

Exploration of Nature in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *Rāsa Līlā* with *Gopīs* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*

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Abstract

The focus of this article is to explore Nature in *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. The objective of this article is to explore *rāsa līlā* as a union of male and female for the creation and continuation of Nature of this world. In *rāsa līlā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa represents the entire male element (Puruṣa) of creation whereas the *gopīs* typify Prakṛiti, the female element. There is the union of Prakṛiti (Nature) and Puruṣa (consciousness) in the *rāsa* dance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā*. To evaluate the *rāsa līlā* superficially, from the materialistic perspective is a problem of this study. The researcher incorporates Nature for the analysis of the *rāsa līlā* between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. He has used theory of Immanuel Kant to explore Nature in *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs*. The philosopher realizes divine being in the objects of Nature and argues that Nature is not different from divine being. It is based on the interpretation of critics and scholars in the *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The findings of this investigation are to provide new perspective with evidences in the *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It gives a new insight to readers about this divine dance. The main conclusion to be drawn from this research paper is that men and women are fragments and incomplete in themselves without union between them. There should be continuation of *rāsa* in different forms for the existence of humans and other creatures on earth.

Keywords: Exploration, *līlā*, prakṛiti, puruṣa, *rāsa*, union

Introduction

Dance, a way to please divine being during the time of *kīrtan* (chanting) explicates ritual practice in the *Hinduism*. On this ground, Ravi Prakash Arya defines: "The word *rāsā* or the sentiment primarily denotes taste or favour, however in literature; it has the connotation of emotional experience of beauty" (12). Evidently, the term *rāsā* is the focusing point and it has become the subject matter of discussion in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. *Rāsā* refers feelings or sentiments of characters in a literary work of art. It is an aesthetic taste which evokes emotions of readers. *Rāsā* deals with the emotions of the author in the creativity of a literary work of art and readers share the emotions of the writer with them. The term *bhāva* is used in *Sanskrit* to indicate the emotions of writers and characters in texts. Two prominent

terms *rāsa* and *rāga* are frequently used in the classical music and aestheticism in the Eastern Philosophy.

The credit of defining *rāsa* goes to Bharata *Munī*. The sage defines *rāsa* as the quality of drama *āsvādhyate* [“is capable of being relished”] (qtd. in Gosh 105). This definition extends the scope of *rāsa* in the *Vedic* texts. The commentator states that *rāsa* associates with the quality of drama. The theory of Bharata *Munī* about *rāsa* explicates the quality of a literary text. To support the idea of *rāsa līlā*, Charles A. Filion defines: "When women dance in a circle holding one another's' hands and when their necks are grasped by male dancers, that is *rāsa*" (505). To strengthen the argument, one claims that *rāsa* is a special dance involving many male and female dancers. This dance is promoted when male and female partners have similar type of cleverness. In this connection, Filion further claims that the focus of *rāsa līlā* for the *gopīs* is the dance but not for Śrī Kṛṣṇa (503). Its dominant aspects are words, gestures, and temperaments.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* introduces *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* in the 22nd chapter and from 29th to 33rd chapters of the Tenth Canto. The term *rāsa līlā* is widely used in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa plays the flute and the sound becomes the basis of *rāsa līlā*. The sound is so melodious that it steals the minds and hearts of *gopīs*. It takes place during the time of full moon night in autumn in the forest of Vṛndāvan when the *gopīs* listen to the melodious sound of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's flute. The sound of the flute is so magical that it allures the *gopīs* and they leave their duty for the sake of beauty. Rādhā and her other *sakhis* (friends) do not care about the fear of wild animals. As the *gopīs* meet Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the *rāsa līlā* commences. It signifies various actions in love such as singing, dancing, hugging, and kissing. The attraction of Śrī Kṛṣṇa mesmerizes them easily and his appearance is beyond comparison and the *gopīs* drink his form with loveliness.

In this connection, N. Śrī Kṛṣṇa Swami clarifies *rāsa līlā* with the argument that “This covered the entire gamut of man- woman relationship, and ranging from the entirely human to the wholly divine” (94). In this discussion, the words “man- woman relationship” is used for the presentation of their emotions. Emotion is the ground stone of *rāsa līlā* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. Readers realize the connection between a man and a woman with the help of their emotions. To support this idea, Purnendu Narayan Sinha examines: “The *gopīs* had given up everything for the sake of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and they would ill bear to hear these unkind words” (417). It shows that the *gopīs* neglect themselves after listening to the sound from his flute. This argument supports that the *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the basis of attractions for the *gopīs*. They sacrifice everything for the sake of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. From this statement what Sinha argues seems to be plausible and believable.

