

The Rejected Avatar

A poem

by

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(Sufi Ahmed Murad Chisti)

O, All-Pervader, may I be forgiven.
Guilty of stealing fire from heaven,
Like Prometheus, to utilize forethought
And share with others the wisdom I have sought.

He was born with a tawny body,
With none of the accustomed marks of Avatar,
Nor any of the thirty-two signs of a Buddha.
(What rules are made for Super-superman
And that beyond control of maya!)
As if freedom were even more of a restriction
Than the karma-bound universe of samsara!
The Creator, by whatever Name we call Him,
Has emanated humankind in His Own Image,
To manifest the attributes of the transfinite
And sow the seeds of perfectibility
Throughout the world.
The Caucasian peoples have the genius of creativity,
While the Black-skinned laugh, imbued with utter joy,

So each of them foreshadow their divinity,
Though living in chaos, poverty or torpor.
There is an eternal dharma, source of all religion,
Transcending time and space and institutions,
Often sarcophagused under a thousand wrappings,
Until it is all but lost, to be resurrected
Perennially to solace, comfort and release;
But priests, in ignorance or security,
Have carefully designated the position of each
Till **varna**, color of skin, was established as a virtue,
Genealogy circumventing ethics,
While legalists usurped the place of sages,
Insisting, of course, that they were fulfilling dharmas
Until the role of every man was fixed
And dermatology became an exacting science,
Demons and asuras transforming dharmas.

Had his mother been found guilty of adultery?
Was he a changeling, cribbed by some outcaste
While the true offspring was spirited away?
Whatever was, they placed him in a manger.

O manger, holy manger,
The place for a God-man,
The Inn is for the stranger
As if there were some plan
To separate the lowly,
To consider the well-born holy,
So we worship the manger but patronize the Inn,
And all our sanctimonies do not diminish sin—
The manger-babe has made us free,
So it has been, and ever will be.

Thus he stayed in fellowship with the animals
And being tolerated, pressured to be thankful.
Has this not been the course of history?
The stone which is rejected becomes the corner-stone,
And in the hour we think least the Son of Man appears,
In the place the least considered he will function,
In the role the least expected he fulfills himself,
From before the pre-history till now
While the elite expect the All-Being to chalk-mark,
And the privileged write endless restrictions

For the underprivileged.

He was born aware of his completeness,
Nor needed any special transfiguration
Nor special moment for emancipation—
Krishna knew his being from the hour of birth,
Aware of the travail and essence of all forms,
Whether rock or plant or animal or man,
Naraka or hungry preta or tirthaga-yoni,
Of the attribute of every aspect of existence,
Capable of transforming his personality,
And also the seeming “self” of others
As if an actor in a series of dramatic sketches
Or the cosmic manager of the stage of total being,
Knowing every part to be played by every actor—
The prompter, the energizer, the encourager.

Gifted with laughter because of selected varna
Which dormants in our Anandamayakosh,
That bliss allied to our very essence,
He retained his infant smile and even developed it,
Joined in joy as a baby and guffawed at other’s pranks,
Even if he were the butt of their playful humour.
But Bharata, with its grades of caste and divisions,
Could not accept a jester whose shadow might fall
Upon the superior twice-born nobility
Who would disdain such commerce as unbecoming,
So only the humble observed his comic antics.
His schooling was that of other menial children,
Mostly at the craft of tending animals,
And he was disciplined to deem it an honour
To tend the cows because such beasts were holy,
Whose very presence conferred an aura of sanctity
And blessed the less-favored servant-groups
Who dared not approach the temple-idols,
Or let their shadows fall on hallowed ground.
He treated his charges as if this were really so
Who might be incarnations of some lesser gods
(Not to be confounded with the Grand Supreme
Whose Name should not be repeated by the uninitiate).
He learned the music which could summon cattle
To pasturage, to water or at milking time,
To protection in the barns or otherwise—

Being Avatar he could select the proper reeds,
Being Avatar he knew the mysticism of sound,
Being Avatar he expressed himself only through music,
Being Avatar he could radiate charm whenever he willed.

