

SURDAS'S MOMENT OF GLORY

Chapter 1.

It had been raining incessantly in and around Mathura last few days. Coming so soon after an unusually torrid summer, the first few days of rain came as a very welcome relief. Children danced on the streets, farmers took out joyful procession and ladies served celebratory feasts and faithful performed thankful pujas in the temples. But when the rains did not stop even after a week, it became a nuisance soon graduating into full scale calamity. Rains gained strength to become torrential. Flash floods inundated low lying areas, washing away thatched roof huts and kutcha houses, rendering people homeless. Misery and distress enveloped every one. Of several villages that bore the brunt of rains, Srirangpur village was one. It was in the north of Mathura and boasted of a very famous citizen called Surdas, the poet. Confusion reigned supreme as clamour for relocating to higher grounds became frenzied. But to leave their houses unguarded presented new problem as criminals and opportunists gained courage to indulge in large scale looting. People were faced with a dilemma of having to decide between standing guard in front of their houses or running for safety to high grounds.

Surdas's family was one such family facing this dilemma. They decided to move out to high ground to escape the fury of floods as Yamuna breached the banks at several places adding to their misery. They locked up their house and began their trek to safety. The grand niece of Surdas was entrusted with the task of helping the aging and blind Surdas. They made slow progress. As they moved along in orderly fashion helping one another a flash flood swept them off their feet. The niece tried to hold fast to the blind Surdas but the current was stronger and she let go her hold on Surdas. She advised him that in the event of separation, he should hold himself in one location so that they would trace him and get him back. Surdas discovered that he had lost his bearing totally and had to join another group working their way to an old temple. He swam upstream in waist high water calling frequently his grand niece. It had become dark and people hurried to reach some place to spend the night

Surdas was hungry and cold. His old limbs had taken a severe beating and he longed to put his body down to rest. There were many around him in same

state.. The elders with some strength left in them tried to mobilise some food. Children had started crying.. In that wet condition , they could not light a fire to cook some thing. Some one located an orchard of fruit bearing trees near the temple and soon they were munching on fleshy guava fruits. .With a little food inside , people looked around for some thing to lift their spirits. Some one recognised Surdas and invited him to sing bhajans to divert people’s mind from their miserable experience.

Surdas thought for some time. He was in no mood to sing. He was worried about his family. He missed them , especially his grand niece who always joined him in singing. Today, like in his earlier times he had to sing alone. In his anxiety ,he saw singing as an open an outlet to drain his stress and he sang a song that brought to memory happier days in the sun.

Eh Giridhari

That day you lifted a mountain

To save your people from rains,

To give them shelter and warmth

They hailed you as Govindhaa,

Where are you now ?,

The same rains have visited us again,

Bringing misery and pain

Rains no doubt are your blessings

Too much of amrit is also not benign

So show mercy and hold up these rains,

we have had enough,

ocean of mercy, My Giridhari lal.

For ever we are in your debt,

Different are your ways of blessing us

Come wipe the tears of terrified children,

Help us to reach our home and hearth

Bring solace to our souls so troubled

You are a magician, work your miracle

There is no time better than now,

We are your faithful herd

My Giridhari Lal

The people knew of their plight, but when it is sung in style and in chorus, emotion gets hold of you and makes you think of the almighty. Fervent prayers in chorus reach heaven wards to push and nudge the good lord. Loud singing and clapping of hands had drained their energy and they dozed off to blissful sleep. The night passed peacefully and a new day dawned bright and dry. They were thankful to Surdas for the pretty song that was composed extempore. People were unanimous in declaring that it was Surdas who had worked the magic, to bring sun out once again in all his brilliance.

They now planned to move back to their houses. One elderly gent asked Surdas, where he would like to go.