Nature is earth and the objects which we find on it. The Nature of the world is our existence and our life depends on it. It is the duty of humans to save Nature for our benefits. In

this connection, John Locke, a philosopher on Nature, argues: “Nature is the equality, which all men are in, in respect of jurisdiction or domination of one over another” (5-6). Despite equality in Nature, humans neglect the rights of other creatures. On this ground, Victor Schauburger supports Locke and the analyst further explores that “Millions of people can no longer earn their daily bread by honest labor” (9). They kill animals, destroy forest, and create problems in Nature. Humans exploit Nature either directly or indirectly for the fulfillment of their greed. In this context, Jozef Keulartz explores that the role of a man in this primeval Nature is that of a hunter, gatherer or scavenger (162). This stand point justifies that humans create problems in Nature. They do not hesitate to destroy the inhabitants of the wild animals and birds.

Humans use the objects of Nature for the completion of their works and they destroy Nature from their different activities. Every living being uses the gifts of Nature as a source of benefits. Humans' intervention in Nature creates problems in ecology. Explaining this statement, William Beinart and Peter Coates clarify: “Nature can be seen to have a self-regulating but not necessarily stable dynamic independent of human intervention” (30). Analyzing this statement, one argues that humans should not intervene the works of Nature. In this context, Andrew Lustig and et al have different line of logic on Nature. The interpreters evaluate that the *Hinduism* emphasizes Nature with God (13). This dealing with Nature is based on the idea of biocentrism in which humans get the reciprocal relationship between creatures and plants. On this ground, Ben Klassen argues: “Nature is the whole cosmos, the total universe, including its millions natural laws through space and time” (qtd. in Klassen 14). On the basis of this expression, one can say that Nature lovers extend their scope. The critic clarifies his ideas by referring to the laws of Nature which are constant all times.

All living creatures should obey the laws of Nature without raising questions. The violation of the laws of Nature creates problems. To strengthen the argument, Susan Green incorporates her ideas: "I am a pagan. I am part of the whole of nature. The rocks, the animals, the plants, the elements, and the stars are my relatives. Planet earth is my home. I am a part of this large family of nature, not the master of it"(qtd. in Green 39).The analyst stresses the significance of Nature in the life of creatures. Humans realize the horizontal relationship between creatures and plants. The aforementioned discussion shows that the interpreters and philosophers intellectually reach the conclusion that Nature is a prime tool for the analysis of literature. Śrī Kṛṣṇa likes to remain in forest during the time of his childhood and plays games with cowherd friends happily. Later, the *rāsa līlā* takes place in forest with *gopīs*. The fragrance of flowers enhances the *rāsa līlā* and it becomes memorable for the participants.

The *rāsa līlā* is one of the *līlās* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in which there is the revelation of the divine love. The love of the *gopīs* to Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the subject matter of discussion in the field of literary criticism. The union between a man and a woman is necessary for the sake of progress, success, and creation. Without attraction between male and female, no one imagines the

continuation in the creation of this world. The commentator argues positively in the *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Thus, *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa shows a union between *Prakṛiti* and *Puṛuṣa* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. Nature is the prime setting for the performance of the *rāsa līlā* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. Other creatures and plants participate in the *rāsa līlā* and are pleased.

Problems and Objectives

Veda Vyāsa incorporates Nature impressively in the *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. According to him, Nature is not manifested for beauty; it is the support for the generation of meanings. The compiler creates meanings in the *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa on the basis of Nature. In the similar vein, Arne Naess writes ahead: “The earth cannot speak for itself in ways that are intelligible to us. Therefore humans, even environmentalists, are limited by their own interpretations of it” (52). The argument intensifies that Nature provides emotions, courage, and beauty in the *rāsa līlā*. Against the background of Nature, the problem of this research paper addresses how Nature is manifested in the *rāsa līlā* between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. To deal with it, the following research questions are set:

- What relation is perpetuated between *rāsa līlā* and Nature in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*?
- How does *rāsa līlā* thrive in Nature in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*?
- Why does the *gopī gīta* become the ground stone of *mahārāsa* represented in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*?

The first objective of this research is to explore the relation between *rāsa līlā* and Nature. Its other objectives are to examine the flourish of *rāsa līlā* in Nature and to explicate the role of *gopī gīta* in *mahārāsa*. The researcher has used theory of Immanuel Kant to explore Nature in *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs*. The philosopher realizes divine being in the objects of Nature and argues that Nature is not different from divine being. The researcher has used Veda Vyāsa's the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* translated and commented by Bhakti Vedānta Swāmī Prabhupāda with Sanskrit stanzas as the primary text.

