

# Sri Krishna of Vrindavana.

( THE LORD OF RASA AND RĀSA )

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Religion is the food of the soul and hence we must take the utmost care about what is essential for, what is the real and vital essence of, our being. Matthew Arnold defined it in a brief and telling way as morality touched with emotion. It is certainly much more. It is the realization of our essential nature as *Sachchidānanda*. But its pivotal points are certainly morality and emotion. If it is not based on morality, it will lose its light. If it is not based on emotion, it will lose its warmth. It is not mere morality or philosophy or art, but these are its next-of-kin. Holiness is not mere ceremonial purity but is the sublimation of morality. Further, religion must include morality and art and philosophy and also transcend them.

It is usual to connect Religion with Theism, and Philosophy with the Absolute. It has been well said that ultimacy and immediacy and intimacy are of the essence of religion. It is wrong to describe the Absolute as an abstraction. The Absolute is God viewed apart from His relation to the world. God is the Absolute viewed in relation to the world. Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa makes it clear to us in two verses in the *Gītā* that He, the Supreme Personal God, is the basis of the Absolute and of the Eternal *Dharma* and the Supreme Bliss, and is also the enjoyer of all sacrifices and austerities and the Overlord and Friend of all—

ब्रह्मणो हि प्रतिष्ठाहममृतस्याव्ययस्य च ।

शाश्वतस्य च धर्मस्य सुखस्यैकान्तिकस्य च ॥

(XIV. 27)

भोक्तारं यज्ञतपसां सर्वलोकमहेश्वरम् ।

सुहृदं सर्वभूतानां ज्ञात्वा मां शान्तिमृच्छति ॥

(V. 29)

Thus religion is the realization of God. The mere exaltation of Nature or Humanity to divine heights does not satisfy the highest cravings of the human soul. If God is regarded in a merely anthropomorphic or in a merely supernatural way, that does not satisfy our highest cravings either. The personal God as the God of Beauty, and Love and Grace, who is at the same time omnipresent and omniscient and omnipotent, has an irresistible appeal to us and satisfies our highest cravings. He guides and rules the universe and conserves the highest values of existence.

It is, therefore, clear that monism and monotheism are not contradictory, but are consistent with each other and are but the obverse and reverse sides of the highest Religion, just as the Absolute and God are but two aspects of the One—out of relation to the world and in relation to the world. There is a beautiful stanza in the *Bhāgavata*, which says that God is called *Brahma* and *Paramātmā* and *Bhagavān* (ब्रह्मेति परमात्मेति भगवानिति शब्द्यते). The Upaniṣads describe *Brahma* as *Ānanda* or *Rasa* (आनन्दं ब्रह्मेति व्यजानात् । रसो वै सः । रसं ह्येवायं लब्ध्वाऽऽनन्दी भवति). The Purāṇas and Itihāsas describe Him as Beauty and Love and Grace.

The glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is that He draws all hearts to Himself by attracting them in one way or another. The *Bhāgavata* describes Him as the Supreme in Its fulness (कृष्णस्तु भगवान् स्वयम्) and as पूर्णब्रह्म (the infinite *Brahma*). He exhibited His Majesty and Supremacy in other places and at other times, but in Vrindāvana, as the cowherd (*Gopāla*),

He revealed Himself as a Friend and Lover.

अहो भाग्यमहो भाग्यं नन्दगोपत्रजौकसाम् ।  
यन्मित्रं परमानन्दं पूर्णं ब्रह्म सनातनम् ॥

I referred above to the concept of God as *Rasa*. In Śrī Kṛṣṇa we see all the *Rasas* in a state of fulness. We see the *Vira* and *Raudra* and *Bhayānaka* and *Bibhatsa* *Rasas* in the *Viśvarūpa* chapter of the *Gītā*. Refined humour or *Hāsya Rasa* is found in the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata*. The *Rasas* of *Śṛṅgāra* and *Karūṇa* and *Bhakti* and *Śānti* naturally predominate in him. Śrīdhara says in his commentary on the following verse in the *Bhāgavata* that it refers to all the nine *Rasas*:—

महानामशनिर्चृणां नरवरः स्त्रीणां सरो मूर्तिमान्  
गोपानां स्वजनोऽसतां क्षितिभुजां शास्ता स्वपित्रोः शिशुः ।  
मृत्युभोजपतेर्विराडविदुषां तत्त्वं परं योगिनां  
वृष्णीनां परदेवतेति विदितो रङ्गं गतः साग्रजः ॥

“The Lord on entering the stage with His elder brother (Śrī Balarāma) appeared as a thunderbolt to the wrestlers, as a paragon among men to the spectators, as Love personified to the ladies present there, as a kinsman to the Gopas (cowherds), as a chastiser to wicked princes, as a child to His parents, as Death to Kamsa (the Lord of the Bhoja clan of Kṣatriyas), as a monster to the ignorant, as the Ultimate Reality to the Yogis and as the Supreme Deity to the Vṛṣṇis (the clansmen of Śrī Kṛṣṇa).”