Then came the flood:
The rampaging river, like a freed rhinoceros,
Rushing through the wadis, smashed its channeling chains,
Ravaged its erstwhile banks to ramble on
Rapining the fields, running wildly over the land.
Where are your prayers, you chosen of the gods?
What value now, you twice-born, of your heritage?
Of what avail your philosophies and studies?
The boatman, being illiterate, missed half of life;
The Brahmin, self-esteeming, now lost his grace,
His self-assurance gone, his calmness flooded away
(To reassume his vaunted superiority after it was over,
To return at a later time as if nothing had happened),
But now the waters waded over the land,
The cows and monkeys had lost their sanctity,
The lion and lamb were really lying together,
Permitting a little child to lead them, if needs must be.

Praised be this Fear which demonstrates
What orthodoxies never succeed in proving:
The brotherhood of everything in existence,
The instinctive love which binds all living forms,
The unity in this vast universe of variety—
When else so manifest as in the presence of Fear!
Then it was with the little child, Sri Krishna,
Beholding the ineptitude of the priests,
The apparent disappearance of compassion,
Skillfully guided his flocks to protected havens,
Forgetting his self in the presence of tragedy,
And only after his charges were so protected,
Essayed to face the spirit of disaster.
But Narayan holds the knowledge of the cosmos,
Which wisdoms within his manifold conscious being,
And having knowledge of the various breaths,
Could adopt this knowledge in the presence of storms.
Aware he must not upset equilibria,
Noting he was alone, bent to his task:
Seated in a dry spot, assuming lotus posture,

Subsiding perturbations of the instant,
Oblivious to surroundings and desecrations,
He concentrated wholly on his breath,
While focussing his mind upon the river,
Loosening inhalation and exhalation until
The breath was caught in the pulsation of the waters,
In their wild, unchallenged anarchic activity,
Compelling air to enter only the left nostril,
Where inhalation is difficult and retention hard,
Then compelling exhalation with explosive force
Until the movements of his respiration
Were synchronized to the writhing, swirling waters
And his soul had become as a broken bough
Carried on the surface of the torrent;
Like a cowboy, holding the tail of an angry bull
While the beast raged and rampaged and ran;
Neither opposing nor fighting; like a youngster
Seeking membership in some delinquent gang,
Tested, tried, tormented to prove his prowess,
Seemingly deprived of motive, self-will and inertia,
Carried by the forces of gravitation;
To swim like a captive fish along a current
Until he seems to be part of the very stream;
A musician playing in a huge jazz orchestra,
Still capable of proper improvisation,
He does not battle against the accepted theme,
But gradually introduces his contribution-
So Krishna summoned what is known as Akasha.
This Universe became out of Akasha,
Whence fire and air and water and earth emerged,
Clothed, attributed and attuned
Upon this stage of manifest being-becoming,
Combining or self-operating within samsara,
The ceaseless whirlpool of living-dying activity—
But with Akasha tranquillity, and thence surcease
To pleasure, pain, disturbance or ennui.

This quintessence has become a mystery
To the thinking or emotional appointees
Who regard themselves interpreters of wisdom,
But cannot explain what they have not experienced.
The seepage of Akasha comes like a fog,
Slowly descending calmness on the atmosphere,

The storm is worn by its own ebullience,
The thief is unaware of the approaching sleuth,
Too intent on carefully planned bravado,
When, caution having been so thrust aside,
He is captured by superior, mighty arms,
Or like the loser in a judo contest,
Is tossed out of the ring.

No struggle here between opposing forces,
No element of fire to antagonize the water
Or permitting union in a cartel-effort,
For Akasha is a grace and not a partner,
Nor modified by any mayaric compulsion.
Slowly, very slowly, the wrestler fatigues,
Quite unaware that there be opposition,
Half-believing he has exerted beyond his limits,
Nor counted on the habit of rivulets,
Homesteading with their loot in satisfaction;
They ignore their parent-leader to mutual doom.
The lion is tamed without ceasing to be a lion,
The tiger controlled remaining a carnivore,
The elephant adapts himself to his captivity—
And so the river returned to erstwhile channels,
Pretending it had been a childish prank,
And back to the service of the countryside.

