

Introduction

AMONG the pantheon of Hindu gods, *avatāras*, and / or manifestations of Bhagavān, Śrī Kṛṣṇa stands out as one of the most popular and highly revered. Even among non-Hindus, He is widely acclaimed for His universal teachings on the path of enlightenment in the form of *Bhagavad Gītā*, the most renowned scripture of the Hindus, and for His fascinating life-stories. In spite of this extensive notoriety, His identity remains a great enigma. No other Hindu deity is shrouded in as much mystery as He. People from different backgrounds hold diverse opinions about Kṛṣṇa, many of which seem contradictory. They consider Him as a great lover, a skilled statesman, and a highly realized mystic. As an irrepresible lover, He is famous for stealing the clothes of the young *gopīs* while they were bathing in the Yamunā River and for marrying 16,108 princesses. Yet, as an accomplished mystic, He is esteemed as the speaker of *Bhagavad Gītā* and as Yogeśvara, the “Master of Yoga,” in which celibacy and reticence are fundamental principles. He is well-known as a simple cowherder, yet He is also famous as the most venerated royal scion, who received the principal honors at Emperor Yudhiṣṭhira’s *rājasūya-yajña*,¹ in the presence of the world’s foremost kings, scholars, and sages.

Notwithstanding Kṛṣṇa’s enigmatic nature, it is essential to gain a clear picture of His true ontological status in order to grasp the significance of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the method by which it self-discloses truth, namely, *bhakti-yoga*. As established in

¹ An elaborate ritual undertaken by an all-conquering monarch to establish his authority over all other kings operating under his jurisdiction.

Tattva Sandarbha (Anucchedas 50–52) with reference to the *Bhāgavata*'s second verse (SB 1.1.2), this *Purāṇa* specifically propounds the supreme *dharma* of humanity, which is love for Bhagavān — our very source and refuge. To be infused with transcendental love for Bhagavān, authentic and unambiguous knowledge about Him and His essential being is of utmost importance. Since Bhagavān has innumerable forms, such as Viṣṇu, Rāma, Kṛṣṇa, and Nṛsiṃha, the question must be asked, are They all equiprimordial in Their constitutional status or is there some hierarchy of being among Them? To address this question, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī wrote this book, *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*.

The conventional and for the most part unexamined point of view is that Kṛṣṇa is simply an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. In *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī uproots this misconception, demonstrating that Bhagavān Viṣṇu, being ontologically related to the play of creation and hence to immanence, is Himself implicitly included within a more complete transcendent Whole (*avatāri*), technically known as Svayaṁ Bhagavān, who is clearly identified in the text as Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Although Śrī Jīva previously delineated the ontology of Bhagavān in general terms in *Bhagavat Sandarbha*, he did not address the question of the identity of Svayaṁ Bhagavān Himself, or Bhagavān in His ownmost essential being, nature, and original form. In this respect, Kṛṣṇa's status in regard to the various *avatāras* was not yet made a subject of inquiry. By first establishing a comprehensive universal understanding of Bhagavān in *Bhagavat Sandarbha*, Jīva Gosvāmī laid the foundation for a detailed investigation into the ontology of Svayaṁ Bhagavān in *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*. His fundamental conclusion in the latter volume is that Kṛṣṇa is the source of all other *avatāras* of Bhagavān and that He has no source other than Himself.

Jīva Gosvāmī's primary intention in writing this book is to reveal Kṛṣṇa as the supreme object of worship and love. In the very beginning of *Tattva Sandarbha*, he clearly stipulated that the subject of the *Six Sandarbhas* is meant specifically for those whose sole aspiration is to be immersed in the *bhājana* of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. He even declared that the *Sandarbh*as should be studied only by such

devotees. The present *Sandarbha* is surely in line with this declaration. In order for a devotee to be rightly established in such *bhajana*, he must have a clear understanding of the true nature of his object of worship. In *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī provides this distinct and esoteric knowledge of Kṛṣṇa, the supreme worshipable deity.

