

Krishna: The Beautiful Legend of God

Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa, Book X

*With Chapters 1, 6 and 29–31
from Book XI*

Translated with an Introduction and Notes by
EDWIN F. BRYANT

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CHAPTER 23

The Deliverance of the Wives of the Sacrificers

1. ‘The *gopas* said: “Balarāma, mighty-armed Balarāma! Kṛṣṇa, the annihilator of the wicked! Our hunger is really troubling us; please satisfy it.”’

2. Śrī Śuka said:

‘*Bhagavān*, the son of Devakī, was feeling pleased with his devotees, the wives of the *brāhmaṇas*. When he was appealed to in this way, he spoke as follows:

3. “Go to the sacrificial arena. Desiring to attain *svarga* [the celestial abode of the gods], the *brāhmaṇa* reciters of the Vedas are taking part in a sacrifice called *āṅgīrasa*.

4. Go there and request some cooked rice, mentioning the names of the worthy *Bhagavān* Balarāma, and of me myself; say that you have been dispatched by us.”

5. Directed thus by *Bhagavān*, the boys went and asked as suggested. They fell on the ground before the *brāhmaṇas* like sticks,¹ their hands cupped in supplication:

6. “You are gods on earth, please listen. May good fortune be with you. Please know that we *gopas* have been despatched by Balarāma and come to you to execute Kṛṣṇa’s instructions.

7. Balarāma and Acyuta have become hungry while grazing the cows not far from here, and desire cooked rice from you. You are distinguished in the knowledge of *dharma*, and if you have any respect for them, give them cooked rice. They entreat you, O *brāhmaṇas*.

8. The eating of food, even from a person who has been consecrated for the performance of sacrifice, is not defiling, O most noble ones, the exception being during the consecration ceremony, the slaughter of the sacrificial animal, and the *sautrāmaṇi* sacrifice.”²

9. Although they heard *Bhagavān*’s request, the *brāhmaṇas* did not listen to it. They had petty aspirations. They thought themselves distinguished, but despite the fact that they performed numerous rituals, they were ignorant nevertheless.

10–11. Kṛṣṇais *Bhagavān*, Adhokṣaja, the supreme *brahman* in person. The place, time, sundry utensils, *mantras*, *tantra* rituals, *rtvik* priests,³ fires, gods, sacrificer, offering, and the results accrued [from the sacrifice], are constituted by him. But the *brāhmaṇas*’ intelligence was perverted; thinking their bodies to be their real selves, they did not show him courtesy, perceiving him to be a mortal.

12. When they did not respond with either a “yes” or a “no”, the *gopas* returned dejected and reported what had happened to Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, O scorcher of enemies.

13. After listening to this, *Bhagavān*, the Lord of the universe, laughed, pointing out the materialistic ways of the world. He then spoke again to the *gopas*:

14. “Inform the wives that I have arrived, along with Saṅkarsana [Balarāma]. They

will give you as much food as you wish. They are affectionate, and their minds dwell in me.”

15. So, the *gopas* went to the *patnīśālā* [women’s quarter],⁴ where they saw them sitting down, prettily bedecked. They humbly paid homage to the wives of the *brāhmaṇas* and spoke as follows:

16. “Greetings to you, O wives of *brāhmaṇas*; please listen to what we have to say. We have been sent by Kṛṣṇa, who is passing by not far from here.

17. He has come from afar, and has been grazing the cows with Balarāma and the *gopas*. Please give food to him. He and his companions desire to eat.”

18. The women had always been eager for a glimpse of Acyuta, because they had been captivated by accounts of him. When they heard that he had arrived nearby, they became flustered.

19. Taking along a great variety of the four types of food⁵ in pots, they surged forth to meet their beloved, like rivers to an ocean.

20. [Although] they were obstructed by their husbands, brothers, relatives and sons, their hopes [of meeting Kṛṣṇa] had long been sustained by hearing about him. He is *Bhagavān*, who is praised in the best of hymns.

21. The women saw Kṛṣṇa surrounded by the *gopas* and wandering about with his elder brother in the grove on the Yamunā, which was a picturesque sight with fresh buds of *aśoka* trees.

22. He was dark blue in colour, and wearing a golden garment. He was dressed like an actor with fresh shoots, minerals, a peacock feather and a forest garland. One hand was placed on the shoulder of a companion, the other was twirling a lotus flower. His smiling lotus face had curls on the cheeks and lotuses behind the ears.

23. The women had heard so much about their beloved, and his celebrity had so filled their ears, that their minds had become absorbed in him. Now, they drew him into [their hearts] through the openings of their eyes. They embraced him for a long time and cast off their distress, just like false notions of the self are cast off after wisdom is embraced.

24. Kṛṣṇa is the seer who discerns everything, and so understood that they had arrived in this fashion, giving up all false aspirations out of a desire to see him. He spoke to them smiling:

25. “Welcome. You are very fortunate women! Please be seated. What can I do for you? You have come desiring to see us, which is certainly worthy of you.

26. There is no doubt that those who are learned and who understand their self-interest engage in selfless, uninterrupted *bhakti* to me, because I am the one who is dear to their souls.

27. The vital airs, intelligence, mind, body, wife, children, wealth and other worldly assets, become dear because of contact [with me]. Therefore, what else is there that is dear in actuality?

28. So, go to the sacrificial arena. Your *brāhmaṇa* husbands are householders, and

can only complete their sacrifice with your participation.”⁶

29. The wives replied: “You should not speak to us in such a cruel fashion, O Lord! Abide by your own doctrine!⁷ We have transgressed against all our relatives and have arrived at your lotus feet to wear on our hair the *tulasī* garland discarded by your feet.

30. Our husbands, parents, sons, brothers, relatives and friends, not to speak of others, will not accept us. We are souls who have fallen down at your lotus feet, so there can be no other destination for us. Therefore, grant [us your shelter].”

31. *Śrī Bhagavān* said: “Neither your husbands, fathers, brothers, sons or other relatives, nor people in general, will be angry with you. Even the gods will approve, as they take shelter of me.

32. Physical contact between people in this world does not [produce] joy or affection. Therefore, fix your mind on me, and you will obtain me without delay.”

33. *Śrī Śuka* said:

‘When they had been addressed in this way, the wives of the *brāhmaṇas* returned to the sacrificial enclosure.⁸ The [*brāhmaṇas*] were not displeased with them, and completed the sacrifice with their wives.

34. One woman there, who had been impeded by her husband, embraced *Bhagavān* in her heart – as she conceived of him from what she had heard – and gave up her body, the product of *karma*.

35. So *Bhagavān*, Govinda, the Lord, fed the *gopas* with the four kinds of foodstuffs, and then he himself ate.

36. Imitating the world of men in a human body for the purpose of *līlā*, he brought pleasure to the cows, *gopas* and *gopīs* through his deeds, words and beauty.

