

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jodem.v15i1.68922>

## **Divine Play in Vṛndāvan: An Exploration of Śrī Kṛṣṇa Līlā in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa**

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### **Abstract**

*The Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa, a cornerstone of Hindu scripture, intricately weaves together a tapestry of divine narratives relating to Śrī Kṛṣṇa līlā. The Kṛṣṇa līlā unfolds a kaleidoscope of enchanting episodes from the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the eighth incarnation of Lord Vishnu, revered as the supreme embodiment of divine love and wisdom. The Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa intricately portrays Krishna's multifaceted persona, showcasing his roles as a compassionate friend, a fearless protector, and a profound philosopher. It delves into his divine interventions, such as the lifting of Mount Govardhan to shelter the residents of Vṛndāvan from Indra's wrath, and his legendary Rāsālīlā, a celestial dance of divine love with the Gopīs, symbolizing the union of the individual soul with the Supreme. The major objects of this study are to explore Śrī Kṛṣṇa līlā in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa; to examine Śrī Kṛṣṇa līlā for our understanding of the philosophical concepts of the divine play in the text; and to evaluate Śrī Kṛṣṇa līlā in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa. For the analysis of the primary text, the researcher has used Sanātana Gosvāmī's principle of līlā. The theorist claims that humans perform different activities as līlā in their lives. The interpretative method has been used in the analysis of this article. The result drawn from this investigation is Śrī Kṛṣṇa līlā in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa serves as a timeless reservoir of spiritual wisdom and awakens to the eternal truths of love, devotion, and self-realization. The discussion concludes that the portrayal of Śrī Kṛṣṇa līlā in the Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa stands as a pinnacle of devotional literature, encapsulating the essence of divine play, love, and wisdom.*

**Keywords:** Bhāgavata, bhakti, dharma, līlā, mythical activities

### **Śrī Kṛṣṇa Līlā: An Introduction**

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, one of the most discussed texts. It delves deeply into the divine pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, known as Śrī Kṛṣṇa līlā. The līlā unfolds different episodes from the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, portraying his divine playfulness,

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compassion, and wisdom. His childhood in Vṛndāvana is particularly enchanting, characterized by his endearing antics, playful interactions with the cowherd boys and girls, and his mesmerizing flute melodies that captivate the hearts of all beings. In this connection, Śūkadeva, the narrator of the *Bhāgavata* incorporates Vṛndāvana as the setting of Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā*. In the *Bhāgavata*, Vṛndāvana is described in this way:

Between Nandeśvara and Mahāvana is a place named Vṛndāvana. This place is very suitable because it is lush with grass, plants and creepers for the cows and other animals. It has nice gardens and tall mountains and is full of facilities for the happiness of all the *gopās* and *gopīs* and our animals<sup>1</sup>. (10. 11: 28)

The aforementioned citation approves that Vṛndāvana is a suitable venue for the performance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā*. To support this idea, Pushpendra Kumar explicates that Vṛndāvana is a virgin forest with the sacred hills, pasturage, trees, and plants" ((879). It proves that Vṛndāvana was an appropriate venue for grazing cows during the time of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The *līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa includes his childhood pastimes, interactions with the cowherd boys and girls, different divine exploits in the pastoral setting of Vṛndāvana and it is primarily described in the tenth canto of the *Bhāgavata*. To clarify the importance of Vṛndāvana, sage Śūkadeva corroborates: "In this way they entered Vṛndāvana, where it is always pleasing to live in all seasons. They made a temporary place to inhabit by placing their bullock carts around them in the shape of a half moon"<sup>2</sup> (10.11: 35). To strengthen the argument, one debunks that the beauty of Nature lies in Vṛndāvana where Śrī Kṛṣṇa decides to perform his playful activities. On the basis of this idea, G. V. Tagare states that Vṛndāvana was pleasant in all seasons (1319). From this standpoint what he argues seems to be plausible and believable. Vṛndāvana, located in present-day Uttar Pradesh, India, is considered the sacred playground where Śrī Kṛṣṇa spent his childhood and performed different miraculous feats.

The *Bhāgavata* discusses how Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his elder brother Balarāma remain happy with calves in Vṛndāvana. In the words of Śūkadeva:

One day all the boys, including Kāñēa and Balarāma, each boy taking his own group of calves, brought the calves to a reservoir of water, desiring to allow them to drink. After the animals drank water, the boys drank water there also<sup>3</sup>. (10. 11: 46)