Rūpa Goswami has written a work called *Ujjvala Nīlamanī* (the radiant Sapphire). In it the *Madhura Rasa*, which is the highest form of *Bhakti* (higher than *Śānti*, and *Dāsya*, *Sakhya* and *Vātsalya*) is described as the Supreme *Rasa* (*Ujjvala Rasa*). For this *rasa*, he describes *Kṛṣṇa-rati* (the love of Śrī Kṛṣṇa) as the *Sihāyibhāva*. In *Bhagavadbhaktichandrikāmṛta-rasollāsa*, it is said that supreme devotion must be accepted as a *rasa* by the expert enjoyers of *Rasas* (पर भक्तिः प्रोक्ता रस इति रसास्वादनचपैः). Though according to

the orthodox æsthetic schools the number of *Rasas* is only eight, *Śānti Rasa*. *Bhakti* should certainly be added as an additional *rasa*—nay, as the highest of the aforesaid *Rasas*. Its *Ālambana Vibhāva* is God, the Eternal Beauty and the Eternal Beloved; its *Uddīpana Vibhāva* is the sum-total of His *Vibhūtis*; its *Anubhāvas* are tears of joy, etc.; and its *Vyabhichāribhāvas* are supreme delight, etc. Indeed, the *Bhāgavata* says in VII. i. 2—

तस्माद्भोविन्दमाहात्म्यमानन्दरससुन्दरम् ।  
शृणुयात्कीर्तयेन्नित्यं स कृतार्थो न संशयः ॥

It thus refers to *Ānanda Rasa* and says that the Lord's glory is beautiful because of that *rasa*. *Ānanda* (bliss) is different from *sukha* (pleasure). Pleasure is of the lower variety of sensuality or of the higher variety of sensuousness. It is sensual or sensuous according as it is gross or refined. The description of Rāvaṇa's harem in the *Sundara-Kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa* is the description of sensual pleasure. The description of the Yakṣa's abode in the second part of Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta*, is the description of sensuous pleasure. But in either case the approach to such pleasure is by the mind through the senses to the outward objects. But in joy or bliss, the mind's wanderings cease and the soul is at rest. The soul's true nature has unhindered expression. When the soul's innate bliss is realized in its infiniteness beyond name and form, we have *Nirguṇa Brahmānanda*. When it is realized in devotion to the infinite Personal God, it is *Saguṇa Brahmānanda*. When it is realized in rapturous realization and expression of the loveliness of the divine self-expression in nature and in living beings, we have *Sāhitya-Kalānanda* (the bliss of literature and art). Well has Viśwanātha called in his *Sāhitya-Darpaṇa* the joy of artistic enjoyment and creativeness as *Brahmānanda-sahodara*

(akin to the Bliss of God-Realization). If we enjoy the beautiful as unrelated to God, it is sensuous pleasure (सुख). If we enjoy it as an expression of the Divine Glory (*Vibhūti*), the delight is *Ānanda* (bliss).

Thus Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the Lord of the Supreme *Rasa*, i. e., the *Ānanda-Rasa*. To use the language of the æsthetic technicians, its *Ālambana Vibhāva*\* is the Infinite Personal God. There is no bliss in what is petty and limited. 'भूमा वै सुखं, नाल्पे सुखमस्ति । आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वाञ्च विभेति कुतश्चन'. Its *Uddīpana Vibhāva*† is (His Infinite Beauty, Love and Grace and includes not only Śyāmasundara (His beautiful violet hue) but also all His beautiful, radiant, auspicious and eternal aspects (*Vibhūtis*). Madhusūdana Saraswati says well:—

पराकृतनमद्ग्रन्थं परं ब्रह्म नराकृति ।  
सौन्दर्यसारसर्वस्वं वन्दे नन्दात्मजं महः ॥

"I bow to that mass of effulgence in the shape of the Darling of Nanda, who cuts asunder all bonds of those who bow to Him, who is the Supreme Reality in human shape, and who is the essence and totality of all beauty."

