

Staging Divine Longing through Disguise: The Theft of the Ring Play in the North Indian Rasa-
lila

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Abstract

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This thesis contributes to the study of disguise in North Indian religious drama performance. The core of the thesis involves the analysis of the theme of (dis)guise in devotional Classical Hindi (Brajabhāṣā) drama called Rāsā-līlā, from North India, foregrounding its textual, performative, and theological dimensions. While Rāsā-līlā has been studied as a devotional dance-drama rooted in the Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* movement (devotional movement in the 15th-16th century CE), the specific genre of *chadma-līlās* (plays of disguise) has not received sustained scholarly attention. This study examines how disguise functions as a dramaturgical device in the Mudariyā Corī Līlā (the Theft of the Ring play) to communicate complex theological concepts within the living performance tradition of North India.

Note on Translation and Transliteration

All translations are mine unless otherwise stated in the footnotes. I have read several English translations of books from South Asian languages that have helped me with my own translations. Whenever this is the case, I have acknowledged the sources.

In this thesis, the transliteration of the Devanagari script has been primarily guided by the pattern followed by Professor Rupert Snell, or “Rupert Snell’s transliteration system.” The transliteration strategy employed seeks to balance the traditional accuracy of phonetic representation with modern comprehension and international standards.

Distinguishing Vowel Lengths

I have utilized “a” and “ā” to clearly differentiate between the short and long “a” sounds, respectively. This distinction is crucial, as it significantly affects the meaning of words, as exemplified by “रस” (rasa) and “रस” (rāsa). I have made a conscious decision not to omit the use of vowels, like “a” (अ), at the end of words to portray a clear distinction in pronunciation, particularly where words do not end with a vowel. Eg. “रस्” (rās). However, I have not used the vowel “a” at the end of the word “Braj” as this is a growing practice among scholars today.

Use of Diacritics

Diacritical marks have not been used for modern authors' names and places that have a recognised Anglicised spelling. However, for historical figures and locations from earlier centuries, particularly those known only through Hindi, Brajabhāṣā, or Urdu sources, diacritical marks have been employed. Classified art forms such as Dhrupad and Haveli Sangit have not been transliterated with diacritical marks, as they are commonly recognized by their Anglicized spellings within the scholarly community. In contrast, lesser-known art forms and musical instruments, such as *Saṅghī* art, have been transliterated with diacritical marks. This is done to preserve the phonetic nuances of their names, which might be unfamiliar to the readers and require precise representation for accurate identification and study. Standard language names like

“Hindī”, “Urdu”, and “Sanskrit” are not transliterated with diacritical marks, as opposed to literary languages like Brajabhāṣā (Brajbhasha). I have omitted diacritics for Indic-origin concepts and terms that have been Anglicized for English speakers. However, terms that have not been Anglicized to fit the linguistic and cultural context, such as *GauriyāSampradāya* and *Nimbārka Sampradāya*, are transliterated with diacritics.

Italicization and Capitalization

Proper nouns, including names of people and locations, have not been italicized. This includes Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, and Braj. The term Rāsalīlā has not been italicized as it is used as a proper noun and the main subject of research. On the other hand, various Indic terminologies and concepts, such as “*brajvāsi*”, “*rāsa-dhārī*”, “*gopī*”, “*sakhā*”, “*svarūpa*”, “*svāmī*”, and “*rāsa-maṇḍalī*”, have been italicized. The term *svāmī*, when used as a prefix to a name, is capitalized (Svāmī) and not italicized, but when it is used to see a master of the troupe, then it is written in lowercase with italicization. Italicizing these terms helps highlight them as technical or specialized vocabulary in the text, thereby aiding comprehension and emphasizing their use within specific cultural or religious contexts.

The decisions regarding the use of diacritical marks, vowel length distinction, and italicization are designed to support clarity, scholarly communication, and the accurate dissemination of information.

Note for Chapter 3: *I have merely transliterated the script of Baba Tulsidas and Harivallabh Śarmā Kirtaniyā; I have not inserted the commas and full stops on my own. I have underlined the variations of the words in transliterations.*

क *k*, ख *kh*, ग *g*, घ *gh*, ङ *ṅ*,
 च *c*, छ *ch*, ज *j*, झ *jh*, ञ *ṇ*,
 ट *ṭ*, ठ *ṭh*, ड *ḍ*, ढ *ḍh*, ण *ṇ*,
 त *ta*, थ *th*, द *d*, ध *dh*, न *n*
 प *p*, फ *ph*, ब *b*, भ *bh*, म *m*
 य *y*, र *r*, ल *l*, व *v*, श *ś*, ष *śh*, स *s*, ह *h*,

ड r, ढ rh
अ ण, अँ ण

Abbreviations

M. – masculine.

F. – feminine.

Sing. – singular.

Plu. – plural.

Adj. – adjective.

adv. – adverb.

Obl. – oblique (case).

H. – Hindi.

Brbh. – Brajbhāṣā (Braj).

S. – Sanskrit.

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Personal Note & Acknowledgments

This thesis grows out of that long-standing personal and scholarly engagement with the living tradition of Rāsa-līlā. I grew up attending Rāsalīlā performances at the Jai Singh Ghera complex (Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana) in Vrindavan during the festival seasons of Śrāvana (August-September) and Phālguna (February-March). As a dancer in training, I was drawn to the artistic and aesthetic dimensions of the performances, particularly their layered use of gesture, costume, music, and emotional expression. My engagement with the tradition later developed into formal research through an in-house INTACH project on the contemporary social and economic conditions of Rāsalīlā performers and troupes. During this process, I became increasingly interested in the evolving artistic practices of the *rāsa-dhārīs* (performers), particularly in how changing performer dynamics were reshaping the theatrical and theological depth of the performances. My sincere gratitude goes to Shri Shrivatsa Goswami, Smt. Sandhya Rani Goswami and Shri Venugopal Goswami of Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthan for their guidance and for generously sharing theological and literary insights on Rāsalīlā. I am thankful to the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthan's archive for providing access to their audio-visual documentation of the līlā performances. I extend my gratitude to Vrindavan Research Institute as well for providing access to the manuscripts by Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa.

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Introduction

The Rāsalīlā is one of India's devotional theatrical traditions that focuses on the plays of the cowherd-God (Gopāla) Kṛṣṇa during his childhood in Braj. The area around Kṛṣṇa's birthplace, Mathura, roughly between Delhi and Agra, is today a flourishing center of pilgrimage for Vaiṣṇava *bhakti* or the devotional strand of Hinduism related to the God Viṣṇu. Rāsalīlā is named after Kṛṣṇa's dance of love with the local cowherdesses or gopīs, also named Rāsa-līlā, which stands symbolically for the interaction of God with the human soul. This tradition crystallized in the sixteenth century, as Kṛṣṇa's favorite Gopī, Rādhā, herself became deified and worshiped especially at the pilgrimage center of Vrindavan in Braj. At this locale, performances are particularly prevalent during the festival seasons, the monsoon season of Śrāvana (August-September) and the spring season of Phālguna (February-March), when pilgrims throng the streets of this up-and-coming site near Delhi.

The Rāsalīlā is performed by a *rāsa-maṇḍalī* (troupe), traditionally consisting of a svāmī, the proprietor, master of the troupe, and narrator, *rāsa-dhārīs* or *svarūpas*, the performers, and the *saṃgīta samāja* or orchestra. More than a manager or ritual mediator, the svāmī occupies a pedagogical and theological role. He trains and guides the performers, compiles and edits scripts, directs the flow of the performance, and simultaneously acts as an interpreter of the līlā for the audience. Throughout the enactment, he comments on scenes, fills in transitional gaps, prompts communal singing, and encourages spectators to participate emotionally and devotionally in the unfolding drama. In this sense, the svāmī functions as a teacher not only to the *rāsa-dhārīs* within the troupe but also to the assembled devotees, mediating the performance's theological significance. Sometimes a maṇḍalī has two svāmīs, the second one usually called *choṭe svāmī* to assist the senior svāmī. The scholar Norvin Hein, who pioneered the study of Rāsalīlā, aptly characterizes Rāsalīlā as an "old nonliterary form of Hindu education." This description captures the tradition's role as a living vehicle for transmitting religious knowledge and devotional sensibility.

One important aspect of Rāsalīlā is that the performers are not seen as actors; they are rather considered embodiments of the deity and called *svarūpas* (manifestations) or *sacala vigraha* (mobile deities). Their performance is regarded to be a reenactment of the divine play for mortal eyes by mortal beings. Recent work in performance theory by Harishta M. Kamath and Pamela Lothspeich (2023) has challenged the assumption that impersonation functions merely as a secondary imitation of an original, arguing instead that performance unsettles the distinction between copy and presence. Such a framework proves especially useful for understanding the status of the *svarūpa* in Rāsalīlā, where the performer is not perceived as “acting” but as embodying the divine form itself.

Lothspeich (2023) similarly observes in her study of the Rāmlīlā of Rāmnagar that performers identified as *svarūpas* are understood as entities of divine embodiment rather than impersonators, a conception she suggests may itself be indebted to the Rāsalīlā tradition. While Rāmlīlā often changes its performers every year, Rāsalīlā historically keeps its *svarūpas* till puberty. Contemporary economic and social conditions, however, have increasingly led to the continuation of adult performers, who have grown into their roles (since childhood) through sustained training, embodied discipline, and devotional practice. Read together, these perspectives suggest that performance in these traditions does not hinge on imitation but on enacted presence, where the distinction between actor and deity is continually negotiated through repetition, discipline, and devotional intent.

The sacred and pedagogical dimensions of Rāsalīlā are equally reflected in its spectatorship. Audiences are expected to observe ritual decorum, including removing footwear and engaging in attentive, disciplined participation, while the svāmī continually regulates and guides audience behavior through instructions and devotional commentary. Rather than applauding performances, spectators respond by collectively chanting/hailing the names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, transforming aesthetic appreciation into devotional expression. The audience, like the performers, thus becomes an active participant in the unfolding līlā, sharing in the emotional and theological world that the performance seeks to create.

The Rāsalīlā genre is generally divided into two broad categories: *Kṛṣṇa-carita*, which dramatizes episodes from Kṛṣṇa's divine life, and *bhakta-carita*, which recounts the stories of exemplary devotees. Within this diverse repertoire, the *chadma-līlās*, or disguise plays, occupy a distinctive place because they rely on layered identities, role reversals, and emotional enactment. Rāsalīlā has long employed disguise (*chadma*) within the play as a powerful theatrical and theological device. While contemporary audiences often experience these episodes as comic or aesthetically engaging, their literary and theological depth remains understudied. This thesis argues that disguise in Rāsalīlā is not merely theatrical ornamentation but a performative enactment of bhakti itself, revealing the complex interplay of devotion, performance, and embodied role-play.

To understand this dynamic of layered embodiment and double-dressing, this thesis presents a case study of the audience-favorite Rāsalīlā play *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*, in which both protagonists—Kṛṣṇa himself and his beloved Rādhā—assume disguises (Kṛṣṇa as a gopī and Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa) to delight one another and to experience the depth of the other's emotional state. The play thereby dramatizes the theological principle of mutuality between the divine and the devotee while simultaneously foregrounding the supremacy of Rādhā's devotional perspective, in which access to Kṛṣṇa is mediated through participation in her emotional world.

State of the Art

Rāsalīlā scholarship has primarily focused either on the historical development of the tradition or on broader questions of religion and performance. Yale scholar of religion Norvin Hein's *The Miracle Plays of Mathura* (1972) remains foundational for the academic study of Rāsa-līlā, offering historical documentation, analysis of sampradāyic narratives, and annotated translations of performance texts. Hein briefly identifies disguise plays within the repertoire but does not explore their theological implications.

The Hindi scholar Ram Narayan Agrawal's *Rāsalīlā: Eka Paricaya* (1959) and *Braja kā Rāsa Rangmanca* (1981) provide detailed discussions of the literary and performative traditions of Rāsalīlā while also reflecting anxieties regarding linguistic and performative innovation within

the form. Prabhudayal Mittal (1983) and Vasant Yamdagni (1980) similarly document the evolution of the repertoire and acknowledge the adaptive and fluid nature of Rāsalīlā literature. Yamdagni, in particular, emphasizes the folk dimensions of the tradition rather than viewing it solely through a classical lens. Columbia University's scholar Jack Hawley, in association with Shrivatsa Goswami, expanded the discussion of Rāsalīlā in *At Play with Kṛṣṇa* (1981) by examining its social, artistic, and devotional dimensions. Of particular importance is his discussion of the deification of performers as *svarūpas* or *sacala vigrahas* (mobile deities), a conception that complicates conventional distinctions between actor and character. Hawley's translations and documentation of plays such as *Bāmsī Corī Līlā* provide valuable insights into the role of disguise and role-play within the repertoire. His work demonstrates that these performances are not merely dramatic representations but devotional enactments in which performers temporarily assume sacred identities. Nevertheless, the theological significance of *chadma* (disguise) itself, and the ways in which *chadma* mediates devotional experience, remain unexplored.

Indiana University (Bloomington)'s scholar of religion, David Haberman's *Acting as a Way of Salvation* (1988) examines *rāgānugā bhakti* and devotional role-play within Gauṛīya Vaiṣṇava practice, demonstrating how emotional identification and performative imitation become modes of spiritual realization. Although Haberman does not focus directly on Rāsa-līlā, his work provides an important framework for understanding devotional embodiment within performance traditions. Similarly, Rhodes College Professor of Media Studies David Mason's *Theatre and Religion on Kṛṣṇa's Stage* (2009) explores Rāsalīlā through the combined lenses of theater and religion, emphasizing *bhāva*, remembrance (*smaraṇa*), and the devotional transformation of performers and audiences. Mason's work particularly highlights the theological importance of child performers as embodiments of "pure *bhāva*." However, the contemporary continuation of performers into adulthood, due in part to the endangered status of the tradition, introduces new forms of contemplative and interpretative depth that remain understudied, especially in emotionally complex genres such as *chadma-līlā*.

German-born scholar Selina Thielemann's *Rāsalīlā: A Musical Study of Religious Drama in Vrja* (1998) shifts the focus to the musical dimensions of performance. She argues that *Rāsalīlā* incorporates a remarkable range of North Indian musical styles, extending from classical and semi-classical traditions to regional folk genres. Her documentation of performances at the Śrī Caitanya Prema Saṁsthāna during the 1996 Śrāvana season, including interviews with Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma, provides valuable ethnographic insight into the musical practices of contemporary *Rāsalīlā*. Thielemann characterizes the performers as “ambassadors of the līlā,” whose enactments preserve and communicate the distinctive devotional and cultural heritage of Braj.

In the study of the intersections between devotional and courtly performance traditions in North India, UW PhD Genoveva Castro's study, *Wājīd 'Alī Shāh Plays Krishna's Stolen Flute: The Multiplicity of Voices in the King of Awadh's Dramatic Work*, situates the king's theatrical productions within a broader framework of Hindu–Muslim cultural exchange. It draws attention to how *Rāsalīlā* narratives, such as the *Vaṁśī naṭ līlā* attributed to Lalit Kiśorī, resonate within courtly drama. By analyzing both textual and performative dimensions, Castro demonstrates how devotional motifs circulate beyond explicitly religious contexts and become reconfigured within Indo-Persian aesthetic worlds. The relevance of the *Vaṁśī naṭ līlā* to the present study extends beyond its role as a point of cultural transmission. As a narrative structured around theft, disguise, and emotional play between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs, it provides an important precedent for understanding similar dramaturgical strategies in *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*. Both plays mobilize acts of concealment and role inversion not merely for narrative progression, but to intensify affective and devotional experience.

This Thesis' Contribution

This thesis builds upon these studies while contributing to three emerging areas of inquiry within the scholarship. First, it foregrounds disguise as a theological and performative category rather than treating it merely as a comic or aesthetic motif. Second, it contributes a textual and performative study of a contemporary *Rāsalīlā* script that has not previously been translated or

critically analyzed. Third, it examines how Rāsalīlā performance becomes an embodied enactment of devotional practices, particularly Gauḍīya *rāgānugā bhakti* and the Rādhāvallabha ideal of *tatsukha-bhāva*, arguing that practices of remembrance (*smaraṇa*), contemplation (*cintana*), and sustained performance transform devotional role-play into a mode of *sādhana*, while also foregrounding the theological centrality and supremacy of Rādhā within the devotional universe of the play. To supplement the research, I have translated the entire *Śrīśyāma-virahinī līlā* by Nārayaṇa Svāmī in Appendix I, and a few selected verses from Prema Sampuṭa, a Sanskrit play on disguise by Viśvanātha Cakravartī (17th century).

Methodologically, this study integrates textual criticism, performance analysis, and theological inquiry. It draws upon theories of embodied devotion and religious performance, including David Haberman’s notion of devotional re-socialization through role-play, UC Santa Barbara scholar Barbara Holdrege’s work on embodied religious practice, and David Mason’s analysis of *bhāva* and performative remembrance in Rāsa-līlā. It also engages Brown University scholar Donna Wulff’s discussion of disguise and “ingenious concealment” within devotional literature and performance traditions. Building on these frameworks, the thesis argues that disguise in Rāsalīlā operates simultaneously at the literary, performative, and theological levels. The actors do not merely represent divine figures; through practices of remembrance (*smaraṇa*), contemplation (*cintana*), and devotional discipline (*sādhana*), they participate in the emotional worlds of the characters they embody. In contemporary performances, adult actors increasingly contribute meditative and interpretative dimensions to these enactments, particularly in emotionally layered performances such as *chadma-līlās*.

This thesis is based on my transcription, edition, and translation of a three-hour-long live performance of the play “Mudariyā Corī Līlā” (Theft of the Ring), which forms the basis of this thesis. This is one of the plays offered annually as part of the devotional cycle celebrating Kṛṣṇa’s birth festival in the monsoon month, when the pilgrimage season reaches its peak. This particular performance was carried out by Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma’s *maṇḍalī* (troupe) at Jai Singh Ghera, in Vrindavan, on August 8, 2024.

Mudariyā/mudari, meaning ring, in this play, becomes the catapult for the plot. In this *līlā*, Kṛṣṇa, in his attempt to secure another meeting with Rādhā (Kṛṣṇa's beloved), steals Rādhā's ring. However, his plan backfires when he gets caught and is ultimately robbed by the *gopīs*. To retrieve his belongings, he disguises himself as a Śyāma-virahaṇī (a maiden longing for Kṛṣṇa). Appearing as a Śyāma-virahaṇī, Kṛṣṇa-as-gopī publicly laments the absence of his beloved (Kṛṣṇa) in front of Rādhā's palace to trick the *gopīs* and Rādhā. Ultimately, this compelled Rādhā to grant the divine sight to the Śyāma-virahaṇī, dressed as Kṛṣṇa. This temporary inversion of identities dramatizes the devotional ideal in which the feminine mode (*gopī bhāva*) of longing becomes the pathway to divine union.

Interestingly, in this particular performance, there are not one but three disguises, which I explore with their respective theological ideals. First, there is Kṛṣṇa disguised as Śyāma-virhinī. Kṛṣṇa's embodiment of the longing *gopī* reflects the Guārīyā Vaiṣṇava practice of *rāgānugā bhakti*, particularly the cultivation of *gopī-bhāva* through devotional identification with the emotional world of the cowherd women of Braj. The second is Rādhā, who disguises herself as Kṛṣṇa or Yugalarūpa (unified divine couple) to quench the suffering of the Śyāma-virahaṇī. However, her disguise is not a complete change of garb; she is adorned with Kṛṣṇa's ornaments while wearing her skirt and oṛhaṇī (a veil to cover the head and shoulders), symbolically representing the divine couple. This unified disguise reflects the theological orientation of both Guārīyā (*rāgānugā bhakti*) and Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya (Vaiṣṇava sects), particularly the concept of *tatsukha-bhāva*. And the third disguise, created by Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma's troupe, the Mansukhā (jester), is dressed up oddly as a *gopī*, by wearing bangles on his ears and a skirt on his chest. His disguise conveys theological ideas (by assuming the feminine *bhāva* participates in Kṛṣṇa *līlā*) while adding humor to the rather emotionally intense drama.

Outline of the Thesis

The first chapter of this thesis examines the concept of *chadma* (disguise) within Vaiṣṇava literature and performance traditions, with particular attention to its place within the Rāsālīlā repertoire. It introduces the historical development of Rāsālīlā, the genre of *chadma-līlā*, and the

fluid textual practices through which *rāsa-svāmīs* compile, adapt, and transmit performance scripts. It also examines the influence of different Vaiṣṇava sāmpradāyic ideologies and devotional practices on both Rāsalīlā literature and performance. Focusing specifically on *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*, the chapter highlights the fluid and composite nature of Rāsalīlā textuality, tracing the literary evolution and divided authorship of the play through the contributions of Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa (c. 1700–1787) and Nārāyaṇa Svāmī (c. 1828–1900), together with their respective Rādhāvallabhī and (possibly) Nimbārkī theological orientations. It also addresses the role of the *rāsa-svāmīs* themselves as creative composers and editors of *līlās*, whose authority within the tradition enables them to incorporate, rearrange, and reinterpret inherited poetic materials.

The second and third chapters are separated for the reader’s convenience, although both engage with the same *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* performance staged by Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma’s maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera in 2024. They differ, however, in their modes of presentation and analytical focus.

The second chapter offers a narrative account of the performance, attending closely to its unfolding as a live event. It foregrounds the svāmī’s role not only as director but also as narrator, teacher, and interpreter, demonstrating how he guides the audience through the performance, ensures seamless scene transitions, and deploys the text dynamically during the enactment. The chapter examines the improvisational practices of the *rāsa-dhārīs* and the process of *saralīkaraṇa* or ‘simplification’ whereby older Brajbhāṣā verses and poetic passages are made accessible through a flexible combination of Braj and modern standard Hindi vocabulary. Particular attention is paid to *svāmī vacana*—verses introduced by the *svāmī* during performance that claim no fixed authorship and are absent from earlier printed scripts. These interpolated passages often facilitate transitions between episodes or elaborate actions only implicitly suggested by the poetry. The chapter also highlights the narrative and symbolic function of Mānsukhā, whose comic interventions both sustain audience engagement and reinforce theological ideas by repeatedly reorienting the performance toward Vaiṣṇava devotional themes. Through devotional practices such as *kīrtana*, *bhajana*, and spontaneous commentary, the

performers continually anchor the dramatic action within a devotional atmosphere, demonstrating how enactment itself is guided by practices of remembrance (*smaraṇa*).

The third chapter presents an annotated edition (in transcription as well as in Devanāgarī) and English translation of the same performance. Here the text-critical aspect is foregrounded through comparisons with earlier printed versions attributed to Baba Tulsīdās (1950s) and Harivallabha Sharma Kīrtanīya (1960s). Textual variations are supplied for comparison in the notes. This chapter also offers a literary analysis of the play. Special attention is devoted to the processes of *saralīkaraṇa*, the incorporation of Modern Standard Hindi (MSH) vocabulary, and the role of *svāmī vacana* within the evolving performance text. The chapter identifies instances in which the *svāmī* and *rāsa-dhārīs* modify, simplify, or omit older poetic compositions to accommodate the needs of a contemporary audience. At the same time, it argues that not all improvisations serve merely explanatory purposes; many display considerable poetic creativity, including devices such as alliteration and rhythmic embellishment, which enhance the performance's aesthetic and mnemonic appeal.

The fourth chapter examines the theological and performative dimensions of disguise in *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*. It begins by tracing the figure of the *Śyāma-virahaṇī* through the earlier *Śyāmavirahaṇī* play attributed to Nārāyaṇa Svāmī before turning to the disguises enacted within the contemporary performance. The chapter explores how the disguises of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā articulate devotional and aesthetic frameworks associated with Guṇīyā *rāgānugā bhakti* and the Rādhāvallabhan *tatsukha-bhāva*. It further investigates the role of remembrance (*smaraṇa*), contemplation (*cintana*), and emotional embodiment through devotional discipline (*sādhana*) in the acting practices of contemporary *rāsa-dhārīs*. As performers continue in these roles into adulthood, the practice of *smaraṇa* deepens through sustained *cintana* and repeated participation in the līlā, gradually transforming performance itself into a form of *sādhana*. In this process, the *svarūpas* do not simply represent the relationship between the divine and the devotee; they actively embody and cultivate it. The chapter, then, argues that disguise functions not merely as

dramatic representation but as a mode of devotional realization within the living tradition of Rāsalīlā.

In the study of North Indian devotional performance, this thesis contributes by showing how theater traditions such as Rāsalīlā operate as living sites of theological reflection rather than fixed literary or ritual forms. Through the lens of disguise in *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*, the play demonstrates how performance becomes a mode of embodied interpretation, in which bhakti is enacted through gesture, role-play, and emotional identification. This approach invites a reconsideration of vernacular drama in North India as an evolving field in which aesthetics, devotion, and theology are continuously negotiated in performance.

Chapter 1

Understanding *chadma* in Rāsalīlā literature

The word *chadma* derives from the Sanskrit word *chadman*, a neutral noun, meaning external covering, deceptive dress, or disguise. In the context of drama, it is considered deception.¹ Although disguise as a narrative device appears across Sanskrit and Vaiṣṇava literature, the specific term *chadma* is rarely employed in classical Vaiṣṇava dramas to describe such episodes. In the Braj Rāsalīlā tradition, however, *chadma* eventually emerged as a recognized category of performance centered on Kṛṣṇa's disguises by Cācā Vrindāvana Dāsa.

This chapter examines the emergence of *chadma-līlā*, the dramatic motif of divine disguise, within the Vaiṣṇava literary and performative traditions of Braj. It argues that, while the concept of divine disguise has earlier roots in Sanskrit religious literature, *chadma* emerged as a distinct theatrical category within the devotional and sectarian culture of Braj. At the same time, the development of rāgānugā bhakti and the aesthetics of devotional participation, particularly as articulated by Rūpa Gosvāmī, blurred the boundaries between spectator, performer, and deity, making dramatic role-play itself a mode of religious practice.

The chapter further demonstrates that the development of Rāsalīlā cannot be understood within the boundaries of a single *sampradāya*. Instead, literary motifs, devotional practices, and performance traditions circulated across Gauṛiyā, Rādhāvallabha, Nimbārka, and Puṣṭimārga communities. This inter-sectarian exchange remains visible in contemporary performance traditions, including the present study of Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma's mandalī, which belongs to the Puṣṭimārga lineage while performing literary materials shaped by other Vaiṣṇava sectarian traditions.

The emergence of *chadma* reflects the convergence of divine embodiment, bhakti aesthetics, and inter-sectarian literary production, laying the groundwork for the analysis of *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* in the following chapter. There, I show how disguise functions not only as dramatic concealment

¹ Dhananjaya writes 'mistatement' is deception, *adbhūtāharaṇaṃ chadma. Dasarupaka*, verse 38

but as a means of negotiating intimacy, desire, and the fluid boundaries between human performance and divine manifestation.

Chadma and Divine Embodiment in Vaiṣṇava Literature

The philosophy underlying *chadma* is closely connected to the broader Vaiṣṇava understanding of divine embodiment. Vaiṣṇava traditions frequently depict the deity assuming forms to benefit devotees.² As John Stratton Hawley observes, temple worship and Rāsālīlā are not separate domains but two expressions of a single dramatic reality. In the Vaiṣṇava imagination, God is not only the object of representation but the supreme actor who assumes multiple roles to experience and reveal himself through līlā. His descents (*avatāras*) are not metaphorical interventions but embodied performances of divinity in different relational modes. In this intimate form, divinity experiences itself relationally, especially through the complementarity of masculine and feminine, Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, within the dramatic structure of līlā.³

Tracing the idea of Kṛṣṇa disguising himself by embodying forms could take us back to *Bhagavadgītā* (second-first century BCE).⁴ One of the earliest narrative expressions of divine disguise appears in the episode of Mohinī during the *Samudra Manthana*. Here Viṣṇu assumes the form of a celestial enchantress, Mohinī, to deceive the *asuras* (demons) during the distribution of nectar. Here, disguise functions not as mere deception but as divine strategy within līlā.⁵

In Jayadeva's (12th century) *daśāvatāra* (ten incarnations) song one, in the *Gīta-Govinda*, Viṣṇu has been equated with Kṛṣṇa, and thus Jayadeva describes each *avatāra* as taken on by the Absolute Self, Kṛṣṇa. The refrain (dhruvapada), *Keśava dhṛtaśarīra* (Keśava/Kṛṣṇa takes on the body of ...name of the incarnation...), underscoring the deity's capacity to assume multiple forms while remaining ontologically singular.

² 'Whenever sacred duty decays and chaos prevails, then, I create myself, Arjuna. To protect men of virtue and destroy men who do evil, to set the standard of sacred duty, I appear in age after age.' *Bhagavadgītā*, Chapter 4 verse 7-8

³ Hawley (1981), p.16-17

⁴ Like Hṛṣīkeśa, Vīrāṭa, Viśvarūpa form, etc. Wulff (1984), p. 22

⁵ *Srīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*, canto 8, chap. 8, verse 41

Furthermore, the idea of play within a play⁶ or disguise within play is seen in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (c. tenth century CE), where the gopīs imitate Kṛṣṇa's Govardhana līla. It is an impressive narrative of *gopīs* as the first Rāsālīlā performers. Kṛṣṇa disappeared in the middle of *rāsa* (dance) because of the *gopīs*' arrogance, born out of loving desires. When the *gopīs* could not find him, they grieved in *viraha* (separation). They contemplated his *līlās* to overcome the pangs of separation. This led them to reenact various *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa, like the *Govardhana līlā*⁷. They created the Govardhana (hill) by adjoining their *oṛhanīs* (scarves), and one *gopī* stood in the centre, forming the peak of the Govardhan to symbolise Kṛṣṇa lifting the hill.⁸ This story intertwines *viraha* (love born out of separation) with drama and embodiment.

Bhakti, Rāgānugā Devotion, and Dramatic Participation

The rise of Rāsālīlā as a performative tradition is inseparable from the transformations brought about by the *bhakti* movement (16th-17th century CE) in medieval Braj.

Within Gauṛiyā Vaiṣṇavism (led by Caitanya Mahāprabhu⁹ from Bengal), from a philosophical standpoint, Kṛṣṇa is understood as non-different (*abheda*) from his intimate companions, while from an aesthetic standpoint, difference (*bheda*) is necessary for *rasa* (sentiment) to emerge. This gives rise to the idea of *acintya bhedābheda* (inconceivable difference in nondifference). This philosophy will play an integral role in understanding the disguise in Chapter 4.

One of Caitanya's close associates was Rūpa Gosvāmī (c. 1470-1583 C.E.), who theorized the devotional transformation through *rāgānugā bhakti*, defined as following the spontaneous love of the inhabitants of Vraja.

Under the influence of Gauṛiyā Vaiṣṇavism, Rūpa Gosvāmī developed the idea of *rāgānugā bhakti*. He devotes an entire book to defining the aesthetics of *bhakti rasa* in Vaiṣṇavism called *Bhaktirasamṛtasindhu* (the ocean of the essence of the devotional rasa). According to him, bhāva

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ When Kṛṣṇa lifts the Govardhana hill on his finger to save the villagers from the dreadful rain and flood caused by Indra. See *Srīmadbhāgavata Purāṇa*, canto 10, chap. 25

⁸ Ibid., chap. 30, verses 2-3

⁹ De (1961), p. 67-103

(here, love) is born in two ways: *sādhana* (spiritual discipline) or by the grace of God.¹⁰ The *sādhana* bhakti in itself has been categorized into *vaidhi sādhana* and *rāgānugā sādhana*. He defines it as following (*anusṛta*) the spontaneous love (*rāgātmika bhakti*) of the inhabitants of Vraja.¹¹ (Further details of this practice are discussed in Chapter Three)

Scholars such as S. K. De and Edward Dimock interpret this as a form of imaginative identification in which the devotee internalizes the roles of Kṛṣṇa's companions.¹² Donna Wulff argues that Rūpa's theory places drama at the center of devotion. Regardless of whether the devotee stays a spectator of *līlā* while remaining in perpetual awareness of the divine drama.

This theatrical ontology is further deepened in temple practice. Barbara Holdrege's analysis of the Rādhāramaṇa temple in Vrindavan demonstrates that *murti/vigraha* (image) worship operates through a "double life of deity."¹³ On one level, the deity appears in its public form as sovereign (*aiśvarya*), through structured ritual sequences, offerings, and liturgical service. However, I would regard these practices centered on the emotion of *vātsalya prema* (parental love) as enacted as if Kṛṣṇa were in the Nandabhavana (paternal home). On another level, the deity is understood through the logic of *mādhurya*, in which the temple becomes a mirror of the eternal Vraja-līlā unfolding in transcendence. Daily worship is organized into the *aṣṭayāma-līlā*, eightfold temporal cycles that replicate Kṛṣṇa's activities in his divine abode, making the temple not a site of representation but of temporal participation in eternal performance.

Rūpa Gosvāmī's dramas, such as *Vidagdhamādhava*, use role-play and dramatic concealment, though Kṛṣṇa himself does not appear in disguise. However, another Gauṛiyā author, Viśvanātha Cakravartī (c. 1626-1708 CE) wrote the play on disguise, *Śrīpremasampuṭaḥ*. Where Kṛṣṇa goes to meet Rādhā dressed as a gopī, but the divinity of his disguise made him be perceived as a *devī* (goddess) by the gopīs and Rādhā.¹⁴ This disguise is listed with the same plot in Hein's list of plays. This means that *Premasampuṭa* became a part of the Rāsālīlā repertoire. Cakravartī, rather

¹⁰Bhaktirasamritasindhu, Eastern Quadrant, first wave, v. 6

¹¹Ibid., second wave, v. 69

¹²S.K. De says that the process is one of imaginative identification with one of the principal characters in the Braj līlā. See De (1961), p. 176-177; bhakta 'becomes, by a mental-training process..., one or another of the people in the Bhāgavata stories in his relation to the Lord.' Dimmock (1966), p. 22

¹³Holdrege (2004), p. 5

¹⁴This play has not been studied by modern authors, nor translated properly.

than using the term *chadma* to indicate disguise, writes *urarīkṛta*¹⁵, “sometime in the morning, Kṛṣṇa, accepted (*urarīkṛta*) the guise (*veśa*) of a beautiful woman (*cārurāmā*).”¹⁶ Although he does not use the term *chadma*, instead preferring *veśa*, the practice of disguise is clearly present. However, it is not just Gauṛiyā philosophy that shaped the Rāsalīlā repertoire and performance; multiple sects were also at play. Therefore, a brief overview of the history of Rāsalīlā practice and sectarian involvement is necessary to understand its corpus.

