



Received: 02-10-2023
Accepted: 12-11-2023

International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies

ISSN: 2583-049X

Intrinsic Nature of Krishna's Raslila

Mukta Sathisha

School of Life Sciences, Division of Languages, JSS Academy of Higher Education and Research, Mysuru, Karnataka, India

Corresponding Author: Mukta Sathisha

Abstract

Krishna's rasalila with the gopikas of Vraj, is played out by Krishna before Krishna leaves for Dwarka. There has been much debate about Krishna playing with other's wives by summoning them in the middle of the night in Vraj. His escapades with Radha have been the subject of discourse in several works, paintings, treatises, and scriptures. Krishna's episodes with the gopikas of Vraj also find mention in the hymns of the propounders of the Bhakti movement namely Sri Chaitanya in West Bengal and Meerabai in Rajasthan. According to several interpretations of the Bhagavata

Purana, the union between Radha and Krishna is an example of the ultimate spiritual and blissful union between the *jeevatma* (individual soul) and *paramatma* (Supreme Soul). This is because according to many scriptures, Radha was another incarnation of Lord Vishnu himself. This was also the reason why Krishna never got married to Radha since it would entail Krishna marrying himself. The Radha and Krishna love story is an instance of the zealous pursuit of spirituality which culminates in the union of Radha-the individual self, with Krishna-the universal self.

Keywords: Gopikas, Supreme Reality, Rasalila, Yogamaya

Introduction

The Bhagavata Purana is one of 18 Mahapuranas. It has a total 335 chapters, and 18000 verses divided into 12 Cantos. The first canto has 19 chapters, the second canto has 10 chapters, the third Canto has 33 chapters, the fourth Canto has 31 chapters, the 5th Canto has 26 chapters, the 6th Canto has 19 chapters, the 7th Canto has 15 chapters, the 8th Canto has 24 chapters, the 9th Canto has 24 chapters, 10th Canto has 90 chapters, 11th Canto has 31 chapters, and the 12th Canto has 13 chapters (Gitananda & Vyasa, 2014)^[3].

The Bhagavat Purana contains the stories of the divine sport of Lord Vishnu. Several episodes of the Mahabharata like the story of Krishna's birth, subduing of Kaliya by Krishna as a child, Vidhura and Udhava dialogues, the story of Prahlada, etc have been described in the Bhagavata in language which is simple and lucid to understand. After composing the Bhagavata, Vyasa asked his son Shukadeva to narrate it to the rest of the world. The *raslilas* of Krishna are included in the 10th chapter of the Bhagavata Purana. Krishna's cosmic victory in his battles with the serpent Kaliya at the Jumna River and his battle with Indra at Mount Govardhan is beautifully represented in the Bhagavata in a lucid manner. These episodes of Vrindavan were the major themes of sculptures from 500 to 1500 A.D (Hawley, 1979)^[5].

Krishna's childhood antics were an intrinsic part of his *lila*. Even as an infant Krishna accomplished superhuman feats by slaying of demons like Putana which find mention in the Bhagavat Purana as well. Though Putana was liberated, everyone including his own foster mother Yashoda forgets that he is the Lord of the Universe (Schelling, 2013).

The Real Identity of the Gopikas of Brindavan

In the Tretha Yuga, when Lord Rama along with Sita had stayed in the forest called Dandaka, at that time there were some sages who were the worshippers of Gopala. Just like Sita, they too had the wish to worship their chosen deity (Sri Krishna). It was these sages who were later born as gopis in Brindavan (Gitananda & Vyasa, 2014)^[3]. These gopis belong to a class of those who were born as gopis owing to their spiritual practices. Again, even in this class there are two divisions: one group is the group of gopis who are of the same age as that of the eternally perfect gopis are their close friends. Because of this close friendship, they too had become eternally perfect and were free from their attachment to their husbands and family members. They brushed aside the prohibitions and objections from their family members and would always go to meet Krishna. Those

gopis who had grown old were not close friends with the eternally perfect gopis. As a result, they had not attained pure devotion to God, and because of that they still had some attachment towards their family members. These were the gopis who could not go to the venue of *raslila* and staying in their homes became absorbed in the meditation of Sri Krishna. According to Vyasa's Bhagavat Purana, God cannot be attained as long as we have attachment to worldly things just as a thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle even if the tiniest fibre of the thread sticks out (Gupta, 2012)^[4].

Those who could not go to the venue of *raslila* became absorbed in meditation on Krishna and suffered excruciating pain caused by their separation from him. As a result, all their accumulated sins were washed away. In their meditation itself they embraced Krishna and experienced supreme bliss and because of this their accumulated merits were also washed away. In this way as their accumulated merits as well as sins were exhausted simultaneously, their *prarabdha* karma (Sadhguru, 2021)^[8] also came to an end. Resultantly, these gopis were liberated from their worldly bondage that very moment. They gave up their mortal bodies and became united with the Supreme Reality, Krishna.