He even prefers the glory of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's infinite and eternal beauty, love and grace to the *Akhaṇḍa Sachchidānanda* of the realization of *Nirguṇa Brahma*. He says:—

ध्यानाभ्यासवशीकृतैर्न मनसा तन्निर्गुणं निष्क्रियं  
ज्योतिः किञ्चन योगिनो यदि परं पश्यन्ति पश्यन्तु ते ।  
असाकं तु तदेव लोचनचमत्काराय भूयाच्चिरं  
कालिन्दीपुलिनोदरे किमपि यन्नीलं महो धावति ॥

"Let the Yogis behold, if they so choose, with their mind controlled by meditation and other spiritual practices,

\* That on which a *Rasa* or sentiment hangs, the person or thing with reference to which a sentiment arises.

† That which excites or feeds a sentiment.

the Supreme Effulgence which is actionless and devoid of attributes. As for ourselves, let that violet Effulgence ever be before our eyes which is seen running to and fro on the banks of the Jamuna."

That renowned Adwaitī further says:—

"I know of no Reality higher than Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who has a flute in one of His hands, whose complexion is like the hue of a cloud laden with moisture, whose lips are ruddy like the fruit of the *Bimba* tree, whose charming countenance is bright as the full moon, and whose eyes are beautiful as a pair of lotuses."

The *Anubhāvas*\* of the *Ānanda-Rasa* are a calm radiance of face and form, tears of joy, love of all, etc. Its *Vyabhichāribhāvas*† are a quivering and rapturous delight at all His *Līlās* in creation, and all the nine forms of devotion. We can understand the significance and value of the *Rāsa* episode only if we realize it as the supreme external manifestation of *Ānanda-Rasa* by devotional music and dance amidst and under the enchantments of earth and sky.

शरच्छशिकरैर्मृष्टं मानयन् रजनीसुखम् ।

गायन् कल्पदं रेमे स्त्रीणां मण्डलमण्डनः ॥

(*Bhāgavata*. III. ii. 34)

The story of Śrī Kṛṣṇa's life and teachings is gatherable from the *Mahābhārata*, *Harivaṃśa*, *Bhāgavata*, *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa*, *Brahma-Purāṇa*, *Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa*, *Skanda-Purāṇa*, *Vāmana-Purāṇa* and *Kūrma-Purāṇa*. In the last-mentioned three *Purāṇas* it is briefly narrated, but it is extensively described in the other works. In the

\* An external manifestation or indication of a feeling (भाव) by appropriate symptoms, such as by look, gesture, etc.

† A transitory feeling, an accessory, as opposed to a *Sthayibhava*. (Though like the *Sthayibhavas* these accessories do not form a necessary substratum of any *rasa*, still they act as feeders to the prevailing sentiment, and strengthen it in various ways, whether openly or covertly.)

*Mahābhārata* we find His life from the time when He comes in contact with the Paṇḍavas and the Kauravas. His earlier life is found described in the *Harivaṃśa*. His earlier life and His later life are beautifully described in the *Bhāgavata*. In the *Brahmaivaivarta-Purāna* the Rādhā episode is fully described.

It is often said by our critics and opponents that there was a sensual element in the *Rāsa* episode. Even the admirers of Śrī Kṛṣṇa have spoken about it in an apologetic tone. One of such admirers is good enough to say that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was not immaculate like Rāma but that His youthful loves did not go beyond violent flirtations. But we must remember that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was then only a boy of eleven years of age. It must be further remembered that though Śiśupāla abuses Śrī Kṛṣṇa and refers to the Gokula episode, he does not abuse Śrī Kṛṣṇa as an immoral person. *Rāsa* means merely a dance. The *Rāsa-Kṛidā* was merely a circular dance. Lilāśuka describes it thus:—

अङ्गनामङ्गनामन्तरे माथवा माथवं माथवं चान्तरेणाङ्गना ।  
इथमाकल्पिते मण्डले मध्यगः संजगौ वेणुना देवकीनन्दनः ॥

Jayadeva says in the *GitaGovinda*:—

राससे सहस्रत्यपरा हरिणा युवतिः प्रसदासे ।

In the *Harivaṃśa*, the word used is not *Rāsa*, but *Hallīśa*. In the *Lalitā-Triśati* the Devī is called हल्लीशलास्यसन्तुष्टा. What right have we to import any ideas of sensuality into it? Swami Vivekananda says well: "And what a love! I have told you just now that it is very difficult to understand the love of the Gopis. There are not wanting fools, even in the midst of us, who cannot understand the marvellous significance of that most marvellous of all episodes. ...For them I have only to say, first make yourselves pure, and you must remember that he who tells the history of the love of the Gopis is