Veda Vyāsa's Position in *Hinduism*: A Review of Literature

Major critical thinkers and researchers of *Hinduism* such as Swami Sivananda, Max Weber, Yogi Panchavedi, Sankaraj, and Neha Borkarand Subhamoy Das have interpreted Veda Vyāsa's epic career. They have stressed the contribution of Vyāsa for the *Purāṇas* in the *Hinduism*. Their evaluation asserts the place of the compiler in the world literature. Swami Sivananda judges Veda Vyāsa's development of the career as an epic writer and the prime quality of his scriptures. The interpreter evaluates Vyāsa with the argument: “Vyāsa is considered by all *Hindus* as a *chiranjivi* (immortal) one who is still living and roaming

throughout the world for the well-being of his devotees” (3). Among *asta* (eight) *chiranjivis*, Veda Vyāsa is one. Other *chiranjivis* are Markandeya, Bali Charkravarti, Hanumān, Ashwasthāmā, Parashurāma, Vibhiṣaṇa and Kumārs (qtd. in Krishnanda 3). *Chiranjivi* are those born humans who are blessed to be immortal by the divine being. In this context, Sivananda shows the quality of Vyāsa to be immortal for blessing his devotees. The quality of Vyāsa’s writing is beyond comparison not only in the *Hinduism* but also in the other religions (Prabhupada III). We have immense knowledge through his writings about philosophy of life and soul.

With the different belief Max Weber discusses the furnished style of Veda Vyāsa in his writing. In his expression, “We may be confident in reading Vyāsa that the expression will always be just to the thought; he never palter with or labors to dress up the reality within him” (5). The expression of the author draws special attention of readers because the sentences are meaningful with the knowledgeable ideas. His writings exhibit kernel of the *Hinduism* so that he is the focusing literary figure in *Sanskrit* literature. Nature is the base for his writing that warns humans to emphasize nature's beauty. Unlike Weber, Yogi Panchavedi discusses the condition of the *Hindu* scriptures. Before Vyāsa, the *Vedic* knowledge was in the oral form. It is true that the *Vedas*, *Upanishadas*, and *Purāṇs* in the pre-Vyāsa era were only in the oral form. During the time of the pre-Vyāsa era, there was no trend to keep scriptures in written form. The sages used to provide precepts of the scriptures to their disciples.

Sankaraj Jayanthi supports Panchavedi about the contribution of Veda Vyāsa as he differentiates Veda Vyāsa from other ordinary humans by expressing that he is the *avatār* (incarnation) of god because an ordinary person could not write faultlessly innumerable scriptures. A little different from Jayanthi, Neha Borkar focuses on the Vyāsa’s prediction about the future condition of earth. She extends the scope of Nature from the expression of Vyāsa: “It’s quite surprising that sage Veda Vyāsa when he lived knew the earth was going to be a horrible place to live in the coming 5000 years” (10). In her thoughts, the prediction of Vyāsa about Nature has come to be true. In this sense, Vyāsa is not only a writer but a good predictor because the world has been facing a natural crisis as the prediction of Vyāsa.

Research Methods and Materials

All the aforementioned reviews highlight Veda Vyāsa from different perspectives due to his unique contribution to *Hinduism*. The compiler divides the *Vedas* into four parts -*Rig Veda*, *Yajur Veda*, *Sāma Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. The life of Veda Vyāsa is a unique example for the dissemination of spiritual knowledge. Readers of all times get influence from his writing. The *Śrimad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* establishes the personality of the writer at the apex of success. Before writing this text, the author has not been satisfied in his writing from other texts. Nārada Mūni instructs him to write the *Śrimad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* for the

glory of the Lord. This *Hindu* scripture makes the goal of his life successful. *Rāsa līlā* consists of five chapters in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* but it draws the attention of different readers, interpreters, and writers. It becomes the subject matter of discussion among writers and critical thinkers. The writers and critics have evaluated Veda Vyāsa from various perspectives. But no one has evaluated *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* from the perspective of Nature. Thus, this article adds a new block in the area of study and shows how *rāsa līlā* is necessary in the progress and success in the life of humans.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of *Rāsa Līlā* from the Perspective of Nature

Rāsa līlā, a romance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs*, draws the attention of philosophers, critics, scholars, and common people who interpret this *līlā* from different perspectives.

In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, *rāsa* is the state of pleasure which comes directly from soul. The readers of this text require predisposition towards the rapture from this *līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Rapture, a part of *bhakti rāsa*, is brought by transcendental potency. Readers get the manifestation of Nature in the *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The hero selects the beauty of Nature for the performance of *rāsa līlā*. The analysts need spiritual perspective for the evaluation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with Nature in *rāsa līlā*. It incorporates how Śrī Kṛṣṇa behaves with devotees in the form of a lover and how the hero makes a balance between *Prakṛiti* and *Puruṣa*.