37. Later, those *brāhmaṇas* repented in retrospect: “We have committed an offence because we ignored the request of the two lords of the universe. They are playing the role of mortals.”

38. Seeing the supreme devotion of the women to *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa, they lamented their own lack of it, and rebuked themselves:

39. “Curses on that birth which is threefold,⁹ curses on vows, curses on extensive learning, curses on our family lineage, curses on skill in rituals: we still remain averse to Adhokṣaja [Kṛṣṇa].

40. Truly, the *māyā* of *Bhagavān* bewilders even the *yogīs*. Because of it, we *brāhmaṇas*, the *gurus* of humanity, are confused about our own self-interest.

41. *Aho!* See the unlimited devotion of these very women to Kṛṣṇa, the *guru* of the world. It has pierced the fetters of death under the guise of household life.

42. Neither the *samskāra* purificatory rites of the twice-born,¹⁰ nor residence in the house of the *guru*, nor austerity, nor inquiry into the self, nor rites of cleanliness, nor auspicious rituals were [practised] by these women.

43. Nonetheless, they were constant in devotion to Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of the lords of *yoga*, whose glories are renowned. This was not the case with us, even though we have undergone the *samskāra* and other such rites.

44. *Aho!* Through the words of the *gopas*, Kṛṣṇa reminded us about the path of the virtuous, but we were deluded about our self-interest and heedless because of our domestic activities.

45. Otherwise, what was the purpose of this play-acting with us by the Lord, the controller who grants blessings such as that of liberation? His own desires are fulfilled, but we are meant to be controlled [by him].

46. His begging [for food] bewilders people, since the goddess of fortune, spurning others and relinquishing the faults of her own nature,¹¹ worships him constantly with the desire to touch his feet.

47. The place, time, sundry utensils, *mantras*, *tantra* rituals, *rtvik* priests, fires, gods, sacrificer, offering, and the results accrued [from the sacrifice], are constituted by him.

48. He, indeed, is *Bhagavān* himself, Viṣṇu, the Lord of the lords of *yoga*, born amongst the Yadus. Although we had heard this, being fools, we did not understand.

49. *Aho!* How fortunate we are to have wives such as these! Their devoutness has given rise to unwavering devotion to Hari in us.

50. Homage to him, *Bhagavān*, Kṛṣṇa, whose intelligence is ever fresh. We are wandering on the path of *karma*, our intelligence bewildered by his *māyā*.

51. He is the primeval person and so should graciously forgive our offence. Our minds are confused by his *māyā* and we are ignorant of his might.”

52. Reflecting on their offence in this way, the [*brāhmaṇas*], who had been contemptuous of Kṛṣṇa, desired to see Vraj; but they did not go, out of fear of Kamsa.¹²

CHAPTER 24

*Kṛṣṇa Diverts Indra's Sacrifice**

1. Śrī Śuka said:

‘As he was residing there in Vraj with Balarāma, *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa saw the *gopas* making preparations for Indra's sacrifice.

2. *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa is the seer of everything as well as the soul of everything; despite knowing all about it, he bowed down reverentially and inquired of the elders headed by Nanda:

3. “Tell me, father, what is this bustle that has arisen? Why is this sacrifice being performed, from what incentive and by whom?

4–5. Explain this to me, father – I am curious to hear about it and my desire is great. Surely, the deeds of *sādhus* are not secret. They see the *ātmā* within everything in this world. They do not distinguish between what is their own and what is another's, and they have no friends, enemies or neutral relationships. It is said that a neutral party is to be avoided like an enemy, but a friend is like one's own self.

6. These people perform actions [the purpose of which] they either understand or do not understand. Success in action will be granted to the one who has knowledge, but not for the one who is ignorant.

7. This being so, is this act of *yoga* ¹ something that has received careful deliberation, or is it popular practice? This should be clearly explained to me, for I am asking.”

8. Śrī Nanda said: “*Bhagavān* Indra is the rain. The clouds are the manifestations of his being. They release water, the nourishing life-force of living things.

9. He is the lord and master of the clouds, my son; other people also worship him, just as we do, by sacrifices of the products of his flow of water.

10. They subsist with the remnants in order to accomplish the threefold goals of life.² The rain-god produces fruit for people engaged in human undertakings.

11. The person who neglects this duty handed down by tradition, out of lust, animosity, fear or greed, definitely does not achieve auspicious results.”

12. Śrī Śuka said:

‘After hearing the words of Nanda and the other residents of Vraj, Keśava spoke to his father, provoking the indignation of Indra.

13. Śrī *Bhagavān* said: “The living entity is born because of *karma* and perishes because of *karma*. Happiness, distress, fear and security all arrive because of *karma* alone.

14. Even if there is some kind of a controller who awards the fruit of the *karma* of

other people, he can only interact with a person engaged in action. He is certainly not the master of one who does not engage in action.

15. What can Indra do to living beings who are following their own *karma*? He is incapable of doing anything other than what has been determined as a result of people's own nature.

16. People are actually controlled by their own nature and they act according to their own nature. This whole universe with gods, demons and humankind exists in its own nature.

17. It is as a result of *karma* that the living being accepts and then gives up higher and lower bodies. It is *karma* alone that is the enemy, friend or impartial observer, the *guru* and the lord.

18. One's deity is actually that through which one is able to subsist easily. Therefore, grounded in one's own nature and performing one's duty, one should worship *karma*.

19. If one entity is the means of subsistence, while another entity is dependent on something else, then one cannot find security in the latter, just as an unfaithful woman will not find security in a paramour.

20. A *brāhmaṇa* should subsist by means of the Veda, the *ksatriya* by the protection of the earth, the *vaiśya* by business, and the *śūdra* by service to the twice-born.³

21. There are four types of business: agriculture, trade and cow-protection, as well as money-lending, which is said to be the fourth. From these, we have always taken subsistence from the cows.

22. The causes of maintenance, production and destruction are *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*. *Rajas* produces the entire universe, which is given shape by mutual interaction.⁴

23. The clouds are propelled by *raja*, and they shower water everywhere. Living beings prosper as a result of clouds alone. What can the mighty Indra do?

24. Cities are not for us, father, nor are inhabited countries, villages and homesteads. We are forest-dwellers, living in forests and hills.

25. Therefore, let us begin a sacrifice for Mount Govardhana, the *brāhmaṇas* and the cows. Let this sacrifice be accomplished with these very utensils that are for Indra's sacrifice!

26. People should prepare various types of cooked food, starting with soup and ending with a pudding made from rice, as well as *samyāva*, *āpūpa* and *śuskalī* cakes. And all the milk-products should be collected.