This book is truly a work of genius. No other book in or related to its field of study can compare to it. There have been many essays or short treatises written about Kṛṣṇa, but no one else has afforded this subject such a thorough and systematic treatment. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī traces out Kṛṣṇa's factual status among all the *avatāras* of Bhagavān based upon his careful study of *Bhāgavata Purāna*. Not only does he demonstrate that Kṛṣṇa is the original form of God, Svayaṁ Bhagavān, he goes a step further to establish a hierarchy within Kṛṣṇa's own multifaceted manifestations. In this respect, he discloses that Kṛṣṇa as a cowherder and lover in Vraja is superior to His manifestation as a royal statesman in Mathurā and Dvārakā. This fact is so abstruse that even among Vaiṣṇavas, there are some who have difficulty in comprehending and accepting it. This precise realization, however, is crucial for the practice of *rāgānugā-bhakti*, or pure devotion in the wake of natural affection, which is the subject of the next book in this series, *Bhakti Sandarbha*. *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* is therefore the most important of all the ontological writings in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava School, because it unravels the mystery regarding the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava's worshipable deity, which gives the school its unique identity.

Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha is the fourth book in the series of the *Six Sandarbhas*. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī wrote the first three *Sandarbhas* — *Tattva*, *Bhagavat*, and *Paramātma* — based on the *Bhāgavata Purāna*'s famous “*vadanti*” verse (SB 1.2.11).² In these three books, he elaborated on the key words mentioned in this verse: *tattva*, *brahma*, *paramātmā*, and *bhagavān*. While treating their own graded thematic subjects, these first three *Sandarbhas* ultimately serve as an introduction to the fourth volume, *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, in which Śrī

² *vadanti tat tattva-vidas tattvaṁ yaj jñānam advayam
brahmeti paramātmēti bhagavān iti śabdyate*

Jīva Gosvāmī ascertains the identity of the original form of Bhagavān. In doing so, he brings to light the true significance of another key phrase from the *vadanti* verse — namely, that ultimate reality (*tattva*) is nondual consciousness (*advaya-jñāna*). Śrī Jīva conclusively establishes that this phrase is a reference to Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the Nondual Personal Absolute replete with His own interiority.

Summary of Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha

Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha begins with a brief recapitulation of the two previous books, specifying the distinction between Brahman, Paramātmā, and Bhagavān. The special role of Paramātmā as the source of all *avatāras* appearing within the cosmos is described next. After enumerating twenty-two *avatāras*, Jīva Gosvāmī points out that although Kṛṣṇa is initially included within this list, He is not an *avatāra* of Paramātmā but the original form of Bhagavān: *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam* (SB 1.3.28). Even though this phrase is just a quarter verse out of some 18,000 verses, it is the foundation for the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and, hence, of *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* as well. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī thus goes to great length to fully unpack its meaning and to establish Kṛṣṇa as Svayaṁ Bhagavān, the original form of God.

In reply to the objection that Kṛṣṇa is also counted among the *avatāras* of the Puruṣa (SB 1.3.23), Śrī Jīva points out that in the entire list of *avatāras*, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are singled out as unique by the fact that only They are designated by the word *bhagavān*. More importantly, he argues from the point of view of hermeneutics that in the case of a disparity between precepts, the later injunction (SB 1.3.28) overrides the earlier one (SB 1.3.23). In this respect, he identifies the statement “*kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam*” as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s *paribhāṣā-sūtra*.³ In doing so, he lays down the authoritative context to correctly interpret the entire *Purāṇa*, a meaning hierarchy with the power to override

³ A definition of terms, a rule, or a theme, usually placed in the beginning of a book, which must be understood in order to accurately assess the remainder of the book.

all contrary interpretations of any statement therein. Moreover, since the *Bhāgavata* is the emperor of all the Vedas (as established in *Tattva Sandarbha*), its *paribhāṣā-sūtra* — *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam* — has the power to override contrary statements or interpretations from any Vedic scripture. It is a *mahā-vākya*, a great declaration, like the *tat tvam asi* proclamation of *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*.