Sectarian Narratives and the Formation of Rāsalīlā

Different Vaiṣṇava sampradāyas preserve competing narratives regarding the origins of Rāsalīlā. Gauṛiyā Vaiṣṇavas attributes its development to Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa, who is described in Jānakī Prasāda’s *Śrī Nārāyaṇācārya Caritāmṛta* (c. 16th-17th CE) as organizing *banajātrā* (pilgrimage of the forest) pilgrimage circuits in Braj. He mentions that Bhaṭṭa staged enactments of Kṛṣṇa’s līlās at sacred sites, including cattle-grazing episodes and Kāliyā-damana performances, at multiple spots. David Mason notes that such accounts present Bhaṭṭa as a pioneer of pilgrimage-based dance-drama performances.¹⁷

However, the connection between Bhaṭṭa and formalized Rāsalīlā remains debated.¹⁸ Nābhājī’s *Bhaktamāla* (c.17th-18th century) praises him as a devotee of Kṛṣṇa-līlā but does not explicitly confirm a structured Rāsalīlā performance. The text does mention a performer named Vallabha who enacted *rāsa* under Bhaṭṭa’s guidance, suggesting an early link between devotional pilgrimage and theatrical enactment.¹⁹

The Vallabha Sampradāya, a sect founded by a saint Vallabhācārya (1479 - 1531 CE), is also known as Vallabha. Their main philosophy is rooted in the advaita or non-dualistic tradition. While Vrindavan hosts Caitanya’s followers, it also hosts a center for Vallabha’s. The sect Vallabha established upon his arrival in Vrindavan is called Puṣṭimarga (path of grace). As Richard Barz notes, *anugraha*, or divine ‘grace of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’, is closely associated with *puṣṭi*,

¹⁵ *urarīkṛta* past passive participle, meaning Promised, agreed, accepted. (qv MW)

¹⁶ See Appendix II

¹⁷ Mason (2009), p. 75

¹⁸ Hein writes that Prasāda’s writing does not match up with other records. - Hein (1972), p. 226- 228

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 228-229

meaning nourishment or sustenance. In this understanding, both terms see the same theological principle: the grace of Kṛṣṇa as the sole support of the jīva, the source of spiritual strength, and the means by which one attains the ultimate goal of the Puṣṭimārga, namely, eternal association with Kṛṣṇa in his līlās.²⁰ Within this devotional framework, Rāsalīlā performance became deeply intertwined with Puṣṭimārga communities.

Furthermore, the Nimbārka Sampradāya, traditionally associated with the Vedāntic thinker Nimbārka (1130-1200), is grounded in the doctrine of Dvaitādvaita, or “duality and non-duality,” a formulation that closely resembles the idea of *acintya-bhedābheda*. It is also sometimes described as *bhedābheda* or *svābhāvika-bhedābheda*, meaning natural difference in non-difference. The Nimbārka Sampradāya may have had the longest continuous presence in Braj, although its historical visibility is often overshadowed by the Puṣṭimārga and the Gauṛiyā Sampradāya. One of its most important early figures was Śrībhṭṭa (c. 1525–1575 CE), a Gaur Brahmin from Mathura; his Yugal-śatak, known within the tradition as Ādivāṇī, is regarded as the earliest Nimbārka text in the Braj dialect and as the first to foreground contemplation of the love-play of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā as well as identification with the sakhīs.²¹

Both the Nimbārka and Vallabha traditions attribute the origins of Rāsalīlā to Ghamaṇḍī Deva. The *Rāsasarvasva*, an eighteenth-century autobiographical text by the *rāsa-dhārī* Rādhākṛṣṇa, presents Ghamaṇḍī as central to early performance traditions. Nābhājī’s *Bhaktamāla* similarly describes him as immersed in rāsa performance at Bansīvaṭa.²²

Hein notes that Ghamaṇḍī Deva remains central to the cultural memory of Karhala, where rāsa performance developed as a hereditary occupation among Brahmin families. Frederick Growse similarly describes Rāsalīlā as the professional activity of performers based in Karhala and Pisaya. Ghamaṇḍī thus emerges as a recurring figure in multiple origin narratives.²³

²⁰ Barz (1976), p. 86

²¹ Entwistle (1987), p. 157.

²² Hein (1972), p. 223

²³ Mason (2009), p. 68

These competing accounts demonstrate that Rāsalīlā cannot be traced to a single sectarian origin. Instead, it developed through overlapping devotional communities whose narratives reflect both theological claims and performative genealogies.

Development of Chadma-līlā in Rāsa-līlā

In Brajbhāṣā, it is unclear who first used the term *chadma* as a label for the disguise genre. However, it was in the poetic compositions by Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa, aka Cācājī (c. 1700–c. 1787), that the term *chadma* or *chadama* has been explicitly used to identify Kṛṣṇa's disguise.²⁴ Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa has significantly contributed to the Brajbhāṣā literature.²⁵ A devotional poet from the Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya contributed to the Sampradāya's literature with about two hundred works (1738-87).²⁶

The Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya, founded in sixteenth-century Vrindavan by Śrī Hita Harivaṃśa, develops a distinctive theology in which Rādhā is not secondary to Kṛṣṇa but the supreme reality herself. As Guy L. Beck shows, this tradition shifts the center of Vaiṣṇava devotion away from Kṛṣṇa as the ultimate deity and instead places him in a dependent position, where his identity and bliss are fully realized only in relation to Rādhā.²⁷ In this framework, devotion is shaped by *tatsukha*, the idea that divine joy arises in the sakhi by witnessing Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's union.

Within this vision, Kṛṣṇa's *nitya-vihāra* with Rādhā is understood not as a balanced romantic union but as an asymmetrical relationship in which Rādhā is the origin of divine experience itself.²⁸ He describes her as “the very ground of being,” emphasizing her role as the supreme source of bliss and devotion.

Cācājī's text, *Rāsa chadma vinoda*, has ‘radically innovating stories of Kṛṣṇa's disguises’.²⁹ Another manuscript, *Caubīsa Chadmalīlā*, is also ascribed to him; it has twenty-four plays of

²⁴ Yāmadagni (1980), p. 245

²⁵ Busch, A. (2005); Williams (2016). For details on his contributions to Rāsalīlā, See Yāmadagni, p. 192-196 & Mīṭala, p. 153-155.

²⁶ See Entwistle (1987), p. 213

²⁷ Guy (2005), p. 68

²⁸ Ibid. 79

²⁹ Hein (1972), p. 156

chadma. He used the term *chadama*³⁰ to describe the disguises taken on by Kṛṣṇa, to name a few, Sunārī (a goldsmith's wife), Manihārī (a female bangle-dealer), Nāinarūpa (a barber's wife), Naṭanī (actress or dancer), Joginī (a female ascetic), and so on. Interestingly, these disguises seem to have something in common. They are all women from lower or working-class backgrounds, who can easily go unnoticed when Kṛṣṇa goes to meet Rādhā. Hein, while discussing the plays of disguise, writes that Kṛṣṇa's disguises, created by Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa, cannot be traced to the *Purāṇic* literature; they are his own innovative creations.³¹ He further notes that, as these plays are not directly connected to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, they are conceived to have been penned down after Kṛṣṇa revealed himself to the poet in these forms.

Yāmadagni classified Rāsālīlā plays into two categories: *Purāṇāśrita* (based on the Purāṇas) and *Purāṇetara* (other than the Purāṇas or outside the Purāṇic tradition). He suggests the latter were composed after the Purāṇas and are mostly in Brajbhāṣā.³² He classifies *chadma* under the *Purāṇetara*.³³

Yāmadagni, in his work, classifies *chadma-līlā* as those episodes in which Kṛṣṇa appears in disguise to test Rādhā's love. In these narratives, after the arising and intensification of emotion (*bhāvotpatti*), the two are ultimately reunited as the divine couple. In some instances, Rādhā herself assumes a disguise to test Kṛṣṇa. He further notes that the idea of disguise (*chadma*) can already be found imagined in the poetry of Sūradāsa (c. 1483-1583); however, it is in the works of Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa that fully developed compositions of *chadma-līlā* become clearly visible.

Interestingly, instead of borrowing from Cācājī's *chadma-līlā*, the *rāsa-dhārīs* connected the Mudarī corī incident mentioned in Cācājī's *Vana Vihāra Cāndanī* (*Kunja Baiṭhaka*), where Kṛṣṇa steals Rādhā's ring, but then he is caught by the gopīs. His *chadma* is rather fashioned based on another author's work, Nārāyaṇa Svāmī's play *Śrīśyāma-virahinī* (discussed in Chapter Three).

³⁰ Simplified term in Brajbhāṣā.

³¹ Hein (1972), p. 156

³² Yāmadagni (1980), p. 242-248

³³ *Purāṇetara* ("non-Purāṇic" or "outside the Purāṇic tradition") is further classified into *Brajbhāvāśrita* ("based on the emotional world of Braj") and *Nikuñjabhāvāśrita* ("centered on the mood of the divine grove or intimate bower-pastimes"). These are further subdivided according to the use of disguise (*chadma*): *Chadmasahita* ("with disguise") and *Chadmarahita* ("without disguise"). Ibid., p. 248

Nārāyaṇa Svāmī (a nineteenth-century poet) mentioned in Indra Brahmācārī's *Śrīkrishnalīlā-rahasya*, as pointed out by Hein, together with Cācāījī, who has contributed to the plays of disguise. Mītala³⁴ and Yāmadagnī³⁵, while specifying his contributions to Rāsalīlā. He was an enthusiastic follower of the Rāsalīlā performances and their troupes; he wrote especially for the troupes. His nights, however, were devoted to witnessing Rāsalīlā performances, especially at Tikārī Rānī Mandir³⁶, which became a profound source of spiritual and artistic inspiration.

Though married, he lived apart from his family, gradually moving toward renunciation. Initially composing ghazals, along with Rekhta and padas, his poetic voice evolved under the influence of Bhakti literature. Eventually, he left his job and accepted *sanyāsa* (renunciation). A pivotal moment in his life was his vision of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa at Kusum Sarovar. His sampradāya affiliation remains uncertain, although some associate him with the Nimbārka tradition or Mukundadev. He authored works such as *Brajavihāra*, an anthology of poetry and plays. His works reflect the influence of Śrī Bhaṭṭa Devācārya (16th century) and Śrī Harivyāsa Devācārya (16th century).³⁷ He passed away in VS 1957. In the *Śrīśyāma virahinī līlā*, Nārāyaṇa Svāmī also includes a verse in Punjabi, reflecting his Punjabi roots in Rawalpindi.³⁸

Although *Śyāma virahinī līlā* is independently listed neither in Hein's catalog nor Yāmadagnī's, verses from it appear in *Mudariyā Corī*, identified through Nārāyaṇa Svāmī's poetic signature (*chāpa*). This suggests that the text was absorbed into the performance tradition of *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* through adaptation and circulation rather than fixed textual transmission.

The *Śyāma virahinī līlā* is not mentioned in Hein's list, but he does mention *Mudariyā corī līlā*, where the second half of the plot matches *Śrīśyāma virahinī līlā*. Additionally, the poetry of the

³⁴ Mītala, p. 163-168

³⁵ Yāmadagnī, p. 308-312

³⁶ Tikariwala Mandir, a temple beside the river near Gyan Gudari, which was completed in 1871 and was founded by Rani Indrajit Kunwari, widow of Het Kam, the zamindar of Tikari, near Gaya. Originally in the custody of members of the Nimbark Sampraday, it was later given over to Ramanandis. Another notable figure in the Nimbark Sampraday was Ramda - Growse. p. 263

³⁷ Harivyāsa Devācārya was the successor of Śrī Bhaṭṭa. "His main lasting contribution to the sect was an elaborate work entitled *Mahavani*, in which he assimilated aspects of devotion that had been formulated in Sanskrit texts by the leading Bengali Goswamis." See more in Entwistle (1987), p. 171

³⁸ This introduction is framed on the basis of the introductory account given in *Brāja Vihār Arthāt Śrī Nārāyaṇa Svāminī kī Vāṇī*. p. 6-12

second half of the play mentions songs and verses from Śrīyāmavirhainī, under the pen name (*chāpa*) Nārāyaṇa Svāmī. Therefore, there is a possibility that Śrīyāmavirhainī could have been usurped into the Rāsalīlā repertoire under Mudariyā corī līlā. Meanwhile, the *chadma* by Rādhā at the end of Mudariyā corī līlā has been inspired by the *Yugalchadma līlā*, also written by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī. Hein mentions this līlā in his list³⁹; however, the plot differs from that of the *Yugalchadma līlā* Nārāyaṇa Svāmī.

Hein mentions that “average svāmī is at most an editor of his scripts”.⁴⁰ There are also several rāsa-dhārīs who were remembered as playwrights from the 19th-20th centuries, such as Keśavadeva Rāsadhārī, Rādhākṣṇa Rāsadhārī, and Brajlāla Bohre, to name a few.⁴¹ Mudariyā corī līlā concludes with a *kavitta* ascribed to someone with the pen name (*chāpa*) ‘Keśava’. It could be speculated that this entire līlā was compiled by Keśavadeva Rāsadhārī (a contemporary of Nārāyaṇa Svāmī). However, there is no clear evidence for it. Besides Hein, other scholars have not mentioned him.

Conclusion

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the logic underlying *chadma-līlā* is deeply rooted in older Vaiṣṇava conceptions of divine embodiment rather than being an isolated innovation of early modern Braj. Long before *chadma* emerged as a named dramatic category, Sanskrit religious and literary traditions had already imagined the deity assuming alternate forms and identities. Viṣṇu’s manifestation as Mohinī, the *Bhagavadgītā*’s conception of recurring divine descents, Jayadeva’s portrayal of Keśava as the single absolute assuming multiple bodies through the daśāvatāra, and the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*’s depiction of the gopīs reenacting Kṛṣṇa’s līlās all point toward a theological world in which transformation, role-play, and embodiment are intrinsic aspects of divine action. In these earlier sources, disguise is never merely an act of deception; rather, it is a mode through which the divine enters into new relational and affective possibilities.

³⁹ Hein (1972), p. 176

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 154

⁴¹ Ibid.

The growth of bhakti traditions in medieval Braj further expanded these possibilities by framing participation in divine play as a devotional practice. Theories of *rāgānugā bhakti* and dramatic identification encouraged devotees to imaginatively inhabit the emotional worlds of Vraja, while the temple's ritual life transformed performance from symbolic representation into an experience of living presence. Within this broader theological environment, the fluid movement between identity and alterity, concealment and revelation, became central to the devotional imagination.

The emergence of *chadma-līlā* was equally shaped by the diverse philosophical orientations of the Vaiṣṇava sampradāyas that contributed to the formation of the Rāsalīlā tradition. Gauṛīya theology, through the doctrine of *acintya-bhedābheda*, articulated a paradoxical relationship in which difference and non-difference coexist, allowing the divine and the devotee, actor and role, to remain simultaneously distinct and united. Similarly, the Nimbārka doctrine of *dvaitādvaita* or *svābhāvika-bhedābheda* understood reality through the complementary interplay of duality and non-duality, offering another conceptual framework for thinking about embodied multiplicity. In contrast, the Puṣṭimārga emphasizes divine grace (*puṣṭi* and *anugraha*), situating participation in Kṛṣṇa's līlā as the highest expression of devotional fulfillment. Although these traditions differ in their metaphysical formulations, they share a common understanding that divine reality can be experienced through relational and performative modes of being.

The contribution of the Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya marks a particularly significant moment in the development of *chadma*. By elevating Rādhā as the supreme principle and the ultimate source of divine bliss, the tradition reorients the dramatic world of Vraja around her subjectivity and experience. In the theology of Hita Harivaṁśa and later Rādhāvallabha authors, Kṛṣṇa's fulfillment is inseparable from his relation to Rādhā, and the *sakhi* derives joy through witnessing and facilitating their union. It is within this theological landscape that Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa's compositions acquire their significance. His *chadma* narratives do not merely introduce novel episodes of disguise; they transform disguise into a devotional strategy through which Kṛṣṇa negotiates access to Rādhā's world. The repeated assumption of female disguise,

especially from the lower social classes, underscores that *chadma* functions not simply as concealment but as a means of crossing social, emotional, and even ontological boundaries.

Finally, the evidence examined here suggests that *chadma-līlā* itself should be understood as the product of inter-sectarian exchange rather than the exclusive creation of any single lineage. The transmission of texts, the adaptation of scripts by *rāsa-dhārīs*, and the incorporation of compositions by figures such as Nārāyaṇa Svāmī into the *Mudariyā Corī* repertoire reveal a performative tradition that remained fluid and cumulative. The history of *chadma* is therefore also the history of Braj Rāsalīlā itself: a tradition continually reshaped through dialogue between Sanskritic inheritance, sectarian theology, vernacular literary innovation, and embodied performance. This conceptual and historical framework provides the basis for the next chapter's examination of *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*, where disguise moves from theological possibility to enacted dramatic practice.

Chapter 2

Mudariyā Corī Play: Narration & Description

This chapter provides a narrative and performance-based description of the Mudariyā Corī Līlā as observed at Jai Singh Ghera, also known as Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana, in Vrindavan. The present chapter traces this performance sequentially, paying particular attention to the role of the *svāmī* and the *rāsadhārīs* in shaping narrative coherence, facilitating scene transitions, and mediating between textual tradition and audience reception. The discussion, therefore, moves beyond the written script to consider the interaction of poetry, narration, music, gesture, dance, and audience participation that together constitute the lived experience of Rāsalīlā.

The performance analyzed here took place at Jai Singh Ghera, also known as Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana. The Rāsalīlā platform was first established by Savāi Jayasīmha in 1699. Rāsalīlā connoiseur Śrī Purushottam Goswami has been hosting Rāsalīlā in the compound since the 1950s.⁴² Over the years, the Samsthana has built a proscenium stage for performances. This represents a significant shift from the traditional circular stone or concrete platform used as the dancing platform (*rāsa-maṇḍala*) to a theatre-like stage.⁴³ The proscenium format introduces a more theatrical mode of presentation, reconfiguring audience-performer relations while preserving the tradition's devotional ethos. Several authors, including Margaret Case, John S. Hawley, Selina Thielemann, David Haberman, and David Mason, have documented Rāsalīlā at the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana.

The Rāsalīlā repertoire itself consists of two interconnected components: *rāsa* and *līlā*—literally, “dance” and “play.” Its narrative material is drawn primarily from the *Purāṇas*, especially the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, and elaborated through the literary and performative traditions that emerged during the Bhakti movement. Yet the significance of Rāsalīlā does not lie merely in the dramatic representation of these stories. The performance serves as a devotional act of recollection,

⁴² See Case (2000), p. 15

⁴³ See more on traditional stages of Rāsalīlā in Hein (1972), p. 137; Yāmadagni (1980), p.232

enabling participants and spectators alike to enter the sacred world of Kṛṣṇa's eternal Braj pastimes.

This devotional mode of engagement can be understood through the concept of *smaraṇa* (remembrance), which Mason identifies as fundamental to the experience of Rāslīlā. Drawing on Vaiṣṇava theology and expanding upon Haberman's work on *rāgānugā bhakti*, Mason argues that *smaraṇa* is not simply the recollection of a distant sacred past but an active process of making that past present.⁴⁴ It is a mode of remembrance through which scriptural narratives, ritual practices, and the sensory environment of Braj converge to produce an experience of Kṛṣṇa's ongoing presence. The sacred landscape of Vrindavan—with its temples, pilgrimage routes, songs, festivals, and everyday invocations of “Rādhē-Rādhē”—cultivates this discipline of remembrance, training devotees to perceive the ordinary world as permeated by Kṛṣṇa's līlā.⁴⁵ In this framework, Rāslīlā becomes less an isolated theatrical event than an extension of a broader culture of *smaraṇa*, one in which audiences are already prepared to recognize and participate in the divine drama unfolding before them.

It is through this devotional practice of remembrance that the performers attain their sacred status as *svarūpas*. The child actors do not merely represent divine figures; they become ritually authorized embodiments through whom the divine manifests itself. The ritual sanctification of the *mukuta* (crown) is central to this transformation.⁴⁶ Before each performance, the crowns of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are ritually purified through the recitation of mantras and then ceremonially placed upon the foreheads of the child actors. It is this act that marks the transition from ordinary performer to *svarūpa*.

Keeping these ritual and devotional dimensions in view, the following discussion approaches the *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* not simply as a dramatic narrative but as a performative act of sacred remembrance. The sequential analysis that follows explores how the *svāmī*, the *svarūpas*, the musicians, and the audience collaboratively create a devotional environment in which poetry,

⁴⁴ Mason (2003), p. 114

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 115

⁴⁶ Hawley (1980), p. 14

narration, music, gesture, and ritual converge to make Kṛṣṇa's eternal līlā present in the here and now.

Maṅgalācaraṇa

Like other contemporary Rāsalīlā performances in Braj, the enactment is preceded by *harināma sankīrtana*, sung by the *choṭe svāmī* as the audience settles down. The chanting extends beyond the repetition of Kṛṣṇa's name to include popular devotional compositions glorifying Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa, and Vṛndāvana. This preparatory segment establishes a devotional atmosphere and gradually draws the spectators into the sacred atmosphere of the performance.

The *maṅgalācaraṇa* is an auspicious invocation that seeks divine blessings and ritually sanctifies the theatrical space. Through the recitation of hymns, *svāmī* establishes the theological framework within which the ensuing performance is to be understood. Yāmadagni specifies that these hymns are dedicated to the teachers (*guru kī vandanā*), Kṛṣṇa (*Rāsabihārī kī vandanā*), Braj (*braj kī vandanā*), and the form of the god (*prabhusvarūpa*).⁴⁷ The Svāmī recites Brajabhāṣā verses describing the beauty of the divine couple. As he recites, ...*Hasana lasana pīta vasana cāru hāra singāra*⁴⁸ (The smiling radiant one, clad in yellow garments, adorned with a lovely necklace and adornment...), he closes his eyes and smiles, enjoying the beauty of the poetic verse. He recites a few invocations in Brajabhāṣā (inevitably performed)⁴⁹,

Śrī brajakumāra-vara gāiyai|

Ānanda kī nidha-vara gāiyai||

Braja-bhaktana kau mana-bhāmatau gāiyai||

Śrī lāṛilīlalana-vara gāiyai||

Śrī braja kī jīvana-dhana gāiyai||

⁴⁷ Yāmadagni (1980), p. 189

⁴⁸ *Lasa* m. to be radiant or beautiful. (qv McG) *hasana*, *lasana*, and *vasana* are acting as verbal agents; *Singāra* [*S. śṅgāra*] m. dress or adornment. (qv McG)

⁴⁹ Yāmadagni (1980), p. 189; Recorded by Hein in October 1949. See Hein (1972), p.143; Recorded by Thielemann in 1995. See Thielemann (1998), p. 37

Sing of the glorious Prince of Braj (Krishna).

Sing of the supreme treasure-house of bliss.

Sing of the one who delights the hearts of the devotees of Braj.

Sing of the cherished darling of Vraja (Rādhā).

Sing of the precious wealth and very life of Braj.

For this performance, the hymn recitation incorporates verses from diverse devotional traditions, including the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and the *Mahāvāṇī* of Harivyāsa Devācārya. This demonstrates the eclectic literary sources that inform contemporary Rāsālīlā practice. For instance, *choṭe* svāmī recites verse 10. 21. 5 from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, followed by salutations to the Gurus. Then he recites verse 4 from the *Mahāvāṇī*⁵⁰.

One should be mindful that *maṅgalācaraṇa* hymns are a culmination of works by different poets from various Sampradāyas; they are selected by troupes for their beauty and impact in creating an atmosphere appropriate for the beginning of the Rāsālīlā.⁵¹

Meanwhile, the curtain rises, and the audience's gaze shifts to the divine couple sitting on the throne (*śimhāsana*) amidst *aṣṭasakhis* (eight sakhis).⁵² Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are wearing light pink clothes; the sakhis, on the other hand, are wearing red skirts and scarves. The color of the sakhis' clothes is selected based on 'momentary feeling' or *modd*, but Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's light colored clothes are apt for the season.⁵³ What follows is a carefully structured sequence consisting of the Dhrupad *pada* (by Nandadāsa)⁵⁴ recital, *āratī* (offering of the lamp), *gopī-prārthanā* (request of the gopīs to the divine couple), and *rāsa* dance.

⁵⁰ *Rādhākṛṣṇa-svarūpām vai kṛṣṇa-rādhāsvārūpiṇam
kalātmānaṁ nikuñjasthaṁ gururūpaṁ sadāśraye* | - verse 4

⁵¹ Yāmadagni (1980), p. 191-192

⁵² Yāmadagni describes, 'Seated on a throne, Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are accompanied by their sakhīs, who sit slightly below on either side, or are depicted serving them by fanning them with a chaurī and holding a chhatra (royal umbrella) and other forms of service.'

⁵³ Thielemann (1998), p. 152

⁵⁴ *Hā kai haṭaka-haṭaka, gāya ṭhaṭhaka-ṭhaṭhaka|
Gokula kī galī sava sākarī||...*

Nandadāsa prabhu jahīm-jahi ṭhare hota tahī-tahīm, laṭaka-laṭaka kāhū so hā karī au nā karī|| This *pada* is ascribed to the poet Nandadāsa. See Das (1959), p. 296

The svāmī then explains the Dhrupad style of singing and the verses recited, helping the audience understand their significance. He also highlights that the *pada* is attributed to the poet Nandadāsa (16th century). Such explanatory interludes occur at several points throughout the performance, familiarizing the audience with Braj poetry and its literary traditions. During these explanations, the orchestra continues to play softly, keeping the musical flow of the performance uninterrupted.

Post the Dhrupad recital, Sakhi does *āratī* of the divine couple, svāmī sings,

*Gāvo sakhi āratī priyā aur pyāre kī,
Bhānudulārī kī giravaradhārī kī rāsabihārī kī*

Sing, O friend, the *āratī* of the Beloved Lady (Rādhā) and the Beloved Lord (Kṛṣṇa).
Of Vṛṣabhānu's darling daughter (Rādhā), of the Lifter of Govardhana (Kṛṣṇa), of the Enjoyer of the Rāsa dance (Kṛṣṇa).

The svāmī also used to sing the Sanskrit poem from *Gīta-Govinda* (12th century) for *āratī*.⁵⁵ However, he has now switched to *āratī kuñjabihārī kī* and *gāvo sakhi āratī priyā aur pyāre kī*, as they also mention *līlās* performed outside of Braj, making them more relatable to the public.⁵⁶

The rāsa performance has been extensively documented.⁵⁷

Rāsa

⁵⁵ Thielemann (1998), p. 49

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 165

⁵⁷

After the *ārati* comes *gopī-prārthanā*, where the *gopīs* request Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to begin *rāsa*, by saying, *āja rāsa (maṇḍala) meṁ padhāriye* (Please enter the *rāsa* circle).⁵⁸ The invitation to enter the *rāsa-maṇḍala* does not merely mark the beginning of *rāsa* dance itself. Rather, it reaffirms the theological understanding that *rāsa* is an eternal and unmanifest (*aprakāṭa*) divine play. Through this invocation, the Divine Couple is requested to become manifest (*prakāṭa*), specifically within the *rāsa-maṇḍala* through the *svarūpas*, so that their *līlā* may be witnessed by human eyes. Responding to this invitation, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa descend from their throne and enter the performance arena.

As the *rāsa* commences, Kṛṣṇa poses in a graceful *tribhaṅgī* (three-bend) posture and clasps his hands in *añjalī mudrā* (joining the palms), respectfully requesting Rādhā to initiate the dance. The performance begins with Rādhā's solo dance, after which the *gopīs* form a series of circular *maṇḍalas*. At different moments, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa dance together at the center of these circles and, at other times, join the *gopīs* within them. The choreography subsequently shifts as the *gopīs* sit in a circle, with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa at the center, performing Kathak sequences to a variety of rhythmic bols.⁵⁹

The climax of the *rāsa* is particularly striking. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa clasp each other's hands and spin rapidly, while the *gopīs* pair off and whirl in unison around them. Their *leheṅās* and *oṛhanīs* billow and swirl through the air, creating a visually mesmerizing spectacle. This moment is regarded as an *adbhuta* (wondrous) scene, and the *svāmī* often responds with an exclamation of “*Jai Ho!*” Usually, the Kṛṣṇa performs the ‘Krishna gat’ (virtuosic spin on the knees), which holds the audience in awe. Apparently, according to Walker, *rāsa-dhārīs* have preserved this feature of Kathak.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ ‘He *priyāprītamajū*. *Āpake nitta rāsa ko samaya hai gayau ai*. So *āpa kirapā karikairi rāsa-maṇḍala meṁ padhārau*.’ Yāmadagni notes the same request in the performance; however, he does not mention which *līlā* this was. See Yāmadagni (1980), p.196

⁵⁹ Yāmadagni mentions the use of various movements and positions specified in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. See Yāmadagni (1980), p. 204-207. However, nowadays, the *rāsa-dhārīs* do not perform such sophisticated moves.

⁶⁰ Walker (2014), p. 72

Within the devotional framework of Rāsalīlā, applause would imply appreciation of theatrical skill alone, whereas devotees perceive the event as a manifestation of divine presence. Consequently, expressions of appreciation take the form of devotional acclamations, such as the names of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, uttered in moments of aesthetic and spiritual exhilaration. Indeed, a notable characteristic of Rāsalīlā audiences is their complete absence of clapping; devotional exclamation serves instead as the appropriate response to scenes that evoke profound bliss.

Although rāsa is understood as an eternal play that never truly concludes, the staged performance concludes with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa embracing one another, symbolically taking leave, and then standing together for *darśana* before the devotees. The audience, as devotees, raise their hands in the air or join them in *añjalī mudrā* as if they are in a temple.

As the curtain falls, the svāmī announces, “This is *rāsa*; now there will be *līlā*.” He proceeds to explain that the Rāsalīlā tradition originated with poet-saints who, through divine grace, experienced visions of the *rāsa* dance. These visionary experiences inspired the devotional poetry that later became the foundation of the performance tradition. Through witnessing the enactment, the audience is granted an opportunity to experience *rāsa-rasa*, the devotional mood associated with the divine dance. The *svāmī* further advises devotees to engage in *cintana* (contemplation) upon *rāsa* before retiring for the night, adopting whichever devotional disposition most nourishes their spiritual life, like *sakhi-bhāva* (the emotion of an intimate female companion of Rādhā), *sakhya-bhāva* (the emotion of friendship toward Kṛṣṇa), *gopī-bhāva* (the devotional mood of the cowherd maidens of Braj), or *vātsalya-bhāva* (the emotion of parental affection toward the divine child Kṛṣṇa). In doing so, he reiterates the Puṣṭimārga’s emphasis on cultivating a personal, emotionally sustaining relationship with the divine, a theme discussed in Chapter One. This teaching also applies to the *rāsa-dhārīs* who practice this throughout their performing careers, even beyond that.

A *bhajan* recital or *kīrtana* follows, after which the patron, Ācārya Shrivatsa Goswami, offers a brief introduction to the forthcoming līlā and provides a concise explanation of its underlying

philosophy. This part is called *pravacana*, and was usually performed by the Kṛṣṇa *svarūpa* of the *maṇḍalī*. The *pravacana* was scripted for the *svarūpa*; as a child, it would be difficult to explain complex philosophical ideas.⁶¹

The *maṅgalācaraṇa* and opening *rāsa* sequence reveal Rāsalīlā as a carefully structured devotional experience. The eclectic use of hymns and poetry from multiple literary traditions, combined with the *svāmī*'s interpretive commentary, demonstrates how performance serves as a medium for simultaneously transmitting theological ideas, literary heritage, and devotional practice. Finally, the Mudariyā Corī Līlā begins. The narrative unfolds through a dynamic interplay of sung poetry, spoken dialogue, improvisation, comic interludes, and *svāmī* narration.

Līlā

Act 1

Svāmī is both a narrator and a mediator for the audience and the divine. Therefore, he keeps telling the philosophical ideas. He orates, “Those who sing of Kṛṣṇa win Rādhā's grace, but those who chant ‘Rādhā, Rādhā’ with true devotion, on them, Kṛṣṇa becomes spellbound.” This reiterates the idea of non-duality and duality of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Saying that, he takes a deep *alāpa* and adjusts his notes. He narrates that Kṛṣṇa is meditating under a tree, and from here the *līlā* begins. Meanwhile, the patron (Ācārya Shrivatsa Goswami) quietly enters the stage, standing close to the exit and gently fans (*pañkhā karnā*) the *svarūpa*. In Rāsalīlā, the patrons do not merely observe the *līlā* as viewers, but also as devotees (*bhakta*), offering service to the divine. While some consider sponsoring the *līlā* in itself a service to the divine, making the experience accessible to the public. They often chose to participate by performing some service on the stage.

Svāmī narrates that Śyāmasundara (Kṛṣṇa) is receiving darshan of Radha in his meditation. He is sitting under a tree; the background is a hand-painted backdrop. With closed eyes and seated in

⁶¹ Hein (1972), p. 135

sukhāsana (cross-legged) position, contemplating on Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa adores her *śṛṅgāra* (dress-up) in his meditation.⁶² Svāmī narrates Kṛṣṇa’s desire:

Śrī ṭhākura jī ne mana meṁ bicāra kāryo priyā jī ke darśana nāya bhae. Kaise hoyā?

Lord Ṭhākura (Kṛṣṇa) contemplated in His mind, “It has been a while since I beheld (or met) Priyā jī (beloved Rādhā). How will this happen?”

This expression of Kṛṣṇa’s desire to see Rādhā highlights motivation in devising multiple attempts to see her. During his meditation, he stumbles upon something missing in Rādhā’s *śṛṅgāra*. He lowly opens his eyes and leaves his *sādhana sthala* (meditation place) to complete Rādhā’s *śṛṅgāra* as the curtain falls.