Stealing clothes of the unmarried *gopīs* by Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the prelude to *rāsa līlā* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. The *gopīs* of Vraja worshipped Goddess Katyayani (Durga) for a month. One day, the *gopīs* take off the clothes on the bank of the Yamunā River and go into the river. Bathing in a river is a trend among the Indian girls and women before worshipping. In this connection, Śūkadeva states: “It is an old system among the Indian girls and women when they take bath in the river they place their garment on the bank and dip into the water completely naked”¹ (10: 22. 7). This argument supports the point that the *gopīs* are the followers of their rituals. They are daughters-in-law of the respectable families with their renowned status. They should not bathe in the Yamunā River in nude condition. Śrī Kṛṣṇa regards the objects of Nature as humans and teaches *gopīs* to respect the objects of Nature as humans.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa warns the *gopīs* not to bathe in rivers, lakes, ponds, seas, and oceans because it creates pollution. If it is necessary to bathe, everybody should take water outside to make the river or lake free from pollution. From *dhārmic* perspective, it is an offence to the water God-Varuna (qtd. in Goswāmi 200). To teach a new lesson to *gopīs*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa takes their clothes and climbs up a *kadamba* tree and starts laughing. The *gopīs* are embarrassed due to the presence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa on the tree. Śrī Kṛṣṇa captivates the *gopīs* and they seem to be innocent before him. Explaining this statement, Purnendu Narayan Sinha argues: “He asked the girls to

come up and take them” (405). Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes the condition of the *gopīs* embarrassing and they must not repeat this type of mistake again. It is an unforgettable practical lesson of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to the *gopīs*. It shows that the hero believes more in practical lesson than precepts.

Unlike Draupadi (who is embarrassed when Duṣāsana takes off her clothes), the *gopīs* please from this activity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, their most favorite person. During the time of their embarrassment, they speak respectfully: “Do not torment us with this prank of yours” (qtd. in Subramaniam 449). It further proves that the *gopīs* assume any activities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa positively. The hero instructs the *gopīs* to take their clothes from his hand. To support this idea, Ramesh Menon examines: “They came covering their pubices with their hands, blue with the cold. He saw them in their enchanting nakedness, and draped the clothes over his shoulder” (830). Śrī Kṛṣṇa states the *gopīs* not to bathe nakedly because it is a sin against the gods. He connects between Nature and God for the lesson to *gopīs* to control water pollution. With this idea at the centre of attention, C. L. Goswami confirms that the maidens of Vraja bowed to Śrī Kṛṣṇa (201). It is the promise of the *gopīs* not to repeat the same mistake in their lives.

In this context, it is important to elucidate the view of Śūkadeva about *gopīs*: “ Seeing them bowing down humbly before him, the merciful Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the son of the Devaki, was pleased with them, and returned to them all their clothes”² (10: 22. 21). Innocence of the *gopīs* in front of Śrī Kṛṣṇa changes his mind and the hero returns the garments to the *gopīs*. From the spiritual perspective, it is the intimacy between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his devotees. No devotee meets his/her god with clothes. It shows that Śrī Kṛṣṇa gives grace to his devotees in the form of a lover. The hero does not only steal clothes but also steals their hearts. It proves that a girl does not hesitate to do anything in front of her loved person. Love eclipses ashamed for the beloved and to get her intended person, she does not hesitate to do even illegal and immoral works.

To make this idea more convincing, Devi Dayal Aggrawal regards the *gopīs* as good devotees in the form of beloveds:

Śrī Kṛṣṇa recognized their full devotion only after there was no avail between him and the *gopīs*. Clothes or the veil of clothes is only symbolic of *māyā*. Till one is down under the influence of *māyā*, one cannot reach the almighty and the devotion is not complete till he attains his closeness. The *māyā* in the form of clothes, therefore, had to be taken away to enable one to attain complete absorption in him. (186)

The *gopīs* surrender themselves due to the attraction of *māyā* from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The *gopīs* do not realize the boundary of doubt in the works and words of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Clothes are the intervention to obtain grace from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The devotees who surrender themselves for Śrī Kṛṣṇa cannot obtain salvation in their clothes. The clothes are the form of *māyā* which causes problems to make intimacy between humans and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. As the garments of the *gopīs*, modern fashion kills the divine love. Humans become *narcissus* (love their own appearance) and they forget

their special relations to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Māyā* which is in the form of clothes must be taken away for the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

By taking away the clothes of the *gopīs*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa teaches humans to put away their worldly attachments and they meet him not with the attached body but in a purified state. After the surrender, there is special relation with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Wealth and clothes make obstacles for humans in the *saraṇāgati* with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Every human comes nakedly and also departs from this world after the performance of his *līlā* in nude condition. In the same line of argument, one argues that *gopīs* do not have any reasons to feel ashamed of themselves in front of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The clothes represent culture but skin shows Nature. Humans who live in the natural world without artificiality, get the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The flute is a simple musical instrument which is made of bamboo. It is portable and originates simple and melodious sound. One gets the description of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's flute in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. It allures the creatures, vegetation, and other inanimate things. The flute enhances Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā* because the hero always carries the flute. It is his most favorite musical instrument. It is the ground stone of *rāsa līlā* because the melodious sound lures *gopīs*. In this context, Śūkadeva explicates:

Lord Kṛṣṇa saw the unbroken disk of the full moon glowing with the effulgence of newly applied vermilion, as if it were the face of the goddess of fortune. He also saw the *kumuda* lotuses opening in response to the moon's presence and the forest gently illumined by its rays. Thus, the Lord began to play sweetly on His flute, attracting the minds of the beautiful-eyed *gopīs*.³ (10:29.3)

With the support of this idea, D.R. Kinsley postulates: "A bamboo flute is the only musical instrument which is most natural and does not contain any mechanical parts. This is the reason why the flute is very close to nature" (32). The echo sound of the flute is delightful for creatures.

Bhattacharya follows Kinsley about the utility of the flute in the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the critic states: "The flute has eight holes, using which divine music is brought out by the player. Eight is number of Indian god Śrī Kṛṣṇa; the eight holes control the eight parts of the body and mind: eyes, ears, nose, tongue, skin, mind, intellect, and ego"(21). The musical instrument has its spiritual importance in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. The flute of Śrī Kṛṣṇa symbolizes freedom and entertainment. The flute shows that a person should be as a hollow flute in the absence of vanity. The flute has crucial role for commencement of *rāsa līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* in the background of Nature.

In this context, Śūkadeva discusses the effect of the music of the flute in the life of *gopīs*: "Their husbands, fathers, brothers, and other relatives tried to stop them, but Kṛṣṇa had already stolen their hearts. Enchanted by the sound of His flute, they refused to turn back"⁴

(10:29.8). It further proves that the music of the flute has attracted *gopīs* to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The flute, a simple musical instrument, is the product of Nature. To strengthen this idea, Gunaraj Khan further examines: “The flute is the human heart, a heart which is made hollow, which becomes a flute for the god of love to play” (4). Humans should empty their hands for the grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The human heart should realize hollowness in our lives. As the sound of the flute, one should try to please others as far as possible. On the basis of this relation, Prabhupada explicates: “When the *gopīs* were describing the sweet vibration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s flute, they also remembered their pastime with him” (201). It shows that the *gopīs* have connection with Śrī Kṛṣṇa from their previous birth.

On this ground, Śarartha Darsini argues that the *gopīs* were the sages of Dandaka Forest in their previous birth during the regime of Lord Rāma in *Treta Yuga* (702). According to the findings of Prabhupada, there might have been the previous connections of the *gopīs* with Śrī Kṛṣṇa (518). This *rāsa dance* is the fulfillment of the desires of the *gopīs* according to the promise of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the previous incarnation as Lord Rāma. To fulfil the previous promise, Śrī Kṛṣṇa starts playing the flute. Vanamali examines the effect of the music: “All moving things became immobilized, and the immovable, like the stones and rocks, started to melt and flow, such was the bewitching power of his music” (70). Readers find miraculous impression from the music of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s flute. To melt rocks from music proves that its power is incredible in Nature. The natural objects such as trees, fruits, land, beasts, birds, humans, and rivers are the combination of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s energy. The interpreter proves that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the centre of affection of all living beings (Prabhupada 19). The *māyā* (illusion) of Śrī Kṛṣṇa works appropriately in Nature. The natural works are motivated from the melodious music of the flute.

The *gopīs* listen to the sound of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s flute and become jealous of it. According to them, the flute is lucky to remain always with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. They have their desires to remain with him all time. But he carries the flute wherever he goes and pleases himself by playing it. The *gopīs* believe that he is unable to remain away from the flute. As the *gopīs* reach him at night in Vṛndāvana on the bank of the Yamuna River, there is the commencement of the *rāsa līlā*. In this connection, Śūkadeva explicates:

There Kṛṣṇa threw His arms around the *gopīs* and embraced them. He aroused Cupid in the beautiful young ladies of Vraja by touching their hands, hair, thighs, belts, and breasts, by playfully scratching them with His fingernails, and also by joking with them, glancing at them and laughing with them.⁵ (10:29.46)

The dance of celebration further points to the reality that “The whole life is a meeting of contradictory forces, and that all its happiness comes from this union of opposites” (qtd. in Osho 1). The *rāsa* dance causes the ecstasy of life for the sake of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. It denotes that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is better than Cupid to attract *gopīs* to participate in *rāsa līlā*.