With the similar belief, one can note that tending calves and cows is the hobby of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana *līlā* in the *Bhāgavata*. In the idyllic pastoral setting of Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa's childhood is adorned with the humblest yet joyous duty of tending calves. Sanātana Gosvāmī explicates that Śrī Kṛṣṇa treats calves as his friends (27). Through

his interactions with the calves, Śrī Kṛṣṇa imparts valuable lessons to his companions and devotees about the importance of compassion, responsibility, and selfless service.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa's activities in Vṛndāvana are described as *līla*, divine play, emphasizing the notion that his actions are not bound by mundane limitations but are expressions of divine will. These pastimes, including his childhood pranks, his interactions with the cowherd community, and his amorous dalliances with the *gopīs*, are considered transcendental and serve as sources of spiritual inspiration. In the same line of argument, Śūkadeva describes: "When Rāma and Kṛṣṇa saw Vṛndāvana, Govardhana and the banks of the River Yamunā, they both enjoyed great pleasure"<sup>4</sup> (10. 11:36). Keeping it at the centre of attention, one argues that Vṛndāvana, Govardhana Hill, and the banks of the Yamunā River are the sources of entertainment for Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Basing his argument on such idea, Edwin F. Bryant ponders that "the charming figure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa enchants them with his supreme *līla*" (179). It shows that the charming figure of Śrī Kṛṣṇa affects the natural beauty of Vṛndāvana. Thus, the Vṛndāvana *līla* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavata* is cherished for its portrayal of divine love, transcendental playfulness, and spiritual profundity, making it a central aspect of Vaishnavite theology and devotion.

Vṛndāvana is a venue of merrymaking for Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Nanda Bābā, and the other members of cowherd community. In this context, Śūkadeva is apt to state: "In this way all the cowherd men, headed by Nanda Mahārāja, enjoyed topics about the pastimes of Kāñḍea and Balarāma with great transcendental pleasure, and they could not even perceive material tribulations"<sup>5</sup> (10.11:58). Vṛndāvana emerges as a sacred realm where Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the cowherd community transcend mundane existence to sublime joy and bliss. Elaborating this argument, Benjamin Preciado-Solis writes: "Kṛṣṇa is quite a natural one" (50). From such perspective, it can be argued that Vṛndāvana emerges as a sacred realm. It symbolizes the eternal abode of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, where love, laughter, and merrymaking reign supreme for eternity.

### **Problem, Objectives, and Methodology**

*Līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa at Vṛndāvana incorporates numerous miraculous events and interventions. For readers with a more rational or skeptical outlook, reconciling these miraculous occurrences with a scientific or empirical worldview are the major challenges of study. On the basis of these problems, this article answers the following research questions:

- What does Vṛndāvana *līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa unveil in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*?

- How does the exploration of *līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa contribute to our understanding of the philosophical concepts of the divine play in the text?
- Why does Śrī Kṛṣṇa perform his *līlā* at Vṛndāvana?

Based on the research questions, the major objectives of this study are to explore Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā* in the *Bhāgavata*; to examine Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā* for our understanding of the philosophical concepts of the divine play in the text; and to evaluate Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā* in the text. For this, the research questions are answered with the use of interpretative methodology. The concept of *līlā* is also part of theoretical modality for the analysis.

The theoretical tool used to support the methodology is Sanātana Gosvāmī's principle of *līlā*. The theorist argues that humans perform different activities as *līlā* in their lives (34). He further analyzes that the playful activities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa are remarkable in the *Bhāgavata*. This methodology provides in-depth study on Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā* in the text, touching on various aspects of theology, culture, literature, and broader impact on religious practices and beliefs. The researcher has used Sanskrit text of the *Bhāgavata* of Kṛṣṇa- Dvaipāyana Vyāsa with English translation and commentary by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swāmī Prabhupada as the primary source of study. Apart from the selected texts, other commentaries on the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* written in *Sanskrit*, *English*, *Hindi*, and *Nepali* languages have been taken into account. Transliteration method has been used while citing examples from those texts except A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swāmī Prabhupada's the *Bhāgavata*. While citing examples, non-English words have been written in *italics* along with the translation of Prabhupāda in English.

### Reviews on the Basic Concepts of Śrī Kṛṣṇa *Līlā*

Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the most discussed hero of the *Bhāgavata* is the centre of discussion among critics and writers from different perspectives. In this connection, Prabhupāda highlights the mythical activities of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and deals with incredible actions of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as his mythical works. For example, Nanda Baba is ready to follow the ritual for worshipping Indra, the king of Lords who causes rain on the earth. "My dear father," Lord Kṛṣṇa said, "There is no need to worship the demigod Indra. Everyone has to achieve the result of his own work" (Prabhupada 229). It is the objection of Śrī Kṛṣṇa against Indra and the same objection becomes the root of conflict between them. Furious Indra decides to punish them from the heavy rain. This objection of Śrī Kṛṣṇa establishes himself as a mythical revolutionary hero who changes the trend of worshipping from Indra to the Govardhan Hillock in the *Bhāgavata*. Elaborating this argument, Kamala Subramaniam describes anger of Indra: "The entire group of clouds which had been released by Indra travelled fast towards Vṛndāvana. All on a sudden in

Vṛndāvana, it began to rain” (462). In fact, anger of Indra changes into revenge against Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Vṛndāvana dwellers, and their cows. As the rain starts with *sāmbartak* cloud, the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana request Śrī Kṛṣṇa to save them: “Save us from the wrath of Indra and his rain clouds (qtd. in Subramaniam 462). This mythical event invites crisis for cows, calves, oxen, and the cowherd community. During the time of this crisis, Śrī Kṛṣṇa lifts up the Govardhan Hillock and uses the hillock as a huge umbrella for the safe of the cowherd community and their animal property. Revenge is the prime outcome of anger not only for humans but also for the divine beings. Śrī Kṛṣṇa wants to change the trend of worshipping from Indra to Govardhan Hillock. In this sense, he is a rebel and changes the trend of worshipping in Vraja *Bhumi*.