“I have to wait here. My family would be trying to trace me and I should stay put in one place.” He sounded very hopeful. They wished him luck and went their way. But in their mind the song lingered, especially the lines

“For ever we are indebted

Different are your ways to bless us.:

Soon Surdas was alone in that deserted old temple. He was tired of sitting in one place for long. He felt like stretching his limbs. He set out to walk around for some time. He soon found out that the ground was slushy and dangerously slippery. He had kept his walking stick. He used it with good effect, testing the ground for firmness before stepping ahead. He was scared that he would slip.

There was an unused well in the temple compound. The parapet wall around the well had collapsed during rains. The flash floods had eroded the path

leading to the well making it slope dangerously towards the well mouth. Surdas's walking stick settled on a stone and the stone turned twisting the stick and catching surdas on wrong foot.. He slipped on the slopes and went skidding down. He tried to arrest his fall by grabbing at things around. But it was all wet and whatever he grabbed came to his hand. He could not break the fall. Fear gripped him. He had never felt so inadequate in life before in spite of the blindness. Now he was blind in every sense of the word not knowing where he would stop. He cried out 'krishna' loudly and fell. It was a long drop. When he crashed into the waters of the deep well , he knew he was in real trouble.

. Once in the water, he tried to make himself calm. He was a good swimmer and managed to keep afloat. Once in a while he called out for help , but no one was near by to hear him. .He began to pray as he swam around trying to assess how big the well was. He kept himself close to the wall and swam along the wall and realised it was a large round well. It took some time for him as he never could know if he had completed a full round. If the well had a large opening, people would be using the water. So he must wait till somebody shows up at the well mouth. He kept his ears tuned to hear the rattle of a pulley and sound of lowering rope tied to a pot. He knew that many such wells have steps leading to water. He had heard ladies often complain how difficult it was to climb up those steps carrying a heavy pot of water, on their heads. He thought if he could reach those steps he could climb out. So he began to search for the steps feeling with his hands for a break in the wall. For a blind man it was frustrating work, the moss on the wall and water plants that grow hindered his work. He was aware that even if he found the steps , it would be too difficult for him to climb up. He was more likely to fall back into water. He tried to avoid negative thoughts crowding his brain. He began to think of Krishna and prayed .He had immense faith in his Lord .He should be prepared to be rescued. .So he kept himself alert .He could not find the steps. His heart sank. He knew that the lord waits for man to use up all his resources of self help before rendering help. It happened to Draupadhi and Gajendra, the elephant King. He knew help would come. He was tired. He leaned against the wall to rest. He heard some noise, he turned up and cried out for help. The effort was too much. He swooned.

He heard some steps and splash of some one diving into the waters. Some one was now very close to him. He reached out towards the noise, 'Krishna, you have come for me. I knew you would come sooner or later'. He was in a delirium. The man caught him just as his head slipped under water. He felt the soft hands around him. Strong hands bodily lifted him out of water and put over broad shoulders. He put his hands around the neck. He could feel the soft curly hair of the rescuer, the strength of his shoulders. As they came out of water, Surdas could see a flash of blue. He could hear the man hum a tune and distinctly recognised the lines

I am for ever indebted to you

Different are ways you bless us.

The lines from his own song just the previous evening in the temple. He was thrilled. He wanted to say some thing to the man but he just could not speak. The man put him down on the ground. He could feel the hard ground and grass under him. The man rolled him over and wrapped him in a fine silken cloth and with a jerk removed the wet clothes around his body.. The man gave a vigorous rub down up and down the legs and the hands. Blood circulation was restored .Surdas felt refreshed and wanted to thank the man but he was still unable to speak as he felt he was in some sort of semi coma. He kept a tight hold on the hands of his saviour. Surdas could now smell the scent from the garland of flowers around his saviour's neck. He could also feel the golden bracelets in his hand. The man bent and patted surdas's cheek very affectionately

There was silence all round. Every cell in his body seemed alive and he felt supremely blessed to be so alive. A soft wind brought him back to consciousness and he could now hear sound of running feet. Then there was a rush of people running towards him. The man who had saved him went away with out waiting for any one to thank him. His grand niece was now calling him from close. She was crying calling out " Grand Pa, grand pa". Surdas reached for her hand and pressed it to signal that he was okay .Slowly he spoke, 'Ragini, do not cry. I am okay'

In between sobs, the girl muttered, 'thank God, you are alive. I thought you were gone.'

