

Śrī Brhad-bhāgavatāmṛta

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Volume - 2

Śrī-goloka-māhātmya

The Glories of Goloka

Part 7

Jagad-ānanda

The Bliss of the Worlds

Text 146

mat-kāmā ramaṇam jāram

asvarūpa-vido 'balāḥ

brahma mām paramam prāpuḥ

saṅgāc chata-sahasraśaḥ

37
All those Gopīs
→ knowing Me as their most
charming lover → were
unaware of My actual position.
Yet ↓ by intimate association
with Me → they attained Me.

“All those hundreds of thousands (**śata-sahasraśaḥ**) of women (**abalāḥ**), knowing Me as their most charming (**ramaṇam**) lover (**jāram**) and ardently desiring Me that way (**mat-kāmā**), were unaware of My actual position (**asvarūpa-vidaḥ**). Yet by intimately associating (**saṅgāt**) with Me (**mām**), they attained Me (**prāpuḥ**), the Supreme (**paramam**) Absolute Truth (**brahma**).”

The gopīs fulfilled their highest ambitions by achieving Kṛṣṇa as their lover.

Those cowherd women were so exalted that by personal contact with them thousands of the outcaste women of Vraja—Pulindīs and other aborigines—achieved the same rarest goal of life.

The word abalā (“women”) in its literal sense means “not strong,” indicating that the aborigine women lacked the assets of knowledge, good birth, good behavior, and devotion to God.

They were ignorant of their own eternal identities as spirit souls, and because they had never come close enough to Nanda Mahārāja's village to see Kṛṣṇa with their own eyes, they were also ignorant of Kṛṣṇa's all-attractive beauty.

Nonetheless, in the forest the aborigine women of Vraja accidentally came in contact with grass and leaves smeared with kuṅkuma from the bodies of the gopīs and in this way gained the transcendental association of the gopīs and also became infected with the desire to have Kṛṣṇa as their lover.

Or if we presume that the Pulindīs and other aborigine women, simply by being born in Kṛṣṇa's holy dhāma, must have known that they were eternal souls, their association with the gopīs, even though indirect, infused them with sublime devotion for Kṛṣṇa and made them forget whatever spiritual knowledge they had.

They were also ignorant of who they were in another sense: taking no heed of their own dirtiness and their dingy complexions, they were helplessly impelled toward Kṛṣṇa by the conjugal attraction they contracted from the gopīs.

The Pulindīs and others may have been low-class tribal women, but they had the greatest fortune of being attracted to the Supreme Absolute Truth, the darling son of Nanda Mahārāja.

And that attraction was extraordinary.

They accepted Him as the absolute master of their lives, and that too in the special mood that He was their unmarried lover.

They had to keep their love for Krsna secret because as outcastes they had little hope of ever meeting Him and if they did chance to meet Him that contact would be considered altogether illicit.

Thus they privately cherished the treasure of prema within the cores of their hearts.

At every moment they tasted newer and newer sweetness in the highest possible limits of blissful satisfaction.

Having had some contact with the gopīs, the aborigine women
of Vraja all attained a perfection similar to theirs, if not in this
life then in the next.

etāḥ param tanu-bhr̥to bhuvi gopa-vadhvo
govinda eva nikhilātmani rūḍha-bhāvāḥ
vāñchanti yad bhava-bhiyo munayo vyaṁ ca
kiṁ brahma-janmabhir ananta-kathā-rasasya

For one who has
 tasted the taste →
 what is the use of
 taking the birth of
 even Brahmā

38
 Of all??
 Gopis alone have
 actually perfected
 lives.
 Why? They keep
 achieving the

Perfection of unalloyed love for @ → what is hankered by even greater sages & myself

“Among all persons on earth (bhuvī), these cowherd women alone (etāḥ gopa-
vadhvo eva) have actually perfected their embodied lives (param tanu-bhr̥to),
 for they have achieved the perfection of unalloyed love for Lord Govinda
 (govinda nikhilātmani rūḍha-bhāvāḥ). Their pure love is hankered after (yad
vāñchanti) by those who fear material existence (bhava-bhiyo), by great sages
 (munayo), and by ourselves as well (vyaṁ ca). For one who has tasted the
 narrations of the infinite Lord (ananta-kathā-rasasya), what is the use of taking
 birth as a high-class brāhmaṇa, or even as Lord Brahmā himself (kiṁ brahma-
janmabhir)?”

Texts 147 through 152 (Bhāgavatam 10.47.58–63) were spoken by Śrī Uddhava during his visit to Vṛndāvana.