The scene now changes to Rādhā’s court, where her sakhīs (female friends) hail her name “*vṛśbhānu nandanī kī sadā hī jaya ho*” (Eternal glory to the daughter of Vṛśbhānu!) and ask what is on Rādhā’s mind. Rādhā

expresses her desire to learn *nṛtya* (dance) from Kṛṣṇa. Sakhīs are surprised; they tell her that they can teach her better dance than Kṛṣṇa. But Rādhā remains persistent. The sakhīs warn Rādhā to be careful with Kṛṣṇa because he might steal something of hers. Not paying attention to the warning, Rādhā departs



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna’s mandalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Rādhā observing Kṛṣṇa’s footwork.

⁶² Or maybe he is watching her in his meditation because he is a divine being who can see everything.

from her palace to meet Kṛṣṇa. However, as svāmī narrates, sakhis know Kṛṣṇa's trickster nature, which is why two of them follow Rādhā secretly.

Act 2

Rādhā sets out to walk to Nandagāva (Kṛṣṇa's village); the backdrop has now changed to a forest. With a playful grace, the charming Kṛṣṇa approaches Rādhā; they greet each other by hugging (*gale milnā*), and the svāmī hails, “Bolo Rādhārānī kī jai ho!” (Say glory to Queen Rādhā) at the meeting of the divine couple.

Kṛṣṇa clasps his hands together, showing reverence towards Rādhā. He exclaims, “The *śṛṅgāra* looks perfect, only the *venī*⁶³ is missing. I can braid your hair!” Rādhā expresses her desire to learn dance from Kṛṣṇa.

Rādhā: *Pyāre śyāma-sundara*⁶⁴, *āja main āpke samīpa nṛtya sīkhavē āī hūm.*

Dear Beautiful dark-lord (Kṛṣṇa), today I have come to you to learn dance.

Kṛṣṇa: *Āpa mosom nṛtya sīkhogī? Kīśori ju, kyūm hāsī kara rahī ho? Are mote sundara nṛtya to āpkī vai lalitā viśākhā sakhi sikhāye detī āpkūm.*

You will learn dance from me? Kīśori ju (Rādhā), why are you joking with me? Your friends Lalitā and Viśākhā can teach you better dance.

Rādhā: *Nāe nāe pyāre śyāma sundara, merī sakhiṇ pe āpsom sundara nṛtya nahīm āve hai. Yā hī lie to main āpke samīpa āī hūm. Sikhāe deo kachu.*

No, no, dear Śyāmasundara. My friends can not dance like you. For this reason only, I have come to you. (Please) Teach me something.

⁶³ Here, *venī* = *beṇī* f. braided hair. (qv McG)

⁶⁴ *Pyāre* (vocative/सम्बोधन) m. masc. O beloved, O dear. *Śyāma* itself is an epithet of Kṛṣṇa. *Śyāma-sundar* (vocative), m. beautiful dark (lord), also means Lord Kṛṣṇa. (qv Caturvedi)

Kṛṣṇa: *Avaśya sikhāuṅgo Kiśori jū!*

Of course, I will teach!

Kṛṣṇa then goes on explaining that there are four primary characteristics to learn dance: *calana*, *citavana*, *grīvā kī laṭakana*, and *musakāna*. For *calana*, he shows a graceful walk with one hand on his waist and the other swaying with his movement. While showing *citavana*, he looks at Rādhā, one hand on his chin and his eyebrow raised.⁶⁵ While performing *grīvā kī laṭakana*, he subtly moves his neck from side to side like a bobble-head. In traditional dance aesthetics, this movement is referred to as *sundarī*.⁶⁶ Rādhā watches Kṛṣṇa beautifully performing these movements with a smile. And then she asks about *musakāna*. Kṛṣṇa replies, “Just like you smile as you behold me, that is *musakāna*.”

Svāmī then sings a *kavitta*, *māthe pe mukuṭa* in *ṭhumarī* style. This *kavitta* beautifully captures Kṛṣṇa’s expression and movement, and glorifies his *śṅgāra*, which sways in sync with his dance movements. The *svāmī* sings this poetic piece by interpolating Kathak notations, beginning with simple *tatkāra* (*tā theī theī tat*) and progressing to *torā*⁶⁷ to *parana*⁶⁸, demonstrating different kinds of footwork.

However, their movements are relatively raw when it comes to displaying professional sophistication. After reciting one cycle of notations (*āvartana*), he sings *māthe pe mukuṭa* again (as a refrain or *dhruvapada*). After the dance session, the divine couple takes a walk (*vana-vihāra*) in front of a painted forest backdrop. They circumambulate the stage multiple times, while the *svāmī* sings the rest of the verses of the *kavitta*.

⁶⁵ This eyebrow movement in *Abhinaya Darpaṇa* (13th century) is called *Utkshiṭa*, to express love.

⁶⁶ *Abhinaya Darpaṇa*, verse 80

⁶⁷ It typically begins on the first beat of the rhythmic cycle (Sam) and, after one or more cycles, returns to the first beat.

⁶⁸ It is a heavy rhythmic composition that uses the exact syllables (bols) and sounds traditionally played on the Pakhawaj (a classical Indian drum).

Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā stand together at the center of the stage after their walk, leaning on each other. Seizing the moment, Kṛṣṇa distracts Rādhā with a sight of a peacock, and as Rādhā's gaze follows his hand, he gently, with a smile, slides the ring from her finger without her noticing. The *svāmī*, towards the end of *Māthe pe mukuṭa*, skillfully adds a line narrating this scene (see Chapter 3). His skillful tailoring of a *dohā* narration, *nṛtya sikhāvata* (see Chapter 3) to the poem's end creates an impression as if the poet (pen name Jayadayāla Prabhu) himself has composed a cohesive story. This ensures a smooth transition from one scene to another. This is an example of the *svāmī vacana*'s creative use.

This marks the beginning of the Mudariyā-corī līlā. Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa share a warm hug, while the *svāmī* quips that Kṛṣṇa already took care of his *guru dakṣiṇā* (teacher's fee). With a final glance, they take each other's leave and depart for their respective villages. As Rādhā exits, Kṛṣṇa lingers on stage, with a mischievous glint in his eyes. He holds up the stolen ring for the audience to see, warns them not to say a word, and exits the stage. The audience smiles and listens attentively to Kṛṣṇa. The curtain falls.



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's mandālī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Kṛṣṇa takes the ring (mudari) off Rādhā's finger.

Act 3

As soon as Rādhā arrives at her palace, *sakhīs* eagerly surround her. With playful suspicion, they tease her, “Certainly Kṛṣṇa must have taken something as his *guru dakṣiṇā*.” Their eyes scan her *śṅgāra*, from the anklets on her feet to the crown on her head, until they gasp, noticing the missing ring. They enquire about the missing ring, *kaḥā kara tem mūṁdariyā dārī* (see Chapter 3). This *pada* has been diffused over different scenes. First, the *dhruvapada* (refrain) is recited in Rādhā's court. Rādhā has absolutely no idea about her ring; meanwhile, a sakhi recalls seeing Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa taking a stroll together in the forest. They realize that Kṛṣṇa must have cleverly

slipped off her ring. Here, the *svāmī* recites the second verse. The audience is also eager for them to find the ring.

The *sakhis*, determined to catch Kṛṣṇa for his mischievous antics, finally confront him. One of them accuses him of stealing the *mudariyā*. In his defense, Kṛṣṇa protests, “What evidence do you have?... You complain to my mother about me stealing butter from your houses,... and now I have come to this forest for some peace, and now you're accusing me of stealing your jewels too!”

Unmoved by Kṛṣṇa's attempt to play the victim, the *sakhi* drags him to Rādhā's court. There, Kṛṣṇa turns to Rādhā and complains about her *sakhis*. Rādhā politely asks Kṛṣṇa if he has found her ring somewhere. Kṛṣṇa, with clasped hands, says, “If I had found it, I would directly bring it to you.” Rādhā empathetically says, “These sakhis must have dragged you from afar, please take a seat; you must be tired.” Kṛṣṇa replies, “No need, my tiredness went away once I saw your lotus face.”

Krishna, with a smirk, said to the sakhi who brought him, “I told you that I did not have the *mudarī*, but you did not believe me. Now I am going home”. To this, the sakhi replies, “With whose permission?” Kṛṣṇa replies, “Rādhā's permission”. The sakhis say he also needs their permission (*ājñyā*).

The *gopīs* do not buy Kṛṣṇa's innocent plea and ask him to open his waistband (*phemṭa*). Kṛṣṇa makes excuses by saying that he has tied his sash to please his devotees (*bhaktan ke sukha*). A *sakhī* snatches his waistband from him, and the *mudarī* falls from it on the floor. Everyone claps after finding the stolen *mudarī* and laughs at Kṛṣṇa. And the *svāmī* sings the last verse of *kahā kara tem mudariyā dārī*.

The *svāmī* explicitly acknowledges with the pen name (*chāpa*) of the poet, Vṇḍāvana *hita*, in the last verse that this poem is composed by Cācā Vṇḍāvana Dāsa (aka Cācā ji). He states that Cācā

ji's work has inspired the composition of this līlā. This is another moment where the svāmī is imparting literary knowledge to the public who are not well-versed with Brajabhāṣā poetry.



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Gopī is snatching Kṛṣṇa's *phemṭa*.

However, his poetry does not state the entire plot for the Mudariyā corī līlā. The poem only describes that Kṛṣṇa stole Rādhā's ring during *vana-vihāra*, and the sakhis found that ring in Kṛṣṇa's waistband (*lāla yaha niksī phaimṭa tem corī*, see Chapter 3). The second part of the plot is actually inspired by Nārāyana Svāmī's writings (mentioned later).

Sakhis make fun of Kṛṣṇa with playful insults, embarrassing him. Nothing left to say, Kṛṣṇa exits the stage with a sulking face. Gopīs, then, encourage Rādhā to take revenge and give Kṛṣṇa a taste of his own medicine. Rādhā, reluctant at first, agrees after the sakhis' compulsion. They inform Rādhā that Kṛṣṇa sleeps under a tree after cowerding, which would be a



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Kṛṣṇa, resting under the tree, and Mansukhā (on the right bottom) ties his ankle with Kṛṣṇa's and lies down.

perfect opportunity to rob him. Like a bevy of swans, the Gopīs, along with Rādhā, gracefully circle the stage, making their way toward Kṛṣṇa's resting place. The svāmī begins to/ sing, *Āchī nīkī lāge pyārī jū kī raṅga bharī āvana* (see Chapter 3).

Act 4

Meanwhile, Mansukhā enters with a playful demeanor, cracking jokes and recounting the story of Vasudeva (Kṛṣṇa's biological father) carrying Kṛṣṇa from Mathura to Vrindavan. He then

performs a *rasiyā* titled *acaka carhī āyī rasiyā* (suddenly this *rasiyā* came up), in which Mansukha joyfully narrates Kṛṣṇa's beloved childhood tales. Uniquely, in this *rasiyā*, the term *rasiyā* (a masculine noun typically used for Kṛṣṇa) is instead attributed to the river



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Rādhā and the sakhis stealing Kṛṣṇa's ornaments.

Yamunā, portraying her as a devoted companion. This *rasiyā* is widely popular and often sung as a *bhajana* by devotees. Mansukhā enters like a devotee, and his recitation echoes that emotion.

He, upon seeing Kṛṣṇa resting beneath the tree, recites a *dohā*, which has been recited by sakhis in previous scripts, indicating Kṛṣṇa's whereabouts. The performer remembers this *dohā* because he himself graduated from playing sakhi as a kid. While seeing Kṛṣṇa sleeping under the tree, with his *smaṛaṇa*, he recalled the *dohā* and recited.

He ties his own foot to Kṛṣṇa's and lies down on the opposite side. He explains to the audience that if Kṛṣṇa were to leave, he would be pulled along. Here, he displays *sakhya bhāva* (friendship emotion). As the svāmī continues singing the *khayāl*, the sakhīs enter playfully, stealing all of Kṛṣṇa's ornaments and Mansukhā's clothes, and even going so far as to shave off Mansukhā's mustache! The audience enjoys Mansukhā's random jokes.

When Kṛṣṇa awakens, he is startled to find all his adornments missing. The look of bewilderment on his face delights the audience. Perhaps it wasn't just the gopīs, but even the devotee-spectators who wished for Kṛṣṇa to be taught a playful lesson about the consequences of stealing. Then, the svāmī subtly merges *ko le gayo curāi humaro gehno* (*rasiyā*) and *achī nīkī lāge pyārī jū kī raṅga bharī āvana* (*khyāla*) to, again, ensure a smooth transition of the scene.

Svāmī and Kṛṣṇa sing a *rasiyā*, *ko le gayo hai curāi humāro gehnā* (Who has stolen my jewels?). As Kṛṣṇa steps forward, he trips and finds himself caught by the knot Mansukhā had tied to his ankle. Spotting Mansukhā fast asleep nearby, Kṛṣṇa wakes him and accuses him of the theft. Mansukhā, taken aback, firmly denies the accusation, saying, “I don’t have them—and I don’t lie. In fact, I’m so busy telling the truth all the time, I hardly have any time left for anything else!”



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Mansukhā, crying over his stolen mustache, covers his face.

Mansukhā also looks around for his clothes. Suddenly, Kṛṣṇa bursts into laughter as he points out that Mansukhā’s mustache has disappeared. Even the svāmī and audience erupt into laughter, while Mansukhā conceals his face in embarrassment. Out of humiliation, Mansukhā exclaims, ‘*You may have lost your ornaments, but I lost my honor (izzat)!*’ He urges Kṛṣṇa to recall his latest theft, and then everything becomes clear to Kṛṣṇa. While singing the last verse “*braja kī chatura lugāī*,” Kṛṣṇa claps his hands in the air, giving regards to the lady who has outsmarted him. Acknowledging gopīs’ intelligence and shrewdness, he salutes them by clapping raised up.

Act 5

Once they realize who the real thief is, Kṛṣṇa and Mansukhā together decide to go to Barsana, determined to reclaim their stolen belongings. But as they approach the palace, the gopīs block their entry and taunt them with biting sarcasm, asking, “What are you going to steal now?”

Kṛṣṇa playing the victim card shares their plight. To this news, the gopīs respond with surprise. Kṛṣṇa then invents a sub-plot, claiming that an astrologer, on their way, told them “the thief is

from Barasana and Rādhā herself, along with her sakhis, have stolen your jewels.”

Following this comment, Kṛṣṇa, Mansukha, and the gopīs have an intensive quarrel of *gārī* (insults), where the gopīs accuse him of being “*coran ke gurū*” (the thief of thieves).



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's mandali at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Kṛṣṇa and Mansukhā arguing with the gopīs.

Mansukhā explodes with these remarks, “*cor keha rahīm hai!*” (They are calling us thieves!). The gopī asks Mansukhā the reason for his frustration. He pulls down his scarf, seeing his clean-shaven face. The gopī covers her face while bursting into laughter and exclaims, “You don’t look good at all!” The audience laughs at gopī’s reaction to Mansukhā's face.

After a spirited exchange, Kṛṣṇa storms off, declaring that he will return—not just to reclaim his jewels, but to turn the gopīs themselves into thieves. This means he will fool them and retrieve his jewels, proving they stole them, thus proving they are thieves. The playful confrontation keeps the audience thoroughly entertained, their laughter echoing throughout the scene.

Act 6

As Kṛṣṇa and Mansukhā depart from the stage, the curtain opens with Rādhā’s court emerging from the background. After offering their salutations to the divine goddess, *sakhīs* inform Rādhā about Kṛṣṇa’s ultimatum. Rādhā, knowing the trickster, warns not just the gopīs but also the audience, *Sakhī nanda ko lāla barau chaliyā, bārū kī bhīta uṭhāvata hai*. (See Chapter 3)

As Rādhā sings these verses, she also beautifully enacts them with hand and facial gestures. She enacts the ways Kṛṣṇa can trick someone. This *pada* paints Kṛṣṇa as a charmingly mischievous figure, whose playful cleverness defies logic and ordinary limits. Lifting walls made of sand

(something impossible to grasp or hold) becomes a metaphor for his magical abilities and effortless charm. It hints at his divine nature hidden beneath everyday antics, making even his tricks feel wondrous. She even imitates how he pretends to be nobel's daughter (*sāha lalī bani āvata hai*). The sakhis assure Rādhā not to worry and rest peacefully.

Act 7

The curtain falls again, and as there is a bit of lingering silence, the Svāmī starts playing his harmonium and sings *Bhesa dharyo hai aaj nārī kū bihārī jū ne* (see Chapter 3). Kṛṣṇa makes his entrance disguised as a gopī (Śyāmavirahaṇī). As the *svāmī* sings, he steps onto the stage with graceful poise, his movements refined and feminine. The audience adores this guise of Kṛṣṇa; they are also aware that he assumed this guise to trick Rādhā and her sakhis. Kṛṣṇa as a gopī; they adore him with devotion in his different forms. Meanwhile, the *svāmī* (along with *samājī*) describes Kṛṣṇa in a *braja gopī/Śyāmavirahaṇī's* garb.

Following Kṛṣṇa, Mansukhā makes his entrance, and the audience bursts into laughter. He is cloaked in absurdity, transformed into a comic vision of confused genders and theatrical flair. A bangle dangles absurdly from his nose like a makeshift nose ring; his skirt is tied high at his chest, defying conventional fashion; thick strokes of *kajal* (eyeliner), and a bold *tilak* blaze across his forehead like a flame.

Kṛṣṇa is amused by Mansukhā's attire, laughs, and then gently veils his *janeyu*⁶⁹, the sacred thread of masculinity, and shields his eyes with *ghūṅghaṭa* (veil), a symbolic gesture.⁷⁰ Kṛṣṇa shares his plan with Mansukhā, discussing each step in detail. First, they will go to Barasānā, and Kṛṣṇa will cry and yearn for his name at the palace gate. The second step, as Rādhā loves the people who love Kṛṣṇa, she will definitely invite them in. Third, once they are inside the palace, they will steal back their belongings and run away. Kṛṣṇa tells Mansukha to say,

⁶⁹ The sacred thread, worn by upper caste males.

⁷⁰ This act is layered; Kṛṣṇa conceals Mansukhā's masculine marks. While covering his eyes, he bestows upon him the veil of the feminine gopī bhāva.

Kṛṣṇa:

Cupa hai jao jījī, dhairya dhāraṇa karo

Calm down, sister, have patience.

Confused, **Mansukhā** asks,

Jī jī kauna te? To te?

Who do I call ‘sister’? You?

Kṛṣṇa:

Mote.

To me.

Mansukha:

Ee tū beśaura hai? Tū hamāro sakhā, jījī kaise kah dūṅgo maim?

Hey, are you out of your mind? You’re my male friend (*sakhā*), how can I call you sister?

Kṛṣṇa reminds him,

Hama braja-gopī haiṁ! Taine agar kanhaiyā kaha diyā to bahut māra paregī

We are now Braja-gopīs! If you call me Kanhiyā (Krishna’s name), we will get a good beating.

As soon as they reach, Mansukhā quickly veils his face and quietly tells Kṛṣṇa, “bhāva meri ājāo” (get in the mood). Kṛṣṇa begins to yearn for his name,

He śyāma sundar! He manamohana! Mokū apne darsan deyo pyāre.

O Dark, beautiful one! O Enchanter of hearts! Please grant me your divine vision, my beloved.

As both Kṛṣṇa and Mansukhā are men, according to social norms, they cannot enter the close quarters of Rādhā and her sakhis. That is why, if they get caught, gopīs will beat them. Now Mansukhā hesitatingly says, “cupa hai jāo...jījī”, and the audience laughs at his comedic delivery. The sakhis, with inquisitiveness, whisper about this Śyānavirahaṇī; they ask, “Where have you come from? What is your name? Why are you crying? What is your pain about?”

Meanwhile, Mansukhā quickly sides next to Kṛṣṇa and asks him to speak beside to these gopīs. Kṛṣṇa tries to push Mansukhā, urging him to reply to them. Mansukhā, scared and confused, asks Kṛṣṇa, “What am I supposed to say? You did not tell me!” Kṛṣṇa, biting his lips, pushes him to say anything.

Mansukhā

Jāko nāma hai Lapāko, mero nāma hai Jhapāko. Hama juṛavā haiṁ.
Her name is Lapāko, my name is Jhapāko. We are twin sisters.

Sakhi

Ye ro kyū rahī, yāko kyā kaṣṭa hai?

Why is she crying? What is her pain?

Mansukhā

*Yāe koi kaṣṭa na hai. Moe kaṣṭa dai
rahī hai ye to!
Ye rotī paidā bhai hai aur rotī rahe,
aur maim yāe cupa karatī rahū. Jā ke
cakkar meṁ maimne apāno khasama
chora dīyo. Jāe na chorūṅgī, juṛavā
hai nā!*



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudari Cori Ilā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's mandalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Mansukhā is talking to the gopīs; meanwhile, Kṛṣṇa, as Śyānavirahaṇī, is yearning on the right.

She is not in trouble; she is the one giving me trouble! She was born crying and keeps on crying. I keep trying to console her. Because of her, I left my own husband. I won't leave her, after all, she is my twin.

Mansukhā creates random rhyming names on the spot, and he also humorously calls Śyānavirahaṇī a crybaby. This is not a mere joke; it reflects the social sensibilities that disregard mystic lovers. The audience breaks into laughter with each dialogue. They clap and applaud the performer's impromptu improvisation.

Sakhi talk amongst each other, saying that “this girl, who looks like a lover-devotee of a *Śyāmasundara*, is crying while calling out his name. I will call Rādhā; only she would be able to guide her.” Hearing that, Mansukhā quickly goes to Kṛṣṇa's corner. He whispers, “I will not speak from now on. Rādhā is coming; she would recognize me.” He quietly sits behind Kṛṣṇa.

Now, Kṛṣṇa embodies Śyānavirahaṇī by enacting her emotions. He becomes a teacher to the audience. Śyānavirahaṇī begins to sing, *maim to dhūṁḍha phirī jaga sārā* (see Chapter Three), raises one hand in the air and closes her eyes, as if she is meditating on Kṛṣṇa. As it is a *bhajan*, the audience also sways and claps (on the beats) with Śyānavirahaṇī and the svāmī. Not just the svarūpa, the audience also joins in the recitation, making it a collective singing. This way, the audience could also connect with Śyānavirahaṇī's emotions.

Meanwhile, Kṛṣṇa also completely lets go of himself, surrendering to the divine in *gopī bhāva*, his voice cracking while he sings *mohe roye roye āve hilkī*. He feels the *viraha* of the gopīs and is shaken by this strong emotion of bhakti with his sudden utterance of “*he śyāma!*” in the middle of reciting the verses. (Analyzed in Chapter 4)

Svāmī narrates the background, where the *gopī* informs Rādhā about this Śyānavirahaṇī. Svāmī narrates, *śyāma śyāma śyāma raṭata, śyāmā āpa hī śyāma bhāī*. Svāmī elaborates, “by hearing

the name *śyāma śyāma*, *Śyāmā* (Rādhā) herself becomes Śyāma.” He mentions how the emotions are heightened, which sets the mood for an upcoming scene.

Rādhā comes out of the palace and finds the pining Śyānavirahaṇī. She takes Śyānavirahaṇī’s hand and asks, “You can tell me what is troubling you. Why are you taking Śyāmasundara’s name?” Rādhā tells her not to take Kṛṣṇa’s name; he is clever and deceiving, *sakhi mata lai vāko nāma*, and otherwise she will regret it. But Śyānavirahaṇī does not stop crying. Rādhā’s act of comforting the devotee is also a symbolic representation of her sympathizing with the suffering of a devotee. She understands the pain. Here, the *svāmī vacana* is at the beginning of the līlā, that Kṛṣṇa loves those who recite Rādhā’s name and vice versa.

Rādhā is worried that nothing is comforting Śyānavirahinī. Sakhīs then pull Rādhā aside and advise her to dress up as Kṛṣṇa (in his stolen jewels) and give darśana (in *śyāma bheṣa*) to this gopī so that she can be at peace. Rādhā leaves to change her guise; meanwhile, Śyānavirahaṇī sings another bhajan while yearning: *Batā de re sakhī, sāmvariya ko dero hai kitne dūra*.



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī Corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna’s maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. August 8, 2024. Rādhā is trying to console Śyānavirahaṇī.

Towards the end of the pada, Śyānavirahinī exclaims, “He

Śyāmasundara!” Just then, the curtain rises, everyone raises their hands in the air with the svāmī hailing “*bolo śrī rādhārānī kī jaya*.” (Glory to queen Rādhā). Rādhā, dressed up in Kṛṣṇa’s ornaments, gives *darśana* to everyone of the unified couple (*Yugala rūpa*). The Sakhis redirects Śyānavirahaṇī’s sight to the Rādhā-as-Kṛṣṇa deity. The beautiful disguise of Rādhā blows away

Śyāmavirahaṇī (Kṛṣṇa). She requests the sakhi, “Can I go closer to get better *darśana*?” Sakhi replies, “Of course, this is our in-house temple (*ghara kā mandira*).” To this, Śyāmavirahinī sarcastically comments, “Sure, temple is in-house, deity is in-house, and the *śṛṅgāra* must also be in-house.” But no one paid heed to that remark. He approaches the Rādhā-as-Kṛṣṇa deity; meanwhile, Mansukhā says, “I want to offer some offering (*bhemṭa*) to the ‘in-house’ temple.” Everyone laughs at this sarcastic comment. For the audience, although they are aware, through the narration, that it is a play, they revere this guise of Rādhā.

Śyāmavirahinī, having entered the ‘sanctum-sanctorum’ (*garbhagṛha*), recites compliments to the amazing *śṛṅgāra*, he says, *Nīkī banī* (see Chapter 3).



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel. 27 August 2024. Rādhā, dressed in Kṛṣṇa's ornaments, and Śyāmavirahinī recite a poem for Rādhā-as-Kṛṣṇa.

Just as Rādhā was avoiding making eye contact with Kṛṣṇa, Śyāmavirahaṇī snatched the flute from Rādhā-as-Kṛṣṇa's hand, saying, *yaha baṁsī tau mērī hai*, “this is my flute!” All the gopīs are surprised at this elaborate trickery of Kṛṣṇa. Svāmī exclaims, “Hail Lord Kṛṣṇa, the beloved child!” Again, establishing Kṛṣṇa's primacy in the Puṣṭimārga tradition.

Kṛṣṇa, with a smirk, says, “*Le liyo apno gehno!* (See, I took back my jewels!) Now, ending on a comedic note, the svāmī, pointing at Mansukhā, asks, “Who is the other sakhi?” Mansukhā quickly lifts his veil, sobbing, and asks who stole his mustache.

Mansukhā: *Mauchana ne ukhāra⁷¹ ke lāī tū? Kauna lāyo? Mere se aise hāmsī kyūm karo? Kyom lāī? Tere khasam ke nāhai maucha⁷²! Kahā hai khajane meṁ dhari haiṁ kya?*

Did you uproot and bring the mustache? Who brought it? Why do you joke with me? Why did you take it? Does your husband not have a mustache? Where is it? Is it in the treasury?



Screenshot of audio-video documentation of the Mudarī corī līlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna's maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera, courtesy of RasRaj Swami Shri Fatehkrishna Sharma YouTube Channel, 27 August 2024. Syānavirahinī and Rādhā-as-Kṛṣṇa sitting together on the throne to give blessings.

One sakhi tells him it is in the treasury and leads the way; Mansukhā follows and exits the stage. Everyone laughs at Mansukhā's simplicity.

The performance concludes with an *ārati* of the divine couple. The audience, then, receives *darśana* (holy sight) by coming up to the stage one by one in an organized line to receive the blessings of the *svarūpas*. All the sakhis depart from the scene simultaneously after taking blessings of the divine couple. Meanwhile, one or two sakhis stay back to perform the *ārati* of the divine couple. Svāmī generally recites two verses expressing trust (*āśraya*) and humility (*binatī*).⁷³ However, today he only recites the one based on *āśraya* (a poem by Sūradāsa),

⁷¹ *ukhāra ke* (m. having torn off) is the gerund of (MSH) *ukhaṛnā/उखाड़ना*, v.t., m. to root up, to tear up or off; to take out

⁷² Here, *maucha* = *mūcha*, m. mustache. (qv McG)

⁷³ Thielemann (1998), p 112-113

*dṛṛha ina caraṇana kerau, bharosau..
 śrī ballabha nakha candra chaṭā binu
 saba jaga māhi andherau*

Unwaveringly, I rely upon these Feet.

Without the moonlight emanating from His toes,

My world is all dark.

During the recitation of this poem, the audience is invited onto the stage to take blessings from the divine couple. The audience feels overjoyed when they come on stage, touching the feet of the *svarūpas* regarding them as deities. It feels like a privileged experience for many, where, while in a temple, the general public is not allowed to touch the *acala vigraha*, Rāsalīlā provides them with intimate access to the divine.

Conclusion

The performance of Mudariyā Corī Līlā demonstrates the dynamic relationship between text, performance, and audience that characterizes contemporary Rāsalīlā in Braj. Although the narrative draws from the poetic traditions associated with figures such as Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa and Nārāyaṇa Svāmī, the performance reveals that the dramatic text functions only as a framework rather than a complete script. Meaning emerges through the continuous interplay of poetry, music, dance, dialogue, improvisation, and devotional participation, transforming literary material into a living theatrical and religious experience.

The intertextual character of the performance is itself indicative of the fluid sectarian landscape of contemporary Rāsalīlā. As Mudariyā Corī Līlā is primarily shaped by the poetic traditions of Rādhāvallabha and Nimbārkī, the performers and the svāmī frequently invoke Rādhā's praise, such as "Rādhārānī kī jai" (Glory to queen Rādhā), foregrounding Rādhā's centrality within the performative world of Braj. Similarly, the *maṅgalācaraṇa* incorporates compositions by Nimbārkī authors such as Harivyāsa Devācārya, whose verses continue to occupy an important

place in Rāsalīlā repertoires, while *padas* from the performers' own Puṣṭimārga heritage, including those of Nandadāsa, are also woven into the performance. Even the choice of the opening *ārṭī* reflects this adaptive logic: instead of employing a more formal Sanskrit hymn, the troupe opts for a vernacular composition (*gāvo sakhi āratī*) that is familiar, accessible, and emotionally resonant for the assembled audience. The performance thus does not preserve sectarian boundaries in a rigid fashion, but selectively draws from multiple devotional archives to create a shared Braj aesthetic.

Central to this performative coherence is the *svāmī*, whose role extends far beyond that of a narrator or ritual officiant to that of a dramaturgical mediator and theological interpreter. Through strategic interpolation, explanation, and adaptation of Brajbhāṣā verses, the *svāmī* continually bridges textual tradition and embodied performance, integrating disparate poetic sources, theological ideas, and comic episodes into a unified experiential flow. The *svāmī vacanas* not only provide narrative description but also reveal the inner motivations and emotional states of the characters, often articulating what Kṛṣṇa himself is thinking as he plans his līlā. For example, at the beginning of the performance, the *svāmī* narrates Kṛṣṇa's silent contemplation before the action unfolds, giving the audience access to an interiority absent from the written text and dialogue. He also tactfully diffuses *padas* throughout the performance, stringing together individual scenes through poetic insertions (reciting lines from different scenes) that create continuity and a smooth transition from one scene to another.

The *svāmī*'s interpretive interventions also shape the devotional pedagogy of the performance. His teachings to the audience find resonances with the enacted narrative, creating a dialogic relationship between oral exposition and dramatic embodiment. In this līlā, during the introductory discourse, he emphasizes the reciprocal theology that one who utters Rādhā's name becomes dear to Kṛṣṇa, and one devoted to Kṛṣṇa is equally beloved to Rādhā. This theological principle is subsequently embodied in the performance of Śyānavirahaṇī, where the longing for Kṛṣṇa drove Rādhā to Śyānavirahaṇī. The *svāmī* thus does not merely explain the līlā; he provides the hermeneutic framework for experiencing it.

Equally significant is the role of the *rāsa-dhārīs*, whose improvisational capacities generate the affective texture of the *līlā*. The oscillation between devotion and humor, reverence and play, and divine intimacy and everyday comic inversion produces a distinct Braj aesthetic in which theological meaning is not merely represented but actively engaged with the audience. Rādhā, for instance, warns not only the *sakhīs* but also the audience about Kṛṣṇa's trickster nature, enacting that he may even disguise himself as a woman. The performers regularly simplify the Braj poetry they recite into a blend of contemporary Hindi and Brajbhāṣā, ensuring that the emotional and theological content remains intelligible to a wider audience. Similarly, Kṛṣṇa svarūpa's performance of the Śyāma-virahaṇī becomes not simply a dramatic moment but an exemplary enactment of *bhakti*, as discussed in Chapter Four.

The creative flexibility of the performers is particularly evident in their reliance on memory (*smaraṇa*) rather than on a fixed notion of acting. As David Mason observes, Rāsālīlā performers are not conventionally trained as actors but cultivate embodied recollection of the tradition. The performance offers several examples of this process. When Mansukhā discovers Kṛṣṇa resting beneath a tree, he spontaneously recites the line “*Latabara kuñja maiṃ pauṛhe nanda kumāra.*” In earlier scripts, this verse was spoken by the *sakhis*, yet in this performance, it is recited by the Mansukhā svarūpa. The improvisation is likely enabled by the performer's own literary memory, since he had performed the role of a *sakhī* early in his career and had retained the verse through *smaraṇa*; he recalled it when he saw Kṛṣṇa sleeping. Such moments reveal that the continuity of the tradition depends not on textual fidelity alone but on the performers' accumulated embodied knowledge, allowing verses to migrate across characters and scenes while remaining meaningful within the unfolding *līlā*.

Mansukhā's role itself exemplifies the creative expansion of the dramatic tradition. Although his addition to this *chadma-līlā* by the *svāmī* remains a matter of scholarly debate. He has become one of the most beloved figures among contemporary audiences. His appearance does not merely provide comic relief; he enters as a devotee, singing Kṛṣṇa's praises and recounting the deity's

childhood miracles through a well-known *rasiya*. The audience responds enthusiastically, clapping along with the song while delighting in his dance and comic performance. Devotional participation and entertainment are therefore not opposed categories but mutually reinforcing dimensions of the same aesthetic experience.