G.V Tagare, a translator and critic, supports the view of Subramaniam about the wrath of Indra and he mentions: "When the clouds let loose incessant downpour of showers as big as column (in volumes), the earth was inundated with torrential floods of water, and the elevations and the depressions of the ground became invisible" (1417). It shows the climax of Indra's wrath and his wrath turns into destruction by the heavy rain. As there is crisis for the cowherd community, they expect solution from Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In this situation, Śrī Kṛṣṇa has obligation for the performance of his incredible power to rescue the cowherd community and their cattle as their property. To support this idea, Tagare argues: “Kṛṣṇa, though a child uprooted with ease the mount Govardhana with one of his hands and held it up supportively as if it were a mushroom” (1418). The critic highlights the way of lifting up the Govardhana Hillock by Śrī Kṛṣṇa. This mythical action of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is one of the the most discussed mythical events in the *Bhāgavata*.

C. L. Goswāmi highlights the solution given by Śrī Kṛṣṇa from torrential rain to Vrajabhumi. He requests to the inhabitants of Vrajabhumi to come beneath the Govardhana Hill for shelter. In his words: “O mother, father, the people of Vraja, comfortably take shelter cavity beneath the mountain along with your cattle wealth” (213). It reveals the reliability in the view of Goswāmi about Śrī Kṛṣṇa's help during the time of difficulties for the inhabitants of Vraja. This mythical action of Śrī Kṛṣṇa establishes him as a rescuer. He argues that Śrī Kṛṣṇa takes the guarantee of shelter for those people when they are in need of his help. Ramesh Menon has similar interpretation about the action of Śrī Kṛṣṇa for lifting Govardhana Hillock: "Seven days, without let, Indra's storm raged all around them. But the *gopās* remained beneath the mountain, and Kṛṣṇa held it above them, never moving, and no sip of water or morsel of food passed his lips"(845). What is important is that for holding the Govardhana Hillock for seven days is beyond capacity of a mortal being on the earth.

Without superheroic power, nobody imagines lifting a hillock. This noticeable work of Śrī Kṛṣṇa draws attention of readers and they regard him as a supreme mythical hero.

To look into the broader frame of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's character, the critics and scholars stress the heroic deeds. Supporting this idea, R. K. Srinivasa Lyengar argues that “Kṛṣṇa, who holds the key to the solution of world’s problems, has been grossly devalued in post-Vyasa times” (109). There is reliability in the review of Lyengar in the mythical actions of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. No one bothers to evaluate Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Present people regard him as their equal and are curious to trace his weaknesses without the knowledge of his *līlās*. The above mythical activities were unavoidable for Śrī Kṛṣṇa and he completed the job for the benefits of others. Due to his heroic power and talent, Śrī Kṛṣṇa performs his playful activities as a real person of this world so that the miraculous mythical deeds of Śrī Kṛṣṇa create debates among critics, scholars, and interpreters.

People evaluate him according to their level of understanding, knowledge, and culture. The detailed knowledge of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as a mythic hero is available from the *Bhāgavata*, *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Gīta*, *Śrī Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, and the *Mahābhārata*. Without any knowledge of Kṛṣṇa *tattva*, the evaluation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is not justifiable. Thus, the above review on the mythical interpretation on Śrī Kṛṣṇa refers that his activities should be considered as useful lessons for practical life of human beings.

The aforementioned discussion shows that Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his activities promote his pleasures with objects and *gopīs*. The scenario of *Cīraharāṇa* evokes pleasure to him and to the *gopīs* who are taking bath in the Yamunā River. *Rāsa Līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with the *gopīs* at night postulates the climax of his romance in the text. He teaches human beings to remain happy in their lives and help other people in time of need.

### **Vṛndāvana Līla of Śrī Kṛṣṇa: A Textual Analysis**

The Vṛndāvana *līla* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* is rich and multifaceted that encompasses various playful activities. Śrī Kṛṣṇa's righteous deeds, his compassion towards all beings, and his adherence to *dharma* serve as moral exemplars for the readers, imparting lessons on virtue, duty, and spiritual conduct. The *līla* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana encompasses a significant portion of the text, depicting the enchanting and divine pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa during his childhood and youth in the sacred land. The Vṛndāvana *līla* is not merely a collection of mythological narratives but is imbued with profound spiritual significance. It serves as a source of inspiration and guidance for devotees on the path of *bhakti-yoga*, illustrating the importance of love, devotion, surrender, and selfless service in attaining communion with the divine.