none else but Śukadeva. The historian who records this marvellous love of the Gopis is one who was pure, the eternally pure Śuka, the son of Vyāsa... People with ideas of sex, and of money, and of fame, bubbling up every minute in the heart, daring to criticize and understand the love of the Gopis! That is the very cream of the Kṛṣṇa incarnation. Even the *Gītā*, the great philosophy, itself does not compare with that madness; for in the *Gītā* the disciple is taught slowly how to walk towards the goal, but here is the madness of enjoyment, the drunkenness of love, where disciples and teachers and teachings and books, and all these things have become one, even the ideas of fear and God and heaven. Everything has been thrown away. What remains is the madness of love. It is forgetfulness of everything and the lover sees nothing in the world except that Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa alone, when the face of every being becomes a Kṛṣṇa, when his own face looks like Kṛṣṇa, when his own soul has become tinged with Kṛṣṇa-colour. That was the great Kṛṣṇa.'

I may refer to Śrī Śuka's explanations when Parīkṣita asked him why Śrī Kṛṣṇa sported with other men's wives. Śrī Śuka says at first that when divine persons act in an apparently improper way, they are not affected thereby and that we must not dare to act in a similar way. This was stated by him only to curb a tendency in us to behave so. He then says that Śrī Kṛṣṇa was a *Nirahankāri* (free from the ego-sense) and an *Aptakāma* (one who has his desires fulfilled), and had no desires and could in no wise be affected by the sport. In fact, in other portions of the work he has said:—

विभ्रद्रपुः सकलसुन्दरसन्निवेशं कर्माचरन् भुवि सुमङ्गलमाप्तकामः ॥

(XI. 1. 10)

रेमे रमेशो ब्रजसुन्दरीभिर्यथार्थकः स्वप्रतिबिम्बविभ्रमः ॥

(X. 33. 17)

"The Lord of Lakshmi sported with the damsels of Vraja as a child does with its shadow or reflection."

His was a spiritual touch, though some of the maidens may have harboured carnal desires towards Him. But even such desires were sublimated at once because of their object. He Himself says in the *Gītā*:—

अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो भजते मामनन्यभाक् ।  
साधुरेव स मन्तव्यः सम्यग्व्यवसितो हि सः ॥  
क्षिप्रं भवति धर्मात्मा राक्षसच्यवन्तिं निगच्छति ।  
कौन्तेय प्रति जानीहि न मे भक्तः प्रणश्यति ॥

“Even if the most sinful worship Me with undivided heart, he too must be accounted righteous; for he has rightly resolved. Speedily he becomes pious and goes to eternal peace. Know thou for certain, O son of Kuntī, that My devotee never perishes.”

Nay, He says in the *Gītā*:—

धर्माविरुद्धा भूतेषु कामोऽस्मि भरतर्षभ ।

“In beings, I am desire not inconsistent with virtue, O paragon among the descendants of Bharata.”

He says to Uddhava:—

बाध्यमानोऽपि मद्भक्तो विषयैरजितेन्द्रियः ।  
प्रायः प्रगल्भया भक्त्या विषयैर्नाभिभूयते ॥

“A devotee of mine who has not yet been able to control his senses and who feels irresistibly drawn towards the sense-objects is generally not overpowered by these objects through his intense devotion.”

Jaimini says:—

हृदि भावयतां भक्त्या भगवन्तमधोक्षजम् ।  
यः कोऽपि दैहिको दोषो जातमात्रो विनश्यति ॥

“If there is any carnal weakness still lurking in the mind of those who remember the Lord with devotion, it vanishes as soon as it appears.”

Bhīṣma says:—

कृष्ण कृष्णेति जपतां न भवो नाशुभा मतिः ।  
प्रयान्ति मानवास्ते तु तत्पदं तमसः परम् ॥

“Those who repeat the names of Śrī Kṛṣṇa are never born into this world

again, nor are they haunted by evil thoughts. They attain that region which is beyond darkness.”

He says in the *Viṣṇu-Sahasranāma*:—

न क्रोधा न च मात्सर्यं न लोभो नाशुभा मतिः ।  
भवन्ति कृतपुण्यानां भक्तानां पुरुषोत्तमे ॥

“Those blessed souls who are devoted to the Supreme Being are never obsessed by anger, jealousy, greed or vicious thoughts.”