The relationship between performance and audience extends beyond these moments of interaction. Whenever the *svarūpas* pause—whether at the conclusion of the *rāsa* sequence or at the end of the *līlā* itself—to offer *darśana* in the manner of temple deities, the audience simultaneously folds their hands in reverence. The theatrical action momentarily gives way to ritual encounter, collapsing the distinction between stage and shrine. The *svāmī* further cultivates this devotional engagement by directly addressing the spectators and instructing them in appropriate modes of reception. He advises devotees to continue engaging with the *līlā* after leaving the performance through the practice of *cintana*, contemplating the episodes they have witnessed and entering into them through whichever devotional disposition (*bhāva*) feels natural—whether as a friend (*sakhya*), a *gopī*, or through *mādhurya-bhāva*. The performance, therefore, does not conclude with the final scene but extends into the inner devotional life of the spectator.

The role of the patron further illustrates the porous boundaries between ritual authority, performance, and spectatorship. The *līlā* examined in this chapter was staged at Jaisingh Gherā under the auspices of the Śrī Caitanya Prema Saṁsthāna, where the tradition of Rāsalīlā performance was reinstated in the 1940s by Ācārya Śrī Puruṣottama Gosvāmī. The current patron, Śrīvatsa Gosvāmī, himself both a respected religious leader and an academic, participates in the event not simply as an organizer but as a devotee within the performance ecology. Before the *līlā* begins, he delivers a *pravacana* in Brajbhāṣā, explaining its theological significance to the audience. During the performance itself, he enters the stage and quietly remains in one corner, fanning the *svarūpas* in an act of devotional service. The patron thus occupies a liminal position, simultaneously an interpreter, an organizer, and a participant, embodying the devotional ethos that the performance seeks to cultivate.

The spatial transformation of the performance, from the traditional circular *rāsa-maṇḍala* to a proscenium stage, further highlights the adaptive nature of the tradition. Divine presence is not confined by stage design; instead, it is continually reactivated through invocation, *darśana*, oral interpretation, and participatory modes of reception that dissolve the boundary between spectator and devotee.

Ultimately, *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* underscores a central theological and aesthetic principle of the Rāsalīlā tradition: Kṛṣṇa's play is eternally ongoing (*aprakāṭa*) and is only momentarily made manifest through performance. The dramatic text provides the skeletal structure, but it is the combined work of the svāmī's interpretation, the rāsa-dhārīs' improvisation and embodied memory, the patron's devotional participation, and the audience's active engagement that animates the līlā as a living tradition. The conclusion of the staged narrative, therefore, does not signify closure but a return to contemplation, where the *rasa* generated through poetry, music, memory, and collective devotion is internalized through *cintana* and carried into everyday life. In this sense, the performance is not simply the representation of a sacred story but one fleeting manifestation of an eternal divine play that continues beyond the stage, sustained through remembrance, participation, and devotion.

Chapter 3

Mudariyā Corī Play: Text edition and translation

This chapter presents a transcription, transliteration, and translation of the poetic compositions performed in the *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*. Alongside the contemporary performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma’s troupe, the chapter compares two earlier transcriptions of the līlā by Bābā Tulsīdāsa and Harivallabha Śarmā Kirtaniyā. These sources provide an opportunity to examine both continuity and change within the Rāsālīlā tradition. Throughout this chapter, Bābā Tulsīdāsa’s version is abbreviated as BT, Harivallabha Śarmā Kirtaniyā’s version as HS, and the performance of Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma’s troupe as FKS. The comparison of these sources reveals how poetic compositions have been preserved, modified, and reinterpreted across versions.

Sources

In the *Mudariyā Corī Lila*, the first part, about Kṛṣṇa’s theft of Rādhā’s ring, is inspired by the poetry of Cācā Vṇḍāvana Dāsa. His padas were found in the manuscript titled *Vana Vihāra Cāndanī* (Moonlit Forest Pastime) written by his scribe Keli Dāsa. The date mentioned in the manuscript is 1802–1803 CE (Vikram Samvat 1859). This is a *nikuñja līlā* from the *Aṣṭayāma sevā samaya prabandha* (Schedule of the Eightfold Daily Service). In this telling, Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are wandering in the forest, while the sakhis request Kṛṣṇa not to take Rādhā too far. Meanwhile, Rādhā loses her ring. The sakhis accuse Kṛṣṇa of stealing the ring, and once they find it in his fist, they make fun of him. The plot ends here and does not continue into Kṛṣṇa taking on a guise.

That second part of the plot of the *Mudariyā Corī Lila* is inspired by the *Śrīśyāma virahinī līlā* composed by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī.⁷⁴ This līlā, on the other hand, does not provide any context for Kṛṣṇa taking the guise of a virahinī. So the *rāsadhārīs* combined the *Mudarī corī* (the theft of the ring) incident with Rādhā and Sakhis stealing Kṛṣṇa’s jewelry. They used the *pada āchī nīki lāge*

⁷⁴ The entire translation of this līlā is attached to the appendix.

pyārī ju kī ranga bhari āvana ascribed to the poet with the pen name *sarasa mādhuri* in previous scripts.⁷⁵ This pada adds the plot twist that motivates Kṛṣṇa to disguise himself as Śyāma virahinī. Another līlā composed by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī provides the basis for the plot's conclusion, in which Rādhā appears in disguise as the *Yugala-rūpa* (the unified couple), known as the *Yugalachadma līlā*.

Bābā Tulsidāsa's transcribed script of the līlā is titled as *Mundarī corī-līlā tathā śyāma virahinī chadma* (The theft of the ring play and the disguise of Śyāma Virahinī). While the publication date is not indicated, it likely dates from the 1960s. Information such as when this performance was documented and which troupe performed this līlā is also missing. He specifies on the front page that this līlā is performed in the Rāsa (short for Rāsalīlā), published under the series *Braja Sāhitya*. Two padas, one by Lalita Kīśorī and the other by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī, have been printed on the front page. Bābā Tulsidāsa specifies that he has documented the *padas* of the līlā. He provides an index (*pada sūcī*) of all the poetic compositions performed in the līlā. His documentation begins with Radha and Kṛṣṇa taking a stroll in the forest, followed by the *ṭhumarī*, *Māthe pe mukuṭa*. He writes the changes in the scenes in parentheses and specifies the type of poems recited during the performance.

Harivallabha Śarmā Kirtaniyā's transcribed script of the līlā, titled *Mudariyā-corī-līlā athvā śyāma-birahinī-līlā* (The theft of the ring play and the play of Śyāma Virahinī). (*Details of the publication not yet confirmed*). He transcribes a Sanskrit śloka from *Rādhāsudhānidhi*⁷⁶ recited by the svāmī in *Maṅglācaraṇa*. He annotates the dialogues under *vārtā* (dialogue), and the poems are also classified by meter and recitation. He has also specified the details of the *rāga* (melody) and *tāla* (rhythm). His documentation also begins with Radha and Kṛṣṇa entering the stage together, followed by the *ṭhumarī*, *Māthe pe mukuṭa*.

⁷⁵ Sarasa Mādhuri is the chāpa.

⁷⁶ Ascribed to Hita Harivamśa by Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya, and to Prabodhānanda Sarasvatī by Gaurīyā Sampradāya.

The contemporary performance analyzed here is based on the audio-visual documentation of Svāmī Fateh KṛṣṇaSharma's maṇḍalī at Jai Singh Ghera on 8 August 2024, available through the Svāmī Fateh KṛṣṇaSharma YouTube channel. The *Maṅgalācaraṇa* and *rāsa* portions of the performance have not been included in this chapter (discussed in Chapter 2). The present chapter focuses instead on the troupe's poetic compositions and compares them with their counterparts in the BT and HS scripts.

In the present transcription, narrative verses, *dohās*, and poetic passages that are not explicitly attributed to an earlier author or are primarily employed as narrative commentary have been classified as *Svāmī Vacana*. These interventions play a crucial role in shaping the audience's understanding of the *līlā* and demonstrate how performance mediates between inherited poetic traditions and contemporary devotional experience. This gives a sense of the poetic and narrative development of the *Mudariyā Corī-Śyānavirahinī* episode.

Dictionaries used for translation:

Hindī Śabdasāgara by Śyāmasundara Dāsa. (Dāsa)

The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary by R. S. McGregor. (McG)

A Practical Hindi-English Dictionary by Mahendra Caturvedi. (Caturvedi)

Līlā script (poetry only)

Characters:

- Kṛṣṇa
- Rādhā
- Aṣṭasakhis (eight girlfriends of Rādhā), primarily Lalitā and Viśakhā
- Mansukhā/Madhumāṅgala {vidūṣaka (jester) of the Rāsalīlā, plays the role of Kṛṣṇa's accomplice in some of his mischievous escapades}

Svāmī vacana

Dohā

*śrī vṛndāvana dhanya hai, vicarata⁷⁷ śyāmā śyāma| rāsa kheleṁ rasa rahem magana, nisidina⁷⁸
 āṭhoṁ yāma⁷⁹||
 vṛndāvana so⁸⁰ vana nahīm, nandagāva so gāva| baṁsībaṭa so baṭa⁸¹ nahīm, (śrī) kṛṣṇa nāma so
 nāma||⁸²*

दोहा

श्री वृन्दावन धन्य है, विचरत श्यामा श्याम। रास खेलें रस रहें मगन, निसिदिन आठों याम॥
 वृन्दावन सो वन नहीं, नन्दगाँव सो गाँव। बंसीबट सो बट नहीं, (श्री) कृष्ण नाम सो नाम॥

Śrī Vṛndāvana is truly blessed, where Śyāmā (Rādhā) and Śyāma (Kṛṣṇa) wander,
 And perform rāsa (dance), immersed in bliss every day in the eight watches of the night and day.
 There is no forest like Vṛndāvana, no village like Nandagāva,
 There is no tree like Baṁsībaṭa, and no name like Śrī Kṛṣṇa's name.

[Rādhā sets out to meet Kṛṣṇa; Kṛṣṇa enters]

Svāmī vacana⁸³

*(Āve⁸⁴) laṭaka-calata-chabīlau-mohana⁸⁵ āve⁸⁶ Ghūgharārī-alaka-mukuṭa⁸⁷-bhuva-bhaṭake/
 maṭake-caṭakāta,⁸⁸ laṭaka calata chabīlo mohana āve|*

स्वामी वचन

⁷⁷ vicarata/bicarata is an imperfect participle (वर्तमान कृदन्त) of vicaraṇa [S.], m. masc. wandering, roaming.

⁷⁸ nisidina = niśi-dina, adverb (क्रिया-विशेषण) m. by night and day. (qv McG)

⁷⁹ āṭhoṁ yāma = aṣṭayāma (eight watches of the day), m. a watch of the day or night, period of three hours.

⁸⁰ sau (m. equal to or like) is used here in establishing the supremacy of each noun in its category.

⁸¹ baṭa = vaṭa means [S.], f. a banyan tree. (qv McG)

⁸² These two verses are composed in the *dohā* meter; the second *dohā* is popularly ascribed to Śrī Rāma Lalā, but a proper source is not available. However, they do not completely fulfill the *matrā* requirement. In *dohā*, there are 24 *mātrās* in each line (13+11 *mātrās*). The first line follows this pattern and has 24 *mātrās*. However, in the second line, the first *pāda* (part) has 15 *mātrās*, but the second *pāda* has 11 *mātrās*. With the loose *mātrā* structure, this *dohā* has been adapted for singing (kīrtan style). The second *dohā* fulfills the 24 *mātrā* requirement, but the svāmī adds *śrī* in the second line, which disrupts the *mātrā* arrangement. However, during recitation, it is common to add *śrī* as a sign of respect.

⁸³ Similar to *laṭaka calata juvati-sukha-dānī* by Caturbhujadāsa (15th century). Classified as a *pada* by Yāmadagni (1980), p. 277

⁸⁴ Āve = (MSH) āe/आए (m. comes, arrives, approaches) is the present subjunctive of ānā (v.i.), m. to come; to approach; to arrive. In this verse, Āve is the main finite verb. The entire verse encapsulates how Kṛṣṇa arrives (āve).

⁸⁵ Here *mohana* [S.] means m. enchanter, an epithet of Kṛṣṇa. (qv McG)

⁸⁶ *laṭaka* [H. laṭaknā] hanging, dangling; *chabīlo* = (MSH) adj. *chabīlā* m. graceful or handsome (in a feminine way). (qv McG) *laṭaka* modifies *calata* (imperfect participle) as an adverb, and *chabīlau* as an adjective modifies *mohana*.

⁸⁷ *Ghūgharārī* = (MSH) f. adj. *Ghūgharālī* curly (of hair). It modifies *alaka*, m. [S.] f. a lock of hair. (qv McG) It could also mean that the curly locks crown (*mukuṭa*) his head.

⁸⁸ *bhuva* = (MSH) f. *Bhōmha*/भौह [S. bhrū] (qv Dāsa); *bhaṭake* (same as in MSH) m. to stray, modifies *bhuva*. *caṭakāta*, m. in a quick or snapping manner) is used as an adverb for *bhaṭake*; alternatively, *bhaṭake* could also be *maṭake*, f. flirtatious glances or manner, because *maṭaka-caṭaka* are often paired together. The svāmī replaced *ma* with *bha* for alliteration (*anuprāsa alaṅkāra*/अनुप्रास अलंकार), which is a common practice in Rāsālīlā recitation. Here, *bhaṭake-caṭakāta* could mean cleverly. (qv McG)

आवे लटक-चलत-छबीलौ-मोहन आवे। घुँघरारी-अलक-मुकुट-भुव-भटके/मटके-चटकात, लटक चलत छबीलो मोहन आवे॥

He comes, swaying as he walks, the graceful enchanter (Kṛṣṇa) arrives.
His crown adorns curly locks, while his eyebrows dance with clever mischief,
swaying as he walks, the graceful enchanter (Kṛṣṇa) arrives.

[As Kṛṣṇa begins Kathak footwork, the *svāmī*, along with the *samājī*, sings a *Ṭhumarī*]

Svāmī

*Ṭhumarī*⁸⁹

*Māthe pai mukuṭa śruti⁹⁰ kuṇḍala viśāla bhāla⁹¹, alaka kuṭila sohaiṁ alina mada gañjanī||
⁹²dhrupad||*

Kāchanī kalita kaṭi kiṅkiṇī vicitra citra,⁹³ pītāmbara aṅga saum birāja dyuti baiñjanī||⁹⁴

⁸⁹ According to the meter, it is a *Kavitta*; however, it has been recited as a *Ṭhumarī* in Rāga Khamājā. In BT's script, this composition is labelled as a *Ṭhumarī*; in HS's script, it is labelled as a *pada*.

Variations

In HS's script:

Pada (in Rāga - Koṣiyā, Tāla - Tritāla)

Māthe pai mukuṭa, śruti kuṇḍala, biśāla bhāla, alaka kuṭila sohaiṁ alina mada gañjanī|

Kāchinī lālita, kaṭi kiṅkiṇī bicitra, citra pītāmbara aṅga saum birājai duti baiñjanī||

Diye galabāhīm priyā-prītama bihāra karaiṁ, ati anurāga bhari āi nāi dvai janī|

Kahata "Dayāla" prabhu merau mana mohi liyau, manda-manda bājata gobinda-paga paiñjanī||

In BT's script:

Ṭhumarī

Māthe pai mukuṭa śruti kuṇḍala biśāla bhāla, alaka kuṭila sohai alina mada gañjanī|

Kāchanī kalita kaṭi kiṅkiṇī bicitra citra pītāpaṭa aṅga som birāja dyuti baiñjanī||

Diye galabāhīm priyā-prītama bihāra karaiṁ ati anurāga bhari āi nāi dvai janī|

Kahaiṁ Janadayāla prabhu merau mana mohiṁ liyo manda manda bājata govinda pāya paiñjanī||

In all three versions, the *chāpa* is different. In FKS, it is Jayadayāla, in HS, it is Dayāla, and in BT, it is Janadayāla. The authorship of this *kavitta* is not known. The *kavitta* itself has extensive use of alliteration, for instance, *priyā-prītama*, *mero mana mohiṁ*, and *vicitra citra*, as well as *punarukti prakāśa alaṅkāra* in *manda-manda*. The *svāmī* has also added his alliterative modification, for instance, *lālita* (in HS) to *kalita* (IN BT & FKS). Furthermore, *pītāmbara* (in FKS & HS) and *pītāpaṭa* (in BT), this change could also be for alliteration of nasalization with *aṅga* following *pītāmbara*. A noticeable difference between the scripts: in the HS versions, hyphens are used to indicate compounds in the poetry, like *gobinda-paga* and *manda-manda*. He has also used commas to highlight different features of Kṛṣṇa: *śruti kuṇḍala, biśāla bhāla, kaṭi kiṅkiṇī bicitra*. In FKS & BT, it is *dyuti*; meanwhile, in HS, it is *duti*. Both words have the same meaning; however, *dyuti* is Brbh, and *duti* is a S. word.

⁹⁰ *śruti* [S.] f. the ear. (qv McG)

⁹¹ *bhāla*, masc. forehead.

⁹² *alaka* means a curl or a lock of hair (qv McG), and *kuṭila*, adj. crooked or curved (qv Caturvedi); *alina*, masc. plu. of *ali* m. a large black bee (or भौरा/bhaurā); (qv McG; Caturvedi) *mada*, masc. pride (qv McG); *gañjanī* (f. of *gañjana*) m. one who destroys, and is used figuratively for *alaka*. (qv McG)

⁹³ *Kāchanī* f. cloth worn over a *kācha* (shorts or dhoti); *kalita* [S.], adj. made with art or skill; *kaṭi* f. belt or waist ornament; *kiṅkiṇī* [S.], f. bells or any tinkling ornaments; *vicitra* adj. wonderful; *citra* masc. a picture or painting. (qv McG)

⁹⁴ *pītāmbara* masc. yellow silk cloth; *birāja* = (MSH) *birājanā* (v.i.) m. to grace (by sitting on the body); *dyuti* f. beauty or radiance; *baiñjanī* could mean *baiṅganī* (purple). (qv McG)

*Diyem garabāyīm⁹⁵ priyā prītama⁹⁶ vihāra karaiṁ, ati anurāga bharī āiṁ nāi dvai janī⁹⁷
Kahaiṁ jayadayāla prabhu⁹⁸ mero mana mohiṁ liyo, manda manda bājata govinda paga
paiñjani⁹⁹||*

कवित्त

माथे पै मुकुट श्रुति कुण्डल विशाल भाल, अलक कुटिल सोहैं अलिन मद गंजनी।
काछनी कलित कटि किंकिणी विचित्र चित्र, पीताम्बर अंग सौं बिराज द्युति बैजनी॥
दियें गरबायीं प्रिया प्रीतम विहार करैं, अति अनुराग भरी आई नई द्वै जनी।
कहैं जयदयाल प्रभु मेरो मन मोहिं लियो, मंद मंद बाजत गोविन्द पग पैजनि॥

Upon his head rests a crown, earrings adorn the ears, and the broad forehead shines. Curly locks fall gracefully, humbling the pride of a swarm of bees.

At the waist, a waistbelt is artistically tied over the *kāchanī*, set with tinkling ornaments, painting a wonderful picture. The yellow garment drapes the body, its radiance glowing with a purplish hue.

The dear one (Rādhā) and dearest (Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa) gracefully take a stroll together, a pair of maidens approach, overflowing with deep affection.

Jayadayal Prabhu says, “My heart has been completely captivated, as the anklets on Govinda’s feet softly chime in a gentle rhythm.”

Kṛṣṇadistracts Rādhā and steals her ring]

Svāmī vacana

Dohā

Nṛtya sikhāvata sāvāro¹⁰⁰, sikhata bhānu kumārī| Śrī Rādhā ke hātha te, mudari lei utārī||

दोहा

नृत्य सिखावत साँवरो, सीखत भानु कुमारी। श्री राधा के हाथ ते, मुदरि लेइ उतारी॥

The dark-skinned one (Kṛṣṇa) teaches dance, and the daughter of the Bṛṣabhānu (i.e., Rādhā) learns. From the hands of Śrī Rādhā, he took off the ring.

[Sakhis notice that Rādhā’s ring is missing]

⁹⁵ *garabāyīm* = *galabāhī* [H. *galā* + *bāha*] f. to put one’s arm around someone’s neck. (qv Dāsa)

⁹⁶ *prītama* = *priyatama* masc. dearest or lover

⁹⁷ Here, *anurāga* m. affection; *dvai* (Brbh) m. a pair, the two; (qv McG); *janī* f. woman (qv Caturvedi)

⁹⁸ This is the *chāpa* (m. the pen name of the author). Not much information could be found out about Jayadayāla Prabhu. In BT’s text, his *chāpa* is “jana dayāla”, in HS’s it is “dayāla.”

⁹⁹ Here, *paiñjanīm* (f.) means an anklet with small bells. (qv McG)

¹⁰⁰ *sāmvaro* = [S. *śyāmalaka*-] dark-complexioned, title of Kṛṣṇa.

SakhisPada¹⁰¹

Kahā kara tem¹⁰² mūdariyā dārī¹⁰³|| dhruvapada||
Maim bali jāū¹⁰⁴ batāya Kishorī, taim kaba te na nihārī¹⁰⁵||
Āvat haim bhuja amsana dīnhem¹⁰⁶ tuma saṅga chaila bihārī¹⁰⁷||
Hai una hī ki tūmām-palaṭī¹⁰⁸ yaha bhorī bhārī||

पद

कहाँ कर तें मुंदरिया डारी॥ ध्रुवपद॥
 मैं बलिजाऊँ बताय किशोरी, तैं कब ते न निहारी॥
 आवत हैं भुज अंसन दीन्हें तुम संग छैला बिहारी।
 है उन ही की तुमां-पलटी यह भोरी भारी॥

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Variations

In *Aṣṭayāma*, *Vana Vihāra Cāndanī* (*Kunja Baiṭhaka*),
 Cācā Vṛndāvan Dāsa's *pada* to be sung in Rāga Devagiri and tāla Asavārī:

Kahā kara ratana mūdariyā dārī| Hauṁ bali gaī batāi kiśorī, taim kaba te na nihārī||
Āvat hai bhuja amsani dīye eho catura bihārī| Jo dekhi to kahiye mosom mudita hota kaha bhārī||
 Corī capala lagāvati mokoṁ nyāva karau tuma pyārī| Vṛndāvana hita rūpa darasī parī lāla pheṁṭa jaba jhārī||29||

In BT's script:

Kahā kara tem mūdariyā dārī| Maim bali jāū batāya kiśorī, taim kaba te na nihārī||
Āvat hai bhuja amsana dīne tuma saṅga chaila bihārī| Jo dekhi to kahiye mohana mudita hota kahā bhārī||
 Corī capala lagāvata mokoṁ nyāva karo tuma pyārī| Vṛndāvana hita rūpa lakhi parī lāla pheṁṭa jaba jhārī||

In HS's script:

Pada (in Rāga -Sahānaurī Kānharau, Tāla - Dhīmā Tritāla)
Kahā kara sauṁ mudariyā dārī| Maim bali jāū batāya kiśorī, taim kaba te na nihārī||
Āvat hai bhuja amsani dīyaim tuma sāga chaila bihārī| (The rest of the pages are missing)

The svāmī has dispersed the *pada* across different scenes, added dialogues between the verses (see Chapter 2), and run the entire *pada* as a narrative strand. The word *ratana* (in Cācā ji's version) has been replaced with *tem* (in BT & FKS) and *sauṁ* (in HS). As part of simplification, *Hauṁ* (the first-person pronoun in Brbh) has been replaced with *Maim* (commonly used in MSH). The verse *Jo dekhi to kahiye mohana mudita hota kahā bhārī* is different in each script. While the BT version and Cācāji's version are similar, in FKS that verse has been completely changed. The verse, *Corī capala lagāte rādhe, mokū nyāva karo tuma pyārī*, is recited as a dialogue instead of being sung as a part of the *pada*. *Eho catura bihārī* in Cācā ji's version has been changed to *tuma sāga chaila bihārī* in all three versions. *Chaila* highlights the charming aspect of Kṛṣṇa, and *Catura* highlights the clever side; both are relevant to the context. The last line containing the *chāpa* in Cācā ji's version says *darasī*, whereas in FKS and BT it says *lakhi*; again, both have the same meaning.

¹⁰² *kara tem* = (MSH) *hātha se*/हाथ से, m. from the hand.

¹⁰³ *dārī* = (MSH) *dālī*/डाली (f. sing. perfective participle)

¹⁰⁴ Here, *balijāu* = (MSH) *bali jānā*/बलि जाना to offer oneself as a sacrifice. (qv McG)

¹⁰⁵ *niharī* is the perfective participle of *niharanā*, m. to look at intently or expectantly; to gaze at. (qv McG)

¹⁰⁶ Here, *ansana* (obl. plu. of *amsa*) means shoulders; (qv McG) *dīnhem* is m. Perfective participle, m. gave.

¹⁰⁷ Here, *chaila* = *chailā*, m. fine-looking or handsome; *bihārī* = *viḥārī* (adj.) means sportive (as Kṛṣṇa with the herdgirls). (qv McG)

¹⁰⁸ No meaning for *tūmām* could be found; instead, it could be *tūmāra* or *tūmāla*, which means fuss. (qv Caturvedi) This would go with *ulaṭā palṭī*, which means to do here and there.

Where did you lose your ring from your hand?
 I am devoted to you, O Kishori (Rādhā); tell me—haven't you noticed it till now?
 The handsome, playful one (Kṛṣṇa) comes, placing his arm around your shoulders.
 It is all his mischief; you are the innocent one.

[Kṛṣṇa's presented in Rādhā's court]

Kṛṣṇa: *Corī capala lagāte*¹⁰⁹ *rādhe, mokū nyāva*¹¹⁰ *karo tuma pyārī*¹¹¹.

Pada

चोरी चपल लगाते राधे, मोकूँ न्याव करो तुम प्यारी।

They accuse me of theft, O Rādhā. Please bring justice to me, my beloved!

Svāmī vacana (& Kṛṣṇa)¹¹²

Pada

*Maim nahīn cora cora ko sāthī, naṭakhaṭ*¹¹³ *sakhī haiṁ tihari* | *Kahā kara tem mudariyā dārī* ||

मैं नहीं चोर, चोर को साथी, नटखट सखी हैं तिहारी। कहाँ कर तें मुदरिया डारी॥

Neither am I the thief nor his accomplice. Your friend is mischievous. Where did you lose your ring?

[After the ring falls from Kṛṣṇa's waistband]

Svāmī

Pada

*Vṛndāvana hita rūpa*¹¹⁴ *lakhi parī lāla*¹¹⁵ *phemṭa*¹¹⁶ *jaba jhārī*¹¹⁷ | *Kahā kara tem mudariyā dārī* ||

पद

वृन्दावन हित रूप लखि परी लाल फेंट जब झारी। कहाँ कर तें मुदरिया डारी॥

¹⁰⁹ Here, the transition from 'lagāvatī' to 'lagāte' is an example of *saralīkaraṇa*.

¹¹⁰ *nyāva* = *nyāya* (justice)

¹¹¹ Here, *pyārī* (f. of *pyārā*) means beloved or dear. (qv McG)

¹¹² The svāmī integrated this verse into the *pada* recitation, elaborating Kṛṣṇa's defense.

¹¹³ *naṭakhaṭ* means mischievous. (qv Caturvedi)

¹¹⁴ This *chāpa* can be understood as "may be read both as the dedicatory shorthand for three significant names (Vrindavandas—Hita Harivamsa—Ruplal Gosvami), as well as a divine epithet." See Williams, p. 1415

¹¹⁵ *Lāla* is used as a designation of Kṛṣṇa. (qv McG)

¹¹⁶ *phemṭa* f. waistband (made with cloth). (qv McG)

¹¹⁷ *jhārī* = *jhārī* is perfective of *jhāranā*, m. causing to drop or to fall, shaking down.

For the sake of Vṛndāvana, witnessing the form, when Kṛṣṇa's waistband was shaken off. Where did you lose your ring?

Sakhi

Dohā

Jinakūṁ āpa batāmtī, sāṅce sāhūkāra¹¹⁸ | Vo pratakṣa nainan lakhe¹¹⁹, corana ke saradāra¹²⁰

दोहा

जिनकूं आप बतांती, साँचे साहूकार। वो प्रत्यक्ष नैनन लखे, चोरन के सरदार॥

The one whom you yourself declare to be a true money-lender, He is the very one we caught red-handed, the leader of thieves!

¹¹⁸ Here, *sāhūkāra* means a money-lender, private banker, or rich man.

¹¹⁹ *pratakṣa* = *pratyakṣa*, m. real or actual. (qv McG) *Vo pratakṣa nainan lakhe*—His reality is visible to the eyes.

¹²⁰

Variation

In BT's script:

Jākau āpa batāvati sāṅce sāhūkāra |

So pratyakṣa nainan lakhe, corana ke saradāra |

Compared with BT, the FKS has replaced a few Brbh words with MSH for *saralīkaraṇa*, without altering the meaning. For instance, *jākau* became *jinakūṁ*, *so* became *vo*. There is also nasalization in the *batāvati*, which became *batāmatī*. But even with these alterations, the *dohā* meter remains unchanged.

*Pada*¹²¹

Lālā terī niksī¹²² phemṭa meṁ te corī|| dhruvapada||
Maiṁ pahacāne nain tumhāre, priyā na jānata bhorī¹²³||
Ānākānī¹²⁴ diye jāta haiṁ, maiṁ kahi yaha ju bahorī¹²⁵||
Vṛndāvana hita rūpa lakhi parī, lāla kapaṭa phemṭa ṭakaṭorī¹²⁶||

पद

लाला तेरी निकसी फेंट में ते चोरी॥ ध्रुवपद॥
 मैं पहचाने नैन तुम्हारे, प्रिया न जानत भोरी॥
 आनाकानी दिये जात हैं, मैं कहि यह जु बहोरी।
 वृन्दावन हित रूप लखि परी, लाल कपट फेंट टकटोरी॥

O Lālā! Theft slipped out from your waistband!

I recognized it through your eyes, yet (your) beloved remains naïve.

He goes on making excuses, and I say, “Well then, what about this again?”

For the sake of Vrindavan, witnessing the form when Lālā’s trickery appeared as his waistband was searched.

[Rādhā, accompanied by her sakhis, sets out to steal Kṛṣṇa’s ornaments]

¹²¹ Sung in Rāga Mīśra pīlu in FKS.

Variations

In *Aṣṭayāma*, *Vana Vihāra Cāndanī* (*Kunja Baiṭhaka*):
 Cācā Vṛndāvan Dāsa’s *pada* to be sung in Rāga Devagīrī:

Lāla yaha niksī phaimṭa teṁ corī||
Hama pahicānaim naimna tihāre priyā na jānati bhorī||
Ānākānī diyaim jāta he maiṁ kahi yaha ju vahorī||
Vṛndāvana hita rūpa āju maiṁ kapaṭa buddhi ṭakaṭorī||30||

In BT’s script:

Lālā terī niksī phaimṭa te corī||
Hama pahacāneṁ nain tihāre, priyā na jānata bhorī||
Ānā kānī diye jāta haiṁ, maiṁ kahi yaha ju vahorī||
Vṛndāvana hita rūpa āju meṁ kapaṭi buddhi ṭaka ṭorī||

In the first line, there are minor changes. First, *yaha* (this) has been replaced with *terī*, making it explicit that it was Kṛṣṇa’s waistband. Second, *meṁ* has been added after *phaimṭa* to supplement the division of the verse, while singing also adds alliteration with *meṁ te*. Shift from *hama* to *maiṁ*, *tihare* to *tumhāre* in FKS performance reflects *saralīkaraṇa* to MSH. In the last line, Sakhi says, *āju maiṁ kapaṭi buddhi ṭaka ṭorī* (today I uncovered the tricking mind) in BT and Cācājī, has been changed to *āla kapaṭa phemṭa ṭakaṭorī*. Bringing the audience back to the waistband, which hides the trickery. The entire composition in Cācājī mentions that it should be sung in Rāga Devagīrī, however, in FKS it is sung in Rāga Mīśra Pīlu, which is a common rāga used in Rāsālīlā.

¹²² *niksī* m. slipped out (f. sing. perfective participle); [*niṣkasati: Pk. ṇikasiijjā] = (MSH) निकलना to get out, to escape, to slip out. (qv McG)

¹²³ *bhorī* = (MSH) bholī, f. of bholā, m. innocent. (qv McG)

¹²⁴ *Ānākānī* here means to make excuses. (qv McG)

¹²⁵ *bahorī* = *vahorī* [cf. *vyāghuṭati: Pk. vāhuḍia-], adv. Brbh. Av. 1. again, anew. 2. then, next, further.

¹²⁶ *ṭakaṭorī* = *ṭakṭoh(r)nā*, m. to make a preliminary survey or to reconnoitre. (qv Caturvedi)

Svāmī*Khayāla*¹²⁷*Āchī nīkī*¹²⁸ *lāge pyārī jū kī raṅga bharī āvana*¹²⁹ || *dhruvapada* ||*Eka kara dhari lalitā jū ke aṁsana, dūje*¹³⁰ *kara kamala phirāvana*¹³¹ ||

खयाल

आछी नीकी लागे प्यारी जू की रंग भरी आवन॥ ध्रुवपद॥

एक कर धरि ललिता जू के अंसन, दूजे कर कमल फिरावन॥

The beloved's colorful arrival feels befittingly pleasing.