### **Divine Conquests: Śrī Kṛṣṇa's Triumph over Demons**

Śrī Kṛṣṇa's triumph over demons in Vṛndāvana aptly captures the essence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's divine exploits in the sacred land. This discussion effectively conveys the theme of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's heroic deeds and victories over different demonic forces. It evokes the sense of divine intervention and the triumph of righteousness over evil, showcasing Śrī Kṛṣṇa's role as the ultimate protector and savior of his devotees. The demons which attack Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvana are in the forms of animals. Bakāsura, a demon in the form of a gigantic crane, terrorizes the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana by attacking them and causing havoc. One day, as the cowherd boys, including Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, are herding the cows near the Yamuna River, Bakāsura appears and challenges Śrī Kṛṣṇa to a fight. Bakasura opens his beak wide, ready to devour Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa displaying his divine prowess, accepts the challenge fearlessly. The incident is narrated by Sūkadeva:

Kāññā, who was the father of Lord Brahmā but who was acting as the son of a cowherd man, became like fire, burning the root of the demon's throat, and the demon Bakāsura immediately disgorged Him. When the demon saw that Kāññā, although having been swallowed, was unharmed, he immediately attacked Kāññā again with his sharp beak<sup>6</sup>. (10.11:50)

The above discussion contemplates Śrī Kṛṣṇa's divine Nature and his role as a leader of the cowherd community as he defeats the powerful demon effortlessly and protects the cowherd community. It also highlights Śrī Kṛṣṇa's playful and mischievous demeanor, even in the face of danger, showcasing the intimate relationship between Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his devotees in the pastoral setting of Vṛndāvana. Moving ahead in this line of logic, Ramesh Menon analyzes: "Bakasura felt he had swallowed a ball of fire, that is how Krishna burned his throat" (771). It is important to remember that killing the demon Bakāsura is a part of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's childhood pastimes in Vṛndāvana.

After the death of Bakāsura, the cowherd community in Vṛndāvana is initially filled with fear and astonishment but feel safe when Śrī Kṛṣṇa showed miraculous feat performed by killing the demon. In this context, it is necessary to cite the argument of Sūkadeva:

When the cowherd men and women heard about the killing of Bakāsura in the forest, they were very much astonished. Upon seeing Kāññā and hearing the story, they received Kāññā very eagerly, thinking that Kāññā and the other boys had returned from the mouth of death. Thus they looked upon Kāññā and the boys with silent eyes, not wanting to turn their eyes aside now that the boys were safe.<sup>7</sup> (10.11:54)

Kamala Subramaniam writ about the joy of the cowherd community after the death of Bakāsura. In her words: "Balarama and other boys rushed to Krishna and embraced him" (412). It shows Śrī Kṛṣṇa's divine nature and his role as their true friend and guardian. It strengthens their resolve to continue their lives in Vṛndavan, immersed in the blissful company of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, and devoted to serving him with unwavering love and devotion.

In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa*, the story of Aghāsura demon is a captivating episode that illustrates the divine expertise of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Aghāsura is a monstrous serpent demon, the brother of Bakāsura, lures Śrī Kṛṣṇa and his friends into his deadly trap. With the support of this idea, Śūkadeva Gosvāmī postulates:

While Kṛṣṇa was considering how to stop them, all the cowherd boys entered the mouth of the demon. The demon, however, did not swallow them, for he was thinking of his own relatives who had been killed by Kāñēa and was just waiting for Kāñēa to enter his mouth.<sup>8</sup> (10.12:26)

Above-mentioned example confirms that all the boys, along with their cattle, have entered the demon's mouth, Aghāsura swiftly closes his jaws, trapping them inside. But Śrī Kṛṣṇa, ever vigilant and omniscient, immediately senses the danger and understands the true nature of the serpent. Prabhupāda says: "Kṛṣṇa is the assurance of safety to everyone" (118). This explanation further supports that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the ray of hope during the time of crisis in the cowherd community. In a spectacular display of transcendental power, Śrī Kṛṣṇa vanquishes Aghāsura, destroying the demon's vile manifestation and liberating his soul from its wicked deeds. Aghāsura's colossal body erupts in a radiant explosion, dispersing into the cosmic ether and marking the end of his malevolent reign. Effect of Aghāsura's death is expressed by Śūkadeva in this way:

Thereafter, everyone being pleased, the demigods began to shower flowers from Nandana- kānana, the celestial dancing girls began to dance, and the Gandharvas, who are famous for singing, offered songs of prayer. The drummers began to beat their kettledrums, and the Brāhmaēas offered *Vedic* hymns. In this way, both in the heavens and on earth, everyone began to perform his own duties, glorifying the Lord.<sup>9</sup> (10.12:34)

After the victory over the Aghāsura demon, the *Bhāgavata* recounts a scene of immense joy and celebration among Śrī Kṛṣṇa's companions, cowherd boys, and their cattle. Osho too catches this feat: "Krishna's fame will be heading towards its peak, moving towards the pinnacle of its brilliance" (5). This extraordinary episode further cements Śrī Kṛṣṇa's status as the beloved friend and guardian of *gopās*, inspiring countless souls to seek refuge in his divine embrace and experience the unparalleled joy of pure devotion.