Because of his own solid reputation as an exalted Vaiṣṇava, his testimony that the devotional service of the gopīs is supreme is extremely credible.

Uddhava is a favorite student of Brhaspati, the spiritual master of the demigods, and he is a trusted advisor to Kṛṣṇa in Dvārakā.

Kṛṣṇa Himself praises Uddhava with enthusiasm:

athaitat paramam guhyam
śṛṇvato yadu-nandana
su-gopyam api vakṣyāmi
tvam me bhṛtyaḥ suhṛt sakhā

O beloved of the Yadu dynasty (**yadu-nandana**)! Because you
are my servant, well-wisher and friend (**tvam me bhṛtyaḥ**
suhṛt sakhā), I shall now speak (**atha vakṣyāmi**) to you who
listen well (**śṛṇvataḥ**) the supreme secret (**su-gopyam**
paramam guhyam). (Bhāgavatam 11.11.49)

vāsudevo bhagavatām
tvam tu bhāgavateṣv aham

“Among those entitled to the name Bhagavān I am Vāsudeva
(**vāsudevo bhagavatām**). And among the devotees, you
indeed, Uddhava, represent Me (**tvam tu bhāgavateṣv aham**).”
(Bhāgavatam 11.16.29)

na tathā me priya-tama
ātma-yonir na śaṅkaraḥ
na ca saṅkarsano na śrīr
naivātmā ca yathā bhavān

“My dear Uddhava, neither Lord Brahmā (**na ātma-yonih**),
Lord Śiva (**na śaṅkaraḥ**), Lord Saṅkarsana (**na ca**
saṅkarṣaṇah), the goddess of fortune (**na śrīh**), nor indeed My
own self (**na eva ātmā**) is as dear to Me (**tathā me priya-tama**)
as you (**yathā bhavān**).” (Bhāgavatam 11.14.15)

When Uddhava met with the gopīs in Vṛndāvana, he used all his diplomatic skill to deliver Kṛṣṇa's message in a way that would relieve the agony the gopīs felt in separation from Kṛṣṇa.

But after hearing the message, the gopīs became even more deeply immersed in the ocean of their distress.

Uddhava was astonished by the extraordinary intensity of the gopīs' attachment to Kṛṣṇa.

He had never seen or even heard of such pure devotional
surrender.

Therefore, just before leaving Vṛndāvana, Uddhava spoke these
six verses, in homage to the gopīs and their pure devotion for
Kṛṣṇa.

Here, in the first of these verses, Uddhava declares the gopīs
greater than all aspirants for liberation, greater than all self-
realized liberated saints, and greater than all other devotees of the
Personality of Godhead.

Only the gopīs—the goddesses of fortune who reside in the cowherd village of Śrī Nanda—have realized the full potential of human life (tanu-bhr̥to bhuvī).

That these greatest of all Vaiṣṇavas are human beings and residents of earth is fitting because on higher planets like Svarga, the abode of Indra, the residents enjoy so much power and sense gratification that such love for Kṛṣṇa is practically impossible for them to achieve.

In other words, the demigods and sages living in the higher regions of the universe can hardly ever perfect their lives like the gopīs of Vraja.

The words tanu-bhr̥to bhuvi (“~~perfecting their lives on earth~~”) can also be understood in another way: By sharing the rare gift of prema-bhakti, the gopīs deliver the fallen conditioned souls of this earth.

In other words, the devotional lives of the inhabitants of earth
are nourished by the gopīs.

The influence of the natural compassion and other virtues of
the gopīs is supremely beneficial for everyone because the
gopīs possess the greatest possible love for the inner Lord of
all souls, the son of the king of the cowherds, the Lord who is
famous as Govinda because He is “the Indra of the cows.”

Moreover, the gopīs disregard everything else and love Govinda as the Lord of their hearts, their lover, their paramour.

They enjoyed with Kṛṣṇa the unprecedented rāsa-līlā festival, and then, by displaying the all-attractive transformations of their viraha-bhāva, they deprived Uddhava of his wisdom by vanquishing his sobriety.

For a long time the gopīs had quietly endured within their hearts the pain of separation from Kṛṣṇa; but after hearing Kṛṣṇa's message from Uddhava they could no longer hold themselves back.

Uddhava then became a witness to the uncontrollable waves of their complete distress.

The ecstasy the gopīs feel in separation from Kṛṣṇa makes the whole world cry in sympathy and brings Vaisnavas to the verge of death.