27–28. The sacrificial fires should receive oblations from the *brāhmaṇas* who recite the Veda. All of you should give many kinds of food and donations of cows to the *brāhmaṇas*, as well as to others also, up to the *cāndālas* [outcastes], and dogs, as is appropriate. And, after grass has been given to the cows, offerings should be made to the mountain.

29. Then, when you are nicely adorned, adequately smeared [with sandalwood paste], handsomely dressed and well fed, walk round the cows, the *brāhmaṇas*, the fire and the

hill in a clockwise direction.

30. This is my opinion, father, which can be followed if it is approved. Such a sacrifice will be pleasing to the cows, the *brāhmaṇas* and the mountains, and to me as well.”

31. Śrī Śuka said:

‘Hearing those words spoken by *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa, who, in the form of time, desired to destroy the pride of Indra, Nanda and the others accepted his words as appropriate.

32–33. They prepared everything just as Madhusūdana [Kṛṣṇa] had said. Auspicious blessings were chanted, and offerings presented with full respect to the twice-born and to the hill with those same utensils, as well as grass to the cows. Then, they circumambulated the hill, with their riches – their cattle – in front.

34. The beautifully adorned *gopīs* mounted the carts, which were yoked to the oxen. They were singing of the exploits of Kṛṣṇa in harmony with the uttering of blessings of the twice-born.

35. Then Kṛṣṇa transformed himself into another body to gain the confidence of the *gopas*. Saying: “I am the mountain!” the huge form ate the lavish offering.

36. Together with the people of Vraj, Kṛṣṇa prostrated himself before that form – which was really himself saying: “*Aho!* Look – this mountain is assuming a form! It has bestowed its favour upon us.

37. Assuming any form at will, it kills the human residents of the forest who disregard it. We should prostrate ourselves before it for the protection of our cows and ourselves.”

38. After performing the sacrifice to the twice-born, the cows and the hill, as directed by Vāsudeva in this fashion, the *gopas* went to Vraj along with Kṛṣṇa.’

CHAPTER 25

Kṛṣṇa Lifts Mount Govardhana

1. Śrī Śuka said:

‘At this, O king, Indra understood that his own worship had been abandoned, and became enraged with the *gopas*, led by Nanda, who had accepted Kṛṣṇa as their Lord.

2. Considering himself Lord, Indra summoned the host of clouds called Samvartaka which bring about the annihilation of the universe.¹ Furious, he spoke the following words:

3. “Just see how intoxicated the forest-dwelling *gopas* are because of the wealth [of the forest]. They have taken refuge with Kṛṣṇa, a mortal, and now they neglect the gods.

4. Abandoning meditative knowledge, they desire to cross over the ocean of material existence through ritualistic so-called sacrifices which are like unstable boats.

5. By taking refuge with Kṛṣṇa, a boastful, childish, stubborn, ignorant mortal who thinks himself to be a great scholar, the *gopas* have made an enemy of me.

6. Destroy the arrogance of these people caused by the conceit of riches. They are steeped in wealth and their egos have been inflated by Kṛṣṇa. Bring destruction to their livestock.

7. As for me, I will mount my elephant Airāvata,² and follow you to Vraj accompanied by the immensely powerful host of Maruts,³ with the intention of destroying the cattle station of Nanda.”

8. Śrī Śuka said:

‘Ordered on this way by Indra, the clouds, unleashed from their moorings, deluged rain on Nanda’s Gokula.

9. Flashing forth with lightning and roaring with claps of thunder, they showered down hail, urged on by the fierce hosts of Maruts.

10. The clouds released incessant torrents of rain as thick as pillars, and the earth became inundated with floods. Low ground could not be distinguished from high ground.

11. The livestock, shivering because of the high wind and rain, and the *gopas* and *gopīs*, afflicted by cold, approached Kṛṣṇa for protection.

12. Covering their heads and shielding their children with their bodies, shivering and tormented by the rain, they approached the soles of the feet of the Lord:

13. “Kṛṣṇa, most virtuous Kṛṣṇa, master – you are compassionate towards your devotees. Please protect Gokula, which accepts you as Lord, from the wrath of this divinity.”

14. Seeing them pounded unconscious by the excessive wind and hail, Lord Hari

reflected on what Indra had done in his fury:

15. “Indra unleashes rain full of hail and mighty winds out of season in order to destroy us because we neglected his offering.

16. Consequently, I will employ suitable countermeasures through my mystic power. I will destroy the ignorance and pride born of opulence of those who, out of stupidity, think of themselves as lords of the world.

17. The bewilderment caused by thinking of oneself as lord is inappropriate for the demigods, who are endowed with a godly nature. If I break the pride of the impure for their peace of mind it is an appropriate thing to do.

18. Therefore, I make this pledge: I shall protect the cowherd community by my own mystic power. They accept me as their Lord, their shelter is in me and they are my family.”

19. Saying this, Viṣṇu lifted up the mountain of Govardhana with one hand and held it effortlessly, as a child holds a mushroom.

20. Then the Lord spoke to the cowherds: “Mother, father and residents of Vraj, enter the cavity under the mountain with your herds of cows whenever you wish.

21. Do not be afraid that the mountain might fall from my hand during this time. Enough of your fear of the rain and wind! I have arranged shelter from them for you.”

22. At this, reassured by Kṛṣṇa, they entered the cavity with their wealth, their herds and dependants as far as there was room for them.

23. Giving up concern for hunger and thirst, and any expectation of comfort, Kṛṣṇa held up the mountain for seven days. Watched by the residents of Vraj, he did not move from the spot.

24. Subdued and helpless, and with his plan thwarted, Indra reined in his clouds. He was awed by Kṛṣṇa’s mystic power.

25. When he saw that the sky was cloudless, the fierce rain and wind had ceased, and that the sun had arisen, Govardhanadhara [Kṛṣṇa], he who lifted Mount Govardhana, spoke to the *gopas*:

26. “Don’t be afraid, O *gopas*, and come out with your wives, possessions and children. The wind and rain have ceased, and the rivers are for the most part without [flood] water.”

27. At this, the *gopas*, women, children and elders each took their own cows and their utensils, which had been loaded on to carts, and came out slowly.

28. While all watched, *Bhagavān*, the Lord, effortlessly put back the hill where it had been.

29. The people of Vraj were filled with the force of love, and came to embrace him, or whatever was appropriate. And with joy the *gopīs* offered auspicious blessings, and with love worshipped him with offerings of yogurt and unhusked barley, and other such items.

30. Overcome with love, Yaśodā, Rohinī, Nanda and Balarāma, best of the strong, embraced Kṛṣṇa and offered blessings.

31. The hosts of gods, the *siddhas*, *sādhya*s, *gandharvas* and *cāranas* in the heavens, satisfied, praised Kṛṣṇa and let fall showers of flowers, O Parīkṣit, descendant of Pṛthu.