### Divine Deception: Brahmā's Mischief

Driven by curiosity and a desire to test Śrī Kṛṣṇa's divine powers, Brahmā orchestrates a cunning scheme to disrupt the transcendental pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Using his mystic potency, Brahmā discreetly takes away the cowherd boys and their beloved calves, intending to observe Śrī Kṛṣṇa's reaction to this apparent loss. In this context, the *Bhāgavata* presents the view of Śrī Kṛṣṇa:

Let Me go and search for the calves," Kāñēa said. "Don't disturb your enjoyment." Then, carrying His yogurt and rice in His hand, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, Kāñēa, immediately went out to search for the calves of His friends. To please his friends, he began searching in all the mountains, mountain caves, bushes and narrow passages<sup>10</sup>. (10.13:14)

Devdutt Pattanaik sums up the effect of trick of Brahma: "Shyam realized what Brahma was up to" (89). Śrī Kṛṣṇa's love and care for his companions, both human and animal, exemplify his divine qualities of compassion and devotion to his devotees.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa performs a miraculous feat known as *Virātarupa* (universal form), where he expands himself into multiple forms to become simultaneously both the cows and the cowherd friends who were lost in the forest. This event is expressed in the text in this way: "Thereafter, just to create pleasure both for Brahmā and for the mothers of the calves and cowherd boys, Kāñēa, the creator of the entire cosmic manifestation, expands himself as calves and boys"<sup>11</sup>(10.13: 18). This event shows Śrī Kṛṣṇa's ability to manifest multiple forms simultaneously, each imbued with his divine presence, is a demonstration of his omnipotence and divine nature. To comfort and reassure them, Śrī Kṛṣṇa manifests his divine powers and expands himself into identical forms of each and every cow and cowherd friend.

This story is cherished by devotees of Śrī Kṛṣṇa for its depiction of his divine play (*līlā*) and his unwavering devotion to those who love and worship him. Moving ahead in this line of logic, Śūkadēva Gosvāmī explicates: "In this way, Çré Kāñēa, having Himself become the cowherd boys and groups of calves, maintained himself by himself. Thus he continued His

pastimes, both in Vāndāvana and in the forest, for one year"<sup>12</sup> (10. 13:27). Çré Kāñēa understanding Brahma's intentions decides to respond with his divine power. He expands himself into exact replicas of each of the kidnapped cowherd boys and calves. Each replica has the same appearance, characteristics, and memories as the original, so much so that even their parents and friends couldn't discern any difference. In this connection, Prabhupāda comments that Çré Kāñēa's expansion is situated in everyone's

heart as the Supersoul (685). It teaches the lesson of humility and the recognition of the divine presence in all beings, regardless of their form.

Brahmā wanted to surprise Çré Kāñëa by hiding cows and cowherd boys but he was surprised himself by the playful activities of Çré Kāñëa. Brahmā experiences regret and seeks forgiveness from Çré Kāñëa. On this ground, Śūkadeva Gosvāmī tries to clarify himself with the argument:

After seeing this, Lord Brahmā hastily got down from his swan carrier, fell down like a golden rod and touched the lotus feet of Lord Kāñëa with the tips of the four crowns on his heads. Offering his obeisance, he bathed the feet of Kāñëa with the water of his tears of joy<sup>13</sup>. (10. 13:62)

It proves that the *līlās* of Çré Kāñëa are not understood even by Brahmā in the *Bhāgavata*. In Hindu philosophy, the idea of seeking forgiveness or redemption from the divine is deeply ingrained. So, if Brahmā were to seek forgiveness from Çré Kāñëa, it would symbolize a universal acknowledgment of the need for divine grace and guidance in the face of cosmic responsibilities and challenges.

### Śrī Kṛṣṇa's *Rāsa Līlā*

The *Bhāgavata* discusses *Rāsa Līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa with *gopīs* of Vraja in five chapters (twenty nine to thirty three) of the tenth *skandha* (canto). Monier Williams gives detail of *Rāsa Līlā*: "*Rāsa* is the dance of one male with several females" (qtd in Solis 84). In *Rāsa Līlā*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is with several *gopīs*. He remains in the centre to please all of them. It is an interesting playful activity of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in which there is the involvement of a large number of *gopīs* (Filion 504). It takes place in the full moon night of autumn season in the forest of Vṛndāvana. The *Rāsa Līlā* has its connection to Nature for its utility to human beings and other creatures. It shows how there is attraction between *Prakṛiti* and *Purūsa*. Śūkadeva deals with beauty of Nature: "Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Supreme Personality of Godhead, full in all opulence, yet upon seeing those autumn nights scented with blossoming jasmine flowers, He turned His mind toward loving affairs"<sup>14</sup> (*Śrīmad Bhāgavata Mahāpurāṇa* 10. 29: 1). Richness in Natural beauty motivates Śrī Kṛṣṇa dance with *gopīs* in the forest. Śrī Kṛṣṇa has intention to link the beauty of Nature to the beauty of the *gopīs*. In a similar note, it is crucial to remember the amalgamation of the natural beauty with the beauty of women. In this connection, Swāmī Sivananda argues that he was cupid for *gopīs* (19). He becomes the source of everlasting peace and bliss during the time of *Rāsa Līlā* at night in the forest of Vṛndāvana. *Rāsa Līlā* is par excellence form of Śrī Kṛṣṇa *līlā*.