I'll reveal this esotericism for a song:
Garnished lies, high-priced, are quite acceptable,
But freely give and the secrets remain preserved
In the recesses of the ear which is their home.
Man must have his temples more than have his God,
Structured by human hands, serviced by attendants,
Financially endowed and financially supported,
In the Name of That which needs no outer support;
Thus religion and on the other side wisdom,
Bosomed in the being of the little child, Krishna.

The battery of the orchestra had ceased,
The drums and cymbals had played their parts,
Songs sounded no more and the leader has retired.
Peace and solitude are superior to music,
In eternity divinity is ever victorious:
Avatar-Hercules struggled with Priapus,

Thousand-guised but unable to escape,
But scheming proposed a grand alliance:
The demon and the God-man would work together.
Thus the river, to preserve its integrity,
Was silent first, then yawned and flattered and smiled,
Like a conniving maiden luring a timid yokel
(Or the receptionist greeting an awkward stranger)
Or like a dog which has broken training
Returns, in docility, to his master.
The waters had subsided, and there in the slimy mud
Was the carcass of a giant snake, drowned in the flood,
With an almost wistful, blissful smile,
Casting away its life, not just its skin,
Finding that renewal which persists through the aeons,
Abandoning its flesh as a final gesture.
The boy, delighted, called his foster brother:
Timid Balarama crawled from his covered hide-out,
Slowly treading up the slushy path,
And joined his holy playmate to behold
The last remains of the dreadful serpent.
"Take and show the people, the crisis is passed."
So Balarama carried the loathsome carcass
Back to the village, summoning the people,
And pointed the ophidian to them
Who, in their superstitious habit,
Regarded it as the demon which had forced
The river to destruction; they knelt in the mire,
Kissed the feet of Balarama and gave thanks,
Declaring that he must be an Avatar,
Protector of humanity in its need,
Saviour and bestower of the Dharma,
The Godhead again returning to visible form,
The latest incarnation of Lord Krishna,
Therefore to be adored, admired, respected,
While the scribes and pharisees of those times
Recorded it as history, to be set forth in the Puranas,
And So it was.

But Krishna smiled and went his merry way,
Playing upon the flute, nursing the animals,
Joyous in the contentment of the manger,
Smiling in the presence of the high-born,
Hiding whenever a Brahmin might approach,

So that his shadow never would contaminate
The bodies of the super-privileged of men—
Thus the so-called truth of conceited samsara,
Thus, otherwise the eternal verity.

Part 2

So it was with the childhood of Sri Krishna,
Pranking as if he were a monkey-person,
Delighting in humour, gleeful with his jokes,
Interfering with the gopis as they churned,
Stealing their cream and constantly mocking them—
This symbolic of his position in the universe,
For the churning of the cosmos was his dharma.
In those days young maidens had little protection,
Especially if they were of the lowest castes,
To be told it was a beneficial honour
To be devirginized by the twice-born,
So many infants came outside of regular wedlock,
Whose places in society were indeterminate,
And they were selected for the craft of husbandry
To service goats or kine or even the wild monkeys,
To carry milk to farmsteads and to temples;
When the bright springtide came to their bodies,
Trained to be temple-dancers and prostitutes,
Or otherwise at the mercy of the elect.
Among them were widows of the humbler classes,
No longer compelled to sacrifice themselves,
But to give instruction to their youthful charges,
Being veterans, one might say, in this occupation.
So the gopis were the lowliest of the low,
Protected, of course, from mlechhas and outcastes
Who were prohibited from coming anywhere near
Unless, like Krishna, they lived in stables or mangers,
For their dharma was of equal qualification,
Who were presumed to restrain their sexual functions,
Save on proscribed occasions, sanctified
By religion as saturnalian rites.

There was no purdah for these children of nature,
But properly escorted, the girls would bathe
In near-by rivers or tanks, when these were not too sacred
Or otherwise reserved for the nobly born—

Not that each river was especially reserved,
For the Brahmins had determined to exactitude
The sanctity of every body of water,
Stratified into an hierarchal society,
According to caste, and near the bottom
The wallows of buffaloes and these cowgirls.
In feverish hours, the buffaloes,
Wiser in their ways than many creatures,
Buried their bulks in coolness till heat abated,
And the maidens would accompany them thereto
Until the sun was fatigued from its fiery dancing.