32. Directed by the gods, they played conches and kettledrums in heaven, while the leaders of the *gandharvas*, headed by Tumburu, sang.⁴

33. Then, O king, Hari, together with Balarāma, went to his own cow-pen surrounded by the friendly cowherders. The *gopīs* happily went on their way singing about such deeds as this. Their hearts were touched.'

CHAPTER 29

*The Description of the Rāsa Pastime*¹

1. Śrī Śuka, the son of Bādarāyana, said:

‘Even *Bhagavān*, God himself, beholding those nights, with autumnal jasmine [*mallikā*] flowers blossoming, called upon his divine power of *yogamāyā*, and turned his thoughts towards enjoying love.

2. At that time, the moon, king of the constellations, arose in the east, covering the face of the heavens with its copper-coloured soothing rays. It wiped away the cares of the onlookers, like a lover who has been absent for a long time wipes away the cares of his beloved.

3. Seeing that full disc, herald of the white night-lilies, reddened with fresh vermilion powder, its splendour like the face of Lakṣmī, the goddess of fortune, and seeing the forest coloured by its silky rays, Kṛṣṇa played [his flute] softly, capturing the hearts of the beautiful-eyed women.

4. The music aroused Kāma.² When they heard it, the women of Vraj, enchanted by Kṛṣṇa, came to their lover, their earrings swinging in their haste, and unknown to one another.

5. Some, who were milking cows, abandoned the milking and approached eagerly. Others had put milk on the fire, but then came without even removing [the milk or] the cakes [from the oven].

6–7. Others interrupted serving food, feeding their babies milk, and attending to their husbands. Still others were eating, but left their food. Others were putting on make-up, washing, or applying mascara to their eyes. They all went to be near Kṛṣṇa, their clothes and ornaments in disarray.

8. Their hearts had been stolen by Govinda, so they did not turn back when husbands, fathers, brothers and relatives tried to prevent them. They were in a state of rapture.

9. Some *gopīs*, not being able to find a way to leave, remained at home and thought of Kṛṣṇa with eyes closed, completely absorbed in meditation.

10–11. [The *karma*] from their impious deeds was destroyed by the intense and intolerable pain of separation from their lover, and their auspicious deeds were diminished by the complete fulfilment resulting from the intimate contact with Acyuta that they obtained through meditation.³ Their bondage was destroyed, and they immediately left their bodies made of the *gunas*. Uniting with the supreme soul, they considered him their lover.’

12. Śrī Parīksit said:

‘O sage, they related to Kṛṣṇa as their supreme lover, not as *brahman*, the absolute truth. So how did the flow of the *guṇas*, in which their minds were absorbed, cease for the *gopīs*?’

13. Śrī Śuka said:

‘This was explained to you previously: in the same way as the king of the Cedis, Śiśupāla, attained perfection despite hating Hṛīkeśa.⁴ What then of those dear to Adhokṣaja [Kṛṣṇa]?’

14. God appears for the supreme good of humanity, O king. He is immeasurable and eternal. As the controller of the *guṇas*, he is beyond the *guṇas*.

15. Those who always dedicate their desire, anger, fear, affection, sense of identity and friendship to Hari enter for certain into his state of being.

16. You should not show such surprise at Lord Kṛṣṇa. He is unborn and the master of all masters of *yoga*. From him the whole universe attains liberation.

17. The Lord saw that the women of Vraj had arrived in his presence. Being the best of speakers, he addressed them, captivating them with the charm of his words:

18. “Welcome – you are most fortunate. What can I do to please you? Is everything well in Vraj? Tell me the purpose of your coming.

19. This fearsome dark night is frequented by ferocious creatures. Go back to Vraj, O slender-waisted ones; this place is not fit for women.

20. Your mothers, fathers, sons, brothers and husbands are worried because they cannot find you. Do not cause your relatives concern.

21–22. You have seen the forest, adorned with flowers, coloured by the rays of the full moon, and made beautiful by the blossoms of the trees quivering playfully in the breeze of the Yamunā river. Therefore hurry now to the cow-pen and serve your husbands –, you are chaste ladies. The babies and calves are crying; suckle them and milk them.

23. Or perhaps your hearts are captivated, and you have come out of love for me. This is commendable of you – living beings delight in me.

24. The highest *dharma* [duty] of a woman is to serve her husband faithfully, to ensure the well-being of her relatives, and to nourish her children.

25. A husband who is not a sinner, even though he be of bad character, ill-fated, old, dull-headed, sick or poor, should not be abandoned by women who desire to attain heaven.

26. Without exception, the adultery of a woman of good birth does not lead to heaven. It is scandalous, fear-laden, worthless, fraught with difficulty and abhorrent.

27. Love for me comes from hearing about me, seeing me, meditating on me and reciting my glories –, not in this way, by physical proximity. Therefore, return to your homes.”

28. Hearing Govinda speak these unwelcome words, the dejected *gopīs* had their

aspirations dashed and were inconsolable in their distress.

29. They stood silently, their red *bimba*-fruit-coloured lips faded by their sighs, and the vermilion powder on their breasts smeared by the mascara carried by their tears. Casting down their faces out of sorrow and scratching the ground with their feet, they were weighed down by extreme unhappiness.

30. Wiping their eyes, and having checked their tears somewhat, the *gopīs* spoke to Kṛṣṇa, their beloved, with voices faltering with agitation. They were utterly devoted, and had sacrificed all desires for his sake, but he had replied to them as if he were anything but their beloved:

31. ‘You should not speak to us in such a heartless fashion, O Lord. Renouncing all enjoyments of the senses, we are devoted to the soles of your feet. Reciprocate, you obstinate one, just as the Lord, the original being, reciprocates with those who desire liberation. Do not reject us.

32. You, the knower of *dharma*, have declared that the occupational *dharma* of women consists of attending to friends, husbands and children. Then let this be our *dharma* when it comes to you, the source of this advice, O Lord –, after all, you are the soul within all relatives. Indeed, you are the most dear of all embodied beings.

33. You are the eternal beloved, O soul of all, and so the learned place their affection in you. What is the use of husbands and children who simply cause problems? Therefore, O supreme Lord, be pleased with us. Do not dash our hopes. They have been sustained by you for such a long time, O lotus-eyed one.

34. Our hearts, which were absorbed in our households, have been stolen away with ease by you, as have our hands from domestic chores. Our feet cannot move one step from the soles of your lotus feet. How can we go to Vraj? And, besides, what would we do there?

35. O beloved, pour the nectar of your lips on the fire dwelling in our hearts which has been kindled by your musical harmonies, your glances and your smiles. If you do not, we will traverse the path to your feet through meditation, our bodies consumed by the fire born of separation.

36. Lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, you are dear to the forest-dwelling hermits. Somewhere or other, for a moment, we providentially touched the soles of your feet, which belong to the goddess of fortune. Alas, from that moment, instantly enamoured of you, we became incapable of remaining in the presence of any other man.

37. The goddess of fortune aspires to the dust of those lotus feet which is worshipped by your servants, even though she has obtained a place on your chest along with Tulasī.⁵ Other gods, even, strive to attract her personal glance. In the same way, we solicit the dust of your feet.

38. It is you who banish distress –, therefore be compassionate to us. In the desire to worship you, we have given up our homes and arrived at the soles of your feet. Allow us, whose hearts are burning with intense desire born from your beautiful smiles and glances,

to be your servants, O ornament of men.

39. We have gazed on your face covered with curls, with its smiles and glances, and on your honeyed lips placed between your cheeks made beautiful with earrings. And we have beheld your two strong arms, which bestow fearlessness, and your chest, which is the exclusive delight of the goddess of fortune. After this, we have become your servants.

40. Dear Kṛṣṇa, what women in the three worlds would not stray from the behaviour proper to āryans, when thrown into turmoil by the melodies of your flute, which vibrates harmoniously? And what woman would not stray after seeing this, your form, which brings good fortune to the three worlds and causes the hair of cows, birds, trees and deer to stand on end with bliss?

41. It is clear that you have accepted birth to remove the tribulations and fears of Vraj just as the Lord, the primeval person, protects the denizens of heaven. Therefore, since you are the friend of the afflicted, place your lotus hands on the burning breasts and heads of your servants.”

42. Śrī Śuka said:

‘The master of the masters of *yoga*, hearing their despairing words, laughed and engaged in amorous pleasures from compassion, even though his satisfaction is self-contained.

43. Kṛṣṇa, the infallible one, whose conduct is upright, shone forth with the assembled *gopīs*, who were dazzling with jasmine teeth and broad smiles. As the *gopīs*’ faces blossomed from the glances of their beloved, Kṛṣṇa appeared like the moon surrounded by stars.

44. Praised in song, and singing loudly himself, the Lord of hundreds of women, wearing a garland of *vaijayantī* flowers, frolicked in the forest, making it beautiful.

45–46. Accompanied by the *gopīs*, Kṛṣṇa approached the bank of the river. Its cool sand was swept by a wind bearing the scent of *kumuda* flowers and refreshing from its contact with the waves. Arousing Kāma in the young women of Vraj with jokes, smiles and glances, playfully scratching their breasts, girdles, thighs, hair and hands with his nails, and embracing them with outstretched arms, he gave them pleasure.

47. Such attention from Kṛṣṇa *Bhagavān*, the supreme soul, made the *gopīs* proud. Indeed, they thought themselves to be the best of women on earth.

48. Keśava saw their pride, which was born from the exhilaration of their good fortune, and vanished from the spot out of kindness, in order to moderate [their pride].’

CHAPTER 30

Searching for Kṛṣṇa in the Rāsa Pastime

1. Śrī Śuka said:

‘When *Bhagavān* suddenly vanished, the women of Vraj were filled with remorse at his disappearance. They were like female elephants who had lost sight of the leader of the herd.

2. Intoxicated by the pleasing gestures, playfulness and words, as well as by the quivering glances, smiles of love and movements of Kṛṣṇa, the husband of Rāmā, the goddess of fortune, their minds were overwhelmed. They acted out each of those behaviours, their hearts [dedicated] to him.

3. Those beloved women were so bewildered by Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes that their bodies imitated their darling in the way they moved, smiled, glanced, spoke, and so forth. With their hearts [dedicated] to him, the women declared: “I am he!”

4. Singing loudly in unison only about him, they searched from grove to grove, like mad women. They asked the trees about the supreme being who, like space, is inside and outside living creatures:

5. “O *aśvatthatree!* O *plaksatree!* O *nyagrodha* tree! Have you seen the son of Nanda at all? He has stolen our minds with his glances and smiles of love, and has gone.

6. O *kurabaka*, *aśoka*, *nāga*, *punnāga* and *campaka* trees! Has the younger brother of Balarāma [passed] by here? His smile steals away the pride of haughty women.

7. O auspicious *tulasī* plant, you who are dear to Govinda! Have you seen your most beloved, Acyuta, wearing you [as a garland covered] with swarms of bees?

8. O *mālatī* plant! O *maillkā* plant! O *jātī* plant! O *yuūthikā* plant! Has Mādhava [Kṛṣṇa] passed by, awakening your love with the touch of his hand? Have you seen him?

9. O *cūta* [mango], *priyāla*, *panas* [bread-fruit], *asana*, *kovidāra*, *jambu* [rose-apple], *arka*, *bilva* [wood-apple], *bakula*, *āmra* [mango], *kadamba* and *nipa* trees, and those others which grow on the shore of the Yamunā river and which exist to benefit others! Point us to the path [taken] by Kṛṣṇa. We have lost our hearts.

10. O earth, you are beautiful in that the hairs of your body [the trees] stand up from the bliss of the touch of the feet of Keśava [Kṛṣṇa]. What ascetic practice have you performed?¹ Is the cause of this these very feet [of Kṛṣṇa]? Or is it because of the step of Urukrama?² Or rather from the embrace of the body of Varāha?³

11. O wife of the deer, has Acyuta passed by here with his beloved, his limbs giving pleasure to your eyes? O friend, the scent from the jasmine garland of the Lord of our group is wafting here – a garland coloured with breast saffron contracted from the body of his lover.

12. O trees, did the younger brother of Balarāma wander here? Was he followed by

swarms of bees, blinded with intoxication, on his *tulasī* [garland]? With his arm placed on the shoulder of his beloved, he [must have been] holding a lotus flower. And did he acknowledge with glances of love your bowing down?

13. Ask these creeping plants! Just see, although they are embracing the arms of the forest tree, they surely must have been touched by his fingernails, for they are bristling with ecstasy.”

14. The *gopīs*, [uttering] these crazed words, became perplexed in their search for Kṛṣṇa. With their hearts [dedicated] to him, each of them imitated the *līlā* of *Bhagavān*.

15. One, who was acting as if she were Kṛṣṇa, suckled the breast of someone else, who was playing the part of Pūtanā. Another became an infant, began crying, and then kicked another one, who was acting as a cart, with her foot.

16. After changing into a demon, one *gopī* kidnapped another, who was imagining herself to be the child Kṛṣṇa. Yet another crawled around, dragging her two feet, accompanied by the sounds from her jewellery.

17. Two *gopīs* enacted the roles of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, and others behaved as *gopas*. Yet another struck a *gopī* who had become Vatsa, the calf demon, while someone else there struck the *gopī* who was playing the role of Baka, the crane demon.

