The Meeting of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Disguised as a Female Singer

By Visvanath Cakravati Thakur

One day, Śrī Rādhā was in deep māna (sulky mood). Although Śrī Kṛṣṇa brought Her gifts, praised Her and tried to pacify Her in every way possible, nothing He did had any effect. At last He went to see Kundalatā, to consult with her privately about what to do. (1)

After discussing the situation with Kundalatā, He disguised Himself as a beautiful young girl. He donned young girl’s clothing and jewellery, and assumed a voice so sweet and enchanting that it put the melodious song of the cuckoo to shame. In this way, He went with Kundalatā to the house of Jaśilā, His jewelled ankle-bells tinkling softly as He walked. (2)

Śrī Rādhā was in the company of Her sakhiśs. The moment Śrī Rādhā set Her doe-like eyes upon this extraordinarily attractive young woman approaching in the distance with Kundalatā, Her mind became completely enchanted. Smiling, She addressed Kundalatā: “Come, come, Kundalatā. Tell us right now why you are paying us a surprise visit today. (3)

“And who is this beautiful young woman with you? Where does she come from, and what is Her name?”
“Rādhā,” replied Kundalatā, “Her name is Kalāvali. Having heard of Your name, fame and qualities, She has come from Mathurā to meet You. Her expertise in singing surpasses that of even Indra’s guru, Brhaspati. What more can I say? You will only understand what I mean if You hear Her sing.”
“My friend, Kundalatā,” Śrī Rādhā then asked, “from whom has Kalāvali learned such skill?”
“From Brhaspati himself,” replied Kundalatā.
“And how did She get the chance to meet him?” (4–5)
“Beautiful-limbed Rādhā,” replied Kundalatā, “once, when the brāhmaṇas of Mathurā were performing a great āṅgirasa sacrifice, Brhaspati came there from the abode of the demigods and stayed in Mathurā for one month. He received great honour at that place, and this pleased him immensely. (6)

“Sakhi Rādhā, one day in that respected assembly, Brhaspati performed a recital of a celestial song. This song is extremely difficult to sing, but Kalāvali is so astute that, amazingly, She immediately memorised it, and the next day She sang it with precisely the same complex rhythm and subtle melody he had used. (7)

“When Brhaspati heard Her sing, he was lost in amazement and inquired from one of the Mathurā brāhmaṇas, ‘Who is this young woman who is singing my intricate celestial song? I am astonished! She is a mere resident of this mortal world, and yet She has learnt this song after hearing it only once. Please bring Her to me.’ (8)

“On Brhaspati’s order, the brāhmaṇa brought Kalāvali before him. ‘Most intelligent of young girls,’ said Brhaspati, ‘Your genius is matchless and Your voice defeats the cooing of cuckoos. How wonderful! I will therefore instruct You in the topmost knowledge of the Gandharvas. Such a fine intelligence and sweet voice cannot be found in the realm of human beings or even Kinnaras.’ (9)

“Brhaspati instructed this girl for the duration of his month’s stay in Mathurā. Then he took Her with him when he returned to the heavenly planets and taught Her there for a further year. She returned to the Earth planet at the end of the month of Āsvina, and came to Mathurā only yesterday. Today at dusk, She has come before You here in Vraja.” (10)

Upon hearing Kundalatā’s story, Śrī Rādhā said, “O Bhāvini (beautiful lady), kindly sing something for Me.”

“Vṛndāvaneśvari,” replied Kalāvali, “which rāga would You like to hear Me sing?”

Śrī Rādhā replied, “It is twilight, so You may sing a mālava rāga.”

“Sumukhi (beautiful-faced one), in which melody should I sing?”

“Please sing in sadaja,” replied Śrī Rādhā.

Kalāvali then asked, “Rādhā, in which of the four different srutis of that melody will I sing?” (11)
“O beautiful one,” replied Śrī Rādhā, “if one has a bodily disorder in which the kapha or vāta in the throat is out of balance, it is impossible to sing purely. In the same way, it is not possible to sing pure notes without the backing of a vīnā. Nonetheless, I would like to hear You sing a sweet song full of the various attributes of music such as scale (rāga), rhythmic cycles (tāla), musical notes (svara), ornaments (gamaka), the particular class of rāga (jāti), improvised variations (tāna) and the Vedic system of melody (grāma).” (12)

“Rādhā,” said Kalāvali, “who in this universe is as expert in music and song as You are? I can only sing simple melodies. Please listen.” Saying this, Kalāvali began to sing, “Tā nā na nā ta na na r,” in such a beautiful voice that She put to shame both the peacocks and the bumblebees. (13)