In this light, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī analyzes various statements from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that seem to depict Kṛṣṇa only as a partial manifestation of Viṣṇu. In the course of such deliberations, he clearly establishes that Kṛṣṇa is the ultimate source of all *avatāras*, including the *guṇa-avatāras* of Brahmā, Viṣṇu, and Śiva. He then cites a number of verses from *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that support the empirical decree, *kṛṣṇas tu bhagavān svayam*. He compares these to an army surrounding and strengthening the emperor-like statement. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī proposes that not only *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* but all other Vedic scriptures also accept Kṛṣṇa as the original Bhagavān. This is called *gati-sāmānya-nyāya*, or the universal concordance among different scriptures. He cites statements from other scriptures to this effect.

Next, Śrī Jīva shows that the sole intention of all the speakers and listeners in *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is to speak and hear about Kṛṣṇa, whom they accept as the supreme form of Bhagavān. Although Kṛṣṇa is obviously the subject of the First, Tenth, and Eleventh Cantos, the complete exposition of His being is in fact the main theme of the entire *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Jīva Gosvāmī confirms this by analyzing the *Purāṇa* with reference to the two sets of six criteria employed in textual interpretation, known as *ṣaṭ-pramāṇa* and *ṣaḍ-liṅga*.

The first set of six indicators (*ṣaṭ-pramāṇa*) determines the subject or the meaning of a statement primarily through an analysis of language itself. The six “linguistic” criteria are as follows:

1. *Śruti*, direct statement.
2. *Liṅga*, inferential mark or word meaning.
3. *Vākya*, sentence or syntactical connection.
4. *Prakaraṇa*, context or interdependence.
5. *Sthāna*, position or order of words.
6. *Samākhyā*, name or etymology.

In contrast to the former, the second set of six indicators (*ṣaḍ-liṅga*) determines the subject or meaning through a thematic analysis of the text as a whole. The six “thematic” criteria are as follows:

1. Determination of the subject through concurrence of the introductory and closing statements.
2. Analysis of what is repeated throughout the book.
3. Evaluation of what is described in the text as extraordinary.
4. Assessment of the subject derived from statements describing the fruit to be attained by such an investigation.
5. Identification of what is praised throughout the text.
6. Appraisal of what is established through logic.

From both sets of criteria, Jīva Gosvāmī establishes that the subject of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is none other than Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is the nondual Absolute and Svayaṁ Bhagavān.

Up to this point in *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*, Jīva Gosvāmī has been concerned solely with the determination of Śrī Kṛṣṇa as Svayaṁ Bhagavān, which concludes the first major division of the book. In the second division, he delineates at length the constitutional facets of being of Svayaṁ Bhagavān. He begins with an exposition of Svayaṁ Bhagavān’s own *mūla-catur-vyūha*. The concept of *catur-vyūha* — the fourfold manifestation of Bhagavān as Vāsudeva, Saṅkarṣaṇa, Pradyumna, and Aniruddha — is an important subject of the Itihāsas, Purāṇas, and Āgama literature, the latter of which includes the Tantras, Pañcarātras, and Saṁhitās. Within the context of Kṛṣṇa’s manifest *līlā* on earth, His own *mūla*, or “root” *catur-vyūha* consists of Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa’s brother Balarāma, Kṛṣṇa’s son Pradyumna, and His grandson Aniruddha. In Śrī Rāma’s *līlā*, the *catur-vyūha* is manifest as Rāma and His three brothers, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata, and Śatrughna. Within the