In this point, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is a supreme enjoyer of the universe in Nature. When *rāsa līlā* commences, “The cows have stopped grazing” (qtd. in Subramaniam 447). The interpreter relates Nature in the *rāsa* dance and she further analyzes that even the natural objects are impressed by the music of the magical flute. We realize the division of the world into two opposite parts for creation. The commencement of *rāsa līlā* attracts the two opposite forces in the universe. As each *gopī* remains in the company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, she consoles herself with the argument: “She is grammarian, without her, he is speechless” (qtd. in Hawley 109). Grammar joins words into beautiful sentences both in speech and writing. In the same way, each *gopī* realizes that she is in need of love from Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The *gopīs* are jealous of each other to remain intimate with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. To relieve their jealousy, Śrī Kṛṣṇa suddenly disappears during the time of *rāsa līlā*. The mind of the *gopīs* fully absorbs in ideas of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and they start looking for him everywhere in the forest. Their climax of bliss shattered by the disappearance of their consort. By using *yogic* power, Śrī Kṛṣṇa disappears from the middle of *gopīs*. It shows that jealousy is an evil quality which becomes the basis of separation among humans. In the words of Śūkadeva: “When Lord Kṛṣṇa disappears so suddenly, the *gopīs* felt great sorrow at losing sight of Him, like a group of female elephants who have lost their mate”⁶ (10: 30. 1). Sudden disappearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa startles the *gopīs* and they start searching him. They realize Nature differently in the presence and absence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa among them. The same trees, rivers, birds, and animals which have pleased them before, displease the *gopīs* in the absence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Responding to such claims, Lyengar argues that love between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* is not limited only to the bodily relationship (*mahāmāyā*) but it belongs to *yogamāyā* (109). Basing his argument on such idea, one explores that the *gopīs* regard Śrī Kṛṣṇa more than their lover. His absence makes problems for them and starts hovering to and fro. In this connection, Pushendra Kumar examines that the *gopīs* do not think the value of their lives in the absence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa (961). These discussions throw light how Śrī Kṛṣṇa is significant in the life of *gopīs* during the time of separation. They start singing songs of separation for the sake of consolation. The memory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa removes the fear of the *gopīs* even in the dense forest. As the band of mad women, they search everywhere in the forest of Vṛndāvana.

The *gopīs* observe creepers on trees and show the sign of jealousy to them. They personify the creepers as humans and assume that they are lucky to stand straight. In this connection, Śūkadeva confirms: “Creepers are hugging their husband (tree) and they are in joyful mood”⁷ (10.30. 13). This explanation further supports that the *gopīs* have desires for reunion with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In this situation, Nature affects the *gopīs* negatively during the time of separation. Like the *gopīs*, humans treat Nature positively and negatively according to their condition and mood. Moving ahead in this line of logic, Prabhupāda clarifies that the *gopīs*

have keen interest to be touched by Śrī Kṛṣṇa (582). This dealing is based on the idea of a beloved during the time of separation with her lover.

During the time of separation, the *gopīs* go to the bank of the Yamunā River to sing songs for invocation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. They have positive attitude towards reunion with Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The songs of the *gopīs* become the basis of *mahārāsa* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. In this context, Śūkadēva incorporates: "O lotus-eyed one, Your sweet voice and charming words, which attract the minds of the intelligent, are bewildering us more and more. Our dear hero, please revive Your maidservants with the nectar of Your lips"⁸ (10:31.8). It is interesting to note how the *gopīs* request Śrī Kṛṣṇa to appear for *mahārāsa*. Giving an overview, Sriprad Bhagavat Maharaja and et al analyze that "the *gopīs*" worship the goddess Katyayani- devi to attain Śrī Kṛṣṇa as their husband" (1). The *gopī- gīta* expresses full surrendering of the *gopīs*. With the help of *gīta*, they feel a bit relief in their anguished mood. The *gopīs* participate in *Sankirtana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to please in the form of *gopī- gīta* (qtd. in Filion18). Some *gopīs* express their emotions indirectly. In this connection, Prabhupada supports Filion from his argument: "The *geet* relieves the agony of those suffering from the burning pain of separation from Śrī Kṛṣṇa and which bestows supreme consciousness" (611). It reflects the agitation of *gopīs* in the memory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. During the time of chanting, the *gopīs* turn from beloveds to devotees.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* presents an evidence of *gopīs'* love to Śrī Kṛṣṇa in their song:

When You go off the forest during the day, a tiny fraction of a second becomes like a millennium for us because we cannot see You. And even when we can eagerly look upon Your beautiful face, so lovely with its adornment of curly locks, our pleasure is hindered by our eyelids, which were fashioned by the foolish creator.⁹ (10:31.15)

This view further supports that the *gopīs* feel difficulties to remain away from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Explaining this statement, Prabhupāda examines the psychology of the *gopīs*: "Your lotus feet certainly kill all kinds of sinful activities of devotees who have taken shelter there" (281).