Krishna's duties would bring him to such places
And, knowing naught of his kin-folk, regarded these girls
As if they were elder sisters in a family;
While they, in turn, deprived of parenthood,
Oft tended such children when they were lonely or ill—
For the proud presume the lowly have weak emotions,
No grand desires or far-sighted ambitions,
And quite incapable of knowing the facets of love.
The merry Krishna enjoyed this life and would laugh:
“If I'd my choice of incarnating nobility,
I'd be Hanuman, that carefree monkey-god
Whose followers do not divide by classes,
So a wise or clever one may become the leader,
And the cunning, most of all, receive their favours.
To me cunning is the superior of virtues,
And I should find my happiness with them;
Besides all this—the freedom of the trees,
No incarceration in a base-mud-hut—
Instead to roam where I would, selecting my food,
And also protected and fed by this human society.
I think I'll build a temple to Hanuman
Where rich, poor, high, low might congregate,
Without embezzling priests or paunchy Brahmins;
Is this not better than their stultified ceremonies?”
But all the while Sri Krishna knew his mission,
Biding his time until at last it came:
The maidens to the bath, leaving their clothes
Upon the nearby branches, leaving unashamed,
Splashing and playing in the soothing water,
Knowing the high-born wouldn't then approach
Nor would their shadows contaminate.

Then krishna seized the chance and grabbed their saris,
Hiding them in the high branches of a tree,
Where, covered by the foliage, he was not seen.
When the sun was downing the maidens shored,
Astonished to find their clothing disappeared,
And overcome with a mixture of horror and awe,
Lest some superhuman being had come that way.
While up above them, the giggling, guffawing boy,
Noting that they were twelve, the sacred number,
Knowing them to be innocent and guileless,
Knew the time had come to reveal his mission.
First pretending to be a human monkey,
He taunted and teased until they were tired and wept,
Whence he began his discourse of enlightenment.

“Naked you came into this world and naked you go,
Taking away the cream of your experiences,
For as you churn the cream to butter here
You churn the cream of your inner life to bliss,
Whence you will have the butter of felicity,
In counter-compensation for this life,
Becoming tambur players for heavenly dancers
Until you are ready to dance yourselves.
Every religion teaches this, and having uttered
The words, tradition changes them to magic,
While leaders appropriate prestige, power and pride,
Carrying a great burden to the afterworld,
For of such stuffs are the hell-lands made.
But you, having nothing, will be able to fly
To that Elysium for which you are prepared.
Karma forms the backdrop to this universe,
That as you sow, you reap, and compensation
Is such that the low may become the high,
The high humiliated and the proud laid low.
Karma is symbolized by a wheel or ball—
Which is the highest point upon a wheel?
What is the summit on a rounded ball?
You will be taught this law again and yet again
To fascinate you to cunning satisfaction
To be the mental slaves of the self-righteous.
Beware then of the priest, the professor, the pundit
Who, self-assuming that they have mastery
And all the rest inferiors, must teach.

That the last become the first, the first the last,
Is a sempiternal lesson repeated by the wise
Who, being selfless, serve the universe.
Beware first of the priest, guardian of the temple,
Selected to perform the sacrificial rites,
Who may prevent the lowly from approaching,
Demanding the discipline of abnegation,
Yet insisting that they proffer suitable gifts,
The Vedas teach that all proceed from Brahm,
That nothing else exists, that self and He are One,
That all formations manifest from His Light,
Creation and dissolution coming from His Breath,
That nothing else has any importance whatever.
The priests, dividing people into categories,
Exclude the more unfortunate from recitals,
In the name, of course, of verbal revelations;
The legal fictions are termed inexorable,
Yet by the laws of karma the reverse must be,
The counter-compensation for every detail,
So heaven-fictioners create their own hells,
Until they realize the Truth within their beings.
Many times will this teaching be repeated,
Many the appearances of Pagambar,
Many the scriptures offered to the world,
But priest, professor and pundit will prevent,
In the name of the Ineffable will they prevent,
The teachings from being disseminated to all.
But I believe, and perhaps you will believe,
That utterance is not the final phase,
That Truth is immanent in Silence and in Love:
From Silence music, from Love vast sympathy,
The tongue can only prate, the heart will know.
'Tis Karma impels continual compensation
To balance and to harmonize formations,
For everything resides in Parabrahm:
In finality there can be no distinctions,
The humility in words of the priest, the pundit
And the professor are karmatized.
The greatest Avatars will come, washing feet,
Kneeling before the low-born, solacing the troubled,
Performing the lowest of tasks and never boast,
To be called the King of Kings and Lord of Lords,
Which is an insult to the lowliest of the low