In the obvious sense, Kṛṣṇa is nikhilātmā in that He is “the soul of all beings,” but in this verse the phrase nikhilātmani has another, confidential meaning.

He is also nikhilātmā in that each gopī cherishes Him as her very life and soul (literally, “her entire self”), in a way that other devotees cannot imitate.

No one loves Kṛṣṇa as unconditionally as do the gopīs.

Mumukṣus, renounced aspirants for liberation, fear material existence; and self-satisfied Vaiṣṇava devotees of the Lord, who are liberated souls (muktas), are free from such fear.

And both, in their own ways, understand Kṛṣṇa to be the supreme goal and the supreme fruit of spiritual endeavors.

The liberated Vaiṣṇavas and the aspirants for liberation who have the good fortune to get the mercy of those Vaiṣṇavas admire the love the gopis have for Kṛṣṇa, but rarely do they attain it.

Uddhava considers Himself to be in the same category—a sincere servant of Kṛṣṇa who can only admire the gopīs' prema from a distance.

But isn't Lord Brahmā, rather than the gopīs, the greatest of all Vaiṣṇavas?

Since he is the original guru for the path of devotional service, isn't he superior to all aspirants for liberation and to all liberated devotees?

He sits on the seat of highest sovereignty in this universe, and he is endowed with many excellences.

If the gopīs are so exalted, then, why didn't they accept births like his, in which they would have been worshiped by the whole world, rather than come to the earth as lowly cowherd women?

Uddhava answers these questions by saying **kim brahma-janmabhir ananta-kathā-rasasya.**

The term **ananta-kathā** refers to topics about the unlimited Lords—Śrī Kṛṣṇa and Śrī Balarāma.

Uddhava simply states that a rasika-bhakta, a person who has a taste for hearing ananta-kathā, sees no use in being born as Lord Brahmā, even numerous times.

Such rasika-bhaktas regard birth as Brahmā as an obstacle to cultivating the taste for ananta-kathā because such a birth creates various distractions, such as pride.

Therefore the gopīs, intent on tasting the honey found at Śrī Govinda's lotus feet, would rather be born as simple daughters of cowherds than as such an exalted being as Lord Brahmā.

Alternatively, the rules of Sanskrit grammar allow kathā-rasasya to be split as kathā-arasasya, meaning "for one who has no taste for hearing these topics."

If someone has no interest in ananta-kathā, what can he gain by taking birth as the creator of the universe? Nothing of real value.

Attraction to ananta-kathā is the real fruit of renunciation, liberation, and devotional practice.

Thus a person who lacks this taste cannot honestly be called a renunciant, a liberated sage, or a Vaiṣṇava.

Another way of looking at Uddhava's words is that he is explaining why the gopīs, though on the highest level of self-realization, chose to abandon the norms of civilized behavior, the principles of dharma taught in the Vedas.

In this context, **brahma-janma** can be interpreted to mean “the appearance of Vedic knowledge within.”

For the gopīs, or indeed for anyone who has a taste for the topics of the unlimited Lord, the presence of Vedic knowledge on the lips and in the heart is less important than attraction to kṛṣṇa-kathā.

Brahma can also be taken to signify “knowledge of the pure self,” and janma to signify “the means to generate this knowledge,” namely the Vedas.

In other words, a person who has realized ananta-kathā-rasa has nothing to gain by Vedic study or theoretical knowledge that he is spirit distinct from matter.

And to a person who has no ananta-kathā-rasa, of what use is Vedic study or knowledge of the self?

Ananta-kathā-rasa is the only substantial result to be gained from studying the Vedas and inquiring into the identity of the self.

Vedic study and self-realization are only means toward that final goal.

Once one has reached the goal, one can put aside the means by which one got there, just as a person who has lit a lamp to find something in his room before going to sleep can put out the lamp and lie down to rest once he has found what he was looking for, or just as one who has paid to take a boat across a river can forget about the boat after crossing.

And, conversely, when a person never attains the goal but remains stubbornly attached to the means, all he accomplishes is useless effort, as in beating empty husks of grain.

A devotee situated in ananta-kathā-rasa is therefore a superior person.

Whether practicing the regulations of vaidhī-bhakti or helplessly submerged in the ocean of rasa, he can never give up hearing and chanting about Kṛṣṇa, and doing whatever promotes that hearing and chanting.

What to speak, then, of the gopīs, those most fortunate of all women, who have the rarest quality of love for Śrī Govinda?

For them, ordinary Vedic cultural standards and the dry realizations of selfish meditation are of no value whatsoever.