Surdas was happy that his family had reached out to him. He told the little girl, "I was trying very much to put myself out, blundering into the well. But your god refused to take me in till I see little Ragini again." The girl laughed

She said, 'so sorry Grand pa, we got separated because of that stampede when the flash floods hit us. I could not hold on to you as we got pushed around by people. We were all running like mad people. I hoped you would manage to reach high ground

Surdas never blamed any one for his own inadequacy.

The little girl asked, 'Grand Pa, where did you get this yellow silk cloth. It looks so good on you. Did you not say that your Krishna always wore yellow silk?

I don't know dear. The man who lifted me out of the well put it around me.

"you fell into the well. How ?

I told you. I should have stayed put in one place like you told me. we had taken shelter inside the temple and spent the night there. I was foolish. I wanted to walk around on my own. I slipped in the slush and blundered into the well..

Ragini was shocked."how long were you in water?"

Quite long , I suppose. I kept myself afloat some how.I frequently called out for help. But nobody seemed to be near by for long. Then this young man turned up from somewhere and brought me out. Actually I had slipped into a semi coma like condition , not knowing what I was doing. Only after he revived me, I became aware.

"Did you recognise that person?"

No dear, you know I can not see. But when he was holding me tight, I put my ear close to his throat and I could hear he was humming a tune known to me

'what song ?'

The song that I sang in the temple last evening. HE KEPT HUMMING THOSE TWO LINES

WHAT LINES?

I am for ever in your debt

Different are ways you bless us

Beautiful lines , grand pa. You must sing that song again for me .

Sure, my dear.

You know grand pa, when ever you go for your bath in the river, I always worry about you. There is a perpetual fear in my mind that you can easily drown if you are not careful.. Here , you see , it almost happened.

The fact dear , is that it did not happen

Long live that young savior.

They could laugh about it so easily.

You know some thing.when I was floating around in water and passing out for brief spells, I had a vision of another deluge. I saw myself being washed away like so many other things. It was like the proverbial terminal floods they call pralaya. God is supposed to use pralaya to destroy all life on earth so that life can begin a fresh That is the way of God to cleanse this earth of all accumulated sins. I saw that deluge in all its glory. I saw myself as a puny little thing bobbing up and down in the waters. Then I saw a green banyan leaf on which a child of immaculate beauty was reclining. As the leaf moved up and down in the water , the child made squeeking strange noises and kicking his legs. Then the child would put his big toe in its mouth. When the toe was removed from the mouth, it would drip honey. I saw that leaf along with the child float towards me. The child saw me and squeeled in delight , reached out to me with tiny hands and plucked me out of water and put me besides him on the leaf.

It was a fantastic vision. I think that was the time the young man appeared to save me.

The vision vanished there after.

When I came back to consciousness, I was on firm ground all dry and with this yellow silk cloth wrapped around me. My dirty cotton doti was gone.

The little girl heard all this in silence and remarked,; So strange, so nice .I am lucky grand pa, to hear all that you say. I want to thank that saviour some time.'

End of chapter1

Chapter 2

Radha was annoyed very much and it showed clearly on her face. She saw Krishna hurrying inside dripping wet. Where the hell did he go, when she was discussing an important matter. This was not the first time. There were many such incidents before this, but she always patched up in the interest of maintaining harmony. As usual he disappeared all of a sudden with a muted “excuse me, I will be back in a minute’ and now he was coming back as though nothing happened.. After all, Radha was down to earth person with normal human failings.

Krishna knew she was annoyed. He could not help such things. There were things he had to do, which did not mean much to her. She was madly in love with Him .She asked for nothing but uninterrupted attention to all that she said and did. It amused him all the time and he hoped that she would someday learn to accept Him with all the hazards attached to him.