For *gopīs*, their lover is the embodiment of *sṛṅgāra-rasa*- feeling of beauty and they are excited by his presence. Prabhupāda argues: "They expect eagerly that Kṛṣṇa will come to meet them again. It shows that the *gopīs* want to continue *Rāsa Līlā* of

Kṛṣṇa. The *geet* relieves the agony of those suffering from the burning pain of separation from Kṛṣṇa and which bestows supreme consciousness" (611). It reflects queries of *gopīs* for the memory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in their maddened condition of separation. For the sake of consolation, as the *gopīs* start singing the song, their position changes from beloveds to devotee. They are really good devotee who leave their houses for the sake of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

Keeping the love of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in their hearts, the *gopīs* express their nostalgia as follows: "When You leave the cowherd village to herd the cows, our minds are disturbed with the thought that Your feet, more beautiful than a lotus, will be pricked by the spiked husks of grain and the rough grass and plants"<sup>15</sup> (10. 31: 11). This discussion oscillates that the *gopīs* do not like to see and hear the pain of Śrī Kṛṣṇa during the time of tending cows in the pasture of Vraja. They are sensitive not to hurt him from any natural objects when he is far from them. On the basis of this relation, Richa Pauranik Clements claims that "In the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, *viraha bhakti* is primarily associated with the *gopīs*" (136). When Kṛṣṇa is not seen, *gopīs* are worried about the probable obstacles that Kṛṣṇa might be facing in forest. From this evidence, it is clear that the *gopīs* are really about Śrī Kṛṣṇa more than their own lives.

When Śrī Kṛṣṇa suddenly appears among them in a silken yellow garment with a flower garland, the anxiety of separation is quickly dispelled. The *gopīs* realize that Śrī Kṛṣṇa understands their agony during the time of his absence. From the presence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the *gopīs* forget their anxieties and become happy with his company. As Śrī Kṛṣṇa comes to the bank of the Yamunā River, they make a seat for him using their shawls. Due to excessive devotion of those *gopīs*, there is the reappearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa among them which is a matter of ecstasy for them. In this regard, Sūkadēva makes apt comment: "One *gopī* respects Kṛṣṇa in her eyes and places Him within her heart. Having closed her eyes, the thirsty *gopī* of love embraces Him within. The *gopī* has the realization of the transcendental ecstasy meditating upon the Lord"<sup>16</sup> (10. 32: 8). This discussion reveals the suppressed emotions of the love-lorn *gopīs*. It explains why *gopīs* are portrayed as the ornaments of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The appearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes the *gopīs* worship him both physically and mentally. The presence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa embalms the injured hearts of the *gopīs* and they express their love from their eyes, hearts, and activities. They tolerate sorrows but do not make any inconvenience for him. They love both Nature and Śrī Kṛṣṇa without any sign of complaints. In this regard, Śrīnāth Paṇḍita comments that "Kṛṣṇa is the soul, the topmost *Purūṣa*" (Filion 96). Being *nirguṇa*, Śrī Kṛṣṇa engages in romance with the divine *gopīs* (Filion 110). The moment of reunion is the base of bliss for the sake of the *gopīs*.

It is evident that *gopīs* forget their distress of separation from the sudden appearance of Śrī Kṛṣṇa among them. For them, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the goal and substance in their lives and they feel great relief from his reappearance. The beauty and purity of Nature creates background of reunion for them. The context is presented in this way:

The almighty Lord then took the *gopīs* with Him to the bank of the Kālindī, who with the handle of her waves had scattered piles of soft sand upon the shore. In that auspicious place, the breeze, bearing the fragrance of blooming *kunda* and *mandāra* flowers, attracted many bees.<sup>17</sup> (10. 32: 12)

In this context, Nature is the most visible aspect for the clarification of the *Rāsa Līlā* in the *Bhāgavata*. Hanumanprasād Poddar explains how a child Kṛṣṇa could play *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 from his *Yogamāyā*, he plays the sports of *rāsa* dance. The night time with beautiful scenario of forest plays a crucial role as the background for the *Rāsa Līlā*.

The base of Śrī Kṛṣṇa *caritra* is the eagerness of mind and independence of thoughts. Śūkadēva describes the scenario of the *rāsa* dance: "The festive *rāsa* dance commenced, with the *gopīs* arrayed in a circle. Lord Kṛṣṇa expanded Himself and entered between each pair of *gopīs*, and as that master of mystic power placed His arms around their necks, each girl thought He was standing next to her alone"<sup>18</sup> (10. 33: 3). This idea is the ultimate implementation of the *Yogic* Power of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. It should be appraised that dance is the point of focus for the *gopīs* but not Śrī Kṛṣṇa (Jarow 115). Devdutt Pattanaik discusses *Rāsa Līlā* that at the beginning of the *rāsa* dance, Śrī Kṛṣṇa had a single form. Then, he disappears and appears again and multiplies himself into many forms (98). It is an incredible matter for readers to believe that a person changes into different forms as the time of need. His work is as the works of a magician in front of the *gopīs*. It hints that Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes impossible works possible from his *yogic* power.