With one hand resting on Lalitā's shoulder and the other hand twirling a lotus,

[Sakhis exit the stage; Mansukhā enters]

Mansukhā

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Variations

In BT's script:

Āchī nīkī lāge pyārī jū kī raṅga bharī āvana ||*Eka kara dhari lalitā jū ke aṁsana, dūje kara kamala phirāvana* ||*Pahūcī jāya jahā hari paūrhe, mana ati harṣa baṛhāvana* |*Lakuṭi muraliyā sabaī curāī, aru sirapeca utārana* ||*Jāge jabahī manamohana, ita uta dṛṣṭi pasārana* |*Sarasa mādhurī tā avasara hī syāma ke ghara āvana* ||

In HS's script:

Pada (Rāga Khamājā, Tāla- Tritāla)

Āchī nīkī lāgai pyārī kī rāga bharī āvana ||*Ika kara dhari lalitā ke aṁsana, dūje kamala phirāvana* ||*Pahūcī jāi jahā hari paūrhe, mana ati harṣa baṛhāvana* |*Lakuṭi, muraliyā, sabaī curāī, aru sirapeca utārana* ||*Tuka**Jāge syāma ihā tihīm ausaru, mana ati soca baṛhāvana* |*Ko lai gayau basana-ābhūṣana, ita uta dṛṣṭi pasārana* |

In FKS, Khyāla has also been similarly dispersed, as in *Kahā kara tem*. In BT and HS, *Lakuṭi muraliyā sabaī curāī, aur sirpeca utārana* (they stole staff, flute, etc., and took off the head ornament). Meanwhile, in FKS, *Lakuṭi muraliyā vanamāla curāī...* includes vanamāla (garland) in the Śṛṅgāra. The last two lines have been adjusted differently across the three versions. In BT, it is recited as part of the Khyāla; meanwhile, in HS, it has been altered into a *tuka* (a line of rhyming verse), with the majority of the words changed. The last line with the *chāpa* (in BT) ascribing the pada to Sarasa Mādhurī has been omitted in both HS and FKS.

¹²⁸ *āchī* = *acchī*, m. fitting or suitable. Both *āchī* and *nīkī* are used as adjectives for *āvana*.¹²⁹ *āvana* = (MSH) *ānā* means coming, or approach. (qv McG) In each verse ending, *āvana*, *phirāvana*, *baṛhāvana*, *utārana* are all infinitives.¹³⁰ *dūje* (obl.) m. in the second or other. (qv McG)¹³¹ m. to cause to turn (qv McG)

Rasiyā

*Acaka*¹³² *caṛhi āi rasiyā*¹³³, *āvata dekhyo to acaka caṛhi āi rasiyā*||

*Pīche sesa*¹³⁴ *agāre*¹³⁵ *yamunā, prāṇa bace lālā ke ab nā*|

*Are lālāe leke cala diye, aura mārṅa pe vāsudeva*¹³⁶||

Are mārāga yamunā āe gaī, aura mana meṁ hai gayo kheda|

*Are chūte hī caraṇa utara*¹³⁷ *gaī yamunā, hāsa gayo rasiyā*||

रसिया

अचक चढ़ि आई रसिया, आवत देख्यो तो अचक चढ़ि आई रसिया।

पीछे सेस अगारे यमुना, प्राण बचे लाला के अब ना।

अरे लालाए लेके चल दिए, और मार्ग पे वासुदेव।

अरे मार्ग यमुना आ गई और मन में है गयो खेद, अरे छूते ही चरण उतर गई यमुना हँस गयो रसिया।

Suddenly she came up, O rasiyā (playful lover); seeing him coming, she suddenly became startled, O rasiyā.

Behind was Śeṣa (the serpent canopy), and ahead was the Yamunā; now there seemed no hope of saving little Kṛṣṇa's life.

Then Vāsudeva took the child and set out; and as he proceeded along the path,

The Yamunā came before him, and sorrow arose in his mind.

But the moment the Yamunā touched the baby Kṛṣṇa's feet, she subsided (or parted), and the rasiyā smiled.

[Mansukhā finds Kṛṣṇa sleeping under a tree]

¹³² *acaka*, adv., m. suddenly. (qv McG)

¹³³ Rasiyā is a man of feeling or passion (qv McG). However, in this song, it is used as a f. sing., calling the river Yamunā a devotee of Kṛṣṇa, who came up to touch baby Kṛṣṇa's feet while Vasudeva was crossing the waters. *Caṛhī āyī* f. (Perfective participle) further implies that the *rasiyā* here is for a female.

¹³⁴ *sesa* = *śeṣa*, m. name of a thousand-headed snake, regarded as the symbol of eternity, on which Viṣṇu sleeps throughout periods of dissolution of the world.

¹³⁵ *agāre* = *agārī*, f. front (qv McG)

¹³⁶ Kṛṣṇa's biological father.

¹³⁷ *utara* is the perfective of *utarnā*, v.i., m. to subside (as flood, fever, a fit of anger). (qv McG)

*Dohā*¹³⁸

*Saghana*¹³⁹ *latā bara kuñja meṁ, pauṛhe*¹⁴⁰ *nanda kumāra*|

सघन लता बर कुञ्ज में, पौढ़े नन्द कुमार।

In a dense, vine-covered grove, the son of Nanda (Krishna) lies resting.

[Mansukhā sleeps; Sakhis and Rādhā enter the stage to rob Kṛṣṇa and Mansukhā]

Svāmī

Khayāla (in continuation)

*Pahūcī jāya jahām hari pauṛhe*¹⁴¹, *mana ati harṣa*¹⁴² *barhāvana*|

*Lakuṭī*¹⁴³ *muraliyā vanamāla*¹⁴⁴ *curāī, aru sirapeca*¹⁴⁵ *utārana*||

पहुँची जाय जहां हरि पौढ़े, मन अति हर्ष बढ़ावन॥

लकुटि मुरलिया वनमाला चुराई, अरु सिरपेच उतारन॥

She reaches the place where Hari is resting, her heart brimming with immense joy.

She stole the lakuṭī, the flute, the garland, and took off the *sirapeca*.

[Kṛṣṇa wakes up from his sleep and realizes that he has been robbed]

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Variations

In BT's script:

Saghana latā vara kuñja meṁ pauṛhe nanda kumāra|

He pyārī! unkoṁ nahī tana kī tanika śm̐bhāra||

In HS's script:

Saghana latā bara kuñja meṁ pauṛhe madana murāra|

He pyārī! tinakaur̥ nahī tana kī tanika śābhāra||

In BT and HS, a sakhi recites this *dohā* when she gives the whereabouts of Kṛṣṇa's resting place to Rādhā. However, in FKS, Mansukhā recites this *dohā*, but incomplete. He cannot recite the second part of the *dohā*, as it is clearly addressed to Rādhā (absent in the scene). In BT & FKS, Kṛṣṇa is addressed as *nanda kumāra*, in HS, as *madana murāra* (conqueror of the god of love).

¹³⁹ *saghana* [S.], adj., m. thick, dense. (qv McG)

¹⁴⁰ *pauṛhānā* [H. pauṛhnā], v.t. to cause to lie down; to put to sleep. (qv McG)

¹⁴¹ *pauṛhe* is the present subjunctive of pauṛhnā [pravardhate], m. to lie down, to rest, to sleep. (qv McG)

¹⁴² *harṣa* means joy or delight. (qv McG)

¹⁴³ *Lakuṭī* = *lakuṭiyā* [cf. H. lakuṭ], f. a small club (esp. that held by Kṛṣṇa).

¹⁴⁴ *vanamāla* = *vanamālā*, m. a garland made from forest flowers. (qv Dāsa)

¹⁴⁵ *Sirapeca* is a headgear. Also defined as an ornament tied on a turban. (qv Dāsa)

Jāge aba āpa manamohana, dekhata dṛṣṭi pasārana|

जागे जब आप मनमोहन, देखत दृष्टि पसारन।

Kṛṣṇa

*Dohā*¹⁴⁶

Āja hama soya aceta pachitāe|

*Nidharaka*¹⁴⁷ *nīnda laī na rahī sudha bhūṣana-bhaṣana gamāe||*

*Ṭhagī*¹⁴⁸ *āja laum*¹⁴⁹ *braja kī nārī, āja hama āpa thagāe*¹⁵⁰*|*

*Barē catura caumkasa*¹⁵¹ *mana māhīm sudha budha sabahi bhulāe||*

दोहा

आज हम सोय अचेत पछिताए।

निधरक नींद लई न रही सुध भूषणभषण गमाए॥

ठगी आज लौं ब्रज की नारी, आज हम आप ठगाए।

बड़े चतुर चौकस मन माहीं सुध बुध सबहि भुलाए॥

Today, having slept in such heedlessness, I have come to regret it.

Lost in a profound slumber, I lost everything—my ornaments, my clothes, and (even) my awareness.

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Variations

In HS's script:

Dohā

Soye āju aceta hama, rahī ju tana sudhi nāyā|

Pachitābau mana yāhi saum bhūṣana-baṣana gāvāya||

Ṭhagī aba laum braja-sundarī, āja hama gaye thagāya|

Ghane catura mana māhīm saba, sudhi-budhi gaī hirāya||

In BT's script:

Pada

Āja hama soya aceta pachitāye|

Nidharaka nīnda laī na rahī sudhi bhūṣana vaṣana gamāye||

Barē catura comkasa mana māhīm saba vidhi jñyāna bhulāye|

Ṭhagī āja laum braja kī gopī, āja hama āpa thagāye||

According to BT, this was recited as a *pada*. However, in FKS, it is recited in a prose-like manner. There is also alliteration by the *rāsa-dhārīs*, for instance, *bhūṣana bhaṣana*, instead of *bhūṣana* (ornaments) *vaṣana* (cloth). Here is an example of poetic alliteration, as the word *bhaṣana* has no meaning. *Vaṣana*→*basana*→*bhaṣana* (aspirated bh and ṣ). They also replaced *saba vidhi jñyāna bhulāye* (all the ways and knowledge have caused to forget) with *sudha budha sabahi bhulāye*. In BT & HS, *hama* (m. we) is understood as sing. m. *I/maim*. (qv McG) In FKS, Kṛṣṇais referring to both himself and Mansukha.

¹⁴⁷ *Nidharaka* = *nidharaka*, m. adj. bold or fearless, modifies *nīnda* (sleep). (qv McG)

¹⁴⁸ *thagī* [H. *thag*], f. means cheating or robbing. (qv McG)

¹⁴⁹ *laum* = [H.] *laga* means until or up to. (qv Dāsa)

¹⁵⁰ All four are past continuous verbs: *pachitāye*, *gamāye*, *thagāye*, and *bhulāye*.

¹⁵¹ *caukasa*, adj. m. watchful, alert, or careful. (qv McG)

Until today, I was the one deceiving Braja's gopīs; today, I have been deceived myself.
Though I am very clever and alert in mind, (but today) I have been made to forget all sense and awareness.

...

*Rasiyā*¹⁵²

*Ko lai gayo hai curāi, hamāro gahanaum*¹⁵³|

*Āja taka gopī ṭhagīm, saba siddha muni nāga nara kinnara*¹⁵⁴ *asura baladhārī*¹⁵⁵ *haim*||

*Āja to kumāra hū ṭhagāya gaye nīkī bhāṭi*¹⁵⁶, *jāne humeṁ ṭhaga liyo vākī balihārī hai*||

*Jāpai kahū*¹⁵⁷ *milai māṅgi lāveṁ gahanom bāṭeṁ saba, rākhau guru banāī*|| *Jāne ko...*

*Vā dina maine rādhe jū kī mudrikā*¹⁵⁸ *curāya līnī*¹⁵⁹, *vohī mere gahane kū utāra cora dhāīm*¹⁶⁰ *hai*||

*Vohī merī guru braja gopījina bolī bolī, mākhan khavāya ṭeva*¹⁶¹ *corī kī sikhāī hai*||

*Cullū bhara chāchi*¹⁶² *pai nacāyo mohi bāra bāra, braja kī catura lugāī*¹⁶³|| *Jāne ko* || ४ ||

रसिया

¹⁵² This *rasiyā* has four stanzas; I have transcribed only the last one, where Kṛṣṇarealizes that it was Rādhā who must have stolen his jewels.

Variations

In BT's script:

Rasiyā

Ko lai gayo hai curāi, hamāro gahanaum|

Āja taka gopī ṭhagīm, saba siddha muni nāga nara kinnara asura bala-dhārī haim||

Āja to "kumāra" hū ṭhagāya gaye nīkī bhāṭi, jāne humeṁ ṭhaga liyo vākī balihārī hai||

Jāpai kahū milai māṅgi lāveṁ gahanom bāṭeṁ saba, rākhau guru banāī|| *Jāne ko...*

Vā dina maine rādhe jū kī mudrikā curāya līnī, vohī mere gahane kū utāra cora dhāīm hai||

Vohī merī guru braja gopījina bolī bolī, mākhan khavāya ṭeva corī kī sikhāī hai||

Cullū bhara chāchi pai nacāyo mohi bāra bāra, brja kī catura lugāī|

(This *Rasiyā* is not in HS)

There are no differences in BT and FKS versions.

¹⁵³ *gahanaum* means jewellery. (qv McG)

¹⁵⁴ *Kinnar*, m. a being with a human body and a horse's head, reckoned among the *gandharvas* (as divine musicians or singers). (qv McG)

¹⁵⁵ *baladhārī* = *balaśālī* [S. balavān], m. the one who possesses strength. (qv Dāsa)

¹⁵⁶ *bhāṭi*, m. way, manner. With words like *bhalī*, or, here *nīkī*, it means thoroughly. (qv McG)

¹⁵⁷ *kahū* here means somewhere or anywhere at all.

¹⁵⁸ *Mudrikā* [S. Mudrā] in Brbh. a ring of *kuśa* grass (worn on the fourth finger while sacrificing to ancestors). (qv McG)
However, here it indicates a simple finger ring. (qv Caturvedi)

¹⁵⁹ *līnī* = *līnhī* f. sing. (Perfective participle) m. taken.

¹⁶⁰ *utāra* is an absolutive ("having removed"). *Cora* is likewise verbal rather than nominal, representing a contracted form of *cori kari* ("having stolen"), with the final -i omitted (in *cor*). The line, therefore, contains a sequence of absolutes—*utāra* and *cori kari*. *dhāīm* (m. she ran away) is the f. perfective of *dhā-* [*dhāvati*], v.i. Brbh. Av. m. to run.

¹⁶¹ *ṭev*, m. a habit, a way. (qv McG)

¹⁶² *cullū bhara*, m. as much water as can be held in the hollowed hand. *Chāchi* = *chācha* [**chācchī*], f. buttermilk. (qv McG)

¹⁶³ *lugāī*, m. a woman, wife. (qv McG)

को लै गयो है चुराई, हमारो गहनौं॥ ध्रुवपद॥
 आज तक गोपी ठगीं, सब सिद्ध मुनि नाग नर किन्नर असुर बलधारी हैं॥
 आज तो कुमार हूँ ठगाय गये नीकी भाँति, जाने हमें ठग लियो वाकी बलिहारी है॥
 जापै कहूँ मिलै माँगि लावें गहनौं बाटें सब, राखौ गुरु बनाई॥ जाने को...
 वा दिन मैंने राधेजू की मुद्रिका चुराय लीनी, वोही मेरे गहने कूँ उतार चोर धाई है॥
 वोही मेरी गुरु ब्रज गोपीजिन बोली बोली, माखन खवाय देव चोरी की सिखाई है॥
 चुल्लू भर छाछि पै नचायो मोहि बार बार, ब्रज की चतुर लुगाई॥ को लै गयो॥४॥

Who has stolen my jewels?

Until now, the Gopīs were the ones deceived, and (so were) all the sages, serpents, humans, divine musicians, celestial beings, demons, and warriors.

But today, even the prince has been thoroughly deceived. I do not know who tricked me, but I am awestruck by that one.

If I meet them somewhere, I will ask them to return my jewels, and I will distribute those amongst them, keeping them as my teacher. Who knows...

That day, I stole the ring of Rādhā; she, having taken off and stolen my jewels, ran away.

The gopīs of Braj have been calling her my guru; she fed me butter and taught me the skill of stealing.

For just a cup of buttermilk, they made me dance again and again, those clever ladies of Braj. Who has stolen my jewels?...

[Kṛṣṇa confronts sakhis about his ornaments, followed by *gārīs*]

*Samvāda*¹⁶⁴

Kṛṣṇa: *Gāma barasānaum kahiyai*¹⁶⁵ *śrīśukhadāya kau* | *Merau batāyau sāsaurau, rādhejū kau māyakaui*

गाम बरसानौं कहियै श्रीसुखदाय कौ। मेरौ बतायौ सासुरौ, राधेजू कौ मायको॥

The village Barasānā is said to be of Śrī Sukhadāya (an abode of bliss). I have been told that it is the home of my in-laws, the maternal home of Rādhā.

Kṛṣṇa

¹⁶⁴ This is a verse from a *pada* ascribed to poet Sūradāsa Madanamohana (16th century) in BT's script. See more on Sūradāsa Madanamohana in Entwistle (1987), p. 167 & 402; Yāmadagni (1980), p. 271-272

¹⁶⁵ *kahiyai* (m. 'is said', or 'is called') is the subjunctive-present tense in the passive of *kahanā* [kathayati], v.t. & m. 1. v.t. to speak, to say. (qv McG)

*Kavitta*¹⁶⁶

*Tuma karata ho corī banata ho bhorī gorī, naimnana nacāye mukha mora*¹⁶⁷ *musakāta ho|*
*Ḍarata nahi ek bāla*¹⁶⁸ *bhaumha karabāla*¹⁶⁹ *kara, prema te nahi bolo aundhi sūdhī*¹⁷⁰ *sī kahāta ho||*

*Śyāma duja dvāra*¹⁷¹ *roka rākhī, itarāta batarāta satarāta*¹⁷² *jhūṭhī sācī sī kahāta ho|*
*Are dhanya panihārī yā brija kī basanahārī*¹⁷³ *īndhana*¹⁷⁴ *binā āga pānī meṁ lagāta ho||*

कवित्त

तुम करत हो चोरी बनत हो भोरी गोरी, नैनन नचाये मुख मोर मुसकात हो।
डरत नहीं एक बाल भौंह करबाल कर, प्रेम ते नहीं बोलो औंधी सूधी सी कहात हो॥
श्याम दुज द्वार रोक राखी इतरात बतरात सतरात, झूठी साँची सी कहात हो।
अरे धन्य पनहारी या ब्रिज की बसनहारी, ईंधन बिना आग पानी में लगात हो॥

You steal and act all innocent, O beautiful woman, your look here and there, turning your face with a (sly) smile.

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Variations

In BT's script:

Karata ho corī banata ho bhorī, gorī naimnana bacāye mukha musakyāyo ho|
Ḍarata na bāla hokara lāla lāla, prema so na bolo ūdhi sudhi sī sunāyo ho||
Aite hūṭhī thāri itarāta batarāta satarāta, jhūṭhī sācī sī kahāo ho|
Dhanya panahārī barasāne kī panahārī, īndhana binā āga pānī meṁ lagāo ho||

In HS's script:

Karata hau corī, aru banata ho bhorī, gorī! Nainani nacāye, mukha mori musakāau hau|
Ḍarata nā bāla! Naiṅka bhaumha karabāla kari, prema saum nā bolau, aundhī-sūdhī-sī sunāau hau||
Aite hūṭhī thāri itarāta batarāta satarāta, hau hamasaum jhūṭhī-sācī-sī kahāau hau|
Dhanya ye panihārī, barasāne-basanahārī, indhana binā āga pānī meṁ lagāau hau||

For alliteration, the version with *nainani nacāye* has been preserved in FKS & HS, while *naimnana bacāye* in BT. In FKS & HS, *bhaumha karabāla kari* is recited, complementing the eye movement, *naimnana nacāye*. Meanwhile, in BT, *Ḍarata na bāla hokara lāla lāla* (You do not fear, instead you are blushing). Both gestures symbolize that sakhis are not afraid, rather, they are enjoying it. In HS & BT, it is *aite hūṭhī thāri* (standing right here only), in FKS, they changed it to *śyāma duja dvāra roka rākhī*. Both phrases have the same connotation: they blocked Kṛṣṇaby standing or blocking the entrance. In there are variations, in HS, *barasāne-basanahārī*; in BT, *barasāne kī panahārī* (*panahārī* repeated twice); in FKS, *brija kī basanahārī*. While in both HS & BT the sakhis are addressed as the dwellers of Barasana, in FKS they are called the dwellers of Braj.

¹⁶⁷ *mora* = *mōṛa* (MSH), m. turn, is used as an absolute (having turned). (qv McG)

¹⁶⁸ *eka bāla* = *eka bāra*, m. once. (qv McG)

¹⁶⁹ *karabāla* = *karavāla* Brbh. Av. 1. a sword. (qv McG)

¹⁷⁰ *aundhi sūdhī* = (MSH) *ulaṭī sīdhī* f. of *ulaṭā-sīdhā*, m. absurd. (qv Bahri)

¹⁷¹ *duja* = *dūja*, m. Second; *duja dvāra*, m. Another door

¹⁷² There is rhyme: *itarāta batarāta satarāta*, with *rāta* ending. *itarāta* is the imperfect participle of *itarānā*, v.i. 1. to behave with pride, or conceit, or arrogance, or affectation; *batarāta* is the imperfect participle of *batalānā* = *batānā* [H. *bāt*], v.t., m. to inform, to state, to tell; *satarāta* is the imperfect participle of *satānā*, v.t., m. to tease. (qv McG)

¹⁷³ *panihārī*, f. of *panahārā*, the one who fills/fetches water. (qv Dāsa) *basanahārī* (m. Dweller, inhabitant) has been created to rhyme with *panihārī*, with *basanā* v.i., m. to reside, dwell.

¹⁷⁴ *īndhana* = *indhana* [S.], m. 1. firewood. 2. fuel. (qv McG)

You are not afraid at all, eyebrows shaped like a sword, you do not speak with love, but rather talk absurdly (or upside-down, or twisted ways).

Krishna at another door, acting proud, talking and teasing, speaking lies as truth.

Ah, blessed are you, carrier of water, dweller of Braj. You know how to set fire in water even without fuel!

Sakhi

*Kavitta*¹⁷⁵

*Yāhi*¹⁷⁶ *srī vṛndāvana meṁ ina gvālana ke saṅga jū, hamhi soṁ māṅga piyo chācha ke curū*¹⁷⁷ *ho|*

*In bhoṛi braja-bhutina*¹⁷⁸ *ke hiye mein cohabe kūm, kāṭe ho karīla*¹⁷⁹ *ke kaidhaum*¹⁸⁰ *gokharū*¹⁸¹ *ho||*

Ūdhama macāye rahe corī lagāye rahe, nāhīm kareṁ to bhai laṛive ko śurū ho|

*Kāna phukavāye kidhaum*¹⁸² *kañṭhī bandhavāī śyāma, kahibe ko celā para corana ke guru ho||*

कवित्त

याहि श्री वृन्दावन में इन ग्वालन के संग जू, हमहि सों मांग पियो छाछ के चुरु हो।

इन भोरी ब्रज-भूतिन के हिये में चोभे कूँ, काँटे हो करील के कैधौं गोखरु हो॥

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Variations

In BT's script:

Yāhi vṛndāvana meṁ gvālana ke sang aju, hamhi soṁ māṅgi piyā chācha ke curū ho|

Braja-bhutina ke hiye mein cubane ko, kāmṭe ho karīla ke kidhaum gokharū ho||

Ūdhama macāye rahe corī lagāye rahe, nāhīm karaim to bhave laṛive ko śurū ho|

Kāna phukavāye kidhaum kañṭhī bandhavāī, kahibe ko celā para corana ke guru ho||

In HS's script:

Yāhi vṛndāvana meṁ gvālana ke saṅga ju, hamhīm saum māṅgi piye chācha ke curū hau|

Braja-jubatina hiye mein cubhibe kū śyāma, tuma kāṭe hau karīla ke, kaidhom gokharū ho||

Ūdhama macāya rahe, corī lagāya rahe, nāhīm karaum tau bhave laribe kū surū hau|

(The last verse is missing)

In FKS & BT, the *gopīs* are referred to as *braja-bhutina*, and in HS, as *braja-jubatina* (young girls of Braj). While both terms have the same connotation, *braja-bhutina* refers to all women of Braj (irrespective of age) who have both *vātsalya* and *mādhurya bhāva* for Kṛṣṇa; meanwhile, as *braja-jubatina*, it refers only to young girls (*mādhurya bhāva*). There are no other major variations in these versions.

¹⁷⁶ In this verse, both *yāhi* are the obj. of *yaha* (this).

¹⁷⁷ The word *curū* may be related to *cullū* (qv Dāsa), meaning the hollow of the palm used to hold liquid; here it could also metaphorically suggest that Kṛṣṇaserves as a vessel for the buttermilk (*chācha*).

¹⁷⁸ *bhutin* is f. plu. of *bhūta* [S.], m. creation; a great devotee or ascetic. (qv McG) *Braja-bhutina* would mean created/born in Braj. It is used as a *bahuvrihī* compound for the *gopīs*.

¹⁷⁹ *karīla* = *karīra*, masc. a thorny leafless shrub. (qv McG)

¹⁸⁰ *kaidhaum*, m. Or, and. (qv Dāsa)

¹⁸¹ *gokharū*, m. a medicinal plant and its thorny fruit (qv Caturvedi)

¹⁸² *kidhau* could also be translated as who knows what/why (न जाने) (qv Dāsa)

ऊधम मचाये रहे चोरी लगाये रहे, नाहीं करें तो भई लड़िबे को शुरु हो।
कान फुकवाये किधौं कण्ठी बंधवाई श्याम, कहिबे को चेला पर चोरन के गुरु हो॥

In this divine Vṛndāvana, you ask from us and drink palmfuls of buttermilk with your cowherd friends.

In the hearts of these innocent gopīs (“born in Braja”), you pierce like a thorny shrub or a spikey fruit.

You keep creating mischief and stealing. If we say no, you pick fights instead.

O Śyāma, who knows where you got the initiation mantra (whispered in your ear) and the neckpiece tied?

You pretend to be a student, but in truth, you are the master of thieves!

Kṛṣṇa

*Kavitta*¹⁸³

“Are cora cora!” *khāyo dadhi mākhan malāi dūdha, dośa nahī hamaro phala pāyo tuma jāpa kau|*

*Maiṁ to yahā āyo braja maṇḍala meṁ janma le, bhaktan ko sukh dū meṭū*¹⁸⁴ *santāpa*¹⁸⁵ *ko||*

Mudari jo curāi tere sasura kī kamāi nāhī, hama śyāmā śyāma eka jhagaṛo nahi āpako|

*Rahī tū gamārī ḍyoṛī rokata hai hamārī, jaba śrī radhe hai hamārī to yaha mahala tere bāpa ko*¹⁸⁶ *||*

कवित्त

अरे चोर चोर खायो दधि माखन मलाई दूध, दोष नहीं हमारो फल पायो तुम जाप कौ।

मैं तो यहाँ आयो ब्रज मण्डल में जन्म ले, भक्तों को सुख दूँ मेटू संताप को॥

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Variations

In BT’s script:

Cora cora khāyau dadhi mākhan malāi dūdha, ___ phala jo pāyo tuma jāpa ko|

___ Braja maṇḍala meṁ āye janama liyau, ~~bhaktom~~ ko sukh deū meṭū santāpa ko||

Mudari jo curāi tere sasura kī kamāi na, hama śyāmā śyāma eka jhagaṛo na āpako|

Rahī tū gamārī ḍyoṛī rokata hai hamārī, jaba pyārī hai hamārī phira mahala tere bāpa ko||

In HS’s script:

Corī corī khāyau dadhi-mākhan, malāi dūdha, dosa nā hamarau, phala pāyo tuma jāpa kau|

Maiṁ tau yahā āyo braja maṇḍala meṁ janama laiḱe, ~~bhaktana~~ kū sukh daū meṭauṁ santāpa kau||

Mudari jo curāi tere sasura kī kamāi nāhiṁ, (hama) śyāmā-śyāma eka, kachū jhagaṛau nā āpa kau|

Rahī tū gamārī, ḍyoṛī rokata kahā rī, jaba pyārī haiṁ hamārī, kahā mahala tere bāpa kau||

In the first line, Kṛṣṇa defends himself by saying, *dośa nahī hamaro* (in FKS & HS), missing in BT. *Saralīkaraṇa* visible in BT, shift from Brbh plu ending to MSH, *bhaktana* (in HS & FKS) to *bhaktom*. This indicates that the *saralīkaraṇa* is not always a linear progression.

¹⁸⁴ *mēṭanā* [H. *miṭnā*], v.t. to erase, to efface. (qv McG)

¹⁸⁵ *santāpa* [S.], m. suffering, anguish; grief. (qv McG)

¹⁸⁶ *bāpa kā*, regarded as inherited from (one's, के) father (qv McG), loosely translated as entitled.

मुदरि जो चुराई तेरे ससुर की कमाई नहीं, हम श्यामा श्याम एक झगड़ो नहीं आपको।
रही तू गमारी ड्योढ़ी रोकत है हमारी, जब प्यारी है हमारी फिर तो महल तेरे बाप को॥

You call me a thief, saying I ate the curd, butter, cream, and milk—But it's not my fault; it's the fruit of your own chanting of my name!

I came here, having taken birth here in the land of Braj, to give joy to my devotees and to remove their sorrows.

The ring you claim I stole is not your father-in-law's earnings! We, Shyama and Shyam (Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa), are one, and it is not your fight.

You remain a simpleton, blocking my way at the doorstep; If Rādhā is mine, then is this your father's palace?¹⁸⁷

Sakhī

*Dohā*¹⁸⁸

Calo haṭo basa cupa raho, jāvo apne dhāma| Aise cora cālāka ko, yahām nahīm kachu kāmā||

दोहा

चलो हटो बस चुप रहो, जावो अपने धाम। ऐसे चोर चालाक को, यहाँ नहीं कछु काम॥

Get away now, be quiet, and return to your home. For such a cunning thief, there is no need here at all.

Kṛṣṇa

*Dohā*¹⁸⁹

Tumteṁ laū bhūṣana basana, to maiṁ nandakiśora| Yāda rākhiyo nāgarī, tumheṁ banāū cora||

दोहा

तुमतेँ लऊँ भूषण बसन, तो मैं नन्दकिशोर। याद राखियो नागरी, तुम्हें बनाऊँ चोर॥

If I take back my jewels and clothes, then I am Nanda's son.

Remember this, dear townswoman, I'll turn you into a thief instead!

Kṛṣṇa and Mansukhā leave; Sakhis inform Rādhā about Kṛṣṇa's ultimatum]

¹⁸⁷ It can also be translated as "How are you entitled to stop me?"

¹⁸⁸ Same as in BT. This *dohā* is not mentioned in HS's script.

¹⁸⁹ Same as in BT and HS.

Rādhā*Pada*¹⁹⁰

*Sakhī nanda ko lāla barau chaliyā, bārū kī bhīta*¹⁹¹ *uṭhāvata hai*
*Kara torata hai nabha kī tariyā*¹⁹², *caṭa canda*¹⁹³ *meṁ phanda*¹⁹⁴ *lagāvata hai*||
*Jahā pavana na jāi sakai, sajani, vahā muralī-dhvani dūtī*¹⁹⁵ *paṭhāvata*¹⁹⁶ *hai*
Kahū cora banaiṁ dadhi-dānī banaiṁ, kahū sāha lālī bani āvata hai||

Friend, Nanda's son (Kṛṣṇa) is such a clever trickster! He can even lift walls made of sand!
 He plucks stars from the sky with his hands, and in an instant sets a snare on the moon.
 Where even the wind cannot go, there he sends the sound of his flute as his messenger.
 Sometimes he becomes a thief, (sometimes) a curd-seller, sometimes comes disguised as a noble girl.

[Rādhā warns the sakhis about Kṛṣṇa's trickster nature. Meanwhile, Kṛṣṇa and Mansukha enter the stage in the disguises]

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Variations

In BT's script:

Manamohana lāla barau chaliyā sakhi bārū kī bhīmta uṭhāvata hai
Kara torata hai nabha kī tariyām, caṭa canda meṁ phanda lagāvata hai||
Jahā pavana na jāi saka muralī dhuni kī tahā dūtī paṭhāvata hai
Kahū cora banem kahū dadhi-dānī banem kahū sāha lālī bani āvata hai||

In HS's script:

Manamohanalāla barau chaliyā! Bārū kī bhīmta uṭhāvata hai
Kara torata hai, nabha kī tariyā, caṭa canda meṁ phanda lagāvata hai||
Jahā pauna na jāi sakai, vahā muralī-dhuni kī tahā dūtī paṭhāvata hai
Kahū cora, kahū dadhi-dānī banaiṁ, kahū sāha, lālī bani āvata hai||

Kṛṣṇa is addressed in FKS as *nanda ko lāla*; meanwhile, in BT & HS, he is referred to as *manamohana lāla*, which serves right to the premise of the song, where the “enchanter of hearts” can trick anyone.

¹⁹¹ *bālū kī bhīta*, f. wall of sand: ill-conceived basis (as for plans). However, in this case, Rādhā is commenting on the trickster nature of Kṛṣṇa that he can even trick you into believing that he can lift a wall of sand.

¹⁹² *tariyā* m. Floating one. (Qv Dāsa) *Nabha kī tariyā* would mean the ones floating in the sky, i.e., stars.

¹⁹³ *Cata*, m. adv. quickly; instantly. (qv McG)

¹⁹⁴ *phanda* = *phandā*, m. noose; snare, net; trap. (qv McG)

¹⁹⁵ *dūtī* [S.], f. a female envoy (qv McG)

¹⁹⁶ *paṭhā(va)*- [*prasthāpayati*], v.t. Brbh. Av. to send. (qv McG)

Svāmī vacana*Pada*¹⁹⁷

*Bheṣa dharyo*¹⁹⁸ *hai āja nārī kū bihārī jū ne*|
*Sārī sarasa kusumī lahāga*¹⁹⁹, *aṅgiyā pe jarada kinārī*²⁰⁰ *ko bihārī jū ne bhesa dharyo hai*||
*Hāra hamela*²⁰¹ *ḍṛgana mein añjana*²⁰², *nath sau hai alkārī ko bihārī jū ne*|
Bheṣa dharyo hai aaj nārī kū bihārī jū ne||

पद

भेष धर्यो है आज नारी कूँ बिहारी जू ने।
 साड़ी सरस कुसुमी लहंगा, अंगिया पे जरद किनारी को बिहारी जू ने भेष धर्यो है॥
 हार हमेल दृगन में अंजन, नथ सौ है अलकारी को बिहारी जू ने।
 भेष धर्यो है आज नारी कूँ बिहारी जू ने॥

Today, Bihārī has put on the disguise of a woman.