Thus, even if some maidens approached Him with desire (*Kāma*), they had that *Kāma* (desire) sublimated into *Bhakti* (devotion). Śrī Śuka further says that while even His devotees are freed from bondage, He could not be deemed to be bound by the *Rāsa-Kṛiḍā*. He says further that the Lord assumed a human form and acted in a human way so that even men given to desire may become drawn to Him for ever and ever. Śrīdhara says in his commentary on verse 30 of chapter 33:—

शृङ्गाररसाकृष्टचेतसोऽतिवहिर्मुखानपि स्वपरान् कर्तुं तादृशीः  
क्रीडा बभाज ।

Śrī Śuka further says that the husbands of the wives who took part in the *Rāsa-Kṛiḍā* had their wives by their side and never blamed Him, and that the wives went back in the early morning to their homes. He finally urges that God is always in touch with all of us and is our Lord and Bridegroom always and everywhere.

This is not all. Śuka—the purest of men—praised the *Rāsa* episode as the greatest purifier of human hearts. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that he who hears or describes the episode will get the purest devotion to God and will conquer the ailments of the soul and become a man of self-control:—

विक्रीडितं व्रजवधूमिरिदं च विष्णोः  
श्रद्धान्वितोऽनुशृणुयादथ वर्णयेद्यः ।  
भक्तिं परां भगवति प्रतिलभ्य कामं  
हृद्रोगमाश्रपहिनोत्यचिरेण भीरः ॥

Śrīdhara interprets 'धीरः' as meaning *Jitendriya*. This is proved also by the fact that the greatest *Dhīra* and *Jitendriya* of all climes and times—the great *Bhīṣma*—refers to the episode thus:—

ललितगतिविलासवल्लुहासप्रणयनिरीक्षणकल्पितोरुमानाः ।  
 वृत्तमनुकृतवत्य उन्मदान्धाः प्रकृतिमगन् किल यस्य गोपवध्वः ॥  
 ( I. ix. 40 )

"The cowherdesses whose vanity was tickled by the sportive gait, graceful movements, captivating smile and amorous looks of the Lord and who were blinded by passion, attained oneness with Him by mimicking His sports."

The words *Amkaraṇa* and *Prakṛti* in the above verse show that the devotee feels and speaks and acts in unison with the Deity. Nay, *Nārada* in his *Bhakti-Sūtras* has mentioned the *Gopīs* as the highest exemplars of supreme devotion to God ( यथा व्रजगोपिकानाम् ). The *Gopī* episode has evoked the love and artistic expression of countless generations during countless centuries, and it is the height of prudery or ignorance to allow our prurient imagination to contaminate it, and then to condemn it. Śrīdhara says well:—

तसाद्रासक्रीडाविडम्बनं कामविजयाख्यापनायेत्येव तत्त्वम् ।  
 शृङ्गारकथापदेशेन विशेषतो निवृत्तिपरेयं रासपद्माध्यायी ।

"Therefore, the truth is that the Lord enacted this drama of *Rāsa* simply to show to the world how carnal desire can be conquered. These five chapters describing the *Rāsa-Līlā* particularly aim at other-worldliness, though masquerading as a love-story."

Three verses in the *Bhāgavata* give us the real clue to the *Rāsa-Kṛidā*. The *Gopīs* who were unable to go for the dance meditated on the Lord and attained final beatitude, burning up their sins by the grief of eparation and their merits by their embrace of Him in meditation—

दुस्सहप्रेषविरहतीव्रतापयुताशुभाः ।  
 ध्यानप्राप्ताच्युताश्लेषनिर्वृत्या क्षीणमङ्गलाः ॥

When some of the *Gopīs* who came to the *Jamuna* for the *Rāsa-Kṛidā* were proud of their good fortune, the Lord disappeared from their midst to make them calm and equable in mind.

तासां तत्सौभाग्यमदं वीक्ष्य मानञ्च केशवः ।  
 प्रशमाय प्रसादाय तत्रैवान्तरधीयत ॥

Further, the *Gopīs* knew Him to be the God incarnate and to be the Lord of *Lakṣmī*. This is quite clear from their song ( the *Gopikā-Gīta* ).

न खलु गोपिकानन्दनो भवा-

नखिलदेहिनामन्तरात्मदृक् ।  
 विखनसार्थितो विश्वगुप्तये  
 सख उदेयिवान् सात्वतां कुले ॥  
 × × × ×  
 करसरोरुहं कान्त कामदं  
 शिरसि धेहि नः श्रीकरग्रहम् ।

"Thou art not a mere child of a *Gopī* ( *Yasodā* ); Thou art the perceiver of the inner self of all embodied beings. It is in response to the prayer of *Brahmā* ( the Creator ) that Thou hast taken birth in the clan of *Yādavas* for the protection of the world.....Be pleased to place Thy lotus hand on our heads, O beloved Lord, the hand which is the bestower of all boons and which has espoused the hand of the Goddess of Fortune."

