute the great Shiva's desire ...

*Enter STAGE MANAGER.*

*Stage M.* Indeed we are! The actors are in character –  
on fire!

Just give the word! To start, it's to the author we defer! Sir,  
bless us to begin your play – Portrait of Lord Shree  
Krishna!

*Rupa G.* Alright, dear troubadour – alright. They're  
dressed – they're ready, eh?

[*Reflects.*] First off, I will confess – though, not refined  
poetically -

As the theme's Shree Krishna, and you're pilgrims of  
discretion;

I'm confident that from it you'll derive due satisfaction -

If well-water's been sanctified, it's sipped as it were nectar!

*Stage M.* And will you please recite the prayers to  
bless our little theatre!

The gods could well be critiqued by this clever audience;  
And being humble actors, best to give ourselves a chance!

*Rupa G.* Sir, who have we before us? Please do properly  
appraise!

They have very cultured backgrounds, but have very modest ways;

They put themselves last and give encouragement to others;

In that way they're munificent - and big praise gives them shudders.

[*Beholding the audience, he smiles amicably.*] Sagacious devotees of Krishna – do not take offence;

The actor wasn't thinking – but his good-will is immense!

[*Bows.*] Not hard to recognise I am not really qualified, But, absorption in Shree Krishna is accepted far and wide, As the springboard to perfection, so we proceed confidently - Who cares who lights the fire in the gold refinery?

With a humble bit of stagecraft, may the dear Lord be conveyed!

[*Folds hands in prayer.*] Vrindavan Forest groves, that's where our master's always stayed;

Vrindavan is the place in which He permanently glows; With a glimpse of Him in person, the desire to please Him follows!

*Stage M.* I have prayed for such a chance – all of my Diwalis at once!

A stage beside the forest groves, and what an audience! A play about the famous cowherdesses' divine charmer; Let us begin the delectable acts of said new drama!

*Rupa G.* Shame it is, some can't relate. It is, though, troubadour;

Feel sorry for them – makes you stop and wonder, that's for sure...

*Stage M.* Yes, when you consider your accomplished artistry;

It's just that there are some who can't relate to quality - Clever cuckoos are in heaven when they reach a mango tree,



*Prologue*

---

The camels, bless them, walk straight past, plod by indifferently.

Let's delight the hearts of all the clever cuckoos here - With this drama that's descended from the spiritual sphere!

*Rupa G.* Bless me, sir – Purnamasi! This is quite extraordinary!

She's behind the trysts between Krishna and Radharani! Spring, it was. Shree Krishna's mind was turned to thoughts of love;

This marvellous, good lady knew who He was thinking of!

*Purna.* [*Off-stage.*] I see you've my great secret in your drama, good director

I don't know how you know, but, I admit you are correct, sir -

Was going to arrange that Radha meets with Lord Shree Krishna!

*Rupa G.* [*Surprised, turns to the wings.*] Purnamasi has returned! Well, bless my soul – you see her?

Imposing as the mother goddess – shining in a sari;

Beautiful white locks – behold, the Ma of Sandipani!

From Nanda's house, she's stepping out - with adjutant in tow,

Shree Narada's disciple, dressed and ready for the show!

*[Exeunt Rupa Goswami and Stage Manager.]*

*Gokoola Village, near Nanda Maharaja's house. Morning.*

*Enter PAURNAMASI and NANDIMUKHI.*

*Purna.* I see you've my great secret in your drama, good director;

I don't know how you know, but, I admit you are correct, sir -

I'm going to arrange that Radha meets with Lord Shree Krishna!

And, Nandimukhi, child – he makes me feel a whole lot better!

Nice to hear enthusiasm – nice, that theatrician.

*Nandi.* How's it going, noble lady?

*Purna.* Oh, I know, it's slow progression; We'll get there, young lady, I'm just waiting for a chance; Their meeting is the mission and we're going to go the distance

*Nandi.* Why did you have Radhika leave the village? Leave Gokoola?

Had Her hiding in Santanu – how's She s'posed to meet Kanhaiya?

*Purna.* I do have to be cautious 'bout the threat of evil Kamsa.

*Nandi.* What threat, noble lady? How's the king know 'bout Radhika?

*Purna.* For the simple fact that Radharani is a marvel! A marvel's not concealable – of marvels, news will travel; If one wears musk, for instance - everybody knows it's on you.