This idea analyses that the *gopīs* regard them as the devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. One realizes the sense of *Yogamaya* in love which belongs to spiritualism. The *rāsa līlā* involves the spiritual love between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*. In Sriprad Maharaja's words: "Lust is the desire for one's own happiness, and the *gopīs* do not have a trace of such desires" (80). This expression from *gopī gīta* points out their eternal love to Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In the richness of the natural beauty, the *gopīs* put forward this argument to make a union between *Prakṛiti* (themselves) and *Puruṣa* (Śrī Kṛṣṇa). The union is inevitable for the continuation of the creation.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa corroborates that the *gopīs* are not jealous of each other from his presence so that the hero appears among them in a silken yellow garment with a flower garland. From his presence, the pain *gopīs* have felt because of separation from him is dispelled. They praise him as he has understood their feelings and agony during the time of his absence. After his presence, they stop the imitation of his activities and remain happy in his company. In this context, Śūkadeva debunks: “One *gopi* respects Śrī Kṛṣṇa in her eyes and places Him within her heart. Having closed her eyes, the thirsty *gopīs* of love embraces Him within. The *gopi* has the realization of the transcendental ecstasy meditating upon the Lord”¹⁰ (10: 32. 8). It shows that the *gopīs* have transcendental relation with Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Natural beauty. The appearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes *gopīs* worship him both physically and mentally. The presence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa embalms the injured hearts of the *gopīs*.

In support of this line of argument, Hanuman Prāsad Poddar explicates: “God tested his devotees. They came out successful in the test” (48). It is exhilarating to argue that the *gopīs* are the pure devotees who dedicate themselves to Śrī Kṛṣṇa both physically and mentally in the beauty of Nature. To have *rāsa līlā* with Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the aim of their lives. Unlike *gopīs*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa regards time differently. It is useful to refer Osho to clarify Śrī Kṛṣṇa's concept of time: “For him, time is tension, time is anxiety and misery” (648). Explaining this statement, one clarifies that both Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* regard their moment of reunion differently. For *gopī*, it is the moment of ecstasy but for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, it is the moment to fulfil his promise -When he was Rāma in *Tretā Yuga*, he had promised that the sages of Dandakāranya forest would be *gopīs* in *Dwāpar Yuga* and he would hug them. Thus, the *rāsa līlā* is the outcome of Lord Rāma's pledge of *Tretā Yuga*.

The appearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the middle of *gopīs* pleases them. Elaborating his argument, Śūkadeva is apt to state: “Encircled by the *gopīs*, who were now relieved of all distress, Lord Achyuta, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, shone forth splendidly”¹¹ (10: 32. 10). To strengthen the argument, one claims that sudden appearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa removes the distress of the *gopīs*. To support the idea of Nature, Prabhupāda explicates that the beauty of Nature makes the environment of reunion between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*. On that night, breeze brings the fragrance of blooming *kunda* and *mandra* flowers (637). It further proves that Nature is the ground stone of *mahārāsa*. Moving ahead in this line of logic, one claims that the moon of the autumn season challenges the darkness of that night. The role of the moon is crucial to promote reunion between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs*.

The *gopīs* realize their attraction to Śrī Kṛṣṇa from his glance. On the basis of this idea, Śūkadeva clarifies: “Expanding Himself as many times as there were cowherd women to associate with, the Supreme Lord, though self-satisfied, playfully enjoyed their company”¹² (10:33.20). With the similar belief, one argues that Śrī Kṛṣṇa uses human cloning to expand him as the number of *gopīs*. It shows that Peter Kendall, a Scottish scientist is not the first

scientist for the implementation of human cloning. Śrī Kṛṣṇa had implemented human cloning thousands of years before. In a similar vein, Hanuman Prasad Poddar presents sufficient evidences in Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa līlā*: "It was through the influence of *Yogamāyā* that Śrī Kṛṣṇa when He was only a child of seven years appeared as a grown up lad to the eyes of the damsels of Vraja" (53). With the help of influence of his *Yogamāyā*, he plays *rāsa līlā* to please *gopīs*, other creatures, and the objects of Nature.