context of the world appearance or of phenomenality, only the last three members of the *catur-vyūha* are present as the underlying ground of being, manifest as the three forms of the Immanent Self (Paramātmā) — Kāraṇodakśāyī Viṣṇu, Garbhodakśāyī Viṣṇu, and Kṣīrodakśāyī Viṣṇu.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī shows that Kṛṣṇa is the original source of the *catur-vyūha*. Since Kṛṣṇa is the original form of Bhagavān, He implicitly contains all other *avatāras*. Like Him, His brother, Balarāma, is also not merely an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu but a direct expansion of Kṛṣṇa Himself. Sometimes Balarāma is depicted as an *avatāra* of the celestial serpent Śeṣa, the bed of Viṣṇu, or as a manifestation of Saṅkarṣaṇa. Śrī Jīva, however, refutes such opinions and demonstrates that Balarāma is Mahā-saṅkarṣaṇa, or He who is beyond the Saṅkarṣaṇa of the *catur-vyūha*. In the same way, Kṛṣṇa's son Pradyumna is not an *avatāra* of the celestial being, Kāmadeva (Cupid), as misunderstood by some. Kāmadeva was burnt by the wrath of Śiva, and thereafter he merged into Pradyumna, when the latter manifested in Dvārakā as Kṛṣṇa's son.

After elucidating the constitutional status of the members of Svayaṁ Bhagavān's own *mūla-catur-vyūha* and showing that Kṛṣṇa implicitly includes all *avatāras*, Śrī Jīva takes up the discussion of Svayaṁ Bhagavān's form. Although the subject of Bhagavān's body was discussed elaborately in *Bhagavat Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī revisits the topic here again, but this time as it pertains specifically to Svayaṁ Bhagavān, Śrī Kṛṣṇa. The reason for this repetition is to clarify the nature of Kṛṣṇa's own original form in which He appeared on earth. Because His own form is human-like in appearance, one might question how His body could possibly have the transcendental characteristics belonging to the superhuman body of Viṣṇu. Śrī Jīva demonstrates, however, that Kṛṣṇa's body is not only on par with the four-handed forms of Nārāyaṇa and Viṣṇu, but transcends them altogether. Kṛṣṇa's body is not an imposition, *adhyāsa*, of a phenomenal form onto Brahman, as proposed by the Advaitavādīs. His body is eternal, transphenomenal, all-pervading, self-luminous, and self-manifest.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī next takes up the topic of Svayaṁ Bhagavān's personal abode. It is a direct manifestation of Kṛṣṇa's intrinsic potency, *svarūpa-śakti*, and is nondifferent from Him. Like Kṛṣṇa Himself, His abode is all-pervading, even though it appears to be spatially delimited in its earthly manifestation. It is superior to and beyond all the other spiritual abodes (Vaikuṅṭhas) of all other forms of Bhagavān, such as Rāma. For this reason, Kṛṣṇa's abode is called Mahā-vaikuṅṭha. When Kṛṣṇa appears on earth, He does so along with His abode and associates. Kṛṣṇa eternally exists in His own abode, which is sometimes manifest and at other times unmanifest to our perception, just as He Himself is. His abode has three divisions — Gokula, Mathurā, and Dvārakā. Gokula is also called Vraja or Vṛndāvana. Among the three abodes, Gokula is supreme and most dear to Kṛṣṇa. It is here that Kṛṣṇa manifests His most enchanting *līlā*, which is not disclosed anywhere else.

All three abodes have their replicas on earth and bear the same names as their respective counterparts. There is no difference between the original abodes and their earthly manifestations. Thus, the visible abodes on earth are not merely places of worship but are also ultimate destinations to be attained. Their transphenomenal nature has been confirmed by the experience of self-realized devotees even of modern times. Taking this into consideration, it can be said that Kṛṣṇa's abodes have three types of existence. The first is the *aprakāṣa-prakāśa*, an unmanifest state of being in which the abode exists but without visible contact with the earthly plane. The second is the phenomenal appearance, *bhauma*, a form of the abode that has permanent contact with the earthly plane. The Vṛndāvana that is visible to people at present is an example of this. The third is the *prakāṣa-prakāśa*, a state of being fully manifest on the earthly plane, which occurs when Kṛṣṇa personally becomes manifest along with His associates.