When Śrī Rādhā’s dear sakhi heard Kalāvali’s sweet singing, rivers of tears flowed from their eyes. As the song progressed, their rapture and enchantment became such that their tears even stopped flowing. Then, at the song’s completion, those tears pattered to the ground like a shower of small stones. (14)

Śrī Rādhā’s heart had become as hard as a diamond because of Her māna, but now it was melting, and this surprised Her. “Devī, Kalāvali,” She said, “Your song is so sweet it far surpasses the sweetness of the nectar of the demigods. (15)

“If only someone with Your skills would always stay with Me. Oh, then I would be so fortunate. Only then would My entire life become successful. But listen, Devī, if the son of Nanda Mahārāja hears of Your singing, He will certainly always wear You as an ornament around His neck.” (16)

“Rādhā,” Kundalatā said, “among women, Kalāvali is the very epitome of virtue, so do not speak to Her like this. You should simply embrace Her; don’t do anything else.” Śrī Rādhā then stepped forward to embrace Kalāvali and to present Her with a precious necklace, but Lalitā whispered in Śrī Rādhā’s ear, “Rādhā, who is this person You are about to embrace? It is none other than that wicked and deceitful lover of Yours in the guise of a lovely woman.”

“My dear friend Lalitā,” Śrī Rādhā replied out loud, “you give supremely valuable advice. Indeed, after careful consideration you are speaking the truth. I was going to express My appreciation by simply presenting Her with a necklace, but that would not show Her proper respect. I shall therefore present Her with all sorts of jewelled
ornaments and fine garments.” (17–18)

Śrī Rādhā then turned to Rūpa Maṇjāri and said, “O Rūpa Maṇjāri, carefully dress Kalāvali right before Me in a bright new outfit of many colours. Take off Her old bodice, and quickly cover Her raised breasts with a new one.” (19)

Kundalatā promptly spoke up. “Beautiful-faced Rādhā,” she said, “please do not take off this beautiful young girl’s clothes, for She will feel shy and embarrassed in front of You. Just present Her with whatever You want to give Her, and let Her take it home to try on there.” (20)

“Sakhī Kalāvali,” said Śrī Rādhā, “everyone knows that women never feel bashful or fearful when there are only other women around. Tell Me, are You not creating the thorny obstacle of shyness on this very happy occasion?” (21)

“Oh, Rādhā,” Kalāvali said, “I will not accept any garlands, clothes or ornaments. Naive girl, I am not the daughter of a singer. If You are pleased with Me, then only once give Me the wealth of Your embrace. Do not think I am greedy for any other treasure.” (22)

“Oh, sakhi,” Śrī Rādhikā then replied, “why are You so contrary? Why do You refuse My offer? Please put on these fine garments and jewelled ornaments. If You do not comply willingly, I will dress You Myself by force. Look, You are alone, and I have hundreds of sakhis with Me. Silly girl, I warn You not to act so independently before Me. I am telling You, just be careful!” (23)

Having said this, Śrī Rādhā ordered the sakhis to dress Kalāvali in the new bodice. Two sakhis in front of Kalāvali firmly seized the veil on Her shoulders, while another sakhi went behind Her to unfasten Her bodice. As the bodice loosened, two very big kadamba flowers, each somewhat flattened on one side, slipped out and fell to the ground. (24)

“Aha!” cried Śrī Rādhā. “What has fallen out of Her bodice?! Rūpa Maṇjāri and all the other maidservants clapped their hands with glee, and then shyly covered their laughing moon-like faces with their
veils. Vṛṣabhanu-nandini Śrī Rādhā turned Her back on Śrī Kṛṣṇa and sat down. (25)

When the sakhīs saw what Śrī Kṛṣṇa had done, they tried to suppress their mirth by holding their veils over their mouths. Unable to control themselves, however, they burst into loud peals of laughter. Without uttering a word, Śrī Rādhā also joined in, and at last, so did Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Kundalatā. (26)

Then, the personified form of the transcendental mellow of laughter (ḥāsyā-rasa) manifested for a moment in their midst, for everyone’s supreme enjoyment. The sakhīs began to address the two kadamba flowers, saying, “O great big kadamba flowers, of everyone on the face of this Earth, it is you who are truly blessed. You are not usually duplicitous, but you have become so by your association with this cunning person. As flowers of a tree, you know no cunning. But now that you are in the hands of this cheater, you are showing such shamelessness that you have assumed the form of a young girl’s breasts. We are all drowning in an ocean of the nectar of laughter because of you.” (27)

The sakhīs asked Kundalatā, “O Kundalatā, where has your companion Bashfulness gone now?”