The above discussion suggests that the *Rāsa Līlā* "is a meeting of contradictory forces, and that all its happiness comes from this union of the opposites" (Osho 256). It is related to the union between the energies of male and female for creation. On the base of this argument, one realizes the union between *Prakṛiti* (female energy) and *Puruṣa*-male energy. Without the union of these two opposite energies, there is no creation in this world. This divine dance symbolizes the flow of male and female attraction. The attraction between the two opposite forces is inevitable for the existence of the creation of plants and animals. In the similar vein, there is the existence of planets and stars in the universe from the existence of the opposite forces (Osho 260).

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From the *Rāsa Līlā*, human beings come to know the fact that the attraction between a man and a woman is natural.

### Conclusion

The Vṛndāvana *Līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the *Bhāgavata* encapsulates a profound exploration of divine love, devotion, and the eternal play of the divine in the pastoral setting of Vṛndāvana. The residents of Vṛndāvan, especially the *gopīs*, exhibit unparalleled love and devotion towards Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Their selfless love transcends all worldly attachments and serves as a profound example of devotion to God. Śrī Kṛṣṇa's interactions with the cowherd boys and girls are characterized by his divine playfulness and grace. His *līlās* are not mere mortal actions but are imbued with profound spiritual significance, illustrating the eternal play of the divine. The *līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa at Vṛndāvana highlights the concept of divine *līlā*, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa's actions transcend the laws of *karma*. His divine will guides the unfolding of events, emphasizing the ineffable nature of the divine plan. The pinnacle of the Kṛṣṇa *Līlā* is the *Rāsa Līlā*, where Śrī Kṛṣṇa engages in a mystical dance with the *gopīs*. This divine dance symbolizes the ultimate union of the individual soul with the Supreme Soul, illustrating the highest expression of love and spiritual ecstasy.

### Appendix

1. वनं वृन्दावनं नाम पशव्यं नवकाननम् ।  
गोपगोपीगवां सेव्यं पुण्याद्रितृणवीरुधम् ॥ २८ ॥ (10.11:28)  
*vanaà vândävanaà nâma paçavyaà nava-kânanam*  
*gopa-gopé-gavâà sevyâà puëyâdri-tãëa-vérudham*
2. वृन्दावनं सम्प्रविश्य सर्वकालसुखावहम् ।  
तत्र चक्रुर्जावासं शकटैरर्धचन्द्रवत् ॥ ३५ ॥ (10. 11:35)  
*vândävanaà sampraviçya sarva-kâla-sukhävaham*  
*tatra cakrur vrajävâsaà çakaöair ardha-candravat*
3. स्वं स्वं वत्सकुलं सर्वे पाययिष्यन्त एकदा ।  
गत्वा जलाशयाभ्याशं पाययित्वा पपुर्जलम् ॥ ४६ ॥ (10.11:46)  
*svaà svâà vatsa-kulaà sarve päyayiñyanta ekadä*  
*gatvä jalâçayâbhyâçâà päyayitvä papur jalam*
4. वृन्दावनं गोवर्धनं यमुनापुलिनानि च ।  
वीक्ष्यासीदुत्तमा प्रीती राममाधवयोर्नृप ॥ ३६ ॥ (10.11:36)  
*vândävanaà govardhanaâyamunâ-pulinâni ca*  
*vékñyâséd uttamâ prété räma-mâdhavayor nâpa*
5. इति नन्दादयो गोपाः कृष्णरामकथां मुदा ।  
कुर्वन्तो रममाणाश्च नाविन्दन् भवेदनाम् ॥ ५८ ॥ (10.11:58)  
*iti nandâdayo gopâù kãñëa-râma-kathâà mudä*  
*kurvanto ramamäëäç ca nävindan bhava-vedanäm*
6. तं तालुमूलं प्रदहन्तमग्निव –  
द्गोपालसूनुं पितरं जगद्गुरोः ।  
चच्छर्द सद्योऽतिरुषाक्षतं बक –  
स्तुण्डेन हन्तुं पुनरभ्यपद्यत ॥ ५० ॥ (10.11:50)

*taà tãlu-mũlaà pradahantam agnivad  
gopãla-sũnuà pitaraà jagad-guroù  
caccharda sadyo 'turuñãkñataà bakas  
tuèðena hantuà punar abhyapadyata*

7. श्रुत्वा तद्विस्मिता गोपा गोप्यश्चातिप्रियाहताः ।

प्रेत्यागतमिवौत्सुक्यादैक्षन्त तृषितेक्षणाः ॥ ५४ ॥ (10.11:54)

*çrutvä tad vismitã gopã gopyaç cãtipriyãdãtãù  
pretyãgatam ivotsukyãd aikñanta tãñitekñããù*

8. तावत्प्रविष्टास्त्वसुरोदरान्तरंपरं

न गीर्णाः शिशवः सवत्साः ।

प्रतीक्षमाणेन बकारिवेशनं

हतस्वकान्तस्मरणेन रक्षसा ॥ २६ ॥ (10.12:26)