After discussing Svayaṁ Bhagavān's abodes, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī next takes up the topic of Kṛṣṇa's personal associates, who reside eternally in these three abodes. The Yādavas are His associates in Mathurā and Dvārakā, and the cowherd people, the *gopas* and *gopīs*, are His associates in Gokula. Like Bhagavān and His abode, these

associates are real, eternal, and intrinsically endowed with divine qualities like those of Kṛṣṇa. Although their bodies are spiritual and conscious in nature, there are isolated scriptural statements that seem to depict their bodies as mortal or as subject to material limitations, such as bleeding or being wounded by a weapon. These characterizations are only to make them appear like ordinary human beings for the sake of the *līlā*'s conformity to human conventions.

In the *mauṣala-līlā*, for example, in which Kṛṣṇa's family members become intoxicated, quarrel among themselves, and ultimately kill each other, their deaths are only an illusory display. Before Kṛṣṇa appeared on earth, He ordered the *devas* and their wives to take birth on earth and participate in His *līlā*. These *devas* then merged into the bodies of Kṛṣṇa's eternal associates and became His relatives among the Yādavas. When it was time for Kṛṣṇa to wind up His *līlā* on earth, He used the *mauṣala-līlā* as a pretext to again separate the *devas* from His eternal associates, thus allowing the latter to enter into His unmanifest (*aprakāṣa*) *līlā*.

Kṛṣṇa engages in His human-like *līlā* with these associates. Although Kṛṣṇa was born to Vasudeva and Devakī, it was Nanda and Yaśodā who raised Him and relished His childhood *līlās*. The love of Nanda and Yaśodā for Kṛṣṇa is vastly superior to that of Vasudeva and Devakī. This was clearly illustrated by Śukadeva Gosvāmī, the narrator of *Bhāgavata Purāna*, through the *dāma-bandhana-līlā*, in which Yaśodā bound child Kṛṣṇa with ropes as a punishment for His prank of breaking a clay pot full of yogurt.

Jīva Gosvāmī next discusses Svayaṁ Bhagavān's *līlā*, which is of two types — manifest (*prakāṣa*) and unmanifest (*aprakāṣa*). When Kṛṣṇa appears on earth, His *līlā* is called *prakāṣa*. Otherwise, it is called *aprakāṣa*. The *aprakāṣa-līlā* has no contact with the people or objects of this world and is without beginning or end. The *prakāṣa-līlā*, however, has a beginning and an end within a given universe and involves some mixture of earthly objects and people. It is only in the *prakāṣa-līlā* that Kṛṣṇa enacts the pastimes of birth, moving from Vṛndāvana to Mathurā, and finally departing from

the earth. Kṛṣṇa eternally sports in His three abodes — Vṛndāvana, Mathurā, and Dvārakā — but when He is present in His *prakaṭa-līlā* in Vṛndāvana, He remains *aprakaṭa* in the other two realms. Similarly, when He moves from Vṛndāvana to Mathurā, He becomes *aprakaṭa* in Vṛndāvana and *prakaṭa* in Mathurā.

A worshiper can meditate upon the *aprakaṭa-līlā* through two distinct yet interrelated methods — *mantropāsanā-mayī* and *svārasikī*. In *mantropāsanā-mayī* meditation, a particular *mantra* describes the posture of Kṛṣṇa and His associates in one specific location and in which there is no movement. In *svārasikī* meditation, there is no such limitation of place and time. The meditative attunement to the *aprakaṭa-līlā* proceeds as Kṛṣṇa tends the cows, plays with His friends in the forest, and so on. The *svārasikī* meditation is compared to the continuous flow of the river Gaṅgā, while *mantra-mayī* meditation is like a still pond formed from that river.

Within the context of the discussion of the fundamental structure of the *prakaṭa* and *aprakaṭa-līlās*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī launches into a lengthy deliberation on Kṛṣṇa's relationship with the young *gopīs* of Vraja. A relationship with a spouse is called *svakīya*, while a relationship with an unmarried partner, or a partner married to another, is called *parakīya*. In the *prakaṭa-līlā*, the *gopīs'* relationship with Kṛṣṇa takes the form of *parakīya*. This topic has been the subject of great controversy since the ancient time of King Parīkṣit, the first student of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. When the king heard about Kṛṣṇa dancing and playing at night in the forest with the *gopīs*, who in the context of the *līlā* were married to other men, he submitted a question about the morality of such behavior. In reply, Śukadeva said that just as fire can consume filth without becoming impure, so too beings of supernal power are never subject to immorality. He explained, moreover, that Kṛṣṇa is the Immanent Self in all living beings — including the *gopīs* and their husbands. Consequently, even though the *gopīs* appeared externally as though married to other men, from an ontological perspective they are His own intrinsic potencies and thus eternally belong to Him alone and to no other.