“She and Kundalatā have both drowned in the depths of the water of Pātāla-loka,” said Kundalatā. “You cannot see her now.”

“If Kundalatā and her sakhī named Bashfulness have drowned and passed away, then who are you?” they asked.

“Oh, I am only her shadow.”

“But if Kundalatā has departed, how can we see her shadow?” the sakhīs persisted.

“I have nothing to say,” said Kundalatā. “May the goddess of speech dance upon your tongue.” (28)

Lalitā then spoke. “Kundalatā, your love for Brhaspati’s disciple and your good association with Her has been increasing steadily since your childhood. There is no trace of a false statement on your tongue. Your glories are heard again and again throughout Vraja, and it is proclaimed that you instruct chaste girls in their own righteous activities. Thus you perform great deeds on behalf of Kāmadeva. Unfortunately, your desire was not fulfilled today, and consequently you have to tolerate great pain. (29)

“Sakhī Kundalatā, how supremely intelligent you are. Today you proudly came to our assembly from far away and have with great
endeavour tried to sell this knowledge you received from your ‘guru’. But alas, you have not been able to sell your knowledge, and instead you have quickly become a laughing stock. Maybe you came at an inauspicious time.” (30)

Śrī Kṛṣṇa responded, “Lalitā, I can easily sell this knowledge in the market place of the sakhīs and fulfil My desires. Now give Me that bodice, or I will dress you up in it.” (31)

When Lalitā heard this, she said, “O king of rogues! Can a dried-up flower become a fresh bud? Can a body function after its life-airs have left it? Who will continue to worship a proud and deceitful person once his deceit has been revealed? O Svāmī, do not take part in this disgraceful event by exercising Your talents in lying.” (32)

Śrī Kṛṣṇa picked up the two kadamba flowers. Putting them back on His chest as false breasts, He went to Jātīlā’s quarters. There He fell to the ground, wailing loudly. This distressed Jātīlā and she repeatedly expressed her concern. (33)

“When are You, my daughter? Where have You come from? Why are You crying? Has someone harmed You? Wipe the tears from Your lotus-face and tell me everything.” Trembling, Kalāvalī told Her sad story in a faltering voice. “O noble lady. Alas, alas, how unfortunate I am! Fie upon My body. Fie upon My very birth. Hundreds upon hundreds of curses have fallen upon My head. (34)

“I reside in King Vṛṣabhānu’s town, and I am the daughter of Kṛttidā’s sister. I have had a close, loving relationship with Rādhā since My childhood. I came from My home, eagerly looking forward to meeting Her again after a long time. Alas, Rādhā will not so much as glance My way, what to speak of embrace Me with love and affection. (35)

“When She saw Me, She would not smile sweetly at Me, not even once. Nor was She attentive to even once inquiring about My wellbeing. What is the use of My staying alive? I shall give up My life right now before you. Noble lady, please try to recall whether you know of any offence I have committed against Śrī Rādhā. And please ask Her again and again why She is angry with Me.” (36)
Upon hearing Kalâvali’s pitiful speech, Jatilâ said, “O daughter, calm down and do not be afraid. You have not committed any offence. I am going to settle this right now. I will arrange that Râdhâ soon gives You all Her love and affection. I will see to it that She embraces You and talks to You. And what is more, this very night You will both rest together on the same bed.” (37)

With these words, Jatilâ burst into her daughter-in-law’s quarters. Seeing the sakhs there, she turned to Lalitâ and said, “Lalitâ, why is my daughter-in-law in such a contrary mood today? Her own cousinsister has come from Her father’s town, eager to see Her, but She is neglecting Her. Why will She not speak kindly to Her?” (38)

Jatilâ then addressed Śrî Râdhâ, “O girl of good conduct (Sucaritâ), O my daughter, You are full of good qualities. My dear daughter-in-law, just look. This unhappy girl’s clothes are wet from Her tears. My heart is filled with deep compassion for Her. Remove the pain from Her heart: embrace Her properly, ask Her about Her well-being, and speak to Her affectionately. Make Her happy as She was before, and then I will also be satisfied.” (39)

“Mother-in-law,” replied Śrî Râdhâ, “I shall certainly follow your instructions, so please return to your quarters and rest happily. It does not befit you to become involved in the petty quarrels of young girls. All young sakhs are the same; their age is small and so is their intelligence. They swing between quarrel and mutual affection from one moment to the next. Your intelligence, on the other hand, is unsurpassed, and you are highly authoritative. Is it appropriate for you to become involved in these childish quarrels?” (40)