The sari is elegant, the lehenga is reddish-yellow, with a golden border on the blouse; Bihārī has taken on the disguise of it.

Hamela necklace and kajal in the eyes, the nose ring adorns the face of Bihārī.

¹⁹⁷ This pada is classified under *svāmī vacana* because this poem is not mentioned in any of the previous scripts, and does not have *chāpa*. This makes it difficult to classify it under a particular poetic tradition.

Variations

In BT's script:

Mohinī rūpa banāyo hari ne bānoṃ||
Vāhabarā bājūbanda sohe challā chapa gustānoṃ||
Mukha bhara pāna sīka bhara suramā lai darpaṇa kānhā musikyānoṃ||
Māya yaśodā yom ūṭhi bolī tū kyoṃ banoṃ janānoṃ||
Barasāne kī kuñja galina meṃ kānhā phirai dimānoṃ||
Bhāya rāya kī pauri bājhi ke vāhī lārīlī soṃ kānhā jāya batarānoṃ||

Hari (Kṛṣṇa) assumed the guise of a captivating woman.

He adorned himself with bracelets, armlets, rings, and other feminine ornaments that shone beautifully.

With his mouth reddened by betel, his eyes lined with kohl, Kṛṣṇa took up a mirror and smiled at his reflection.

Mother Yaśodā rose and said, “Why have you dressed yourself as a woman?”

Kṛṣṇa proudly roams through the bowers and lanes of Barsānā.

Having inquired about the doorway (or residence) of Vṛṣabhānu Rāya, Kṛṣṇa goes there to converse with his beloved (Rādhā).

Meanwhile, HS transcription does not provide any poetic composition describing the guise of Kṛṣṇa. While the padas in FKS & BT differ widely, they also address Kṛṣṇa's guise in different ways. In FKS, it is *bheṣa*, meanwhile in BT, it is *rūpa* (discussed in Chapter 4).

¹⁹⁸ *Bhesa* means disguise; *dharyo* is perfective of *dharanā*, m. to put on, to wear, or to assume. *Bhesa dharyo* is translated as to assume the guise of, to look like.

¹⁹⁹ *sarasa* adj., m. elegant, modifies *sārī* [S. *śāṭī*-], f. a sari; *kusumī*, [cf. *kusumbha*-], adj. reddish-yellow, modifies *lahāga*, m. a voluminous skirt. (qv McG)

²⁰⁰ *jarada* [P. *jarda*] means yellow (qv Dāsa); *aṅgiyā* means bodice (qv Caturvedi); *kinārī* means edging, trimming (of gold or silver). (qv McG)

²⁰¹ *hamela* [A. *ḥamā* 'il], f. a necklace (usu. made of gold or silver coins, and having a pendant). (qv McG)

²⁰² *añjana* means lampblack (as applied to the eyes and eyelashes as a cosmetic, or an ointment). (qv McG)

Today, Bihārī has taken on the disguise of a woman.

Svāmī resumes singing ‘*Bhesa dharyo hai*’ as they walk to Barsānā:

Svāmī Vacana

Pada

*Banaṭhana ke barsāne mem āye, chalana rādhikā pyārī jī ko|
Bhesa dharyo hai āja nārī kū Bihārī jū ne||*

पद

बनठन के बरसाने में आये, छलन राधिका प्यारी जी को।
भेस धर्यो है आज नारी कूँ बिहारी जू ने॥

Dressed up, he came to Barsānā to deceive the beloved Radhika.

Today, Bihari (Kṛṣṇa) has taken on the guise of a woman.

Kṛṣṇabegins to yearn as a Śyāmavirahaṇī]

Śyāmavirahinī

*Bhajana*²⁰³

*Maim to dhūṁḍha phirī jaga sārā, mohe milā nā prītama pyārā|
Maim kuñjana kuñjana bhaṭakī, Vṛndāvana āyike aṭakī, kahīm chipa gayā nandadulārā|| mohe
milā...||1||
Maim kāsauṁ kahūṁ yā vinatī, mohe roye roye āve hilakī²⁰⁴, nainom se bahe jaladhārā|| mohe
milā...||2||*

भजन

मैं तो ढूँढ फिरि जग सारा, मोहे मिला न प्रीतम प्यारा॥
मैं कुंजन कुंजन भटकी, वृन्दावन आयिके अटकी, कहीं छिप गया नन्ददुलारा॥ मोहे मिला...॥१॥
मैं कासों कहूँ या विनती, मोहे रोये रोये आवे हिलकी, नैनों से बहे जलधारा॥ मोहे मिला...॥२॥

I searched the whole world, but my beloved was nowhere to be found.

I wandered through every grove. Finally, I reached Vrindavan, but Nanda’s dear child (Krisha) is hiding somewhere.

To whom can I make this plea? Hiccups come to me as I cry and cry, from my eyes flow streams of sorrow.

²⁰³ This *pada* is not mentioned in both BT & HS. It does not have a *chāpa*; it is usually recited as a bhajan in the devotional circles. In BT & HS, there are various padas which records similar emotional suffering of the *virahaṇī*.

²⁰⁴ *hilakī* = (MSH) *hickī*/हिचकी m. Hiccups (Qv Dāsa)

Śyāmavirahinī

*Pada*²⁰⁵

Sakhi kaisī karū maim hāya, na kachu vaśa²⁰⁶ mero| bina dekhe sāvaro canda, dṛgana mem ādhero||

Sakhi aiso sundara nahim koī, maim saba jaga hero| vāko jo likhai tasavīra²⁰⁷, so kauna citero||

Sakhi kaṭhina chaila ko viraha, āni mohi ghero| sagarī niśi tāre ginata hī, hota sabero||

Sakhi jo tū milābai āja, vaha rūpa ujero | jabalom jīvoṅgī, guṇa na bhūlūgī tero ||

पद

सखी कैसी करूँ मैं हाय, न कछु वश मेरो। बिना देखे साँवरो चंद, दृगन में अँधेरो॥

सखी ऐसो सुन्दर नहीं कोई, मैं सब जग हेरो। वाको जो लिखै तस्वीर, सो कौन चितेरो॥

सखी कठिन छैला को विरह, आनि मोहि घेरो। सगरी निशि तारे गिनत ही, होत सबेरो॥

सखी जो तू मिलाबै आज, वह रूप उजेरो। जबलों जीवोंगी, गुण न भूलूँगी तेरो॥

Friend, what can I do. Alas, I have no control over myself. Without seeing the dark-beautiful moonlike Śyāma, darkness fills my eyes.

Friend, there is no one as beautiful as he, I have searched the whole world. His written description, what painter could capture such beauty?

Friend, the painful separation from that tricking lover surrounds me. The whole night passes as I count the stars until dawn.

Friend, if you unite me with that radiant beauty today, I will never forget your kindness as long as I live.

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Variations

In BT's script:

Sakhi, kaisī karū mem hāya na kachu basa mero| bina dekhe sāvaro candra dṛgana mem ādhero||

Sakhī, aiso sundara nāhim kahū maim saba jaga hero| vāko jo likhe tasavīra so kauna citero||

Sakhī, kaṭhina chaila ko viraha āna mohi ghero| sagarī niśi tāre ginatahi hota savero||

Sakhi, jo tū milāve āja vo rūpa ujero| jaba laum jīvoṅgī, guṇa na bhūloṅgī tero ||

Sakhi. Nārāyaṇa jo nāhim milaigo vaha mana ko luṭero| to nanda dvāra pai jaya karūgī mem dero||

In HS's script:

(Sakhi) kaisī karū mem hāya! na kachu basa merau, binu dekhaim sāvaro canda dṛgana mem ādherau||

(Sakhi) aiso sundara nāhim kahū maim saba jaga heryau, vākī jau likhai tasavīra, so kauna citerau||

(Sakhi) kaṭhina chaila kau biraha āni mohi gherau| sagarī niśi tāre ginatahi hota saberau||

(Sakhi) jo tū milāvai āja vo rūpa-ujerau| jaba lagi jīvaūṅgī, guṇa nahim bhūlū terau||

'Nārāyaṇa' jo na milai mo mana kau luṭerau| tau nandadvāra pai jai karūgī derau||

This pada is from the Śrīśyāmavirahinī līlā, verse 13 (See Appendix I). The last line of the pada, *sakhī nārāyaṇa jo na milai, vaha mana ko luṭero | taba nanda dvāra pai, jāya karūgī dero* (Friend, if I do not meet that thief of my heart, then I will go and make my dwelling at Nanda's doorway), is missing in FKS. This entire pada is recorded in both HS and BT'S text. No other major differences.

²⁰⁶ vaś [S.], m. Power. (qv McG)

²⁰⁷ tasavīra = tasvīra [A. taśvīr], f.a picture, drawing; painting; portrait.

Friend, if I do not meet that thief of my heart, then I will go and make my dwelling at Nanda's doorway.

Rādhā

*Pada*²⁰⁸

*Sakhī tū mati le vāko nāma, nahīm pachitāvaigī||dhruvapada||
 Mana kapaṭī, mukha mīṭhau bole, kalī-kalī rasa cākhata ḍole|
 Aisin saum kari prīti²⁰⁹ kahā phala pāvegī||
 Merī kahī tū cita na dharata hai, yāhī saum mōhi jāni parata hai|
 Tū apane sundara tana roga lagāvegī|
 Neha kiye kachu hātha na āvai, lōka-lāja kula-dharma nasāvai|
 'Nārāyana' tū nāhaka jagata hāsāvaigī||*

पद

सखी तू मति ले वाको नाम, नहीं पछितावैगी।
 मन कपटी, मुख मीठौ बोले, कली-कली रस चाखत डोले,
 ऐसे सौं करि प्रीति कहाँ फल पावैगी॥
 मेरी कही तू चित न धरत है, याही सौं मोहि जानि परत है,
 तू अपने सुन्दर तन रोग लगावैगी॥
 नेह किये कछु हाथ न आवै, लोक-लाज, कुल-धर्म नसावै,
 'नारायन' तू नाहक जगत हँसावैगी॥

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Variations

In BT's script:

*Sakhī tū mati lai bāko nāma, nahīm pachitāvaigī|
 Mana kapaṭī, mukha mīṭhau bole, kalī kalī rasa cākhata ḍole,
 Aise saum kari prīti kahā phala pāvegī||
 Merī kahī tū cita na dharata hai, jāsauṃ mōhim jāni parata hai,
 Tū apane sundara tana roga lagāvegī|
 Neha kiye kachu hātha na āvai, lōka lāja kula dharma nasāvai,
 Nārāyana tū nāhaka jagata hāsāvaigī||*

In HS's script:

*Pada (Rāga- Deśa; tāla - Addhā)
 Sakhī! tū mati lai bākau nāma, nahīm pachitāvaigī|
 Mana kapaṭī, mukha mīṭhau bolai, kalī kalī rasa cākhata ḍolai,
 Aise saum kari prīti kahā phala pāvegī||
 Merī kahau tū cita na dharata hai, yāhī saum mōhi jāni parata hai,
 Tū apane sundara tana roga lagāvegī|
 Neha kiye kachu hātha na āvai, lōka-lāja, kula-dharma nasāvai,
 'Nārāyana' tū nāhaka jagata hāsāvaigī||*

This pada is from the Śrīśyāma-virahinī līlā, verse 20 (See Appendix I). Just as in HS, this pada is also recited in rāga Deśa in FKS. No major differences in the padas.

²⁰⁹ *Priti*, m. Love, affection; regard.

Friend, do not even take his name, or else you will only regret it.
 He is cunning at heart, though sweet in speech; he wanders, tasting the nectar of every flower.
 What good will come from loving someone like that? You do not pay attention to what I say—
 now I see it clearly.
 You will only give your beautiful body a disease (the sickness of love).
 Love like this brings nothing in return; it destroys reputation, family honor, and social duty.
 O Nārāyaṇa, you will only for no good reason make others laugh (at you).

[Sakhi advises Rādhā]

Sakhi²¹⁰

Tanaka dūra pai jāykai²¹¹, mohana bhesa banāya|
Lakuṭa mukuṭa aura kāvari, āvau vega sajāya||

तनक दूर पै जायकै, मोहन भेस बनाय।
 लकुट मुकुट और काँवरि, आवौ वेग सजाय॥

Having gone a little distance away, assume the guise of Mohana (Kṛṣṇa).
 Taking the staff, crown, and carrying pole, come back quickly, fully adorned.

Kṛṣṇacontinues his yearning]

Śyānavirahinī

*Pada*²¹²

Batā de re sakhi, sāmvariya ko ḍero hai kitne dūra|
Ita mathurā uta gokula nagarī²¹³, bīca bahe yamunā bharapūra²¹⁴||

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Variations

In Yugalachadma līlā by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī,

Āpa śyāma ko bheṣa dhari, tanaka dūri pai jāya|
Hātha lakuṭa kaṭi pītaṭa, āvau dhenū livāya||21||

You take on Shyam's disguise, go a little distance away, and then—holding a herding stick, wearing the yellow cloth—return leading the cows.

This verse is neither mentioned in BT nor in HS. In HS, there is a vārtā (dialogue) of a sakhi, which conveys the same meaning.

²¹¹ *jāykai* (having gone) is an absolutive, however, here it has been employed as an imperative.

²¹² Similar *padas* have been ascribed to both Candrasakhī and Mīrābāī. See to Padmāvatī (1954), p. 39-40
 This *pada* is not mentioned in either BT or HS.

²¹³ *nagarī*, f. Small town, village. (qv McG)

²¹⁴ *bharapūra* (adj.) m. Abundant. (qv Bahri)

Tere kārāṇa joga liyā hai, aba na raho piyā dūra|
Ṽṛndāvana kī masta²¹⁵ joganiyām²¹⁶, mukha pai barasata nūra²¹⁷||

पद

बता दे रे सखी, साँवरिया को डेरो है कितने दूर।
 इत मथुरा उत गोकुल नगरी, बीच बहे यमुना भरपूर॥
 तेरे कारण जोग लिया है, अब न रहो पिया दूर।
 वृन्दावन की मस्त जोगनियाँ, मुख पै बरसत नूर॥

Tell me, O friend, how far away is the dwelling of the Dark One (Kṛṣṇa)?
 Here lies Mathurā, there stands the town of Gokul, and between them flows the abundant
 Yamunā.

For your sake, I have taken up the path of *joga* (renunciation/devotional discipline). Now,
 beloved, do not remain distant.

The ecstatic *yoginīs* of Vrindavan, their faces shining forth with radiance.

[Rādhā dressed as the Yugalarūpa, unified divine couple, appears on stage]

Śyānavirahinī:

Kavitta²¹⁸

²¹⁵ *masta* [P. *mast*], adj. intoxicated, carefree, engrossed, delightful. (qv McG)

²¹⁶ *jōgina* = (MSH) *yoginī*/योगिनी, f. a female ascetic. (qv McG)

²¹⁷ *barasata* is the imperfect participle of (v.i.) *barasanā*, m. to rain, or fig. to be strikingly evident, to be radiant; & *nura*, masc. light; brilliance, radiance. (qv McG)

²¹⁸

Variations

In BT's script:

Nīkī banī hū banī vṛja dūlha sī, mṛdu musikāna cāla nīkī chabi terī hai|
Turrā, kalaṅgī, mōrapakṣa hū, banyau pītāmbara bāsuri lakuṭī kara herī hai||
Jānī ju jānī sāha corī hū karana lāge, karai kauna nyāva aba yāko niraverī hai|
Keśava kṛpā kari dījiyai utāri, dṛṣṭi kitai pherai vāmśī to mēri hai||

In HS's script:

Nīkī banī so banī braja-dūlhai-sī, mṛdu musikāna, cāla, nīkī chabi terī hai|
Turrā, kalaṅgī, mōrapaccha hū jo nīko banyau hai sira. pītāmbara, bāsuri au lakuṭī kara herī hai||
Jānī ju jānī sāha corī hū karana lāge, karai kauna nyāva aba yākau niraverī hai|
'Kesava' kṛpā kari dījiyai utāri sabai, dṛṣṭi kitai pherī, yaha muralī tau mēri hai||

In FKS & BT, *mōrapaṅkha* (peacock feather) is recorded as *mōrapakṣa* (nasalization has been compensated for with a semi-vowel), meanwhile in HS, it is *mōrapaccha* (nasalization has been compensated with reduplication of the consonant). In HS, *Turrā, kalaṅgī, mōrapaccha hū jo nīko banyau hai sira* explicitly portrays that these ornaments adorn the head. In the last line, while HS records *muralī*, *vāmśī* in BT and its variant, *baṁśī* in FKS, could reflect a deliberate choice of words that connects the idea to the Baṁśī corī līlā, where gopī stole the flute as well. In all three versions, the *chāpa* could be of Keśavadeva Rāsadhārī.

Nīkī banī²¹⁹ sau banī braja-dūlhai²²⁰-sī| Mṛdu muskāna cāla nīkī chabi²²¹ terī hai||
Turrā kalaṅgī mōrapakṣa²²² hū²²³ jo nīko banyau| Banyau sirapeca tāpe lapaṭī hū herī hai||²²⁴
Jānī ju²²⁵ jānī sāha²²⁶ corī hū karana lāge| Kare kauna nyāva aba yāko²²⁷ niraberī²²⁸ hai||
‘Kesava’ kṛpā kara dījiyai utāra saba| Dṛṣṭi kita pherī, yaha baṁsī tau mērī hai||

कवित्त

नीकी बनी सौ बनी ब्रज-दूल्है-सी। मृदु मुस्कान चाल नीकी छबि तेरी है॥
 तुरा कलंगी मोरपक्ष हूँ जो नीको बन्यौ। बन्यौ सिरपेच तापे लपटी हूँ हेरी है॥
 जानी जु जानी साह चोरी हूँ करन लागे। करे कौन न्याय अब याको निरबेरी है॥
 ‘केसव’ कृपा कर दीजियै उतार सब। दृष्टि कित फेरी, यह बंसी तौ मेरी है॥

You have dressed up pleasingly, just like a groom of Braja; gentle is your smile and gait, your graceful form is appeasing.

Plume, crest, and peacock feather are fashioned beautifully; that splendid head-ornament tied to it (headgear), I see that too.

I know, I know that even the noble one has started to steal; now who is going to judge this case and bring it to justice?

O ‘Kesava’ (Kṛṣṇa), bestow your grace and take off all of it (disguise/ornaments). Where are you turning your gaze?—That flute is mine!

Conclusion

The *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* reveals the dynamic interplay between poetic tradition, linguistic adaptation, and performative creativity that characterizes the living tradition of Rāsalīlā. Through its rich combination of *padās*, dialogues, *rasiyās*, *dohās*, and *kavittas*, the *līlā* preserves the literary heritage of Brajabhāṣā while continually adapting itself to the expectations of contemporary audiences. Through the examination of the performance of Svāmī Fatehkrishna

²¹⁹ *nīkī*, f. of *nīkā*. *Nīkī banī* menaing dressed up pleasingly. (qv McG) Interestingly, Śyāma virhinī is complementing Rādhā-as-Kṛṣṇa with feminine endings.

²²⁰ *dūlhai*, obl. sg. for *dūlaha* = (MSH) *dūlha*/दूल्हा, masc. groom.

²²¹ *chabi* = *chavi*, m. graceful form. (qv McG)

²²² *mōrapakṣa* = *mōrapaṅkha*

²²³ *hū* = (MSH) *bhī*, used emphatically, m. even.

²²⁴ *herī* is the perfective of *heranā* [*herati (← Drav.): Pk. herai] v.t. Brbh. to detect (a fault). *lapaṭī* is the perfective of *lipaṭanā* v.t. 1. to cause to adhere (to, से), to stick (to); to wind or to tie (round).

²²⁵ *ju* = (MSH) *jo*, m. that or which.

²²⁶ *sāha*, n. masc. a good man or gentleman (as opposed to a thief). (qv Caturvedi)

²²⁷ *yāko* = (MSH) *isko*/इसको obl. of *isa*, m. that.

²²⁸ *niraberī* f. could mean *nibērā* [cf. H. niber-], m. (Brbh. Av.) settlement, decision.

Sharma (FKS) alongside the script traditions preserved by Harivallabha Sharma (HS), Bābā Tulsīdāsa (BT), and, where available, the earlier manuscript tradition of Cācā Vṛndāvan Dāsa, this chapter has shown how the līlā evolves while preserving its devotional and literary core.

One of the principal features emerging from this comparison is the process of *saralīkaraṇa* (simplification). In FKS’s performance, older Brajbhāṣā forms are frequently replaced by forms closer to Modern Standard Hindi, such as *haum* becoming *main* and *jākau* becoming *jinkau*. Such changes make the text more immediately intelligible to contemporary audiences without significantly altering the dramatic meaning.

Other substitutions retain the original meaning while rephrasing it in a form that is more accessible to contemporary audiences. For instance, the expression *aite hū̃ pai thāri* (“standing right here, blocking the way”), found in HS and BT, is reformulated in FKS as *śyāma duja dvāra roka rākhī* (“you have blocked Śyāma at the second doorway”); although the wording changes, the dramatic implication remains identical. Similarly, *eho catura bihārī* in Cācā Vṛndāvan Dāsa’s manuscript becomes *tuma saṅga chaila bihārī* in all three later versions, shifting the emphasis from Kṛṣṇa’s cleverness (*catura*) to his charming nature (*chaila*) while preserving the poetic context. In another instance, *āju main kapaṭi buddhi ṭaka ṭorī* (“today I uncovered the deceitful mind”) is replaced in FKS with *lāla kapaṭa pheṁṭa ṭakaṭorī*, redirecting attention from Kṛṣṇa’s trickery to the symbolic waistband that conceals it. These examples suggest that many textual variants are not substantial modifications but alternative formulations that preserve narrative and emotional continuity while adapting expression to the needs of performance.

The comparison of the three versions also demonstrates that *saralīkaraṇa* is not only a linear progression from older Brajbhāṣā to MSH in Rāsālīlā. While in FKS, there are frequent lexical substitutions with MSH or Khaṛī bolī, it also preserves tatsama and older Brajbhāṣā vocabulary in places where BT or HS employs MSH variants. The coexistence of archaisms and innovations across the scripts suggests that each svāmī selectively reshaped the language of the līlā according to the needs of performance and audience reception, rather than following a uniform process of linguistic modernization.

The analysis further reveals that adaptation takes place not only through language but also through poetic and musical practice. Although the poetic meters of the original compositions are often preserved, their performative realization is flexible and occasionally disrupts strict metrical conventions. A striking example is the composition beginning *Māthe pai mukuṭa śruti kuṇḍala*, which is structurally a *kavitta* but is performed by FKS as a *ṭhumarī* in Rāga Khamāja. Likewise, textual labels differ across the scripts: BT identifies it as a *ṭhumarī*, HS records it as a *pada*, and FKS also presents it as a *ṭhumarī* but interpolates Kathak notations. Such examples illustrate that in Rāsalīlā, poetic genre and musical rendition are not rigidly bound to one another; rather, they remain fluid categories shaped by living performance.

Changes in musical practice similarly point to a tradition that balances continuity with innovation. Comparison of the rāgas specified in HS and Cācā jī's manuscript with FKS indicates that several original melodic settings have been replaced, while others have been retained. On the one hand, Cācā jī prescribes *Lāla yaha niksī phaiṁṭa tem corī to be sung in Rāga Devagiri*; in FKS, it is sung in Mīśra Pīlu (common in Rāsalīlā). On the other hand, certain *rāgas* are preserved in FKS, such as the use of Rāga Deśa (specified in HS) for *sakhī tū mati le vāko nāma*, which reveals a conscious continuity with earlier performative practice.

The textual comparisons also reveal a more subtle process of poetic reworking. Variants often arise through alliteration, sound patterning, and performative embellishment rather than through substantial semantic alteration. The shift from *kāchanī lalita* (in HS) to *kāchanī kalita* (in BT & FKS), furthermore, in svāmī vacans, too, alliterative pairings such as *lataka-calata* and *bhuva bhaṭaka*, demonstrate a sensitivity to oral recitation and musical delivery. Similarly, alterations such as *bhūṣana-vasana* becoming *bhūṣana-bhaṣana* privilege phonetic effect over lexical precision. In other cases, the changes merely expand the interpretive possibilities of the text. For example, the contrast between *braja-jubatina* and *braja-bhutina* does not alter the narrative but broadens the imagined community participating in the līlā, extending it from youthful lovers embodying *mādhurya-bhāva* to all the women of Braj, including those associated with *vātsalya-bhāva* as well.

Equally significant are the places where no substantial variation exists. Many *padas*, including those associated with the Śrīśyāma virahinī episode, remain remarkably stable across the three

versions. These continuities underscore the resilience of the Rāsalīlā literary tradition and caution against viewing adaptation solely as a process of change. The coexistence of preservation and innovation is, in fact, one of the defining characteristics of the tradition. The comparison of the manuscripts also suggests networks of textual borrowing and compilation. The use of inverted commas around *chāpās* in the ‘*Kesava*’ *krpā kara dījiyai utāra saba* in both BT & HS points to the possible role of Keśavadeva Rāsadhārī as a compiler of this līlā. While there are elements preserved by FKS, absent from both HS and BT, such as the *dohā* from the *Yugalchadma Līlā*, *Tanaka dūra pai jayakai*, indicates that the last portion of the Mudariyā Corī līlā performance tradition has also been inspired by the works of Nārāyaṇa Svāmī.

The distinctions between the scripts of Harivallabha Sharma and Bābā Tulsīdāsa further illuminate different approaches to preserving the līlā tradition. HS generally records a more expansive, performance-oriented text, often specifying rāga and tāla, using punctuation to clarify meaning, and retaining detailed stage directions. BT, by contrast, frequently presents a more condensed and devotional version while simultaneously preserving a wider range of independent poetic compositions, including padas attributed to Mīrābāī, Brajanidhi (Mahārāja Sawāī Pratāp Siṅgha of Jaipur), and Nārāyaṇa Svāmī. Neither manuscript, however, functions as a singular or immutable authority. Rather, both operate as repositories of an ongoing performative tradition, recording particular moments within a much larger and evolving repertoire.

Most importantly, this chapter has shown that meaning in Rāsalīlā emerges not from the dramatic text alone but through the act of performance itself. Central to this process is the role of the svāmī, whose *svāmī-vacana*, theological commentary, narrative transitions, and interpretive interventions weave together individual songs, dialogues, and episodes into a coherent devotional experience. His narration mediates between inherited textual material and the contemporary audience, ensuring that the emotional, aesthetic, and theological dimensions of the līlā remain accessible and relevant.

The textual and performative variations examined in this chapter, therefore, highlight the creative agency of the *rāsadhārīs*, who function not merely as custodians of tradition but as active interpreters of it. While language, staging, and performance strategies continue to evolve, the devotional and emotional core of the *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* remains intact. Its continued vitality

lies precisely in this balance between preservation and innovation, allowing the tradition to sustain its cultural and theological significance while evolving with new audiences and performance contexts.

Chapter 4

Decoding Chadma in the Mudariyā Corī līlā

This chapter examines *chadma* (disguise) in the Mudariyā Corī Līlā not merely as a theatrical device but as a theological mode of revelation within Rāsālīlā tradition. While modern theories of performance have argued that impersonation unsettles the binary between “real” vs “copy,”²²⁹ this līlā suggests a more radical possibility: that such instability is intrinsic to devotional experience itself. When Kṛṣṇa assumes the guise of the Śyāmavirahaṇī, a woman longing for Kṛṣṇa’s darśan, the act does not merely function as imitation or deception, but as a layered unfolding of bhakti. Here, the distinction between devotee and deity is erased, as the divine becomes both the experiencer and the object of longing. Disguise thus emerges as a medium through which the relational ontology of bhakti is made visible, revealing that devotional identity is not fixed but constituted through affective participation in divine love.

The analysis proceeds by engaging both textual and performative dimensions of the Mudariyā Corī Līlā episode. First, a brief analysis of the *Śrīśyāmavirahinī līlā* by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī, tracing its resonances in the Mudariyā corī līlā and the Gopī-gīta in the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*.

Drawing on Nāṭyaśāstric theories of *abhinaya* and *rasa*, alongside Vaiṣṇava aesthetic theology as articulated by Rūpa Gosvāmī, the chapter demonstrates how devotional sentiment (*bhakti-rasa*) is generated through the interplay of gesture, bodily reactions, voice, costume, and emotional enactment. Particular attention is given to the ways in which *viraha* (separation) is embodied on stage, transforming literary motifs inherited from sources such as the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and vernacular bhakti poetry into lived, affective performance. The objective of this analysis is to convey that the performer (Kṛṣṇa svarūpa) is not merely comically acting as a Śyāmavirahaṇī; he dwells on that *bhāva* that one experiences through the practice of Rāgānugā bhakti.

At the same time, the chapter further considers how contemporary Rāsālīlā performers negotiate these inherited traditions through improvisation, humor, and embodied practice. By analyzing the layered disguises of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, and Mansukhā, the chapter ultimately argues that *chadma* in this līlā destabilizes boundaries between devotee and deity, gendered identities, and performance

²²⁹ Kamath and Lotspeich (2023), p. 2

and devotion. In doing so, it reveals disguise as a critical medium through which the emotional and theological depths of Braj bhakti are both enacted and made experientially accessible.

Śyāmavirahinī in Śrīśyāmavirahinī līlā²³⁰

In Nārāyaṇa Svāmī's *Śrīśyāmavirahinī līlā*, Kṛṣṇa (Śyāma) has taken on the garb of a woman (*tiya bheṣa*), and he is pretending to be a *virahinī* (love-lorn heroine) wandering through the streets, calling out his own name in longing, *prītama to dekhe binā, china china kalpa bihāya* (O dearest, without seeing you, every moment passes like an age).²³¹ In the opening couplet, he describes Kṛṣṇa as *parama kautukī śyāma* (the very curious Śyāma). The poet narrates that it is Śyāma himself who is taking his own name on the streets (*lai lai apno nāma*). Conveying the devotee's plea, Śyāmavirahinī pleads with Śyāma to give his darśana.²³²

A sakhi notices this virahinī and describes her appearance to Rādhā (Śrījī). Sakhi's description, *nārāyaṇa aisī mohi dīkhatī, hai baṛa gopakumāra* (O Nārāyaṇa, it seems to me that this must be the high cowherd family)²³³, can be interpreted in two ways. First, it could be that the wise sakhi understood Kṛṣṇa's trick, or the poet himself is narrating to the audience that it is indeed Kṛṣṇa as Śyāmavirahinī. Rādhā becomes curious and goes to meet her. Upon encountering the virahinī, Rādhā is struck by her intense emotional state; she appears disoriented, intoxicated, and deeply afflicted by separation. Rādhā gently questions her, asking about the cause of her suffering and offering help.

Usually, in the case of a jealous heroine (*māninī*), the heroine (Rādhā) is jealous when Kṛṣṇa wanders around with other gopīs. However, through this līlā, the idea of *mādhurya bhakti* is conveyed in the performance. Here, Rādhā is not jealous of the beautiful Śyāma-virahinī; rather,

²³⁰ I have deliberately preserved the spelling Śyāmavirahinī while referring to the character in the *Śrīśyāmavirahinī līlā*.

²³¹ See Appendix I, verse 2.

²³² In the *Śrīśyāmavirahinī* play, the poet does not make it explicit why Kṛṣṇa is taking his own name. However, in the FKS performance, Kṛṣṇa explains that Rādhā loves anyone who takes Kṛṣṇa's name. Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma's maṇḍalī. (2024, August 8). Rāsalīlā performance at Jai Singh Ghera, Vrindavan [Video recording].

²³³ See Appendix I, verse 4.

she understands her devotion and tries to ease her pain. In the *Mudariyā corī līlā*, she even goes to the lengths of dressing up as Kṛṣṇa to give Śyāma-virahaṇī Kṛṣṇa's darśana.

The Śyāma-virahinī recounts her experience of meeting Kṛṣṇa at the bank of the river Yamunā (*jamunā ke taṭa mosom bhemṭa bhaī rī*)²³⁴, describing his extraordinary beauty and charm, which has completely captivated her heart. Since that moment, she has lost all sense of self and cannot bear separation from him. Rādhā then warns her: “Why have you gone mad, in the separation of that trickster? Do not take Śyāma's name, even by mistake, (or else) people will talk.”²³⁵ Here, the poet, through Rādhā, displays the societal perception towards a devotee who loses self in the pursuit of the divine.

Despite Rādhā's warnings about the *kaṭhina mārṅa* (the difficult path) of *sneha* (love) and Kṛṣṇa's *chaliyā* (trickster) nature, the virahinī remains steadfast in her devotion and longing. Virahinī asks, *kāsom kahū* (with whom should I share), Śyāma-virahaṇī in *Mudariyā corī līlā* also asks the same things to Rādhā, *maim kāsaum kahūm yā vinatī*.²³⁶ When the entire world thinks the devotee goes mad, to whom should they go? Who can relate to this yearning? Ironically, Śyāma-virahinī asks this question amidst Rādhā and the gopīs, who themselves live in the *viraha* of Kṛṣṇa, notably in the *gopī-gīta* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*; and Rādhā's *viraha* in Jayadeva's *Gīta-Govinda*.