Today Radha had resolved that she would force Krishna to reveal where he had gone and what he did, deserting her all of a sudden. There was no rain in Mathura , yet he had come back dripping wet. And that dirty white doti , she could smell it from a distance. Where did He pick it up from? How could he go around with that dirty cloth around his shoulder? She could not believe He was doing it as duty. She decided to confront him head on.

She asked ,’what is it around your shoulder?’

Krishna looked at the cloth with surprise, ”oh, Is it still with me? This is some thing that I removed from that person.”

‘What person?’

“Surdas, who else? He was about to drown and I had to save him in a hurry.”

‘So you deserted me all of a sudden to rush to help out this man.’

“Yes . He is a great devotee. I had to help”.

‘And in the process you left behind the exotic yellow silk cloth I presented to you.?’

“You are right. I had to wrap him in something. The cloth came in handy. He had been in water for long long time and his clothes were wet”

‘But it was token of my love.’

“It served a good purpose. You must feel happy about it.”

‘Why are you so fascinated with this blind man. what can he offer any one? what can he offer you?’

“a great deal.”

‘tell me one.’

‘I do not have to.. He kept reminding me that we all have a debt to pay for having taken birth on this earth. The debt to save a soul. Noble one at that. I do not care to say it any differently.”..

Okay Krishna. You have made it clear that Surdas means more to you than my love. So be it. I will find out for myself, what he is made of.

You do that Radha and you will learn a great deal.

Their fights always ended like this.one of them will climb down and other will ignore all acrimony associated with the words exchanged earlier in the heat of terrible argument..

Krishna diverted her mind by resorting to his Flute that was the favourite of Radha. When He played the flute, Radha would melt. He played all her favourite songs with gusto and even danced with her. He kept repeating the lines borrowed from Surdas

I am for ever in your debt

Different are the ways

you shower your blessings.

Radha frowned. New questions stormed her mind, was Krishna mocking at her. or was he taunting her. Is it Surdas or me?

Such short term aberrations in her mental make up normally were fore runners of amazing acts of sacrifice which only she could manage. Her love

towards all members of humanity was unmeasurable. In that magnanimity, the aberrations did not have any permanent place. She had realised that there was no point in arguing with Krishna. He was made like that. The actual person to blame was Surdas who had to fall into a well just when she was beginning to explain her new project to Krishna. She decided she would now take on Surdas.

The relationship between Krishna and Radha was built on contradiction. While he was divine, she was a common place mortal. While he was flawless, she was short on many important factors. He was forever composed, balanced and not given to display of emotions, she was excitable, having her heart in the sleeve and given to extreme swings of mood ranging from extreme joy to that of suffering pain for sake of others. In spite or just because of such contradiction, love thrived between the two, a love so sublime that it was envy of other celebrated consorts. The only string attached was that of reciprocation. She was prepared to sacrifice for sake of love. But Krishna could not be owned by any single party as he had to attend to the entire universe. You can not expect to buttonhole an entity credited with unreserved love, ocean of compassion, pillar of forbearance, tolerance and generosity. He was committed to upkeep of righteousness, helping the poor and weak and punishing wrong doers.

Radha reasoned that if Krishna left everything to rush to rescue Surdas from danger, Surdas must be someone very special and close to his heart. Radha decided to find everything about Surdas. His origin, his way of life, his liabilities and obligations, his special skills and merits that had pleased the good Lord. When she studied him, he appeared just like a billion other people born on this earth and added to it he was blind and needed help every day of his life. He had been honoured by emperors and scholars and whatever he said, wrote about or sang about, was read with interest and devotion by people because of the values he promoted. Those values were same as those contained in abundance in her lord, a point she had completely missed in her assessment.

SHE REMEMBERED THE SONG THAT Krishna often played on his flute and hummed the lines

For ever we are in your debt,

Different are ways you bless us

She asked Krishna, 'please tell me, what do these words mean to you?'