*Nandi.* But, really – you've let Radha become lost to Abhimanyu!

Let grandmother Mukhara give him Radhika for marriage! Soon as She got back, they did the marriage in the village! Far as I know, Radha's heart's the property of Krishna, And, noble lady, you don't mind? I see your mood is brighter!

*Purna.* It is. And I've a reason for it.

*Nandi.* Mystery to me!

*Purna.* [*Smiling.*] No marriage! Got to tell you, child, that that was fakery!

Krishna has a sorceress – there's no one she can't fool!

*Nandi.* [*Delighted.*] I see what you've done - Radhika's safe now in Gokool?

*Purna.* Long as She *looks* married, Kamsa-trouble looms much less!

But Abhimanyu's character's a new unpleasantness.

*Nandi.* Oh...?

*Purna.* Jealous that fair cowherd girls are all so fond of Krishna;

He wants to take Radhika far away and isolate Her!

*Nandi.* Can't Krishna's sorceress do something?

*Purna.* Could if I could reach her,  
Her movements aren't predictable - I can't really involve her.

*Nandi.* Isn't there another way to keep the man in check?

*Purna.* Well, yes - he does respond to sweet-talk - poor chap is myopic;

I'll hold him for a while – he's quite disposed to flattery.

*Nandi.* [*Encouraged.*] Has Govardhan said anything? That Kamsa-man should worry;

His fair wife, Chandravali, is so *very* fond of Krishna!

*Purna.* One does imagine that he would, but he, it seems, knows better;

Overlooking something there.

*Nandi.* But she's obsessed with Krishna!

*Purna.* No stopping her, my dear – and she did not need me to help her.

*Nandi.* No stopping you, good lady - since the day Kanhaiya was born,

You've been right here, watched over Him - now, when did your love dawn?

We all know your homeland is a long way from Gokoola.

*Purna.* For that, child, I'm indebted to my kind spiritual master!

*Nandi.* And, then there is your son - he understands the situation?

*Purna.* Oh, yes! He sent his own son who is splendid for the mission!

My grandson Madhumangala – resourceful boy, as well.

*Nandi.* And a fine time he is having, it is quite easy to tell;

Because of you Madhu's becoming very dear to Krishna.

*Purna.* The whole point is, we all make sure that Radha falls for Krishna;

That's your job too, my dear!

*Nandi.* [Delighted.] But She is enamoured already; She adores Kanhaiya – with a passion, noble lady!

*Purna.* How d'you know?

*Nandi.* Why, when She hears Krishna-Kanhaiya's name -

Her hair's on end - exalting in it - every time's the same!

*Purna.* It's always true - the name of Krishna does have that effect;

Two syllables - how heavenly! Quite natural, I suspect -

To want them sounded so, that just one mouth becomes too few -

To hear them, and be thinking how a million ears might do;

To find that you've that name, and nothing else, inside the heart!

*Nandi.* Is love for Krishna something that our temple-gods impart?

Radha at the Sun-shrine with Lalita and Vishakha;

Chandravali at Durga's with her friends Padma and Shaivya?

*Paurna.* The way those darlings love is quite inherent - nothing less!

Tradition's all it is that calls them all to temple service.

*Nandi.* While Radha-love's amazing - her two friends make it redouble.

*Paurna.* Precisely. Now, my dear – it's time we moved things on a little!

I want a portrait done of Krishna, specially, for Radha;  
That Vishakha's good at painting, so the task should go to her.

*Nandi.* Alright, good lady.

*Paurna.* I am going to go and prompt Shree Krishna;

Easy – all it takes is but a mention of Radhika.

I've laddus ready – my excuse to meet Him in the forest.

*Nandi.* He's off there now, He's going – look! Two parents looking stressed!

Poor Nanda and Yashoda miss Kanhaiya readily;

No holding back - you see? His friends all joining Him, good lady!

Brother Balaraam, Madhu, Shridam, and all the rest;

Farewells to the village, and it's down towards the forest!

*Paurna.* [*Observing contentedly.*] My, but He stands out, does Krishna - shining like a gem!

Flower-adorned, with presence like a god from heaven's kingdom!

Goodness me, a portrait - what breath-taking lotus-eyes!

Robed in yellows, sharp as any fresh-made saffron dyes!

I'm off to go and get some sweets - you go and find Vishakha!

*[Exeunt Purnamasi and Nandimukhi.]*