The gopis had realised that Krishna resided in every living as consciousness. He was the divinity present in their husbands, children, and relatives. Thus, by serving Krishna, they knew that their husband, children and relatives were naturally served. They knew that immersing in only worldly affairs would give them sorrow and suffering, so they would always prey to Sri Krishna to always be please with them so that they could get everlasting happiness and bliss.

Jayadeva's treatise 'Gita Govinda' is of great literary value in Sanskrit's literary corpus. Jayadeva has described Krishna's intense emotions towards Radha and other devotees in rich poetic artistry. Through a figment of his devout imagination, poets like Jayadeva have immortalised Krishna, his moods and his intense love for Radha (De, 2022)^[2].

In Swami Vivekananda's words, one cannot understand the spirit of *rasalila* unless the mind becomes completely merged in God, unless it becomes fully pure. One must first forget the love for gold, name and fame and then and only then could they understand the love of the gopis who were too sacred to be understood until the soul was perfectly pure. He said that people whose minds were bubbling up every minute with ideas of sex, money and fame could never understand the love of the gopis. Even the Gita, the great philosophy itself does not compare with the madness of the gopis, for in the Gita the devotee is taught to slowly walk towards the goal, whereas the *rasalila* is the madness of enjoyment, the drunkenness of love, where disciples, books, teachers, teachings, ideas of God and heaven all become one; everything has been thrown away. What remains is the madness of divine love. It is the forgetfulness of everything, and the lover sees nothing in the world except that of Krishna and Krishna alone, the face of every being becomes Krishna and the devotee's own soul becomes tinged with the Krishna colour. The gopis were to able grow above their ego consciousness through their devotion to such an extent that the distinction between themselves and Krishna vanished completely, and they thought that they were Krishna himself. (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, 2016)^[6].

The gopis were attracted by Krishna's extremely beautiful gait, pure smile pure love, affectionate glance delightful talks, his various sports and all other things related to him. When Krishna was in Vraj, (lying between Mathura-Vrindavan in Uttar Pradesh), they had become fully absorbed in Krishna's thoughts and began to imitate his behaviour, ways, attitudes, smile, etc. They started to introduce themselves to others saying that they were Krishna. They had completely lost their existence as gopis (Gitananda & Vyasa, 2014)^[3].

The gopis were the very life force of Krishna, they were his parts. Just as fire and its burning power are not different, so are Krishna and the gopis. Only for the sake of enjoyment of the sport, they sported in two different bodies. When God incarnated as Chaitanya in the 14th century AD, Krishna and Radha had sported only in one body. But in God's incarnation as Krishna, he sported as two separate bodies of Krishna and Radha. This means that Krishna himself had sported with himself. The important thing to be noted is that the gopis were Krishna's parts-they were not separate from him.

Krishna's Divine Sport through his Raslila in Brindavan

According to Hindu philosophical thought, *rasalila* is considered to be Krishna's divine sport where the gopis of Brindavan tasted spiritual bliss by dancing with him and their spiritual ecstasy was considered as an illusionary reflection of the soul's original and eroticized love for Krishna (Walters, 2016)^[10]. When we think of *raslila* we think of erotic sentiments. But the truth is there is not even a trace of anything worldly in it. *Raslila* is that which gives us liberation. The only sentiment present in it is the sentiment of devotion (*bhakti*) and liberation (*mukti*). *Bhakti* as a concept means total devotion and self-less surrender to the Supreme Lord. According to the Sanathan Dharma there are three ways of attaining God. The first is through Gyana Yoga as described by scholars like Shankaracharya. The second was through Karma Yoga which emphasises on the philosophy of performing action without bothering about the results. The third is through *Bhakti* Yoga where love for the devotee's chosen deity is the supreme emotion (Pande, 2019)^[7].

Raslila can be said to be the festival of union of Krishna, who is the embodiment of pure consciousness, pure love, and pure knowledge, with the gopis, who were the embodiments of pure devotion. It is the union of the supreme soul and the individual soul. It is the story of the mutual surrender of God and the devotee. In the *raslila*, the devotee gets God fully for oneself, and even God as per the wish of the devotee, gets bound in the loving embrace of the devotee. Thus, the festival of *rasa*, is the festival of the sweet, indescribable union between the devotee and God. Lord Krishna, dancing with the gopis, showed in his *raslila* that the only way to conquer the unconquerable Cupid, is to take refuge at his feet. During the *raslila*, Lord Krishna, using his six great powers viz. Splendour, strength, glory, prosperity, knowledge, dispassion and the power of Yogamaya (girl child born to Yashoda, with whom Vasudeva exchanged Krishna also considered to be the incarnation of Durga) created an illusionary world at Vraj which was seen and experienced only by the Gopis, but not their families. By completely losing himself in the love of the gopis, Krishna did whatever he liked. Many of the incidents of the *raslila* were completely supernatural, but

Krishna accomplished it through Yogamaya. If Krishna had to do it all alone using his six great powers, then he would not have been able to lose himself completely with the gopis. The gopikas were dearer to him than his own self. This was the reason he took the help of Yogamaya (Gitananda & Vyasa, 2014)^[3].