18. One called the cows who were far away, as Kṛṣṇa would have done. Others praised one *gopī* who was sporting and playing the flute in imitation of him: “Bravo!”

19. Another, wandering about, placed her arm on someone else, and said: “There can be no doubt that I am Kṛṣṇa. Look at how gracefully I move.” Her mind was intent on him:

20. “Do not fear the wind and the rain. I have arranged protection.” Saying this, one *gopī*, exerting herself, lifted up her garment with one hand.

21. Another *gopī* mounted and stepped on the head of another with her foot, O king, and said: “Go, wicked snake! There is no doubt that I have undertaken birth as the chastiser of the wicked.”

22. Someone there said: “Hey *gopas*, look at the terrible forest fire! Close your eyes, I will with ease arrange for your protection!”

23. One slender-waisted *gopī* was tied to a mortar with a flower garland by another one. The former, her beautiful eyes afraid, covered her face and adopted a posture of fear.

24. Inquiring thus after Kṛṣṇa from the creeping plants and trees of Vṛndāvana, the *gopīs* noticed the footprints of the supreme soul in a certain part of the forest:

25. “These footprints are certainly those of the great soul, the son of Nanda,” they said. “They are recognizable from such marks as the flag, the lotus flower, the thunderbolt, the goad and the barley.”

26. Following Kṛṣṇa’s tracks further, footprint by footprint, the women noticed that they were clearly interspersed with the footprints of a young woman. They discussed this together in distress:

27 “Whose footprints are these? She is going with the son of Nanda, his forearm placed on her shoulder, like a female elephant with a male elephant.

28. She has worshipped⁴ *Bhagavān* Hari, the Lord. Consequently, Govinda was pleased, and so has abandoned us and led that *gopī* to a secluded place.

29. Just see, O friends, how fortunate are these particles of dust from the lotus feet of Govinda. Brahmā, Śiva and the goddess of fortune, Rāmā [śrī], place them on their heads to remove their sins.

30. The footprints of that woman are causing us great distress because she alone of the *gopīs* is enjoying the lips of Acyuta in a secluded place.

31. Now, right here, her footprints are no longer visible: the lover has lifted up his beloved, whose feet with their delicate soles are bruised by the blades of grass.

31a.⁵ Look, *gopīs*, at these deeper footprints of lusty Kṛṣṇa weighed down by carrying the young woman. And here the beloved has been put down by that great soul in order to [gather] flowers.

32. Look, here the lover plucked flowers for the beloved: these two footprints are incomplete because he stood on tip-toe.

33. Here, lusty Kṛṣṇa decorated that lusty woman’s hair. Surely he sat here while making his lover a crown with those [flowers].”

34. [Śrī Śuka said]:

‘Kṛṣṇa took pleasure with that *gopī*, although he is complete, content within himself and delights in his own self. He was displaying the wretchedness of lusty men and women because of their depravity.

35–36. The dispirited *gopīs* wandered about pointing [things] out in this way. The *gopī*, whom Kṛṣṇa had taken to the forest after abandoning the other women, then thought that she was the best of all women: “Kṛṣṇa, my beloved, has abandoned the [other] *gopīs* who were impelled by Kāma and dedicated himself to me.”

37. Then, after going to a spot in the wood, the proud woman spoke to Keśava [Kṛṣṇa]: “I am unable to walk any further. Take me wherever your mind [desires].”

38. At this request, Kṛṣṇa told his beloved that she should climb on his shoulder, but then he disappeared. The young woman was filled with remorse:

39. “O Lord, lover, dearest! Where are you? Where are you, mighty-armed one? Reveal your presence to me, friend –, I am your miserable servant!”

40. Śrī Śuka said:

‘The *gopīs*, searching for the path of *Bhagavān*, saw a distressed girl not far away who was disorientated by the separation from her beloved.

41. Hearing her story of how she had first received respect from Mādhava [Kṛṣṇa], and then humiliation because of her bad faith, they were astounded.

42. After this, they went as far into the forest as the moon gave light. Then, seeing that darkness had descended there, the women returned.

43. Their minds absorbed in Kṛṣṇa, the *gopīs*' conversations focused on him, their activities centred on him, and they dedicated their hearts to him. Simply by singing about his qualities, they forgot their own homes.

44. Meditating on Kṛṣṇa, they reached the bank of the Kālindī [Yamunā] river again. Gathering together they sang about Kṛṣṇa, longing for his arrival.'

CHAPTER 31

The *gopīs*' Song in the Rāsa Pastime

1. 'The *gopīs* said: "Vraj has become pre-eminent because of your birth; indeed, Indirā [Laksmī] resides there permanently. O loved one, show yourself! Your devotees, whose lives are sustained in you, are searching for you everywhere.

2. You are taking our life, O Lord of autumn; your glance excels in beauty the heart of a beautiful lotus perfectly born in autumn from a pool of water. We are your maidservants [and do not ask for] any payment. Isn't this killing us, O bestower of favours?

3. O bull among men, we have been continuously protected by you from destruction from the poisonous water, from the wicked demon, from the winds and rains, from fire and lightning, from the bull Ariṣṭa, from the son of Maya [Vyomāsura], and from fear from all sides.

4. You are not, in fact, the son of a *gopī*. You are the witness of the inner self of all embodied beings. Being petitioned by Brahmā, you become manifest in the family of the Sātvatas, O friend, for the protection of the universe.

5. Place your lotus hand on the head of those who have approached you out of fear of the material world, O foremost of the Vṛṣṇi clan. Your hand, which holds the hand of Śrī [Lakṣmī], bestows fearlessness and fulfils desires, O lover.

6. You are the hero of women, and you take away the pain of the people of Vraj! The pride of your devotees is annihilated by your smile! Accept your maidservants, friend! Show us your beautiful lotus face!

7. Place your lotus feet upon our breasts. Your feet have been placed on the hoods of the serpent [Kāliya] and follow the animals to the pasture. They are the abode of the goddess of fortune, Śrī, and they remove the sins of submissive embodied beings. Excise Kāma, who dwells within our hearts.

8. O hero, these women obedient to your will are stunned by your sweet voice, your charming words which please the mind and the intelligence, and your lotus eyes. Reinvigorate us with the intoxicating liquid of your lips.

9. Those who repeat the sweetness of your words in this world are munificent. These words are praised by poets, spread abroad, and are auspicious to hear. They are life-giving for those who are suffering. They remove sins and bring good fortune.

10. Your bursts of laughter, pleasing looks of love, and pastimes are auspicious to contemplate. Those meetings in secret places touch our hearts, you cheater, and perturb us thoroughly.