“O daughter-in-law, say nothing more,” Jatilâ said. “Stand up and immediately embrace Your sister. Have Your meal together and then take rest together. I am Your venerable elder, so do not disobey my order.” (41)

“O mother-in-law,” replied Śrî Râdhâ, “you have instructed Me firmly and solemnly; but before I obey your order, please hear one thing. This girl has spoken harshly to Kundalatâ, and that is why I feel so indignant that I do not even want to look at Her. If She makes up with Kundalatâ, then I will also be satisfied; and I will certainly do as you have told Me.” (42)
“O noble lady,” Kundalatā said, “your daughter-in-law is lying. Kalāvali has not spoken harshly to me, and I do not feel angry towards Her at all.”

Śrī Rādhā boldly said to Kundalatā, “How can you lie in front of My mother-in-law? If you are not angry with Kalāvali, and if you are really happy with Her, then embrace Her now for us all to see.” (43)

Upon hearing Śrī Rādhā’s words, Kundalatā fell silent. When doceyed Śrī Rādhā saw this, She immediately spoke the following clever words: “Mother-in-law, you please decide which of us is lying, and then reproach that one. (44)

“Surely something must be amiss if Kundalatā is not delighted to embrace this pretty young girl. She must be angry with Her. Who could doubt that?”

“My daughter-in-law is speaking the truth,” the old woman said. “Kundalatā, why don’t you forgive Kalāvali and be pleased with Her? (45)

“O Kundalatā, I will do whatever it takes to make you happy with Kalāvali. Now listen to me. I am your worshipable superior, but I am begging you with folded hands to embrace this girl before my eyes. Do not say another word. Aah! To this end I take an oath upon my head.” (46)

When Kundalatā made no move to embrace Kalāvali, the sakhīs called out, “O Kundalatā, are you not afraid of this good woman’s oath? Just see! What kind of intelligence do you have? Just embrace Kalāvali right now.” Saying this, Jatilā, Kuṭilā and all the sakhīs caught Kundalatā and forced Her to embrace Śrī Hari in His disguise as Kalāvali. (47)

If old Jatilā had not been present, the sakhīs would not have been able at all to stop themselves from plunging into hāsyā-rasa. As it was, they just covered their faces with their veils and drowned in silent blissful laughter. (48)

Thereafter, the old woman told Śrī Rādhā, “Daughter-in-law, now You should speak lovingly with Your sister and warmly embrace Her.” Jatilā suddenly caught Śrī Krṣṇa with one hand and Śrī Rādhā with the
other, and drew Them together in the snare of a tight embrace. (49)

“O sisters,” she told Radhā and Kṛṣṇa, “I see that You are crying from the bliss of Your embrace. Now share Your mutual happiness by using Your cloth to wipe away each others' tears. After that, go and happily enjoy a meal together, and then very affectionately spend the night with each other.” (50)

Having said this, the old woman left to take rest in her chambers some distance away. Śrī Kṛṣṇa then spoke to the sakhiśeś even more boldly and arrogantly than before: “Look, sakhiśeś, you thought that this knowledge of Mine was contemptible, but I have quickly sold it and thus attained the result I desired: victory over you all.” (51)

“O king of all gallants,” Lalitā said, “You have indeed achieved Your desired result by enjoying Kundalatā, who is your own sister-inlaw, and thus You have gained the greatest victory. Now that the rules of social conduct are broken, why keep Kundalatā only half-enjoyed? Why not fulfil all her inner desires?” (52)

Kundalatā said, “Lalitā, cannot a brother embrace his sister with a pure heart, or a father his daughter? Your whole body is burning from head to toe with intense amorous desire, so you think that everyone else in the world burns with that same desire.” (53)

Saying this, Kundalatā left the room, as if full of anger. All the sakhiśeś followed her to try to pacify her. The only one left inside was the flower-archer Cupid, who engaged in protecting the youthful Couple, Śrī Śrī Radhā-Kṛṣṇa. (54)

From outside, Śrī Radhā’s dear sakhiśeś peeped in through the patterned, latticed windows and inhaled the beautiful fragrance of the amorous pastimes of Madhusūdana Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He Himself was intoxicated by drinking the honey of Śrī Radhā’s frowning lotusface, which was decorated with arched eyebrows. The sakhiśeś felt themselves falling deeper and deeper into the waves of an ocean of bliss. (55)