Some later scholars, apparently not satisfied with Śukadeva's reply, tried to prove that Kṛṣṇa was married to the *gopīs*. Others agreed with Śukadeva and insist there is nothing immoral in their apparent “*parakīya*” relationship. From the extent of the discussion Jīva Gosvāmī devotes to this topic, it seems this issue must have been very sensitive when he wrote *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*. In *Anuccheda* 177, he endeavors to prove that although Kṛṣṇa was seemingly the paramour of the *gopīs* in the *prakaṣa-lilā*, they attained Him as their husband in the *aprakaṣa-lilā*.

After delineating Svayaṁ Bhagavān's *lilā*, which has the two divisions of *prakaṣa* and *aprakaṣa*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī concludes the book with a discussion of His potencies, following the same strategy as adopted in *Bhagavat Sandarbha*. There are two divisions of the potencies belonging specifically to Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, namely the queens (*mahiṣīs*) in Mathurā and Dvārakā and the *gopīs* in Vraja. Both groups are direct embodiments of Kṛṣṇa's intrinsic potency (*svarūpa-śakti*). Between the two, the *gopīs*' ontological status is paramount, since they are an entirely unique expression of Kṛṣṇa's bliss potency, *hlādinī-śakti*. Even among the *gopīs*, gradations exist according to the degree of manifestation of *hlādinī-śakti* in them.

Among the *gopīs*, Śrīmatī Rādhā is supreme. Just as Kṛṣṇa is the supreme manifestation of Bhagavān, so too His female counterpart, Śrī Rādhā, is the personification of the highest completion of Kṛṣṇa's bliss potency, *hlādinī-śakti*. As such, Kṛṣṇa eternally sports with Her. They are one existential reality manifest as the supreme potency (*śakti*) and the supreme potent source (*śaktimān*) — being one and different simultaneously. Śrī Jīva asserts that the disclosure of this truth is implicit within the first verse of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the supreme authority in the matter of the transcendental Reality. In this regard, he ends the book with an entirely unique interpretation of the *Bhāgavata*'s opening verse, revealing Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as its mutual object. This parallels the strategy employed in *Paramātmā Sandarbha*, where Jīva Gosvāmī interprets the same verse in relation to Bhagavān.

Although this book is exclusively concerned with Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa, its purpose is not to supply a biographical account of Kṛṣṇa's life on earth. For the latter, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī wrote a separate book in two volumes, entitled *Gopāla Campu*, which is a literary composition (*kāvya*), containing both poetry and prose.

Parakīya or Svakīya?

The relationship between Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* of Vraja has been a sensitive, thorny issue within the Gauḍīya School as well as in Hinduism at large. Kṛṣṇa's romantic relationship with young girls who are not His wives presents a formidable challenge for the religious mind to comprehend. Yet this topic is described so explicitly in the Purāṇas that one cannot deny it. Scholars and devotees of Kṛṣṇa have evolved various strategies to circumvent this issue. One group worships Kṛṣṇa only in His baby form, as Bāla Gopāla, averting the need to justify the morality of Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* with the young *gopīs*. Other groups deny the veracity of this *līlā* altogether, considering it to be allegorical. They compare the *gopīs* to various mental states (*citta-vṛtti*), and Kṛṣṇa to the witness of those mental states (*ātmā*). Still others claim that Kṛṣṇa was in fact married to the *gopīs*. According to this view, the marriages of Kṛṣṇa with the *gopīs* took place during the year in which Brahmā stole Kṛṣṇa's friends. During this time, Kṛṣṇa expanded Himself to replace the missing cowherd boys, and so the boys who were married with the *gopīs* were actually Kṛṣṇa Himself.