11. When you go from Vraj grazing the animals, O Lord, your feet, beautiful as lotuses, are troubled by blades of grass and corn stubble, and so we feel distress. You are our beloved.

12. You possess a lotus face, surrounded by blue locks of hair which you constantly

display covered with thick dust at the end of the day. You arouse Kāma in the heart, O hero.

13. O lover, place your most beneficent lotus feet on our breasts. They fulfil the desires of the humble and should be meditated upon in trouble, O destroyer of anxiety. They are worshipped by the lotus-born Brahmā, and are the ornament of the earth.

14. Bestow upon us the nectar of your lips, O hero, which have been thoroughly kissed by the flute as it plays music. It destroys sorrow, increases the pleasures of love, and causes men to forget other passions.

15. When you, Lord, go to the forest during the day, a moment becomes a *yuga*¹ for those who do not see you. He who created eyelashes is dull-witted, from the perspective of those beholding your beautiful face, with its curled locks of hair.²

16. Acyuta, you are the knower of [people's] movements. Bewildered by your song, we have thoroughly neglected our husbands, sons, family, brothers and kinsfolk, and come before you. Who would abandon women in the night, you rogue?

17. We have become unsettled from contemplating your broad chest, the abode of Śrī, the goddess of fortune, as well as your looks of love, your smiling face and the meetings in secret places which aroused Kāma. We long for you intensely all the time.

18. Your incarnation is for the good of the universe, and dispels the distress of the people of Vraj. Deliver a little of that [medicine] which removes the ailment from the hearts of your devotees to us. Our hearts yearn for you.

19. We gently place your tender lotus feet on our rough breasts with trepidation. You wander in the forest on them and our minds are disturbed: what if they have been hurt by small stones? Your Lordship is our life.” ’

CHAPTER 32 *The Gopīs' Lamentation in the Rāsa Pastime*

1. Śrī Śuka said:

‘Thus the *gopīs* sang and spoke incoherently in various ways. Longing to see Kṛṣṇa, O king, they wept loudly.

2. Kṛṣṇa, the descendant of Śūra, bewilderer of the mind of the mind-bewilderer Kāma himself, appeared in their midst, his lotus face smiling. He was wearing yellow garments, and bore a garland.

3. Seeing that their beloved had returned, the women, their eyes wide with love, sprang up simultaneously as if the vital air of the body had returned.

4. One ecstatic woman caught hold of Kṛṣṇa’s lotus hand in her folded hands. Another placed his arm, decorated with sandalwood paste, on her shoulder.

5. A slender woman accepted his chewed betel nut with folded hands. Another, burning [with desire], placed his lotus feet on her breast.

6. Yet another, trembling with the fury of love, was biting her lips with her teeth, her brows knitted in a frown. She glared at Kṛṣṇa as if she could strike him with a look of rebuke.

7. Another woman dwelt on his lotus face with unblinking eyes. Although she drank it in with her eyes, she was not fully satisfied, just as a saint is not fully satisfied [by meditating on] Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet

8. Some other woman, drawing Kṛṣṇa into her heart through the apertures of her eyes and then sealing them shut, stood embracing him [in her heart], like a *yogī* immersed in bliss.

9. All rejoiced at the wonder of seeing Keśava [Kṛṣṇa], and let go the distress they had felt at separation, as people are joyful after encountering a wise man.

10. *Bhagavān*, Acyuta, surrounded by the women who had shaken off their sorrow, shone brilliantly, like the supreme being surrounded by his *śakti* powers.

11–12. The supreme ruler took the women along and enjoyed himself on the auspicious bank of the Kālindī [Yamunā]. There were bees with six legs and a breeze fragrant with blossoming jasmine and *mandāra* flowers. Its soft sands were lapped by waves that were like the hands of the Kṛṣṇa river [Yamunā]. The darkness of the night was dispelled by the full rays from the autumn moon.

13. The heartache of the *gopīs* had been assuaged by the bliss of seeing Kṛṣṇa, just as the Vedas attained the culmination of their hearts’ desire.¹ The *gopīs* made a seat for the friend of their heart with their outer garments, which were smeared with the *kuṅkum* powder from their breasts.

14. *Bhagavān*, the Lord, whose seat is fixed within the hearts of the masters of *yoga*, sat down there. He was worshipped as he sat in the company of the *gopīs*, and revealed

himself in a form that was a unique embodiment of beauty in the three worlds.

15. Those women worshipped that inciter of Kāma by massaging his hands and feet, which they had placed on their laps. They praised him, their eyebrows quivering, with playful looks and laughter. Then they spoke, somewhat angrily.

16. The beautiful *gopīs* said: “Some serve those who serve them. Some do the opposite of this [i.e. serve those who do not serve them]. And some do not serve either. Can you explain this for us clearly?”

17. *Śrī Bhagavān* said: “Friends, there are those who serve each other reciprocally but their exchange is exclusively out of self-interest; there is no *dharma* or friendship there. Personal gain and nothing else is the motive.

18. Those, like mothers and fathers, who serve those who do not serve [them] are truly compassionate. There is perfect friendship and *dharma* in this, O slender-waisted ones.

19. Some do not serve even those who serve [them], let alone those who do not serve [them]. They include those who take pleasure in their spiritual self, those whose desires are fulfilled, the ungrateful and the *guru*-haters.

20. I do not serve even those beings who serve me to enhance their devotional state of mind, O friends. The case is like that of the poor man who is not conscious of anything else when the wealth that he had gained is lost, but continues to contemplate that wealth obsessively.

21. In this way, O women, when I disappeared from your presence – you who had abandoned relatives, the [injunctions of the] Vedas, and the world for my sake – it was really to further [your dedication] to me. I was serving you. Therefore, beloved ones, you should not be displeased with your beloved.

22. You have broken the enduring shackles of the household, and have served me. You are full of goodness and without fault, and I am unable to reciprocate, even in the lifetime of a god. Therefore, let your reward be your own excellence.”

CHAPTER 33 *The Description of the Rāsa Pastime*

1. ‘Hearing the Lord’s winning words spoken in this way, the *gopīs* relinquished their distress at separation, but their aspirations increased from touching his limbs.

2. Govinda [Kṛṣṇa] began the *rāsa* pastime¹ there, in the company of those devoted jewels of women, who linked arms happily together.

3. The festival of the *rāsa* dance began, featuring a circle of *gopīs*. The Lord of all *yogīs*, Kṛṣṇa, inserted himself between each pair of *gopīs*, and put his arms about their necks. Each woman thought he was at her side only. Meanwhile, the sky was crowded with hundreds of the vehicles of the gods, who were accompanied by their wives and carried away with excitement.

4. Kettledrums resounded then, streams of flowers fell, and the chiefs of the *gandharvas*² and their wives sang of Kṛṣṇa’s spotless glories.