Krishna smiled in amusement. Radha was used to commanding. Words like please, will you etc are foreign to her. She believed in the dictum love breaks all barriers. Love breaks the iron in formalities,. Verbal decencies, polite requests and unsaid expectations are all outside love domain. Love gives you liberties. That is Surdas for you. He will make even a devil behave.

Krishna replied, "For me, those words only spell one thing, my dear. That is reciprocation. That is what you also believe in , don't you?"

'Yes, true. I do. But you do not seem to. Especially in your interaction with me. I keep talking to you and all of sudden, you are not there. I lose you completely.'

Radha , for you reciprocation is mutual, you and me. No other. For surdas and me, .There is no bias or constraint. It is universal. Vast , unlimited like the spread of sky

Radha was a simple girl. She sat down to think. This was going very much above her head. For her it was simple. You scratch my back, I scratch yours. Satisfaction guaranteed. why should simple things be complicated so much as to lose original meanings.?

A question Krishna could not answer inspite of all knowledge he had at his command. For him there is nothing called simple. Every thing is couched in complication. It is the intelligence to unravel it , that complicates the point. Let us leave it at that.

Radha remembered one thing that Krishna had said. You would learn a great deal from Surdas.

If she had to learn some thing from Surdas, to please Krishna, she was perfectly ready to do that.

She decided to look up Surdas..

End of chapter2

Chapter3

The village of Srirangapur, on the banks of river Yamuna was a few miles north of Mathura, the capital city. The rains had stopped and normalcy returned slowly to the village that was battered by the recent deluge. Surdas was back in his house along with his niece and grand niece. They put in lot of hard work to clean up the house. There was peace in every house and people resumed their usual chores. For Surdas it meant visiting local temple, give lectures, teach children and sing. All his activities involved Krishna .For Surdas, Krishna pervaded all aspects of life. So not a moment went with out mention of Krishna.

Today , somehow, Surdas 's mind was occupied by Radha and Krishan. Their divine love. He had written so many songs about their love. It appeared as though he knew them both intimately. He remembered the lines from a song written long time ago

Lotusses forgot their enmity towards the moon,

Their soft petals opened delicately,

the moon had come too close to them,

His pearly teeth shone from with in,

As he smiles and his lips opened,

The bees in the moon face twinkled,

Swimming in the milky ocean of eyes,

The face bent over,

The lips turned up wet and expectant

They touched,

A blush sliced through,

She hid her face in her hands

**and twisted to run,
Not so fast Radha, tarry a while.
I have so much to share,
With you, with you,**

**His hands darted to sieze,
Her hands longed to be trapped,
They stayed glued fast,
What the lips missed, the hands rendered
The bliss flowed through.**

A smile lit up his face. He enjoyed remembering those lines.

There was a knock at the door. He turned to face the door.

‘may I come in?’

Surdas heard the request. He had tasted sugar mixed with fresh butter. He also knew that honey also tasted great but the tone of the request was much more sweeter to hear than any other thing he knew about. He waited so that he could hear the voice again

‘May I come in ?’

Surdas responded ,‘who is that ?please identify yourself. I am blind.

I am Radha. I was passing by your house. I have heard a great deal about you. I thought I could stop by and listen to your song. Is it possible?

Radha? from where?

She was not forthcoming with any response. She had already communicated her wish .She waited for him to reply.

“please step in and take a seat. All are welcome at Surdas’s house whether it Radha of Brindavan or Radha from srirangpur. You are all same to me. Do you like Krishna?.” The question was added as an after thought.

She replied enthusiastically, “yes sir, very much. In fact I can sing almost every song ever written about Krishna”

That is very good. I would like to hear you sing. You have an enchanting voice

She was quick “You are very liberal with your praise. I hear it differently. They say when Surdas sings Krishna hides behind Jamun trees to listen tohim, I mean you.’

That is all rubbish. Don’t you believe a word of all that gossip. Krishna has better things to do than waste his time listening to my music.