Bhāgavata Purāṇa, however, which delineates Kṛṣṇa's *prakaṣa-līlā*, is very explicit that Kṛṣṇa did not marry until after He left Vraja and moved to Dvārakā via Mathurā. He lived in Vraja only up to the age of eleven and later underwent the sacred-thread ceremony, *upanayana*, in Mathurā. According to Hindu custom, a *brāhmaṇa*, *ṣatriya*, or *vaiśya* boy was not permitted to marry without first undergoing the sacred-thread ceremony (*upanayana-saṁskāra*). On this basis, Kṛṣṇa's marriage with the *gopīs* in Vraja is ruled out.

Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī tows a middle line between the two points of view. Within the *prakaṭa-līlā*, Kṛṣṇa's *parakiya* relationship with the *gopīs* cannot be denied, for *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* makes it perfectly evident that the *gopīs* were not married to Kṛṣṇa. The intensity of love that they exhibited within the context of this relation is, indeed, an essential feature of their excellence and establishes them as the highest ideal of unconditional love. If they were married, there would be no significant difference between them and the queens of Dvārakā, and thus the queens' praise of the *gopīs* (in SB 10.83.43) would be absurd. However, to pacify religious Hindus, who could not accommodate the idea that Kṛṣṇa could be implicated in an apparent illicit relationship, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī devised an ingenious solution. He argues that the *gopīs* eternally belong to Kṛṣṇa as His own intrinsic potencies. Hence, their paramour relationship with Him in the *prakaṭa-līlā* is mere appearance. At the conclusion of the *prakaṭa-līlā*, this relationship is withdrawn and their eternal *svakiya* relation with Kṛṣṇa in the *aprakaṭa-līlā* is then self-disclosed. This reflects Śukadeva's point that Kṛṣṇa and His energies are ontologically wed. By adopting this line of argument, the author satisfied his conservative contemporaries without tampering with the message of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Since the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is concerned only with the *prakaṭa-līlā*, it does not address the question as to whether or not the *gopīs* are married to Kṛṣṇa in the *aprakaṭa-līlā*.

Other Special Features of Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha

One of the special features of *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* is the disclosure of the fact that Kṛṣṇa's *līlā* eternally unfolds in two dimensions of being — manifest (*prakaṭa*) and unmanifest (*aprakaṭa*). Kṛṣṇa eternally exists in His own abode, beyond the range of worldly inspection (*aprakaṭa*). Once in a day of Brahmā, however, He makes His *līlā* visible to people in general (*prakaṭa*). While invisible to the world, He carries on His divine play with His associates in the *aprakaṭa-līlā*. From the point of view of Kṛṣṇa and His associates, there is no difference between the two *līlās*.

A related concept is the principle that Kṛṣṇa, His associates, and His abodes all have multiple *prakāśa* manifestations on the basis of which the *prakaṭa* and *aprakaṭa-līlās* can be enacted in perfect synchronicity. Kṛṣṇa is one, but He can manifest Himself in many forms at one and the same existential moment, performing different acts in distinct locations and yet remaining one. These simultaneously one and yet distinct forms are called *prakāśa* manifestations. Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī extends the concepts of *prakaṭa*, *aprakaṭa*, and *prakāśa* a step further to explain how each *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa is eternal. In the realm of conventional experience, all actions have a definite beginning and end and thus cannot be eternal. In contrast to this, however, each and every *līlā* of Kṛṣṇa continues to unfold in different *prakāśas* within the *aprakaṭa-līlā* and is thus eternal. On the basis of this understanding, Jīva Gosvāmī is able to reconcile how it could be possible for Kṛṣṇa to depart from Vṛndāvana to Mathurā in spite of His being ever present in both locations.