Rāsa līlā is the divine revelation among the love stories of the world. Ultimate vision of the supreme love is exhibited with the help of *rāsa līlā*. As the voice of soul, the *gopīs* display their romantic expression with their passionate desires yearning for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Sweet songs from the *gopīs* please themselves and Śrī Kṛṣṇa. On the basis of this relation, C. L. Goswami stresses the joy of the *gopīs* during the time of *rāsa līlā* : "Their senses overwhelmed with excessive joy caused by contact with His (Divine) person and their garlands and ornaments loosed" (242). To make physical contact with Śrī Kṛṣṇa in *rāsa līlā* is the ultimate aim of the *gopīs*. The light of the silver moon and the venue of the forest make them emotional to dance enthusiastically with Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Conclusion

Rāsa līlā is the most debatable and discussed action of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāna*. It is often misinterpreted by critics who lack in depth knowledge about Śrī Kṛṣṇa. *Rāsa līlā* connects between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his devotees in which there is a union between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his devotees. Real *gopīs* had been hidden by Brahmā to test Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In their place, Śrī Kṛṣṇa creates the *gopīs* with the help of his *yogic* power. The hero dances with his own created *gopīs*. In this context, his *rāsa līlā* is like the dance of a baby who dances seeing his own reflection. Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* have divine relation. The *gopīs* are the devotees who leave their houses for the sake of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Even a pure devotee feels difficulties to leave the house for the sake of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But the *gopīs* do so easily as the devotees and they get Śrī Kṛṣṇa as a lover. *Rāsa līlā* is a meeting of the two opposite energies for the sake of creation in the world.

Rāsa līlā is the ground stone in the union of *Prakṛiti* and *Puruṣa*- male and female energies. When union occurs between the two energies, creation is possible in this world. For the sake of progress, *rāsa līlā* is necessary in the life of humans. Because of his *madhur bhāva*, the *gopīs* think Śrī Kṛṣṇa as their spouse. They have *parakiyā rāsa* because the *gopīs* who participate in *rāsa* dance are married. During the time of the divine dance, Śrī Kṛṣṇa multiplies himself into different forms as the numbers of *gopīs*. He defeats Kāmadeva in *rāsa līlā* remaining in the middle of each two *gopīs*. The *līlā* is a spiritual performance from which *gopīs* please themselves by the company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This *līlā* is the combination of *gyān* (knowledge), *karma* (work), and *bhakti* (pray). Thus, the *rāsa līlā* that takes place in the beauty of Nature, makes the *gopīs* free from anxiety in the company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

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Appendix

1. नद्यां कदाचिदागत्य तीरे निक्षिप्य पूर्ववत् ।
वासांसि कृष्णं गायन्त्यो विजहुः सलिले मुदा ॥ ७ ॥ (10:22.7)
2. हे स्तोक कृष्ण हे अंशो श्रीदामन् सुबलार्जुन ।
विशालवृषभ तेजस्विन् देवप्रस्थ वरुथप ॥ ३१ ॥ (10:22. 21)
3. दृष्ट्वा कुमुद्वन्तमखण्डमण्डलंरमाननाभं

- नवकुङ्कुमारुणम्
वनं च तत्कोमलगोभिरञ्जितं
जगौ कलं वामदृशां मनोहरम् ॥ ३॥ (10:29.3)
4. ता वार्यमाणाः पतिभिः पितृभिर्भातृबन्धुभिः ।
गोविन्दापहृतात्मानो न न्यवर्तन्त मोहिताः ॥ ८॥ (10:29.8)
5. नीवीस्तनालभननर्मनखाग्रपातैः ।
क्ष्वेल्यावलोकहसितैर्व्रजसुन्दरीणा -
मुत्तम्भयन् रतिपतिं रमयांचकार ॥ ४६॥ (10:29.46)
6. अन्तर्हिते भगवति सहसैव व्रजाङ्गनाः ।
अतप्यंस्तमचक्षाणाः करिण्य इव यूथपम् ॥ १॥ (10:30.1)
7. पृच्छतेमा लता बाहूनप्याश्लिष्टा वनस्पतेः ।
नूनं तत्करजस्पृष्टा बिभ्रत्युत्पुलकान्यहो ॥ १३॥ (10:30.13)
8. मधुरया गिरा वल्गुवाक्यया
बुधमनोज्ञया पुष्करेक्षण ।
विधिकरीरिमा वीर मुहयती -
रधरसीधुनाऽऽप्याययस्व नः ॥ ८॥ (10:31.8)
9. अटति यद्भवानहिन काननं
त्रुटिर्युगायते त्वामपश्यताम् ।
कुटिलकुन्तलं श्रीमुखं च ते
जड उदीक्षतां पक्ष्मकृद्दृशाम् ॥ १५॥ (10:31.15)
10. तं काचिन्नेत्ररन्ध्रेण हृदिकृत्य निमील्य च ।
पुलकाङ्ग्युपगुह्यास्ते योगीवानन्दसम्प्लुता ॥ ८॥ (10:32.8)
11. ताभिर्विधूतशोकाभिर्भगवानच्युतो वृतः ।
व्यरोचताधिकं तात पुरुषः शक्तिभिर्यथा ॥ १०॥ (10:32.10)
12. कृत्वा तावन्तमात्मानं यावतीर्गोपयोषितः ।
रेमे स भगवांस्ताभिरात्मारामोऽपि लीलया ॥ २०॥ (10:33.20)