It must be remembered that Śrī *Kṛṣṇa* never went to *Gokula* again but sent *Uddhava* to them with a most lofty and moving message.

This is not all. I referred above to the possibility—if there be a possibility—of a few maidens having approached Śrī *Kṛṣṇa* with a desire. But most of the *Gopīs* were not of that category at all. The clue is given by *Kṛṣṇopaniṣad*. The opening sentence in it—

श्रीमहाविष्णुं सच्चिदानन्दलक्षणं रामचन्द्रं दृष्ट्वा सर्वाङ्गसुन्दरं  
 मुनयो वनवासिनो विस्मिता बभूवुः ।

—is similar to the famous verse in the *Āraṇya-Kāṇḍa* of the *Rāmāyaṇa*:—

रूपं संहननं लक्ष्मीं सौकुमार्यं सुवेषताम् ।  
ददृशुर्विस्मिताकारा रामस्य वनवासिनः ॥

“The recluses residing in the Dandaka forest looked upon the captivating features, graceful looks, delicacy of form and the beautiful attire of Śrī Rāma with wonderment.”

The Upaniṣad says that the sages loved Śrī Rāma and wanted to be with Him and enjoy His company, and that He asked them and the gods and the Vedas to be born as Gopas and Gopis during His Kṛṣṇa-incarnation. Further, a well-known verse says that among the women, the matrons loved Him as the protector of Gaṇendra, the adolescents loved Him as the Lord of Lakṣmī, and the maidens loved Him as a handsome youth—

गजत्रातेति वृद्धाभिः श्रीकान्त इति यौवतैः ।  
यथास्थितश्च बालाभिर्दृष्टः शौरिः सकौतुकम् ॥

Further, the *Bhāgavata* says that the unmarried cowherd girls, while going daily to the Jamuna to bathe therein, used to pray to Gaurī Devī to make them brides of Nanda Gopa's boy.

कात्यायनि महामाये महायोगिन्यधीश्वरि ।  
नन्दरोपसुतं देवि पतिं मे कुरु ते नमः ॥  
इति मन्त्रं जपन्त्यस्ताः पूजां चक्रुः कुमारिकाः ।  
कृष्णमुच्चैर्जगुर्यान्त्यः कालिन्ध्या नातुमन्वहस ॥

What right have we to assume that all the Gopis who went for *Rāsa-Kṛīḍā* were wives or had carnal desires in their hearts ?

I shall now proceed to deal with a few miscellaneous aspects. Some scholars have ventured to say that the *Rāsa-Kṛīḍā* episode is not true, because in the *Mahābhārata* Śiśupāla, while abusing Śrī Kṛṣṇa, does not call him an immoral person. We must remember that in that public assembly he was referring in the main to the public life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Nay, the following verses show that he attacked the entire career of Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Gokula:—

पूतनाघातपूर्वाणि कर्माण्यस्य विशेषतः ।  
त्वया कीर्तयतास्माकं भूयः प्रव्यथितं मनः ॥  
यत्र कुत्सा प्रयोक्तव्या भीष्म बालतरैर्नरैः ।  
तमिमं ज्ञानवृद्धः सन् गोपं संस्तोतुमिच्छसि ॥

“Thou hast pained us by specially recounting his deeds beginning with the killing of Pūtanā. It is really strange that thou, O Bhiṣma, who art so advanced in knowledge and wisdom, shouldst take it in thy head to extol a cowherd who deserves censure even at the hands of ignorant fools.”

In the same *Sabhā-Parva* Bhiṣma says:—

काकपक्षधरः श्रीमान् श्यामपद्मनिभेक्षणः ।  
श्रीवत्सेनोरसा युक्तः शशाङ्क इव लक्ष्मणा ॥  
रज्जुयज्ञोपवीती स पीताम्बरधरा युवा ।  
श्वेतगन्धानुलिप्ताङ्गो नीलकुञ्चितमूर्धजः ॥  
राजता बर्हपत्रेण मन्दमारुतकम्पिना ।  
कचिद्भायन् कचित् क्रीडन् कचिन्तुल्यन् कचिद्धसन् ॥  
गोपवेणुं सुमधुरं गायंस्तदपि वादयन् ।  
प्रह्लादनार्थं च युवा कचिद्धनगतो युवा ॥

“The youthful Lord wore side-locks of hair on His temples and had eyes resembling blue lotuses. He had a curl of hair on His bosom, which adorned it like the spot in the moon. He wore the sacred thread on His person and was clad in yellow robes. He had His body anointed with white unguent and wore bluish curls on His head. He had a crest of peacock feather on His head, which shook even in the mild breeze. Now He sang songs, at other times He danced and sported and sometimes He made merry. And occasionally He repaired to the woods and played melodious notes on His flute with a view to enrapturing His devotees”.