Eventually, Rādhā agrees to guide her toward Nanda's house, where Kṛṣṇa resides. The Śyāma-virahinī, having reached Kṛṣṇa's door, cries out Śyāma's name and expresses her *dard* (pain) and *prema* (love).²³⁷ She addresses herself as *hom vṛṣabhānukumāra ko cero*, “I am a servant of the daughter of Vṛṣabhānu.” Rādhā is confused. Why would Śyāma-virahinī call herself a male servant (*cero*) instead of a maid (*cerī*)?²³⁸ Lalitā recognizes Kṛṣṇa in the Śyāma-virahinī

²³⁴ Here, Kṛṣṇa himself draws inspiration from the memory/experience of the gopīs. Meeting Kṛṣṇa on the riverbank has been romanticized in poetry over the ages, for instance, in the *Gīta-Govinda*, song 11 (*dhīra samīre yamunā tīre*). Miller (1977), 145

²³⁵ In FKS also, Rādhā tells the śyāma-virahaṇī, *sakhī tū matī le vāko nāma, nahīm pachitāvaigī*, See p. 65

²³⁶ This pada is skipped in FKS; however, another bhajan conveys similar emotion, *maim kāsaum kahūm yā vinatī*. See p. 63

²³⁷ See Appendix I, verse 16-21

²³⁸ Ibid. verse 22

disguise. Kṛṣṇa asks Rādhā, “O beloved! You had said that you would never again fall for my tricks, so how have you come here now?” Rādhā replied, *tiḥāre prasanna karibe kũ* (only to make you happy). The *līlā* concludes with the union of the divine couple. The poet concludes by highlighting that listening to this *līlā* “grants the four spiritual goals of life...whoever sings or listens to it does so for the love of the divine couple.”²³⁹

The idea of Śyānavirahinī could be modeled on the *viraha* of the Gopīs from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. In the Gopī Gīta, separation stretches time unbearably, “a fraction of a second becomes like a millennium.”²⁴⁰ The Śyānavirahinī echoes this almost verbatim: *china china kalpa bahāye* (every moment passes like an age).²⁴¹ In both, time is no longer objective; it is measured through the intensity of longing. *Viraha* becomes a temporal disorder—devotional time replaces worldly time. The gopīs accuse Kṛṣṇa of cruelty, “*neha kim vadha*” (Isn’t this murder?)²⁴², even as they surrender to him. They also call him a cheater (*kuhaka*).²⁴³ The Śyānavirahinī similarly calls him “*bedardī*” (heartless) and “*chaliyā*” (deceiver).

In the Gopī Gīta, the gopīs openly acknowledge abandoning husbands, families, and societal relations.²⁴⁴ The Śyānavirahinī similarly relinquishes *lāja* (modesty) upon seeing Kṛṣṇa: *tāhī samaya lāja ko tilāmjalī daī rī* (in that very moment I abandoned all my shyness). She is warned by Rādhā about reputation, family honor, and social duty.²⁴⁵

Both texts are saturated with recollection of Kṛṣṇa’s form—his smile, lips, glances. The gopīs of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* dwell on “nectar of Your lips,” “lotus eyes,” “sweet voice.”²⁴⁶ The

²³⁹ Verse

²⁴⁰ Verse 15, Ibid.

²⁴¹ See Appendix I, verse 2

²⁴² Verse 2, Ibid.

²⁴³ Verse 10, Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Verse 16, Ibid.

²⁴⁵ See Appendix I, verse 20.

²⁴⁶ Verses 8, 10, 12, 14 Ibid.

Śyāmavirahinī mirrors this in vivid detail, *Adharana pai adbhuta aruṇāī, mutiyana kī lara pāṭi daśana*—his lips (Reddish glow on his lips, and his teeth looked like a row of pearl strings).

The Śyāmavirahinī is not a new character in the Vaiṣṇava literature; she represents the gopīs's *viraha* lament transcending over the generations. Kṛṣṇa's choice of the Śyāmavirahinī disguise is not out of the blue. He knows how *sakhis* connect with each other through shared *viraha*, and all the *padas* he recites parallel their emotions. Thus, the Śyāmavirahinī would be the most apt disguise to become a part of the intimate group of Rādhā and the *sakhis*. In the following section, through the *abhinaya* of the Kṛṣṇa *svarūpa* in the Mudariyā corī līlā, the Śyāmavirahinī is enacted on stage.

Fashioning the guise of Kṛṣṇa

Kṛṣṇa's *chadma-veśa* or disguise in this līlā operates on multiple performative levels. I will rely on the Nāṭyaśāstric framework of acting (*abhinaya*) to understand the performance of Śyāmavirahinī. *Nāṭyaśāstra* lays down four types of *abhinaya* to convey meaning to the audience: *āṅgika* (body), *vācika* (speech/voice), *āhārya* (costume/makeup), and *sāttvika* (emotional state).

At the level of *āhārya abhinaya*, we rely on both textual and AV documentation to determine what the *svarūpa* is wearing. The *svāmī* shifts from the earlier *pada*, *mohinī rūpa banāyo hari ne bānom* (Hari assumed the guise of a captivating woman) to *bheṣa dharyo hai āja brajanārī kū bihārī jū ne* (Today, Bihārī has put on the disguise of a woman). While this shift might raise questions, in BT's script, *svāmī* describes Kṛṣṇa's disguise as *rūpa banāyo* (making the appearance), whereas in the FKS performance, he says *bheṣa dharyo* (putting on the appearance). The earlier *pada* is currently sung in the Candrāvalī līlā, where Kṛṣṇa is pretending to be Candrāvalī's sister to trick her into giving him *mākhana* (butter).²⁴⁷ A stark contrast in these

²⁴⁷ See Rāsālīlā performance by Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma's troupe on YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XoOXQHJXI8&t=7474s>

two *padas* also indicates the plot lines; in *rūpa banāyo*, it signifies that Kṛṣṇa has merely put on the garb of a lovely lady. Meanwhile, in *bheṣa dharyo*, he is not merely putting on the garb; he is embodying the *brajanārī*.

The pada (*bheṣa dharyo*) describes Kṛṣṇa wearing feminine attire, including the reddish (*kusumi*) *lehṅgā* (long skirt), *orhaṇī* (head and shoulder scarf), *sārī*, a blouse (*aṅgiyā*) with a golden border, a hamela necklace (*hāra*), and kohl in the eyes. This is just the outer physical disguise; one needs to understand the embodiment of the disguise as well. Kṛṣṇa, appearing as Śyāma virahaṇī, performs the emotional and devotional interiority of a devotee in separation. The disguise thus moves beyond theatrical concealment toward the enactment of *bhakti-rasa* itself.

While performing *āṅgika abhinaya* (bodily gestures), Kṛṣṇa holds up his *orhaṇī*, covering his face from the side and concealing his identity, while also portraying a shy *gopī*.²⁴⁸ He walks with one hand on his waist and the other holding the veil, swaying from one direction to another (which is sort of a usual walk). He looks up, searching for the lord, then looks down, expressing sadness at the separation.

In Śyāma virahaṇī's performance, Kṛṣṇa does not simply disguise himself as a woman to deceive Rādhā and the *gopīs*. Rather, he assumes the affective condition of the devotee herself. By performing *viraha* toward his own divine form, Kṛṣṇa becomes both the object and experiencer of devotion. The *chadma-līlā* therefore stages not only cross-dressing, but the theological reflexivity of *bhakti-rasa*: Kṛṣṇa embodies the longing through which he is worshipped.

Coming to the presentation of both *vācika* and *sātvika abhinaya*, one witnesses how the Śyāma virahaṇī generates devotional sentiment on stage. First, it is necessary to consider Bharata's theory of *rasa-niṣpatti* (production of *rasa* in drama) in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*: '*the rasa (sentiment) is produced from a combination of vibhāvas (determinants), anubhāvas*

²⁴⁸ In prema-samputa, Kṛṣṇa, disguised as a *gopī*, felt a transcendental rapture in his heart and goosebumps after listening to the words of Rādhā. To hide, he covered his limbs with his veil. See Prema-samputa, v. 12

(consequents), and *vyabhichāri-bhāvas* (transitory states).²⁴⁹ As *bhakti rasa* is not explicitly mentioned in Bharata's canonical *rasa* system, I turn to Rūpa Gosvāmī's *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*²⁵⁰, which adapts dramaturgical aesthetics into a specifically theological framework. Reading the *Rāslīlā* through Rūpa's framework, therefore, allows us to see how devotional experience is simultaneously theatrically produced and spiritually cultivated.

Rūpa explains that *bhāva* arises either through disciplined devotional practice (*sādhana*) or through Kṛṣṇa's grace (*prasāda*), though the former is more commonly attainable.²⁵¹ This distinction is significant for understanding contemporary *svarūpas*. David Mason emphasizes the centrality of *bhāva* (emotion) within *Rāslīlā*, arguing that performers cultivate devotional affect through practices such as *smaraṇa* (remembrance), and these child performers embody a "pure *bhāva*."²⁵² Building on Mason's framework, I argue that contemporary adult performers introduce an additional layer of contemplative and interpretive depth through years of *cintana* (contemplation) and *sādhanā* (discipline). The adult performer's cultivation of gesture, vocal expression, remembrance, and emotional control may be understood not merely as artistic training but as a form of devotional discipline through which *bhāva* becomes performatively accessible. The stage thus becomes a site where aesthetic technique and spiritual practice converge.

According to Rupa's general analysis of *Bhaktirasa*, for the ideal devotee, *rati* (emotion of love) for Kṛṣṇa is the *sthāyī-bhāva*. This *bhāva* gradually transforms into *rasa*, which can be relished perpetually. For Rūpa *madhura-bhakti* (amorous), *rasa* is the highest type of religious experience.²⁵³ Haberman writes, 'For Rupa, love is and remains Foundational, or, to repeat (and reverse) the common adage: "Love is God."²⁵⁴ Like the *rasa-niṣpatti* in *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Rūpa also lays out a similar process. I have referred to the categories (*uddīpana vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*,

²⁴⁹ See *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ch. 6 v. 32

²⁵⁰ For translating these terminologies, I have used Haberman's translation of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu*.

²⁵¹ See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant, third wave, v. 6

²⁵² Mason, David. (2009, May 25). *Theatre and Religion on Kṛṣṇa's Stage*, p. 111

²⁵³ See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant, third wave, verse 36-37

²⁵⁴ Haberman (2007) in *Krishna: A sourcebook*, p 417

vyabhicāri bhāvas, etc.) he listed and, for further explanation, to the instances given to define each category.

First, the *vibhāvas*, which are the causes of emotions, are enhanced by the *uddīpana vibhāvas* (stimulants). The *vibhāvas* first establish the emotional environment of devotion. I have focused on the *uddīpana-vibhāvas*²⁵⁵ (enhancing stimulants) identified by Rūpa; a few of them are staged within Śyānavirahinī's *padas*²⁵⁶. First, his qualities, including physical, vocal, and mental, Śyānavirahinī laments, *bina dekhe sāvaro canda, dṛgana meṁ ādhero* (Without seeing the dark-beautiful moonlike Śyāma, darkness fills my eyes), referring to his complexion (*kāya*). In another *pada*, she talks about his undescribable qualities: *sakhī aiso sundara nahim koī, main saba jaga hero; vāko jo likhai tasavīra, so kauna citero* (Friend, there is no one as beautiful as he—I have searched the whole world. What painter could capture such beauty?). Kṛṣṇa is repeatedly addressed as *Śyāmasundara*, *Manamohana*, and *prītama pyārā*, recalling both his physical beauty and his power to enchant the mind.

The second *uddīpana-vibhāva* is place (*kṣetra*), evoked through the line, *ita Mathurā uta Gokula nagarī, bīca bahe Yamunā bharapūra* (Here Mathurā, there Gokula town, and in between flows the abundant Yamunā). On the other hand, Rādhā, while consoling Śyānavirahinī, also recalls Kṛṣṇa's vocal quality (*vāñī*), adding further stimulus, *mukha mīṭhau bole* (sweet in speech). Through these invocations of Kṛṣṇa's attributes and the Braj landscape, the performance activates devotional memory and immerses both performer and audience within the emotional atmosphere of *viraha*.

Then the *vyabhicāri-bhāvas* (transitory emotions) and *Sattvikabhāvas* (responses) include words, gestures, and involuntary physical reactions through which the emotion is expressed. Finally, the

²⁵⁵ They include Kṛṣṇa's *guṇa* (qualities), *ceṣṭā* (actions), *prasādhana* (ornaments), *smīta* (smile), *aṅgasaurabha* (bodily fragrance), *vaṁśa* (flute), *śṛṅga* (horn), *nūpura* (anklets), *kambu* (conch), *padāṅka* (footprints), *kṣetra* (abode), *tulasī* (Tulasī plant), *bhakta* (devotees), and *vāsara* (festivals). - Southern quadrant, first wave, v. 301 Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu

²⁵⁶ These *vibhāvas* are more detailed in the *padas* mentioned in the previous script transcribed by Tulsīdāsa. For instance, in a *pada* ascribed to "Kumārā", *vasyo mere nainan mein vo natavara nanda Kishora*, is recited by Śyānavirahinī where she recalls Kṛṣṇa's ornaments, smile, and so on. See Tulsīdāsa, p. 9-10

vyabhicāri bhāvas or transient emotions. I have referred to the categories listed by Rupa and, for further explanation, to the instances given by Rupa to define each category.

These *vibhāvas* give rise to *anubhāvas*, the outward expressions through which inward emotion becomes visible. The *anubhāvas* (indications) are vocal, physical, and mental gestures. Haberman describes them, “they are the means by which emotions are made to be felt.”²⁵⁷ Rūpa identifies thirteen *anubhāvas*, five of which appear prominently in the performance. The first is *nṛtya* (dance): Śyānavirahinī raises her hands, twirls, and moves rhythmically as she sings about Kṛṣṇa. The second is *gīta* (song), as she recites multiple *padas* entirely dedicated to Kṛṣṇa’s remembrance.

Another visible *anubhāva* is *krośana* (crying), particularly while she repeatedly calls out: *he Śyāmasundara, he Manamohana, moku darśana do pyāre* (O beautiful dark one, O enchanter of hearts, grant me your vision, beloved). The performance also displays *hikkā* (hiccups), expressed in the line *mohe roye roye āve hilakī* (Hiccups come to me as I cry and cry).²⁵⁸ Finally, the performance demonstrates *lokānapekṣita* (disregard for public opinion). Rādhā warns Śyānavirahinī that such love destroys social honor and invites ridicule: ‘Love like this brings nothing in return; it destroys reputation, family honor, and social duty. O Nārāyaṇa, you will only for no good reason make others laugh (at you).’ The performer’s gestures, cries, and bodily movements, therefore, externalize inward devotion, transforming emotional states into embodied devotional signs.

The performance intensifies with the *sāttvika-bhāvas* (responses), involuntary bodily reactions arising from heightened emotional states. Of the eight²⁵⁹ identified by Rūpa, four are visible in Śyānavirahinī’s enactment. Her voice repeatedly breaks (*svarabheda*) while calling Kṛṣṇa’s

²⁵⁷ Haberman (2007) in *Krishna: A sourcebook*, p 412

²⁵⁸ Rūpa gives an instance, ‘Why are you thinking that there is anything wrong with your dear friend Rādhā? Listen, Beautiful-Eyes, she is simply full of hiccups from continually saying “Hari”...’ See *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* Eastern Quadrant, third wave, verse verse 20

²⁵⁹ The eight sāttvikabhāvas are *stambha* (stupefaction), *sveda* (perspiration), *somāñca* (goose bumps), *svarabheda* (broken voice), *vepathu* (trembling), *vaivariṇya* (change of colors), *aśru* (tears), and *pralaya* (loss of consciousness). Ibid., verse 16

name, while her hands tremble (*vepathu*) when Rādhā attempts to console her. Tears (*aśru*) flow as she sings: *mohe roye roye āve hilakī, nainom se bahe jaladhārā* (Hiccups come to me as I cry and cry; streams flow from my eyes). At moments of overwhelming grief, she loses bodily balance, suggesting *pralaya* (loss of consciousness). Such involuntary expressions are especially significant within Rāslīlā performance because they blur the distinction between acted emotion and devotional absorption, reinforcing the perception that the *svarūpa* is not merely representing *bhāva*, but inhabiting it.

The *vyabhicāri-bhāvas* (transitory emotions) are indicated through the voice, the body, and the mental states, further modulating the emotional texture of the performance. Rūpa lists thirty-three *vyabhicāri-bhāvas*²⁶⁰, several of which structure Śyāma virahinī's experience of separation. *Viśāda* (despair) appears when she wanders restlessly through the groves singing *kunjan kunjan bhataki, kahan milega?* ("I wander from grove to grove, where will I find him?"). Her helpless pleading²⁶¹ is expressed in *maim kāsauṁ kahūṁ yā vinatī* ("To whom can I make this plea?"). She begs the sakhi for assistance: *sakhī jo tū milābai āja, vaha rūpa ujero | jabalom jīvoṁgī, guṇa na bhūlūgī tero* (Friend, if you unite me with that radiant beauty today, I will never forget your kindness as long as I live).

She also exhibits *unmāda* (madness), as she loudly and repeatedly sings Kṛṣṇa's name in a state of emotional excess. Then, *Vyādhi* (sickness) is suggested when Rādhā warns that she will get sick if she does not stop taking Kṛṣṇa's name: *tū apane suṁdara tana roga lagāvegī* (You will only give your beautiful body a disease). *Moha* (confusion) and *jāḍya* (mental inertia) emerge in moments when Śyāma virahinī becomes unresponsive to the sakhis' questions, remaining silent except for uttering Kṛṣṇa's name. *Smṛti* (remembrance) structures much of the performance, particularly in the repeated recollection of Kṛṣṇa's face: *bina dekhe sāvaro canda, dṛgana mem*

²⁶⁰ *nirveda* (indifference), *viśāda* (grief), *dainya* (depression), *glāni* (fatigue), *śrama* (weariness), *mada* (intoxication), *garva* (arrogance), *śaṅkā* (apprehension), *trāsa* (alarm), *āvega* (agitation), *unmāda* (madness), *apasmāra* (dementedness), *vyādhi* (sickness), *moha* (confusion), *mṛti* (death), *ālasya* (laziness), *jāḍya* (mental inertia), *vrīḍā* (shame), *avahitthā* (dissimulation), *smṛti* (recollection), *vitarka* (speculation), *cintā* (anxiety), *matī* (understanding), *dhṛti* (contentment), *harṣa* (happiness), *autsukya* (impatience), *ugratā* (wrath), *amarṣa* (intolerance), *asūyā* (envy), *capalatā* (carelessness), *nidrā* (sleepiness), *supti* (dreaming), and *bodha* (awakening). Ibid., fourth wave, v. 6

²⁶¹ See *Viśāda*, Ibid., v. 14.

ādhero (Without seeing the dark-beautiful moonlike Śyāma, darkness fills my eyes). These verses enact *smṛti* through obsessive recollection of Śyāma's face. Evidently, the performance repeatedly expresses *autsukya* (impatience), as Śyāmavirahinī demonstrates intense restlessness to see Kṛṣṇa again. With *autsukya*, *amarṣa* (intolerance) is also evident in the *padas* of the previous scripts. These vyābhacārī bhāvas cause the foundational emotion to vary.²⁶²

The *sthāyī-bhāva* (foundational emotion) dominates all compatible and incompatible emotions and shines forth.²⁶³ The foundational emotion here is *rati* (love). Rupa mentions two categories of the *sthāyī-bhāvas*: five primary *sthāyī-bhāvas*²⁶⁴ and seven secondary *sthāyī-bhāvas*²⁶⁵, with Kṛṣṇa as the object of that emotion. The secondary *sthāyī-bhāvas* are born from the excitants, nourished by a Primary love. Here, the Śyāmavirahinī expresses *śoka rati*²⁶⁶ (sorrowful love) with *priyatā* or *madhurā* as the *sthāyī-bhāva*. Her *madhurā* bhāva is exemplified by her address to Kṛṣṇa as *piyā* (beloved) *prītama pyārā*, *śyāma-sundara*, *madanamohana*, and *sāmvariya*. Because her love is amorous in nature, she also feels hesitant in sharing her pain, *Maim kāsaum kahūm yā vinatī* (To whom can I make this plea?) And *Sakhī kaisī karū maim hāya, na kachu vaśa mero* (Friend, what can I do—alas, I have no control over myself). Her sorrowful love is defined by her separation, which she recites, *bina dekhe sāvaro canda, dṛgana meṁ ādhero* (Without seeing the dark-beautiful moonlike Śyāma, darkness fills my eyes) and then in *Tere kāraṇa joga liyā hai, aba na raho piyā dūra* (Because of you I took renunciation, now, beloved do not stay away for long).

Through the interplay of *vibhāvas*, *anubhāvas*, *sāttvika-bhāvas*, and *vyabhicārī-bhāvas*, the Śyāmavirahinī performance culminates in *vipralambha-madhura-bhakti-rasa*. Yet this *rasa* is not

²⁶² Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu, Southern Quadrant, fourth wave, verse 2

²⁶³ Ibid. fifth wave, v. 1

²⁶⁴ 'The primary foundational emotions,... are of five types: *śuddha* (non-distinct), *prīti* (respect), *sakhya* (friendship), *vātsalya* (parental affection), and *priyatā* (amorousness).' Ibid., fifth wave, v. 6

²⁶⁵ There are seven types of such particular emotions: *hāsa* (humor), *vismaya* (amazement), *utsāha* (effort), *śoka* (sorrow), *krodha* (anger), *bhaya* (fear), and *jugupsā* (disgust). Ibid., fifth wave, v. 40

²⁶⁶ Sorrow is defined as that burden of pain in the heart that is due to separation from the beloved. It produces weeping, falling to the ground, sighing, dry mouth, and confusion. When it is caused by Kṛṣṇa and is associated with a contracting Primary Love, it is perfected and becomes "Sorrowful Love" (*śoka rati*). Ibid., v. 60

generated solely at the textual level. It emerges through the Svarūpa's embodied devotional labor: years of cultivated *sādhana*, contemplative practice, and performative repetition transform Kṛṣṇa's disguise from theatrical masquerade into the lived enactment of devotional longing itself.

Mansukhā-as-gopī

Mansukhā's assumption of a gopī guise in the Muḍiyā Corī episode is not only in this episode. In the Bāmsī Corī Līlā ("The Theft of the Flute"), Mansukhā was required to transform himself into a gopī by donning feminine attire and adorning himself with *solaha śṛṅgāra* (the sixteen traditional embellishments of feminine beauty), as he wished to participate in Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa* dance. Hawley notes that, though initially reluctant, his appearance in disguise became a source of amusement for the audience.²⁶⁷ The gopīs then cleverly lured him into the ecstatic joy of the *rāsa* experience, overwhelming him to the point of dizziness, so that they could steal Kṛṣṇa's flute, which had been entrusted to Mansukhā for safekeeping.²⁶⁸

In Mudariyā Corī Līlā, the plot is different. Mansukhā, seeing Kṛṣṇa asleep, did not want to wake him up. With his jester thinking at play, he tied his leg with Kṛṣṇa's so that when Kṛṣṇa would wake up and move, Mansukhā would be dragged along with him. When Rādhā and the gopīs came to rob Kṛṣṇa, they also shaved off Mansukhā's mustache and stole his *bagalabandī* (a male upper garment). Mansukhā cries that his mustache has been shaved off/ripped off, and he has lost his honor (*izzat*). Thereafter, Kṛṣṇa decides to disguise themselves as gopīs to retrieve their belongings from Rādhā's palace. On the one hand, Kṛṣṇa excels in his feminine guise; on the other, Mansukhā turns himself into a figure of ridicule, his masculine sensibilities exposed by his inability to wear the female garb properly.

²⁶⁷ Hawley. (1995), p. 123

²⁶⁸ See Castro (2016), p. 165

Mansukhā is usually not a part of the *chadma* genre; however, Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma inserted his character into the *līlā* to induce humor in the performance. Yet this also opens up an important tension within the dramatic structure. On one hand, Mansukhā's disguise lightens the mood through comic exchanges such as his dialogue, *cupa hai jāo jījī* (Be quiet, sister), and his humorous reluctance to address Kṛṣṇa as *jījī*, insisting instead that Kṛṣṇa is his male companion. Such moments reiterate that Kṛṣṇa has not undergone any actual gender alteration, but has merely donned female attire in order to deceive the gopīs. This is followed by Mansukhā's humorous monologue about the Śyānavirahaṇī, where he says that my sister is crying for no reason. This simultaneously pulls the focus on Kṛṣṇa embodying Śyānavirahaṇī. These improvisational additions are often the jester's spontaneous insertions and do not form part of the traditional script; nevertheless, the audience delights in these comic interludes, and the *svāmī* deliberately preserves this stand-up-style humor within the performance.

On the other hand, the theological depth embodied within the disguise is frequently overshadowed by the comedy surrounding it. In the Mansukhā-as-gopī disguise, masculine markers are concealed through acts such as hiding the *janeū* and shaving the mustache, gestures that symbolically suggest the renunciation of rigid gender identity and ego. While the audience laughs at Mansukhā's inability to properly inhibit feminine decorum, the disguise simultaneously gestures toward a deeper theological principle within Vaiṣṇava devotion: access to Kṛṣṇa's intimate *līlā* often requires abandoning ordinary masculine identity and assuming a feminine devotional disposition.

A comparable idea appears in stories of Nārada in Kṛṣṇa devotional literature. In earlier versions, Narada's transformation into a woman serves as punishment for his arrogance in seeking to understand *māyā*; however, in Braj-centered retellings, his becoming the female Naradī after bathing in Puṣpasaras allows him to join the *sakhīs* and participate in Kṛṣṇa's erotic sports. Here, femininity is no longer associated with delusion or degradation but with privileged access to divine intimacy. A similar story is told of Śiva, who assumes the *gopī bhesa* (disguise) to watch Kṛṣṇa's *rāsa* dance. A famous Śiva temple in Vṛndāvana is called *Gopīśwar*, lit. "Lord (Śiva) as a

gopī.”²⁶⁹ The temporary adoption of female identity thus becomes a theological and performative device through which male devotees may transcend worldly ego and approach the affective world of Braj bhakti. It also allows them to gain access to the *rāsa* dance.²⁷⁰

Thus, although Mansukhā’s disguise embodies an important dimension of Vaiṣṇava philosophy, particularly the embodiment of *madhura-bhakti* through *gopī-bhāva*, the humor surrounding his performance often diverts the audience’s attention away from its deeper theological implications. The audience is invited to laugh at the failure of embodiment: his awkward gestures, his inability to internalize feminine decorum, and his persistent attachment to masculine identity. In doing so, the more fundamental question remains unasked: why must Mansukhā, and even Kṛṣṇa himself, assume the *gopī-bheṣa* at all? In *Bāmsī Corī Līlā*, Hawley highlights the importance of the disguise of Mansukhā, “if he were not outside the circle of the *rās*, we would not be able so clearly to sense the power it has for those whom it comprehends.”²⁷¹

This disguise is not merely theatrical but is embedded within a wider devotional and literary tradition, where the adoption of feminine subjectivity signifies the devotee’s longing for intimate access to Kṛṣṇa’s play. By framing the transformation as comic inadequacy rather than spiritual aspiration, the performance renders this theological gesture visible yet insufficiently engaged, leaving its deeper implications latent rather than fully realized.

Rādhā embodies the Yugala Svarūpa

śyāma śyāma śyāma raṭata, śyāmā āpa hī śyāma bhaī

śyāma śyāma śyāma (Kṛṣṇa) repeats, śyāmā (Rādhā) herself has become śyāma.

While the sakhi went to call Rādhā to console Śyāmavirahaṇī, the svāmī recited this line to indicate that Rādhā will transform into Kṛṣṇa. When Śyāmavirahaṇī could not be consoled by

²⁶⁹ For more details, See Entwistle., p. 58-59

²⁷⁰ Hawley (1980) p. 111

²⁷¹ Ibid., p.108

Rādhā, Rādhā wore all of Kṛṣṇa's jewelry while wearing her clothes to give darśana to the Śyāma virahaṇī. Her guise is not a complete transformation into Kṛṣṇa; she presents a unified form of both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, as the *yugala rūpa* (unified form). Interestingly, Rādhā's disguise is inspired by the Yugalachadma līlā, also composed by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī. In the Yugalachadma līlā, Kṛṣṇa disguises himself as a virahaṇī and yearns for Śyāma. Rādhā is advised by the gopīs (just like in Mudariyā corī līlā), *āpa śyāma ko bheṣa dhari, tanaka dūri pai jāya* (You, take on Śyāma's appearance by going to a place close by)²⁷². Because both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa appear in *chadma-rūpa*, the poet has named it the Yugalachadma līlā. However, in the Mudariyā Corī līlā, Rādhā's chadma itself appears to be the *yugala rūpa* (unified form), embodying both Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in a single image.

This imagery may superficially resemble Ardhanarīśvara, but its theological basis differs significantly. Rather than expressing the Śaiva ideal of the metaphysical unity of male and female principles within a single body, the *yugala* conception emerges from Vaiṣṇava devotional theology, shaped in part by Sahajiyā and Tantric conceptions of divine union.²⁷³

In Sahajiyā thought, Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā replace Śiva and Śakti as the supreme divine pair, embodying the union of the enjoyer and the enjoyed, while devotional practice seeks an emotional and psychological realization of this union. Similar ideas also found in Guṇīyā Vaiṣṇava theology, where Rādhā is understood as Kṛṣṇa's *hlādinīśakti*, the bliss potency through which Kṛṣṇa experiences divine love. In *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Caitanya is regarded as a two-in-one manifestation, in which Kṛṣṇa is covered by *Rādhā-bhāva*.²⁷⁴ Consequently, representations of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in entwined or composite forms, described as “one soul, two bodies” (*ek prāṇ do deh*), signify not the erasure of gender difference but the simultaneous coexistence and inseparability of masculine and feminine devotional energies.²⁷⁵ Thus, Rādhā's assumption of Kṛṣṇa's ornaments in the līlā does not dissolve her identity into Kṛṣṇa's; instead, it reveals the

²⁷² See Chapter 3.

²⁷³ Gupta & Dimmock, p. 177-80

²⁷⁴ *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Madhya Līlā, chapter 8.

²⁷⁵ Entwistle (1987), p. 66-67

theological ideal of reciprocal embodiment and affective unity that underlies Braj devotional aesthetics. Goswami writes, “a single non-dual Being effulgent with absolute bliss cannot enjoy itself any more than sugar can taste its own sweetness.”²⁷⁶ Therefore, the Yugalasvarūpa chadma by Rādhā becomes a representation of when “the nature of non-dual necessarily becomes dual.”

The unified guise (*yugala-chadma rūpa*) of Rādhā can also be paralleled with the iconography and naming practices of temple deities in Vrindavan, where Kṛṣṇa is frequently represented with Rādhā standing gracefully at his left side, especially in flute-playing images. Epithets such as *Rādhāramaṇa*, *Rādhāmādhava*, *Rādhākānta*, and *Rādhāvallabha* emphasize this intimate relational identity, while terms like *Jugal Kishor*, *Śyāma-Śyāma*, and *Lārilī-Lāla* foreground their interdependence as a single devotional unit. Even in the so-called “self-manifested” deities of Vrindavan, *Banke Bihari*, *Rādhāvallabha*, and *Rādhāramaṇa*, Rādhā is not always represented as a separate figure but is evoked through her name or symbolically through a coronet (*mukūṭa*) placed beside Kṛṣṇa.²⁷⁷

In the Mudariyā Corī līlā, Rādhā’s disguise is conceived as a deity in the temple, when sakhi refers to her as “*ghar ke ṭhākuraṇī*”²⁷⁸, an in-house deity, and that Śyāma virahaṇī may seek blessings by approaching as closely as she wishes. This reiterates the concept of identifying the svarūpas as *sacala vigraha* (mobile deities). Kṛṣṇa as Śyāma virahaṇī is mesmerized by witnessing the unified form of him and Rādhā from the perspective of a devotee in *gopī bhāva*. This expression is exemplified by the Rādhāvallabhan view in the poetry of Hita Harivaṁśa.

‘The hearts of her own
Well-wishing maids
Cannot contain their bliss:
Having gazed excessively with their eyes
(Their happiness having burst all bounds),

²⁷⁶ Goswami (1995), p. 5

²⁷⁷ Entwistle (1987), p. 79

²⁷⁸ m. title of supreme deity (used by members of the Vallabhan community, and others) (qv McG)

They threw themselves away!’

Caurāsī pada, Stanza 57 ²⁷⁹

Kṛṣṇa praises Rādhā’s assumption of his guise, describing how convincingly she embodies him. He compliments specific qualities (a recall to the *vibhāvas*, mentioned earlier), *mṛdu muskāna cāla* (gentle smile and gait), *nīkī chabi* (graceful form is appealing). He further identifies the visual markers of Kṛṣṇa’s own iconography that she now carries—the *turra* (plume), *kalāṅgi* (crest), *mōrapaṅkh* (peacock feather), and *sirapeca* (headgear).

Then, when the time came to uncover his guise, Kṛṣṇa as Śyāma virahaṇī says, “I know, I know that even the noble one has started to steal; now who is going to judge this case and bring it to justice?” Rādhā then recalls an earlier incident in her court when Kṛṣṇa had asked for justice *corī capala lagāte rādhe, mokū nyāva karo tuma pyārī* (They accuse me of theft, O Rādhā. Please bring justice to me, my beloved!)²⁸⁰ He then addresses her as Keśava (Kṛṣṇa’s own epithet), saying, “O Kesava, bestow your grace and take off all of it (disguise/ornaments). Where are you turning your gaze? That flute is mine!” Śyāma virahaṇī snatches the flute from Rādhā-as-Kṛṣṇa’s hand, declaring it his own. The Mudariyā Corī performance ends with Kṛṣṇa taking back his jewels, making him the ultimate trickster. This is followed by the divine couple in their respective disguises, sitting as devotee and divine, united through līlā.

Hawley, taking the reference of Bansi corī līlā, reasserts Rādhā’s supremacy over Kṛṣṇa, “Krishna’s power is limited by Rādhā’s”.²⁸¹ Rādhā as the *śakti* reserves the power to embody the Yugalasvarūpa; meanwhile, in the Rāsālīlā repertoire, we do not see Kṛṣṇa disguised as Rādhā or the Yugalasvarūpa. This also reflects the ideology of Rādhāvallabhan, which I discussed in Chapter 1, which professes Rādhā as the supreme lord.

²⁷⁹ Translation by C.J. White. See White, p. 90-91

²⁸⁰

²⁸¹ Hawley (1980), p 114

Unlike Kṛṣṇa's assumption of the Śyānavirahaṇī, which renders the divine as devotee, Rādhā's embodiment of Kṛṣṇa does not efface difference but holds together duality within a single, relational form. The Yugalasvarūpa reveals that the unity of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa is not a static metaphysical given but an affective condition enacted through līlā, in which each becomes the other without ceasing to be themselves. As *sacala vigraha*, this unified form is not merely seen but experienced, drawing both performer and spectator into a shared field of devotion where identity is constituted through participation rather than fixed essence. Rādhā's disguise, therefore, completes the movement initiated by Kṛṣṇa's chadma, revealing disguise itself as a theological medium through which the non-dual becomes relational, and divine love becomes perceptible in performance.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* reveals disguise not merely as a theatrical device, but as a profound theological and aesthetic strategy within Braj bhakti performance. Through the layered chadma-veṣas of Kṛṣṇa, Mansukhā, and Rādhā, the līlā blurs boundaries between devotee and deity, masculine and feminine, performer and emotion. Rather than concealing identity, these transformations make visible the relational dynamics of *bhakti*, where subjectivity is constituted through participation in divine love.