The supreme status of Gokula (Vraja) among Kṛṣṇa's three abodes is another unique insight brought to light by Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī in *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha*. The endearing blissful nature of His human-like *līlā*, known as *mādhurya*, is manifest in its highest form only in Vraja. As an expression of this *mādhurya*, Kṛṣṇa is perpetually present in Gokula in His beautiful adolescent form. This is His most astonishing, adorable, and supremely enchanting form — superior to His manifestations in Mathurā and Dvārakā. Correspondingly, Kṛṣṇa's associates in Vraja are superior to His associates in Mathurā and Dvārakā. Their love for Kṛṣṇa is paramount both qualitatively and quantitatively. This implies that the existential status of Vraja is such that in this particular setting, Kṛṣṇa Himself manifests beauty and love far exceeding that exhibited in the other two abodes. On the basis of this determination, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī concludes that in terms of aesthetic completion, Kṛṣṇa in Vraja surpasses even His own manifestation in Mathurā and Dvārakā.

Corresponding to the above understanding, it is to be pointed out that Kṛṣṇa has two essential features — His human-like state of existence (*narākāra*), known as *mādhurya*, and His majestic

existence, known as *aiśvarya*, replete with regulating powers. The first of these is prominent in Vraja, whereas the second is prevalent in Mathurā and Dvārakā. In His *aiśvarya* form, He sometimes manifests two hands and sometimes four. His Universal Form (*viśvarūpa*), described in the Eleventh Chapter of *Bhagavad Gītā*, is inferior to both these aspects. This is why Arjuna could not be satisfied at heart to witness this form. For average Hindus, such a distinction may appear strange indeed. But for Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, this insight is crucial, because it establishes the foundational basis for the practice of *rāgānugā-bhakti*, recommended in *Bhakti Sandarbha*.

Another of Kṛṣṇa's unique characteristics pointed out by Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī is the fact that the *asuras* He slayed in Vraja were killed not by Him directly, but by Viṣṇu, who is implicit within Kṛṣṇa. As explained earlier, Kṛṣṇa, being Svayaṁ Bhagavān, includes all other forms of Bhagavān within His essential being. Thus, He personally does not engage in killing the *asuras*.

Śrī Jīva also emphasizes the fact that the real basis for relationship is love and not blood lineage. This is understood from Kṛṣṇa's life. Although He was born to Vasudeva and Devakī, He preferred to live with His foster parents, Yaśodā and Nanda. The love of Nanda and Yaśodā is far superior to that of Kṛṣṇa's own birth parents. This implies that it is possible even for modern day practitioners to develop love for Kṛṣṇa in the parental attitude without Kṛṣṇa literally taking birth from them. This fact also lays the foundation for the final book of the anthology, *Prīti Sandarbha*, in which Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī elaborately discusses the subject of divine love (*prīti*, or *prema*).

In *Tattva Sandarbha* (Anuccheda 50), Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī stated that in order to elucidate the essential truth of *Śrīmad Bhāgavata*, he would examine in the *Six Sandarbhas* the three topics of *sambandha*, *abhidheya*, and *prayojana*. *Sambandha* refers to the relation between the signified Reality (*vācya*) as subject of the text and the text itself as signifier (*vācaka*) of that Reality. In this respect,

the subject of the relation is known as *sambandhi-tattva*. *Abhidheya* refers to the prescribed means by which the subjective Reality (*sambandhi-tattva*) is immediately self-disclosed in consciousness, and *prayojana* refers to the state of ultimate completion to be arrived at through consummation of the means. In the first four *Sandarbhas*, Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī examined in great detail *sambandha-tattva*, the exposition of which reaches its peak in *Kṛṣṇa Sandarbha* in the disclosure of ultimate Reality as Svayaṁ Bhagavān Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Taking it a step further, he demonstrated at the close of the same volume that the combined form of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, being one indivisible Reality existing as the supreme potency and the supreme potent source, is the *sambandhi-tattva*, or the subject to be realized. In the next book, *Bhakti Sandarbha*, Śrī Jīva proceeds to examine the *abhidheya*, or the means by which one can be permanently established in the completion state of authentic relatedness to this *sambandhi-tattva*.