*tãvat praviñöös tv asurodarãntaraà  
paraà na gërëùù çìçavaù sa-vatsãù  
pratékñamãëena bakãri-veçanaà  
hata-sva-kãnta-smaraëena rakñasã*

9. ततोऽतिहृष्टाः स्वकृतोऽकृतार्हणं

पुष्पैः सुरा अप्सरसश्च नर्तनैः ।

गीतैः सुगा वाद्यधराश्च वाद्यकैः

स्तवैश्च विप्रा जयनिःस्वनैर्गणाः ॥ ३४ ॥ (10.12:43)

*tato 'tihãñöùù sva-kãto 'kãtãrhaëã  
puñpaiù sugã apsarasaç ca nartanaù  
gétaiù surã vãdya-dharãç ca vãdyakaiù  
stavaiç ca viprã jaya-niùsvanair gaëù*

10. इत्युक्त्वाद्रीदरीकुञ्जगह्वरेष्वात्मवत्सकान् ।

विचिन्वन् भगवान् कृष्णः सपाणिकवलो ययौ ॥ १४ ॥ (10.13:14)

*ity uktvādri-daré-kuijagahvareñv ätma-vatsakän*

*vicinvan bhagavän kãñëaü sapäëi-kavalö yayau*

11. ततः कृष्णो मुदं कर्तुं तन्मातृणां च कस्य च ।

उभयायितमात्मानं चक्रे विश्वकृदीश्वरः ॥ १८ ॥ (10.13:18)

*tataü kãñëo mudaë kartuë tan-mätëëää ca kasya ca*

*ubhayäyitam ätmänaë cakre viçva-käd éçvaraü*

12. इत्थमात्माऽऽत्मनाऽऽत्मानं वत्सपालमिषेण सः ।

पालयन् वत्सपो वर्षं चिक्रीडे वनगोष्ठयोः ॥ २७ ॥ (10.13:27)

*ittham ätmätmanätmänaë vatsa-päla-miñëëa saü*

*pälayan vatsapo varñaa cikréde vana-goñöhayoü*

13. दृष्ट्वा त्वरेण निजधोरणतोऽवतीर्य

पृथ्व्यां वपुः कनकदण्डमिवाभिपात्य ।

स्पृष्ट्वा चतुर्मुकुटकोटिभिरङ्घ्रियुगं

नत्वा मुदश्रुसुजलैरकृताभिषेकम् ॥ ६२ ॥ (10.13:62)

*dãñövä tvareëa nija-dhoraëato 'vatérya*

*pãthvyää vapuë kanaka-daëðam iväbhipätya*

*spãñövä catur-mukuöa-koöibhir aighri-yugmaë*

*natvä mud-açru-sujalair akätäbhiñëkam*

14. भगवानपि ता रात्रीः शरदोत्फुल्लमल्लिकाः ।

वीक्ष्य रन्तुं मनश्चक्रे योगमायामुपाश्रितः ॥ १ ॥ (10.29:1)

*bhagavän api tärättriḥ śārdotphulla-mallikāḥ*

*vīkṣya rantuṁ /manaś cakre yoga-māyām upāśritaḥ*



15. चलसि यद्वजाच्चारयन् पशून्

नलिनसुन्दरं नाथ ते पदम् ।

शिलतृणाङ्कुरैः सीदतीति नः

कलिलतां मनः कान्त गच्छति ॥ ११ ॥ (10.31:11)

*calasi yad vrajāc cārayan paśūn*

*nalina-sundaram nātha te padam*

*śila-trṇāṅkuraiḥ sīdatīti naḥ*

*kalilatām manah kānta gacchati*

16. तं काचिन्नेत्ररन्ध्रेण हृदिकृत्य निमील्य च ।

पुलकाङ्ग्युपगुह्यास्ते योगीवानन्दसम्प्लुता ॥ ८ ॥ (10.32:8)

*tam kachin netra- randhrena hardikrtva nimilya ca*

*pulakangy upaguhyaste vgivananda- sampluta*

17. शरच्चन्द्रांशुसन्दोहध्वस्तदोषातमः शिवम् ।

कृष्णाया हस्ततरलाचितकोमलवालुकम् ॥ १२ ॥ (10.32:12)

*śarac-candrāmāśu-sandoha- dhvasta- doṣā-tamaḥ śivam*

*kṛṣṇāyā hasta-taralā cita-komala-vālukam*

18. रासोत्सवः सम्प्रवृत्तो गोपीमण्डलमण्डितः ।

योगेश्वरेण कृष्णेन तासां मध्ये द्वयोर्द्वयोः ।

प्रविष्टेन गृहीतानां कण्ठे स्वनिकटं स्त्रियः ॥ ३ ॥ (10.33:3)

*rāsotsavaḥ sampravṛtto gopī-maṇḍala-maṇḍitaḥ*

*yogeśvar eṇa kṛṣṇena tāsām madhye dvayor dvayoh*

*praviṣṭena grhītānām kaṇṭhe sva-nikaṭam striyaḥ*

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