Some critics seek to give the *Mahābhārata* a higher place than *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* by pointing to the fact that the former is an *Itihāsa* and is called पञ्चमो वेदः (the fifth Veda), while the

latter is only a *Purāna* (a mythological work). But there is no hierarchy among *Purānas* and *Itihāsas*. Both illustrate and explain the *Vedas* (इतिहासपुराणाभ्यां वेदं समुपबृंहयेत्). Some persons go the length of saying that *Śrīmad Bhāgavata* is not one of the *Purānas*. The great *Śrīdhara* has demolished this criticism and it is needless for me to do that work over again.

It is thus clear that the criticism that *Śrī Kṛṣṇa*, who came to establish *Dharma* and punish *Adharma*, would not have violated *Dharma* by the *Rāsa-Kṛīḍā* has no point at all. There was no violation of *Dharma* in *Rāsa-Kṛīḍā*. Nor is it necessary to resort, in justifying the episode, to any such casuistry as saying that the story about the episode was only an allegory or was only an *Athavāda* in praise of the *Vidhi* \* 'सर्वधर्मान् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज' (Abandoning all duties, take shelter in Me alone), though the latter point has a real truth and significance of its own as illustrated by the life of *Mira Bai*. The *Rāsa* episode was but the manifestation of the supreme *Ānanda-Rasa*. Very few of the *Gopīs* were wives and they did not even remember their worldly status, their houses, and their families or even themselves.

तन्मनस्कास्तदालापास्तद्विचेष्टास्तदात्मिकाः ।  
तद्गुणानेव गायन्त्यो नात्मागाराणि संस्मरुः ॥

They refer in the *Gopikā-Gīta* to the fact that His feet will cleanse all sins, and ask Him to place on their breasts His lotus feet, that had danced on the heads of *Kāliya*, the serpent—

प्रणतदेहिनां पापकर्षणं  
तृणचरानुगं श्रीनिकेतनम् ।  
फणिफणार्पितं ते पदाम्बुजं  
कृणु कुचेषु नः कृन्धि हृच्छयम् ॥

Any worldly desire that some of them might have had became purified

\* An injunction of a binding nature.

into devotion and it was that devotion that led them to God-Realization.

कामं क्रोधं भयं स्नेहमैक्यं सौहृदमेव च ।  
नित्यं हरौ विद्धतो यान्ति तन्मयतां हि ते ॥

(*Bhagavata* X. 29. 15)

"Those who have *Śrī Hari* as the perpetual object of their lust, anger, fear, affection, friendship or unifying love are absorbed in Him."

तावद्रागादयः स्तेनास्तावत्कारागृहं गृहम् ।  
तावन्मोहोऽङ्घ्रिनिगडो यावत्कृष्ण न ते जनाः ॥

(*Ibid.* X. 14. 96)

"Attachment and other weaknesses lurk in our mind, the home keeps us in bondage, and infatuation hampers our progress only so long as we do not become Thine, O *Kṛṣṇa*."

न मय्यावेशितधियां कामः कामाय कल्पते ।  
भर्जिता कथिता धाना प्रायो बीजाय नेष्यते ॥

(*Ibid.* X. 23. 26.)

"The desire of those who have their mind fixed on Me does not tend to bear fruit (in the shape of transmigration), just as a cereal which has been parched or boiled is no longer fit for being sown."

Sage *Nārada* spoke to *Yudhiṣṭhira* thus:—

गोप्यः कामाद्भयात्कंसो द्वेषाच्चैद्यादयो नृपाः ।  
सम्बन्धाद् वृष्णायः स्नेहाद्युयं भक्त्या वयं विशो ॥

(*Ibid.* VII. i. 90)

"The *Gopīs*, O king, attained the Lord through Love, *Kamsa* through fear, *Śiśupāla* and other hostile kings through enmity, the *Yādavas* through kinship, yourselves (the *Pāṇḍavas*) through affection, and ourselves through devotion."

प्रातर्ब्रजाद्भजत आविशतश्च सायं  
गोभिः समं कणयतोऽस्य निशम्य वेणुम् ।  
निर्गम्य तूर्णमवलाः पथि भूरिपुण्याः  
पश्यन्ति सस्मितमुखं सद्योवलोकम् ॥

(*Ibid.* X. xiv. 16)



“As He went out of Vraja in the morning and returned in the evening with His herd of cows, playing on His flute, the blessed ladies of Vraja hurried out of their homes on hearing the dulcet tunes and were delighted to behold His smiling face and kind looks.”