Who alone is also the Highest of the High—
In the Grand Heart there are no separations.
Spontaneous humility is a wonder,
The key to freedom and to eternal life,
Spontaneously evoked and never self-asserting,
Not connected with any commandment at all.
Therefore be benign and willing servants
Of the Grand One, howsoever He be called,
Recognizing all people as His representatives,
Remembering your position in society,
Whether at your chores or functioning your bodies.
Am I not called the Happy Cowboy?
Perhaps there is some secret for this bliss,
Perhaps this something all of you may share.

“The body is greater than its raiment,
But in the holy writings, kept as secret,
Hiranyagarbha gave every one garments of light,
More precious than these clothes of cotton
Or linen or silk or finer fabrics,
Not besmirched by any outer defilement,
Or deeds wherein you are compelled to shame.
Let me aware you of these several bodies,
Let me relate what has been kept from you:
Avoid compelling preachers who are damned
Because they are the servants of compulsion,
Because they deny the very karma they explain,
Ignoring the perennial instructions of Pagambar,
“For every idle word you suffer hereafter;”
In the aftermath these persons must repay
By listening until they would listen no more.
But as they **must** relate, they later **must** listen,
Until they free themselves from all compulsion;
For the tongue becomes the devil's tool
Far more than lusts of sex or appetite;
Tongueing is **the** vicious sin, born of the ego,
And for these self-esteemed atonement is hard.

“The pundit may be even worse because
He'll no traffic with you, pretending
Whose very pretense reveals his ignorance;
Not even your bodies' shadows must approach
Except in the darkness where his cupidity

Surpasses his verbal pretensions
And he demands enjoyment of your bodies:
The physical, the subtle and the causal,
The same instruction offered by the wise.
The subtle body awakens when you dream,
Therein to see fulfillment of your hopes,
Your wishes come to pass and what is hidden
Manifested in the abundance of that region;
So sleep has been called death's brother
And Yama-Hades is not only god of death
But a divinity of this subtle world
Where counter-karma is a universal law.
Ego-prelates relate the law of karma
That man's fate is connected with his actions
So there must be an underlying ego-soul
To support such explanation, not its verity.
They will not speak of counter-karma,
The dispossession of the power-obsessed,
The reaction of the Universal Mother
Who constitutes the cosmos outside this ego,
The rising of froth from the ocean's surface,
The movement of a point upon a ball,
The incessant activities of the universe,
Of natural gravitation and much more--
And beyond all this the Supreme Loving-Compassion,
Unseparate from an all-pervading wisdom.
"The subtle body also must be purified,
Undergoing a different form of baptism,
But of a counter-nature. In this drama
Of incessant transfigurations
We play quite different roles, according to the need,
But all within a universe of law.
Do not rejoice, therefore, because of this,
But be patient for your time is surely coming
And perhaps even sooner than you dream;
For each has also a garment of finer light,
Which we may call **Karana** or causal body,
Which also the devas share in their own right,
In a world beyond dualities of sin and virtue,
Above contaminations and adhesions,
Versed in heart's ways, swathed in bliss-love,
Contented to harmonize in constant praise,
Without a priest or any extraneous guide,

In their world of transcendental light.
Ah! I have spoken, but I am only telling
And thus responsible for every word;
So let us dance and dance until we see
The marvelous realities of that world."

Krishna descended, played his flute and danced
Until the naked gopis, forgetting their doffed garments,
Overanxious to join, at which instance
He returned their saris and other clothing,
All joining together:

The strong say "Yes" to God
The weak say "No" to man,
This has been our history
Since the world began.

Must this always be?
Can we break this trend?
Should this habit stay
World without end?