In order to love the gopis, in other words, in order to love the human beings, Krishna wished to sport. In the *rasalila*, it is seen that if we love God, he accepts that love and loves us in return. Thus, if any spiritual aspirant succeeds in tuning one's heart with the tune ringing in the hearts of the gopis, whose souls are lost in Krishna, he too will without doubt, be able to rightly understand and assimilate Krishna's *raslila*. This erotic theme of Krishna's *rasalila* was a spiritual quest of reunion of the gopikas with Krishna and their separation was a fitting representation of a lost world by singers of the Bhakti movement (Trumper, 2020)^[9].

Krishna is the one who fulfils the wishes of his devotees. When the gopis' eagerness to give joy to Krishna through their loving service reached its peak, Krishna wished to accept their service; and the moment he wished, the environment around changed and assumed a form suitable for *raslila*. In the light of full moon night, Krishna played a sweet tune on his flute to summon the gopis. This is the tune which increases one's love for God. When the gopis, whose heart was stolen by Krishna heard this tune, they became madly restless. Without letting others know about their love tryst, they rushed towards their beloved who was the very form of love. Through Krishna's *raslila*, the body consciousness of the gopikas, was totally effaced and the four kinds of elements of the personality; physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual could be merged in the divine.

Intrinsic Meaning of Krishna Summoning his Devotees

Krishna summoning his devotees by playing his flute symbolises that God is eternally summoning us, but we fail to hear his call. This is because we are not yet ready to hear his call. Our mind still has many impurities. A simple analogy would be that a magnet does not attract the iron if the iron is covered with mud. The moment the mud is removed, the magnet draws the iron towards itself. Similar is the relationship between the Supreme Soul and the individual soul. If we succeed in giving up our identification with the body and become pure, we will feel God's attraction-we will be able to hear his flute (Gitananda & Vyasa, 2014)^[3].

Krishna is the incarnation who is the inner controller residing in the hearts of the gopis, their husbands, as well as all the living beings as the Supreme Self. Therefore, there is no one separated from him, not even somebody else's wives. He has become all. It is only externally that we see the sport between Krishna and the gopis. But seen inwardly, it is nothing but the union of the Supreme Self with its own divine energy in the form of the individual selves. The Supreme Self has sported with its own self and this sport is going on throughout the universe. It is only for blessing us that Krishna assumes a human form and engages in such charming sports, so that by listening to his sports, by meditating on it, human beings can turn towards him. Under the influence of Krishna *lila* or sport, the husbands of the gopis found their respective wives present near them. This was because Krishna himself assumed the form of the gopis living with their respective husbands. During this period, the husbands also lived in divine ecstasy. So, they did not blame

Krishna. In this way, the whole Vraj was thronging with divine madness. The gopis, after having spent that long night with Krishna, sought his permission and went back to their homes. Therefore, Krishna did not sport with other's wives, but he sported with himself, just as a child play with its own reflection. The difference between God and devotee vanished and merged in the divine and divinity alone existed. This is a form of *bhakti* which represents the infinite bliss of Krishna and their love is the manifestation of the gopikas intense, unsatisfied and selfless desire for Lord Krishna (Chakravarty, 2018)^[1].

Conclusion

Shukadeva, while narrating the Bhagavata to the saints and sages who had gathered told them that whoever hears or recites again and again the account of Krishna's amorous dalliances with gopis with deep faith in the divinity of Krishna, attains the highest devotion and during development of the devotion, he overcomes lust, an important component of *maya*, the universal heart disease of mankind. When Krishna observed that the gopikas had become proud of their beauty and assume a sense of self-importance, he suddenly disappeared with view to purify them through suffering and make them worthy of his grace. Having lost the love of their hearts, the gopikas suffered unbearable pain because of the separation. They started praying earnestly that he would appear before them again. This sport of Krishna demonstrates that intense yearning and the love of God is the only thing need in a human life to attain eternal happiness. There can be no other greater attainment for a person who is desirous of leading a spiritual life.

References

1. Chakravarty S. Radha, a Social Rebel: Female Sexuality in the Vaishnava Padavalis of Bengal. The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society. 2018; 8:43-56. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v08i02/43-56>
2. De S. Moods of the "Madhusudana" in Jayadeva's "Gita Govinda": A Theological Analysis, 2022. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/2F6GYN>
3. Gitananda. Translated by S., & Vyasa, attributed to. Srimad Bhagavata: The Book of Divine Love (First edition). Advaita Ashrama, 2014.
4. Gupta M. Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna. Sri Ramakrishna Math, 2012.
5. Hawley J. Krishna's Cosmic Victories. Journal of the American Academy of Religion. 1979; 47. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/XLVII.2.201>
6. NA. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. ADVAITA ASHRAMA, 2016.
7. Pande R. Hinduism and the concept of Bhakti, 2019.
8. Sadhguru. Karma: A Yogi's Guide to Crafting Your Destiny. Penguin Ananda, 2021.
9. Trumper MF. Lord Krishna as a Symbol of Covert Resistance in a Female genre of 20th-century India, 2020.
10. Walters H. Playing God: Participant Frameworks in the Ras Lilas of Krishna. The Journal of Religion and Popular Culture. 2016; 28(2-3):p135.