It is strange that the innermost essence of the *Rāsa* episode has been better assimilated by such a person as Miss Tyabji in her recent work entitled “The Heart of a Gopi” than by many Hindus themselves. But that is as He pleases. It seems to me that there was no more violation of morality in the *Rāsa* episode than there was in the *R̥ṣipatni* episode, where the real secret of the philosophy of God-love is well stated:—

प्राणबुद्धिमनःस्वात्मदारापत्यधनादयः ।

यत्सम्पर्कस्त्रियया आसंस्ततः को न्वपरः प्रियः ॥

“Who can be dearer than Śrī Kṛṣṇa, whose contact makes our life, intellect, mind, nay, our very self, our wife, progeny and wealth, etc. dear to us ?”

The Gopīs loved their husbands all the better for their devotion to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, because such devotion purged their family love of all its dross and fanned it into a purer and brighter flame.

Within the limited space of this brief article it is not possible to go into greater detail about the *Rāsa* episode. But it is worth mentioning here that a very charming account of it is found in the *Kṛṣṇa-Karṇāmṛta* of Līlāsūka. In that famous work poetry and philosophy and religion and spiritual realization meet and mingle in a most extraordinary way. In the verse already quoted (अङ्गनामङ्गनाम्, etc.) we must remember that Śrī Kṛṣṇa in the middle of the *Rāsa*-ring had no maiden by his side but was Himself singing and playing on the flute.

Equally remarkable is the equally famous work—*Gīta-Govinda* of Jayadeva. The very word *Rādhā* suggests *Āradhana* or worshipful devotion. The theme

of the wonderful book of songs is the inseparable union of the soul and the Oversoul. In the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* yet another aspect has been presented to us. The glory of the Goloka, of which the presiding deities are Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā Devī, is rapturously described in it in the *Kṛṣṇajanma-Khaṇḍa*. The *Purāna* explains why the name *Rādhā* should be uttered before the name *Kṛṣṇa*. In the 28th chapter Rādhā prays to Śrī Kṛṣṇa:—

त्वत्पदाब्जे मन्मनोऽलिः सततं भ्रमतु प्रभो ।

पातुं भक्तिरसं पत्रे मधुपञ्च यथा मधु ॥

मदीयप्राणनाथस्त्वं भव जन्मनि जन्मनि ।

त्वदीयचरणान्भोजे देहि भक्तिं सुदुर्लभाम् ॥

“Let my mind incessantly hover like a bee about Thy lotus feet in order to suck the honey of devotion trickling therefrom. Be Thou my Lord in every birth and grant me the rare boon of devotion to Thy lotus feet.”

There is in the descriptions in this *Purāna* a consciousness which is not found in the *Bhāgavata Purāna*. Another great work about Śrī Kṛṣṇa is Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha's *Śrī Kṛṣṇa-Līlā-Taranginī*. It says that in the *Rāsa-Kṛīḍā* the Gopīs danced to Śrī Kṛṣṇa's songs and realized the truth of His teachings—

नृत्यन्तस्तेन तद्गीतं गायन्त्यो रासमण्डले ।

तेनोपदिष्टमद्वैतमनुकुर्वन्ति मानतः ॥

I may make here a brief reference to the beautiful description of the *Rāsa* episode in the hymns of the Alvars (saints of South India). These hymns are called *Tiruvaimozhi*. The most rapturous descriptions of the *Nāyaka-Nāyikā-bhāva* and of *Rāsa-Kṛīḍā* are in Nammalvar's hymns and in Andal's *Tirupavai*. There is in them a thrill and a glow which put them far beyond and much higher than any poems in Sanskrit, though the latter excel them in metaphysical depth and philosophical presentation.

Thus, taking all in all, it seems to me that the proper approach to the *Vṛndāvana-Līlā* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is to regard it as a manifestation of the *Ānanda-Rasa* and to understand the *Rāsa-Kriḍā* as the highest manifestation of the *Ānanda-Rasa*. I cannot conclude this article better than by quoting a beautiful verse which contains a most charming idea, viz. that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is dark-blue in colour because the Gopīs have enrobed him in the armour of

their glances. We no longer see the Lord in His transcendental radiance but see Him as the dark-blue Kṛṣṇa. The stanza says also that as the Gopīs, surrendering their eyes to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, fixed their minds in contemplation on His gold-coloured silk garment, they became dazzlingly golden in their complexion.

श्यामः कटाक्षनिक्षेपाद्गोपीनां नूनमच्युतः ।  
गोप्यः पीताम्बरध्यानात्पीतिमानं परं ययुः ॥