The strong say "Yes" with God
The weak repeat their "No!"
The counter-karma enters
And to their doom they go.

For heaven is the world
Where "Yes" fulfills its role
While hell-fire purifies
The tongue—"no" from the soul.

The flute of Krishna brought emancipation
And with it realization of the inner being,
Their hopes and wishes becoming objectified,
In their awareness of the subtle-plane,
And they continued to dance, as is said of Avatar:

"I did pipe and you did dance,
And so I led you to trance,
Where you became so mystified
That all of you were stupified."

For Avatar leads us to awakening ecstasy,
Bringing emancipation to our being,
With the discarding of garments of externality,
And complete consciousness of processes of heart.

The gopis dressed; Krishna continued haranguing:
“Beware of wolves that come in the clothing of sheep,”
Warning, “Beware of wolves that come in the clothing of sheep,”
Thus leading you further into samsara.
Silence holds the keys to all the mysteries,
For discourses only agitate the nerves,
And thus react upon the agitating ego.
The priest, the pundit, and professor
Will deal with you as menials,
While the true guru treats you as himself,
And thus avoids the pitfalls of counter-karma.
Watch therefore for the everlasting “Yes,”
As being the signature of strength,
And also the sign of spirituality.
Spontaneous laughter reveals the inner spirit,
And a smile on the heart reflects itself in the face,
For joy is of the very essence of our being.
Only warm hearts can help their fellows,
Who bow with hand and head in devotional adoration,
Bending before others, serving their fellow man.”
Thus Sri Krishna continued; but these lessons
Debilitated into maxims and often repeated,
Have faded out as the centuries pass by.

Silence ended, and again the flute ...
The maidens rose and performed the grand Ras Lila,
Becoming aware of their unrecognized causal bodies,
Becoming aware of the grandeur within their beings,
And, as they danced, they recognized the light.
They could not see each other nor the ground,
Blinded by light but beckoning to the music,
They made the proper gestures until the eyes could see,
Men they beheld, not just a smiling shepherd,
No lowly cowboy of tawny complexion, but the Grand Being,
A stupendous aureole of effervescent lightings,
The radiations of iridial flambeaux,
The reflections and refractions from the endless light,
Pouring in every colour and back to white,

While the Personality played upon their flute
And in that moment of grandeur beholding Krishna,
As if he had become her special partner,
And more, the very light of inner being.
Their hearts responded and all of them knew
That this was the true Avatar, and no one else.

Then the morning.
The drama ended,
Back to their daily duties,
Karma Yoga foremost, which was their lot,
Jnana Yoga for those who strove to master the self,
Bhakti for those who seek only the Beloved,
Yet each and other could apprehend the Deity,
From the tiniest speck to beyond the widest space,
Above, below, within, without, self, not-self,
All seeded in the innermost heart of man.
Shanti! Shanti! Shanti!

Samuel L. Lewis January 4, 1960

Glossary

Akasha—Clear space, accommodation (the space can be full of forms)

Anandamayakosh(a)—Body of bliss

Asura—Powerful demon of the realm of compulsive action

Avatar(a)—Incarnation of God

Balarama—Krishna's foster brother

Bharata—India

Brahm(a)—The Absolute

Brahmin—Priest, priest-caste

Deva—Angel, god

Dharma—Law, Religion;

dharma—established order, institution, duty

Dharmas—Norms and forms

Hinranyagarbha—Personal Absolute

Karma—Action, work; law of cause and effect

Lila—Play; Ras Lila—sacred dance

Maya—Power of illusion

Mlechha—Foreigner, barbarian

Naraka—Lowest hell

Narayan(a)—Krishna

Pagambar—Message-bearer

Parabrahm(a)—Supreme Brahma

Preta—Hungry ghost

Purana—Ancient mythology

Purdah—Seclusion

Ras(a)—Dance

Samsara—Transmigration, mundane existence; world of birth and death

Shanti—Peace

Tirthaga-yoni—Souls of beasts

Vedas—Ancient scriptures

Yoga—Remedy, means, spiritual practice

—Karma—salvation through action

—Jnana—salvation through knowledge

—Bhakti—salvation through love