5. There was a tumultuous sound of bracelets, ankle-bracelets and the bells of the young women in the circle of the *rāsa* dance with their beloved.

6. Kṛṣṇa *Bhagavān*, the son of Devakī, was radiant in their company, like a great emerald in the midst of golden ornaments.

7. The consorts of Kṛṣṇa, their braids and belts securely fastened, sang about him with hand gestures and dancing feet. Their faces were sweating, their earrings rolling on their cheeks, and the garments on their breasts slipping. Their waists were bent, and they smiled, their eyebrows playful. They shone like lightning in a circle of clouds.

8. They were intent on amorous pleasure and overjoyed by Kṛṣṇa’s touch. Their throats decorated with dye, they sang loudly as they danced, and the world reverberated with their songs.

9. One *gopī* led a duet in harmony with Mukunda. Kṛṣṇa was pleased and praised her: “Well done! Well done!” Then she led the refrain and he heaped praises on her.

10. Another, tired by the *rāsa* dance, her *mallikā* [jasmine] flowers and bracelets loosened, laid her arm on the shoulder of Kṛṣṇa, the wielder of the club, who was standing by her side.

11. Kṛṣṇa placed his arm on the shoulder of one of the *gopīs*. Smelling it, fragrant as a blue lotus and smeared with sandalwood, she kissed it, the hairs of her body tingling with rapture.

12. Kṛṣṇa gave his chewed betel nut to another *gopī* as she placed her cheek, adorned with the glitter of earrings in disarray from the dancing, next to his cheek.

13. Yet another *gopī* who was singing and dancing, her belt and ankle-bracelets jingling, became fatigued. She placed the soothing lotus hand of Acyuta, who was at her side, on her breast.

14. The *gopīs* won their lover Acyuta, who is the exclusive beloved of Śrī, the goddess of fortune. Their necks encircled by his arms, they delighted in him as they sang.

15. The *gopīs*, with glowing faces, cheeks adorned with locks of hair, and lotus flowers behind their ears, were beautiful. They danced with the Lord in the circle of the *rāsa*³ to the musical accompaniment of the bees complemented by the sound of their anklets and bangles. Wreaths of flowers fell from their hair.

16. Thus Kṛṣṇa, the Lord of Laksmī,⁴ sported with the beautiful girls of Vraj with freely playful smiles, amorous glances, and with caresses and embraces. He was like a child enraptured by his own reflection.

17. The senses of the women of Vraj were alive with pleasure from the contact of his limbs. Their ornaments and garlands were awry, and the women could not keep their garments or their hair or the cloth covering their breasts in order, O best of the Kuru Dynasty.

18. The women of the celestial realm travelling in the air were stricken with desire at seeing Kṛṣṇa's pastimes, and became entranced. The moon and its entourage [the stars] were full of wonder.

19. Although content within himself, the Lord became manifest in as many forms as there were *gopī* women, and enjoyed himself with them in *līlā* pastimes.

20. With great compassion, Kṛṣṇa lovingly caressed with his very soothing hands the face of those *gopīs* who were exhausted from the pleasures of love.

21. The *gopīs* paid homage to their hero with sideways looks and honeyed smiles. Their beautiful cheeks glowed with locks of hair and the glitter of golden earrings. Thrilled by the touch of Kṛṣṇa's fingernails, they sang of his auspicious deeds.

22. When he tired, Kṛṣṇa went into the water with them. He was pursued by bees, who [sang] like *gandharva*-chiefs, because of his garland. Crushed by contact with the limbs of the *gopīs*, it was stained with the *kuṅkum* powder from their breasts. Kṛṣṇa was like the king of the elephants who had lost all inhibitions with his female elephants.

23. With looks of love, the young women around him laughed and splashed him vigorously, O King! Worshipped with showers of *kusuma* flowers by the celestial beings in their aerial chariots, Kṛṣṇa disported himself like an elephant in *līlā* pastimes, even though he is content within himself.

24. Later, he strolled in the groves of the Yamunā river, surrounded by groups of young women and bees. The furthest corners of the river, both on land and on the waters, were pervaded by a wind bearing the fragrance of flowers. He was like an elephant exhilarated by the company of his female elephants.

25. Kṛṣṇa's desires are always fulfilled, and his propensity for enjoyment is fulfilled within himself, but during all those nights he participated in this way in the company of throngs of young women. Such nights, brilliant with the rays of the moon, are the setting for *rasa* in both poetry and prose that describe autumn.'

26. Parīkṣit said:

‘God, the Lord of the universe, has descended into the world along with his expansion [Balarāma] for the establishment of *dharma*, and for the suppression of *adharma*, non-dharma.⁵

27. He is the original speaker, exemplar and protector of the injunctions of *dharma*. How could he behave in a manner contrary to *dharma*, O *brāhmaṇa*, by touching the wives of others?

28. The Lord of the Yadu dynasty, who is content within himself, has performed an abhorrent deed. What was his purpose? You who are true to your vows, please take away our doubt.’

29. Śrī Śuka said:

‘Just as fire consumes everything [without being polluted], so it is seen that the blatant transgressions of *dharma* by the more powerful of rulers are not faults.

30. One who is not a powerful being should certainly never behave in that fashion, not even in his mind. Otherwise, acting out of foolishness, he will be destroyed, just as one who is not Śiva will be destroyed [by drinking] the poison churned from the ocean.⁶

31. The words of powerful beings are truth, and so is whatever is performed by them. The wise will act in accordance with their words.

32. O master, those who are devoid of personal ego do not accrue benefit for themselves through appropriate behaviour, nor undesirable results through its opposite.

33. What then of the applicability of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness to the supreme being of all supreme beings and of all living entities, whether celestial, human or animal?

34. Satisfied by worshipping the dust of Kṛṣṇa’s lotus feet, even the sages act according to their own free will. The bondage of all their *karma* has been destroyed through the power of *yoga*, and so they are never bound. How, then, can one speak of bondage for Kṛṣṇa, who accepts forms according to his own will?

35. He lives within the *gopīs*, their husbands and all living beings. He is the supreme witness who has assumed a form in this world for the purpose of sport.

36. Manifest in a human form, he indulges in such pastime as a favour to the devotees. Hearing about these, one becomes fully devoted to him.

37. Confused by his power of illusion, the menfolk of Vraj were not resentful of Kṛṣṇa; each thought his own wife was present at his side.

38. The *gopīs* held the Lord dear. When the duration of Brahmā’s night had expired,⁷ they went home unwillingly with the approval of Vāsudeva.

39. The sober person who is endowed with faith should hear and describe these pastimes of Viṣṇu with the maidens of Vraj. Achieving supreme devotion to the Lord, one quickly frees oneself from lust, the disease of the heart.’