Don’t undermine your skills. Humility is a virtue ,, no doubt. But that does not apply to skills so profound. May I express my wish?’

Please command.

‘You sing and I shall dance.’

My dear, I am very sure that you can dance like those angels from heaven and the celestial apsaras can learn many things from you. But I wont be able to appreciate your skills in dancing as I am differently enabled. I can most definitely appreciate your musical accomplishments if you sing.

‘I appreciate what you say and I will sing for you but that is on the condition that after I finish singing, you will sing and I will dance.’

She waited for him to reply. In the mean while , her eyes roamed around the room , taking in every thing.She spotted the yellow silk cloth draped over a couch.

Surdas got up from his place and walked towards the couch and picked up the yellow cloth. He put it around his shoulder like a shawl.

Radha stared at his face.

She clearly saw Krishna dancing in his eyes

Radha was thrilled.

why don't you begin?

'of course. By all means.' She cleared her throat and began

"for ever we are in your debt,

Different are the ways you bless us." She sang these two lines in different enchanting Ragas and different thalam. Some times slow dignified, suddenly climbing and slow drop or the other way. She exhibited tremendous control on all aspects of rendering a couplet with a musical score

Surdas sat stunned. He had never heard such an exposition of musical skills and perfection. He could not help clapping and shouting in joy , his appreciation of what Radha had presented..

He said with lot of feeling , 'My dear Girl, you have made my words so alive, so vibrant, so compelling and so true.'

'May I say some thing please.'

Yes , please go ahead.

Those were not your words. Those words were uttered by Krishna first, when he sang to please Radha.They were in each others debt.. They blessed one another just as they complimented one another. The blessing was the love they shared between them.. Did you have that love in your mind when you were composing this song?'

No, not at all.

'Then what exactly did you have in mind when you wrote those lines?'

That song was composed and sung at a time of calamity. We were all suffering on account of flash floods and unrelenting rains. Yamuna breached the banks to add to our misery. We were uprooted from our houses and moved to high grounds. There was no food for days. We had no option but to pray to the lord to save us by stopping the rains. I said we were indebted to him because we are born on this good earth, created by Him. He created this earth and he has every reason to protect it from being ravaged by nature, which is also a part of

him. If we have faith in Him he is indebted to us to save us and our habitat. It was my way of reminding Him that he had a duty towards us. I took that liberty. I had a right to do so and that right came on the strength of my faith in Him. The faith that he would not fail us. He obliged us really. The rains stopped. We have resumed our way of life. So the debt stays. We are a grateful lot. That is what the song is all about.” Surdas stopped for breath.

Radha said, ‘ I read it differently.’

It is okay. I am not the type to make issues on such matters. You have a right to your opinion.

‘ thank you. will you sing for me now?’

Must I? At this age my voice is not as good as yours.

Does not matter. What Krishna enjoys, I can endure.

He began to sing. A very touching love song involving the enchanting couple that captured the imaginations of poets all over. Krishna and Radha, the eternal lovers. Surdas was describing the scene in his typical style. Krishna wanting to take Radha to the forests to show her the sights. Radha wanted to stay put in a place and keep peering into His charming face and talk about love. The push and pull between them formed the main theme of the song. She was about to yield when he beats her by capitulating strategically to win her favour. Surdas was singing with great feeling.

Radha danced forgetting that she was in front of surdas. She was back in those woods, running between trees to avoid capture by Krishna. Creepers come in the way , Krishna trips and falls down. Radha watches from distance Krishan feigns injury and acts as though he is in pain. Radha unable to bear watching him suffer comes close to help. The same creeper trips her too and she falls over Krishna. Krishna catches her and holds her in a tight embrace, a long breathless clinch in each others arms, warm , cosy , so blissful.

As Radha danced forgetting herself, a gungroo in her left leg worked loose and fell out. She did not notice it and continued to dance. Surdas had heard and he reached for it and picked it up for safe keeping.

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