At the center of this process is Kṛṣṇa's assumption of the Śyānavirahaṇī guise, which transforms divine play into an enactment of devotional longing itself. By embodying the affective condition of a devotee separated from himself, Kṛṣṇa becomes both the object and the experiencer of *viraha*. The disguise, therefore, exceeds imitation or deception; it stages the theological reflexivity of *bhakti*, in which divine and devotee are united through shared emotional experience.

This theological dynamic is not confined to the narrative level but is realized through the embodied practice of the *svarūpa* on stage. Through the coordinated deployment of *āṅgika*, *vācika*, *āhārya*, and *sāttvika abhinaya*, the performer does not simply represent the Śyāma^śvirahaṇī but inhabits her affective condition, rendering *viraha* as a lived devotional state. Yet this inhabitation is not spontaneous. It is cultivated through the *svarūpa*'s ongoing practices of *smaraṇa* (remembrance), *cintana* (contemplation), and *sādhana* (devotional discipline), through which years of repeated performance become a form of devotional training. The performer's gestures, vocal inflections, bodily discipline, and emotional expression emerge not merely from artistic technique but from a sustained engagement with the emotional world of Braj *bhakti*.

As the performance unfolds, the boundaries between acting and experiencing begin to blur: gestures, vocal inflections, and involuntary bodily responses transform scripted emotion into perceptible *bhāva*. In this sense, the *svarūpa*'s performance is not mimetic in the reductive sense of imitation, but participatory, drawing both performer and audience into the affective world of *vipralambha-bhakti* (divine love in separation). The stage thus becomes a site where aesthetic technique and devotional discipline converge, enabling *chadma* to function not as concealment, but as the experiential realization of *bhakti-rasa*.

Mansukhā's awkward *gopī* disguise, marked by his inability to internalize feminine comportment, interrupts this intensity through humor while simultaneously exposing the limits of superficial transformation. His disguise also conveys the devotional requirement for a male devotee to participate in the intimate *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa, in which the masculine ego is symbolized by a mustache and *janeyu*. Mansukhā, crying over his shaved-off mustache and his resistance to donning a *gopī*'s attire, shows the internal struggle a devotee faces to let go of his ego. While he keeps the audience engaged with his humorous acting and dialogue, they overlook the theological implications of his disguise.

Rādhā's Yugalasvarūpa embodiment expresses the inseparability of divine lover and beloved. Adorned with Kṛṣṇa's plume, flute, and ornaments, she does not replace Kṛṣṇa; rather, she presents a relational form encountered as *sacala vighraha*. At this point, the līlā no longer stages disguise as concealment but as revelation: the *śakti* (Rādhā) becomes the non-dual deity, the deity (Kṛṣṇa) assumes the devotee's longing (Śyānavirahaṇī), and the unified form makes this reciprocity visible.

At the same time, the performance demonstrates how humor, costume, gesture, music, and emotional embodiment together generate *bhakti-rasa* on stage. By drawing upon Nāṭyaśāstric aesthetics, Vaiṣṇava theology, and living performance traditions, the *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* shows that *chadma* ultimately ceases to conceal and instead becomes the very condition through which *bhakti* is embodied, experienced, and made accessible. Through the *svarūpa*'s disciplined practices of remembrance, contemplation, and enactment, disguise itself becomes a form of devotion, enabling both performer and spectator to participate in the emotional and theological world of Braj.

Conclusion

This thesis has argued that disguise (*chadma*) in North Indian Rāsālīlā is far more than a theatrical device or comic embellishment; it is a theological and performative category through which *bhakti* is embodied and experienced. Through a close study of *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*, it has been shown that disguise does not merely conceal identity but reveals the relational dynamics of divine love, longing, and reciprocity that lie at the heart of Vaiṣṇava devotion.

Chapter One situated *chadma-līlā* within the wider history of Vaiṣṇava theology and Braj literary culture. Rather than viewing disguise as a late dramatic innovation, the chapter demonstrated that the theological logic of transformation and role-play is deeply rooted in earlier Sanskrit traditions, where divine embodiment frequently involves the assumption of alternate forms and identities. The development of *bhakti* traditions further expanded these possibilities by encouraging devotees to imaginatively inhabit the emotional world of Vraja through practices of identification and contemplation. The chapter also argued that *chadma-līlā* emerged through a process of inter-sectarian exchange. Gauḍīya, Rādhāvallabha, Nimbārka, and Puṣṭimārga traditions all contributed to the theological and literary environment from which the Rāsālīlā repertoire developed. Rather than belonging to a single *sampradāya*, Rāsālīlā appears as a shared performative space where devotional communities continually reinterpret divine play.

The study further showed that the *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* tradition itself emerged through this process of adaptation and borrowing. While the conceptual inspiration for disguise may reach back to works such as Viśvanātha Cakravartī's *Prema Samputa*, the literary foundations of the play were laid by Cācā Vṛndāvana Dāsa's *chadma-līlās*. Yet, significantly, the *rāsa-dhārīs* did not simply select one of his many disguise narratives. Instead, they turned to Nārāyaṇa Svāmī's *Śrīśyānavirahinī Līlā*, incorporating its verses into the performance, while the climactic motif of the double disguise—Kṛṣṇa as Śyānavirahaṇī and Rādhā as Yugalchadma—draws upon the *Yugalchadma Līlā*, also composed by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī. The history of *Mudariyā Corī Līlā*, therefore, reflects the cumulative and collaborative character of the Rāsālīlā tradition itself.

Chapters Two and Three shifted attention from literary history to living performance. A major contribution of this thesis has been the narrative documentation, annotated transcription, and

translation of the August 8, 2024, performance of the *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* by Svāmī Fatehkrishna Sharma's troupe at Jai Singh Ghera. The analysis demonstrated that the dramatic text functions less as a fixed script than as a performative framework animated through poetry, music, dance, dialogue, memory, and improvisation. The *līlā* is constantly renegotiated by the *rāsa-dhārīs* and the *svāmī*, who adapt inherited material to the needs of the audience while preserving its devotional and literary core.

The comparison of the 2024 performance with the script transcribed by Harivallabha Śarmā and Bābā Tulsīdāsa revealed the importance of *saralīkaraṇa* and *svāmī-vacana* in this process. *Saralīkaraṇa* extends beyond the simplification of Brajbhāṣā into Modern Standard Hindi; it also involves selecting songs, explanations, and comic interludes that remain accessible to contemporary audiences. At the same time, the comparison of manuscripts demonstrated that this process is not linear. The performance often preserves older Braj or *tatsama* vocabulary, even though earlier scripts employ more modern forms, showing that each *svāmī* actively negotiates between preservation and innovation rather than simply modernizing the poetry with MSH.

Similarly, the presence of *svāmī-vacana* highlights the *svāmī*'s creative role as a literary and theological interpreter. These poetic insertions, often absent from older manuscripts and circulating without attributed authorship, weave together individual scenes, explain unspoken actions, and sustain the emotional continuity of the performance. The interpolated *dohā* accompanying the *kavitta*, *Māthe pai mukuṭa*, is one such example, seamlessly guiding the audience through Kṛṣṇa's theft of Rādhā's ring. These interventions reveal that Rāsalīlā literature is not a static archive but an evolving body of poetry continually reshaped in performance.

Equally important is the pedagogical role that emerges through these performative practices. The *svāmī* is not only a narrator but also a teacher who educates the audience in theology, literature, and devotional practice. His introductory discourses provide the interpretive framework for the *līlā*, explaining concepts such as the reciprocal relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, while his explanations of Braj poetry and his selective simplifications make the tradition's literary heritage accessible to new audiences. In this sense, Rāsalīlā functions as a vehicle for both theological and literary education, preserving the works of poets such as Cācā Vṇḍāvāna Dāsa, Nārāyaṇa Svāmī, Harivyāsa Devācārya, Nandadāsa, and many others through living performance.

The performance analysis also highlighted that devotional participation extends beyond the actors themselves. The patron occupies the stage not only as an organizer but as a devotee engaged in *sevā*, while the audience moves fluidly between the roles of spectator and participant through acts of *darśana*, singing, and contemplation. The boundaries between stage and shrine, theatre and worship, are therefore repeatedly dissolved.

The central argument of this thesis, however, emerges most clearly in Chapter Four, which examines disguise as an embodied mode of devotional practice. The disguises of Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā, and Mansukhā do not merely conceal identity; they create new possibilities for theological participation. Kṛṣṇa's assumption of the Śyāmavirahaṇī form, inspired by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī's *Śrīśyāmavirahinī Līlā*, stages the paradox of the divine experiencing the longing of his own devotees. The close relationship between this episode and the Gopī-gīta suggests that Kṛṣṇa is not simply imitating the gopīs' separation but embodying their emotional state. Through the lens of Gauṛīya *rāgānugā bhakti*, this becomes an act of contemplative identification in which the divine himself enters the affective world of the devotee. Here, the deity becomes the devotee.

This inversion is deepened through Rādhā's assumption of the Yugalchadma form. As perceived in Rādhāvallabhan theology, this moment is less a disguise than a revelation of Rādhā's supreme status. The Yugalrūpa expresses the inseparability of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa while simultaneously presenting Rādhā as the locus in which both are united. The Kṛṣṇa *svarūpa*, now in the guise of Śyāmavirahaṇī, receives *darśana* of this form and is himself overwhelmed by devotion. Once again, the divine becomes the devotee, while Rādhā becomes the object of contemplation. The performance thus foregrounds the theological centrality and supremacy of Rādhā, making visible the Rādhāvallabha ideal of *tatsukha-bhāva* and the reciprocity that underlies divine love.

Mansukhā's comic disguise offers a complementary perspective. His awkward adoption of feminine dress and his exaggerated attachment to his mustache provide humor, but they also reveal the devotional challenge of relinquishing ego and worldly identity in order to enter Kṛṣṇa's intimate līlā. Entering the stage as a devotee singing Kṛṣṇa's praises, he simultaneously participates through *sakhya-bhāva*, reminding us that humor and theology are not opposing forces in Rāsālīlā but mutually sustaining dimensions of the same devotional world.

Finally, this thesis has argued that these performances should be understood not simply as representations of devotion but as forms of devotional practice in their own right. The *svarūpas*, understood as *sacala vigrahas*, do not merely act; through repeated enactment, they cultivate remembrance (*smaraṇa*), contemplation (*cintana*), and emotional identification with the characters they embody. As discussed in Chapter Two, the *svāmī* encourages the audience to continue engaging with the *līlā* after the performance through *cintana*, carrying the emotional world of the drama into everyday devotional life. Chapter Four further demonstrated that, for the performers, years of disciplined remembrance and repeated embodiment transform performance itself into a mode of *sādhana*. Particularly in the case of the Śyāmavirahaṇī episode, *smaraṇa* becomes a practical expression of Gauḍīya *rāgānugā bhakti*, in which the emotional states of Vraja are cultivated through sustained contemplative practice. The *līlā*, therefore, extends beyond the temporal boundaries of the stage; it begins before the performance through preparation and discipline, and it continues afterward through remembrance and contemplation.

Ultimately, *Mudariyā Corī Līlā* reveals that divine intimacy is staged not solely through revelation, but also through concealment, inversion, and disguise. *Chadma* becomes the medium through which literary traditions are preserved, theological ideas are taught, devotion is embodied, and aesthetic experience is transformed into religious practice. By treating disguise as a serious theological and performative category, this thesis invites a reconsideration of vernacular North Indian drama not simply as folk theatre, but as a living intellectual and devotional tradition in which poetry, performance, theology, and *bhakti-sādhana* remain inseparably intertwined.

Appendix I

Śrīśyānavirahinī Līlā by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī

This is a translation of the līlā from the published edition of the *Brajavīhāra* by Nārāyaṇa Svāmī in *Brāja Vihār Arthāt Śrī Nārāyaṇa Svāminī kī Vāṇī*.

दोहा—समाजी वचन—

एक दिवस तिय भेष धरि, परम कौतुकी श्याम।
विरहिनि बनि डोलत डगर, लै लै अपनो नाम॥ ९॥

One day, having taken the guise as a woman, the very mischievous (f.) Śyāma.

Eka divasa tiya bheṣa dhari, parama kautukī śyāma।
Virahinī bani ḍolata ḍagara, lai lai apno nāma॥ 1॥

Becoming a woman in longing, she roams on the street, reciting (taking) her name.

दोहा—विरहिनी वचन—

प्रीतम तो देखे बिना, छिन छिन कल्प बिहाय।
बेगि दीजिये दरश अब, मो विरहिनि को आय॥ २॥

O dearest, without seeing you, every moment passes like an age. Quickly come and grant me, virahinī, (your) divine sight.

Prītama to dekhe binā, china china kalpa bihāya।
Begi dījiye daraśa aba, mo virahinī ko āya॥ 2॥

वार्तिक—

काहू सखी ने इनकों देखि के श्रीजी सों जाय कही हे प्यारी!
मैं एक अचरज देखि आई हूँ तब श्रीजी मे बूझी कहा, पुनि सखी बोली॥
३॥

Seeing her, a sakhi went to Śrījī (Rādhā) and said, O dear! I have come seeing a miracle, then Śrījī enquired, what? Again, sakhi said...

kāhū sakhī ne inkoṁ dekhi ke śrījī soṁ jāya kahī he pyārī!
Maim ek acaraja dekhi āī hūṁ taba śrījī me būjhī kahā, puni sakhī bolī॥ ३॥

सखी वचन—

राग देश—

चलौ तौ बताऊँ तुमें भवन के द्वार।
 एक नारि विरहिनि भई डोलै, तन की नाहिं सँभार॥
 श्याम श्याम मुख नाम रटति है, साँवरी रूप अपार।
 नारायण ऐसी मोहि दीखति, है बड़ गोपकुमार॥४॥

Calau tau bataū tumerṁ bhavana ke dvāra| Eka nāri
 virahinī bhaī ḍolai, tana kī nāhim sābhāra| Śyāma śyāma
 mukha nāma raṭati hai, sāvarī rūpa apāra|Nārāyaṇa aisī
 mohi dīkhatī, hai baṛa gopakumāra॥4॥

If you come to the palace door, I
 will tell you. A woman, having
 become a virahinī, is roaming,
 unable to take care of her body.
 Her mouth keeps repeating
 Śyāma-Śyāma, her (the dark-
 complexioned one) beauty is
 boundless. O Nārāyaṇa, it seems
 to me that this must be the great
 cowherd boy.

श्रीजी वचन विरहिनी प्रति—
 पद सोरठ का जिला—

तोहि डगर चल कहा भयो री वीर।
 कहूँ पग की पायल कहूँ सिर को चीर,
 भई बावरी न कछु सुधि बुधि शरीर।
 तेरे मतवारेन सम झूमत नैन,
 मुख भाषति है तू अति विरह के बैन,
 मानो घायल काहू ने करी दृगन तीर॥
 मोसो नारायण जिन राखै दुराव,
 जो तू कहै सोई तेरौ करूँ उपाव,
 जासों रोगहू घटै हटै सकल पीर॥६॥

Tohi ḍagara cala kahā bhayo rī vīra|Kahūṁ paga kī
 pāyala kahūṁ sira ko cīra, bhaī bāvarī na kachu sudhi
 budhi śarīra|
 Tere matavārena sama jhūmata naina, mukha bhāṣati
 hai tū atī viraha ke baina, māno ghāyala kāhū ne karī
 dṛgana tīra॥
 Moso nārāyaṇa jina rākhai durāva, jo tū kahai soī
 terau karūṁ upāva, jāsoṁ rogahū ghaṭai haṭai sakala
 pīra॥6॥

O friend, what happened to you
 while walking on the path?
 Somewhere anklet, somewhere head
 scarf, you have become mad, with no
 presence of mind and awareness of
 your body.

Your eyes are swaying as if
 intoxicated. And your mouth utters
 words of immense (or painful)
 separation. As if someone's arrow
 like eyes have injured you./As if
 someone has wounded you with
 arrows shot from their eyes.

O Nārāyaṇa, do not hide anything
 from me. Whatever you tell me, I
 will find remedy for you. So that
 your illness/worry may lessen, (and)
 all your suffering may disappear.

विरहिनी वचन श्रीजी प्रति—
राग गिरनारी सोरठ—

मैंने देखी री आज मोहन की हँसन।
अधरन पै अद्भुत अरुणाई, मुतियन की लर पाँति दशन॥
वा शोभा के दृग रहे प्यासे, पीबे लगे भरि भरि के पसन।
नारायण तब सों मोहि सजनी, सुधि न रही निज वदन बसन॥७॥

Mainem dekhī rī āja mohana kī hāsanā! Adharana pai adbhuta
aruṇāī, mutiyana kī lara pāṭi daśana॥ Vā śobhā ke dṛga rahe pyāse,
pībe lage bhari bhari ke pasana! Nārāyaṇa taba sōm mohi sajanī,
sudhi na rahī nija vadana basana॥7॥

O Friend, today, I saw
Mohan's smile. Reddish
glow on his lips, and his
teeth looked like a row of
pearls strings. My eyes
remain thirsty for that
beauty, they started
drinking handful it with
every blink.

वार्तिक—

प्रियाजू ने बूझी अरी! तैंने उनकूं कहां देख्यो है॥८॥

priyājū ne būjhī arī! Taimne unakūṁ khām dekhyo
hai॥8॥

Then Priyājī (Rādhā) enquired, friend,
where have you seen him?

साँवरी वचन—
राग आसावरी—

आज सखी भोरही मैं पनियां गई री॥
सांवरो सलोनो एक बड़े बड़े नैन जाके,
जमुना के तट मोसों भेंट भई री।
देखि अति रूप वाको नेह उर हार भयो,
ताही समय लाज को तिलांजली दई री।
उन बिन कल न परत नारायण,
कैसी घरी लगी लगन नई री॥९॥

Āja sakhī bhorahī maim paniyām gaī rī॥
Sāmvaro salono eka baṛe baṛe naina jāke,
jamunā ke taṭa mosōm bherṁṭa bhaī rī।
Dekhi ati rūpa vāko neha ura hāra bhayo,
tāhī samaya lāja ko tilāmjalī dāī rī।
Una bina kala na parata nārāyaṇa,
kaisī gharī lagana naī rī ॥9॥

O friend, today at daybreak I went to
fetch water.

(There) I met a dark and attractive
youth (Kṛṣṇa), with big beautiful eyes,
on the banks of the Yamuna.

Seeing his extraordinary beauty, my
heart was overcome with love; in that
very moment I abandoned all my
shyness.

Now, O Nārāyaṇa, a day cannot pass
(turn over) without him.

श्रीजी वचन विरहिनी प्रति।

राग कान्हडा बागेश्वरी—

सखी क्यों बौरी भई है वा छलिया के वियोग।
भूलि के नाम न लीजो श्याम को, चरचा करेंगे लोग॥
तू सुकुमार कठिन मग नेह को, नहिं श्रम तेरे जोग।
नारायण बिन जाने बूझै, तू मति लगावै तन रोग॥ १०॥

O friend, why have you gone mad, in the separation of that trickster. Do not take Śyāma's name, even by mistake, (or else) people will talk.

sakhī kyom baurī bhaī hai vā chaliyā ke viyoga|
bhūli ke nāma na lījo śyāma ko, caracā kareṁge loga||
tū sukumāra kaṭhina maga neha ko, nahi śrama tere joga
nārāyaṇa bina jāne bujhe, tū mati lagāve tana roga||10||

You are delicate; the difficult path of love is not suited to you. Without understanding it properly, do not attach your mind to a love that becomes a sickness of the body.

विरहिनी वचन श्रीजी प्रति—

राग जोगिया आसावरी—

सखी मेरे मन की को जाने।
कासों कहूँ सुने जो चिद दै, हित की बात बखाने॥
ऐसो को है अन्तरयामी, तुरत पीर पहुँचाने।
नारायण जो बीति रही है, कब कोई सच माने॥ ११॥

Friend, who can truly understand what my heart desires? To whom should I speak, who will be understanding and tell me what is truly good for me?/To whom can I speak who will truly listen and guide me?

sakhī mere mana kī ko jāne |
kāsom kahū sune jo cida dai, hita kī bāta bakhāne ||
aiso ko hai antarayāmī, turata pīra pahācāne |
nārāyaṇa jo bīti rahī hai, kaba koī saca māne ||11||

Who is that all-knowing Lord, who immediately understands this pain— O Nārāyaṇa, who will ever believe what I am going through?

वार्तिक—

प्रियाजू ने कही, अरी! तू घबरावै मति नेक धीरज राखि॥
१२॥

Priyājī said, O friend! Do not worry, have some patience.

priyājū ne kahī, arī ! tū ghabarāvai mati neka
dhīraja rākhi ||12||

विरहिनी वचन श्रीजी प्रति—
लावनी की राह—

सखी कैसी करूँ मैं हाय, न कछु वश मेरो।
बिन देखे साँवरो चन्द, दृगन में अँधेरो॥
सखी ऐसो सुन्दर नहिं कोई, मैं सब जग हेरो।
वाको जो लिखै तस्वीर, सो कौन चितेरो॥
सखी कठिन छैल को विरह, आनि मोहि घेरो।
सगरी निशि तारे गिनत ही, होत सबेरो॥
सखी जो तू मिलावै आज, वह रूप उजेरो।
जबलों जीवोंगी, गुण न भूलूंगी तेरो॥
सखी नारायण जो न मिलै, वह मन को लुटेरो।
तब नन्द द्वार पै, जाय करूंगी डेरो॥ १३॥

sakhī kaisī karūṁ maim hāya, na kachu vaśa mero| bina
dekhe sāvaro canda, dṛgana mem ādhero||
sakhī aiso sundara nahim koī, maim saba jaga hero| vāko
jo likhai tasavīra, so kauna citero||
sakhī kaṭhina chaila ko viraha, āni mohi ghero| sagarī niśi
tāre ginata hī, hota sabero||
sakhī jo tū milābai āja, vaha rūpa ujero |
jabalom jīvomgī, guṇa na bhūlūṅgī tero ||
sakhī nārāyaṇa jo na milai, vaha mana ko luṭero |
taba nanda dvāra pai, jāya karūṅgī ḍero ||13||

Friend, what can I do—alas, I have no control over myself. Without seeing the dark-beautiful moonlike Śyāma, darkness fills my eyes. Friend, there is no one as beautiful as he—I have searched the whole world. His written description, what painter could capture such beauty? Friend, the painful separation from that tricking lover surrounds me. The whole night passes as I count the stars until dawn. Friend, if you unite me with that radiant beauty today, I will never forget your kindness as long as I live. Friend, if I do not meet that thief of my heart, then I will go and make my dwelling at Nanda's doorway.

दोहा—

नन्द भवन जानूँ नहीं, एरी राजकुमारी।
नेक दया करि संग हवै, लै चलि वाके द्वारि॥ १४॥

nanda bhavana jānūṁ nahīm, erī rājakumārī|
neka dayā kari saṅga hvai, lai cali vāke dvāri ||14||

O noble girl, I do not know the way to Nanda's house. Please show some kindness—come with me and take me to his door.

श्रीजी वचन विरहिनी प्रति—
राग कालिंगड़ा—

उठि सजनी चलि तोहि बताऊँ, सन्मुख नन्द को द्वार दिखावै।
तू कित धावति है पुर बाहर, मो पीछे भटु क्यों नहि आवै॥
एक ऐतौ हिय में डर मोकूँ, जो कबहूँ यशुमति लखि पावै।
नारायण मन में जानेंगी, यह सब व्याधि यही सँग लावै॥ १५॥

uṭhi sajanī cali tohi batāū, sanmukha nanda ko dvāra
dikhāvai |
tū kita dhāvati hai pura bāhara, mo pīche bhaṭu kyoṁ nahī
āvai ||
eka etau hiya meṁ ḍara mokūṁ, jo kabahūṁ yaśumati lakhi
pāvai |
nārāyaṇa mana meṁ jāneṁgī, yaha saba byādhi yahī saṁga
lāvai ||15||

Come, dear friend, get up—I
will show you the way and
point out Nanda's doorway.
But where are you running
outside the town like this? Why
do you (lady) not walk behind
me?

I have one fear in my heart—
that if Mother Yaśodā happens
to see us,
she will understand that this girl
has brought this all this love-
sickness with her.

समाजी वचन—

दोहा—

नन्द द्वार पै गई जब, कपट विरहिनी बाम।
पुनि पुनि अति अकुलाय के, लेति श्याम को नाम॥ १६॥
nanda dvāra pai gāi jaba, kapaṭa virahinī bāma |
puni puni ati akulāya ke, leti śyāma ko nāma ||16||

When that deceitful love-tormented girl
reached Nanda's door,
she repeatedly cried out the name of
Śyāma with great restlessness.

विरहिनी वचन—
राग काफी—

बेदरदी तोहि दरद न आवै।
चितवन में चित वश करि मेरो, अब काहे को आँखि चुरावै॥
कबसों परी तेरे द्वार पै, बिन देखे जियरा उकलावै।
नारायण महबूब साँवरे, घायल करि फिर गलै बतावै॥ १७॥

bedaradī tohi darada na āvai |
citavana mem cita vaśa kari mero, aba kāhe ko ākhi curāvai
||
kabasom parī tere dvāre pai, bina dekhe jiyarā ukalāvai |
nārāyaṇa mahabūba sāvare, ghāyala kari phira galai batāvai
||17||

Heartless one! Do you feel no
pain (of mine)?
With just one glance, you
captured my heart—why do you
now hide your eyes from me?
For so long I have been lying
here at your door; without seeing
you, my heart is becoming
restless.
O Nārāyana! That dark beloved
inflicts wounds and then
consoles.

वार्तिक—

श्रीजी ने कही अरी! सखी तू तो यहाँ बैठी, अरु मैं तो अब जाऊँ,
कछु तेरे संग मोहि बावरी तो नहिं हों, तब विरहिनी बोली अजी!
अब मैं कैसी करूँ, तब श्रीजी ने कही यहाँ तो यशोदाजी देखेंगी,
चलि तोहि और ठौर बैठाऊँ वहाँ सँ तू उनको देखि लीजो॥ १८॥

śrījī ne kahī arī ! sakhī tū to yahāṁ baiṭhi, aru main to aba
jāū, kachu tere saṅga mohi bāvarī to nahim honam,

taba birahinī bolī ajī ! aba main kaisī karū, taba śrījī ne
kahī yahā to yaśodājī dekheṅgī, cali tohi aura ṭhaura
baiṭhāū vahā sū tū unako dekhi lījo ||18||

O friend, you sit here for a while,
and I will go now.
If I stay with you too long, I will
go mad like you.
Then the love-stricken girl said:
“What am I supposed to do now?”
Śrījī-jī replied: “Mother Yaśodā
might see you here.
Come, I will seat you somewhere
else—from there you will be able
to see him (Kṛṣṇa).”

साँवरी वचन—

राग ईमन कल्याण—

तैंदी बाँकी चितवन, सानूँ प्यारी लगदी, साँवला मेंढा
दिलदार।
सोहनी सूरत बड़ी बड़ी अँखियां, गल बिच गजमुतियन दा
हार॥
एक नजर तुम हँसकर देखौ बारूँ में जियरा हजार बारा।
नारायण असीं रूप दिवानी आय परी अब तैंदे द्वार॥ १९॥

taim̐hī bāṁkī citavana, sānūṁ pyārī lagadī, sāvalā
mem̐dhā diladāra|
sohanī sūrata baṛī baṛī ākhiyām gala bica
gajamutiyana dā hāra ||
eka najara tuma hāsakara dekhau bārūṁ mem̐ jiyarā
hajāra bāra |
nārāyaṇa asīm rūpa divānī āya parī aba taim̐rhe
dvāra ||19||

श्रीजी वचन विरहिनी प्रति—
राग देश का जिला—

सखी तू मति ले वाको नाम, नहीं पछितावैगी।
मन कपटी मुख मीठौ बोलै, कली कली रस चाखत डोलै,
ऐसे सों करि प्रीति कहा फल पावैगी॥
मेरी कही तू चित न धरति है, जासों मोहि अब जान परति
है,
तू अपने सुन्दर तन रोग लगावैगी।
नेह किये कछु हाथ न आवै, लोक लाज कुल धर्म नसावै,
नारायण तू नाहक जगत हँसावैगी॥ २०॥

sakhī tū mati le vāko nāma, nahīm pachitāvaigī |
mana kapaṭī mukha mīṭhau bolai, kalī kalī rasa
cākhata ḍolai,
aise soṁ kari prīti kahā phala pāvaigī || merī kahī tū
cita na dharati hai, jāsoṁ mohi aba jāna parati hai,
tū apane sundara tana roga lagāvaigī | neha kiye
kachu hātha na āvai, loka lāja kula dharma nasāvai,
nārāyaṇa tū nāhaka jagata hāsāvaigī ||20||

Your crooked, playful glances are so dear
to me,
O dark beloved with the charming form.
Your beautiful face and large eyes—
and around your neck a necklace of great
pearls.
If you look at me once with a smile,
my heart would give itself to you a
thousand times.
O Nārāyana! I have become mad in love
with your beauty,
and now I have come and fallen at your
doorway.

Friend, do not even take his name—you
will only regret it.
He is cunning at heart though sweet in
speech;
he wanders tasting the nectar of every
flower.
What good will come from loving
someone like that?
You do not pay attention to what I say—
now I see it clearly.
You will only give your beautiful body a
disease (the sickness of love).
Love like this brings nothing in return;
it destroys reputation, family honor, and
social duty.
O Nārāyana, you will only for no good
reason make others laugh (at you).

विरहिनी वचन
राग काफी

बिन देखे मन माने न मेरो । श्याम वरण चित हरन
लाडिलो, रूप सुधा नित जगत उजेरो ॥ चाल मराल
मनोहर बोलन, चपल नयन मो तन हँसि हेरो । नारायण
त्रिभुवन को स्वामी, हों वृषभानुकुमार को चरो ॥ २१ ॥

bina dekhe mana māne na mero| śyāma varaṇa
cita harana lāḍilo, rūpa sudhā nita jagata ujero ||
cāla marāla manohara bolana, capala nayana
mo tana hāsi hero| nārāyaṇa tribhuvana ko
svāmī, hoṁ vṛṣabhānukumāra ko cero||21||

Without seeing him, my heart finds no peace.
That dark-complexioned beloved steals the
mind, and the nectar of his beauty forever
illuminates the world.

His goose-like graceful walk, his charming
speech,
and his playful eyes smile as they gaze upon
me. O Nārāyaṇa! Though he is the Lord of
the three worlds,
I am but a servant of the daughter of
Vrishabhanu (Rādhā).

वार्तिक

जब विरहिनी ने अपने कूँ चरो कह्यो, तब प्रियाजी अचरज
मानिके सखी सो बझिबे लगी,
अरी! ललिता! यह लुगाई हवैके फिरि लोग कैसे बनिबे लगी
जो आपकूँ चरो बनावै चेरी बने तौ एक बात है ॥ २२ ॥

jaba virahinī ne apane kūṁ cero kahyo, taba priyājī
acaraja mānike sakhī so bajhibe lagī,
arī! lalitā! yaha lugāī hvaike phiri loga kaise banibe
lagī jo āpakūṁ cero banāvai cerī bane tau eka bāta hai
||22||

When the love-stricken girl called
herself a servant, Priya-ji (Rādhā) was
surprised and began asking Lalitā: "O
Lalitā! If this woman calls herself a
servant, how will people understand
this?

If she makes herself a servant of
someone, then she herself should
become a maid—that would make
sense."

दोहा

ललिता लखि नवलाल को, बोली सुन शिरमौर । बिन प्रीतम
चेरे चतुर, चेरी बने न और ॥ २३ ॥

lalitā lakhi navalāla ko, bolī suna śīramaura| bina
prītama cere catura, cerī bane na aura ||23||

Seeing young lāla (Kṛṣṇa), Lalitā spoke:
listen Śīrmora,
Without the beloved master, even a
clever student cannot become anything
else but a maidservant.

सोरठा

सुनि ललिता के बैन, प्यारी निज मन में हरष।
मानो छबि को ऐन, पुनि पुनि निरखत लाल मुख॥२४॥

sunī lalitā ke baina, pyārī nija mana meṁ haraṣa | mānc
chabi ko aina, puni puni nirakhata lāla mukha ||24||

Hearing Lalit'ās words, the beloved
one (Rādhā) felt joy in her heart,
As if she were a mirror of beauty
itself, again and again gazing at Lal's
face.

वार्त्तिक

धन्य हौ लालजी महाराज, जो काहू की बहू बेटी होते तो
भला काहू को घर तोऊ बसावते ॥२५॥

dhanya hau lālajī mahārāja, jo kāhū kī bahū beṭī
hote to bhalā kāhū ko ghara toū basāvate ||25||

Blessed are you, O beloved Lal-ji
(Kṛṣṇa)!
If you were someone's son-in-law or
daughter's husband, you would surely
bring joy and prosperity to that
household.

श्रीजी वचन लालजी प्रति ।
राग ध्रुपद कान्हडा दरबारी-

आज भले बने लाल, अद्भुत नई ब्रज की बाल,
दृगन सोहै कजरा, अति मीठी मीठी करत बात ।
अँगिया मनमोहनहारी, दामिन की शोभा न्यारी,
झीनी नव चूनरी में, झलकत है श्याम गात ॥
हाथन में चूरी, माथे मुतियन की माँग भरी,
कानन में झुमका पग बिछियन धुनि अति सुहात ।
नारायण बार बार, प्रीतम की छबि निहार,
अचरा मुख दैके प्यारी, मन्द मन्द हँसत जात ॥२६॥

āja bhale bane lāla, adbhuta naī braja kī bāla,
dṛgana sohai kajarā, atī mīṭhī mīṭhī karata bāta |
āgiyā manamohanahārī, dāmīna kī śobhā nyārī,
jhīnī nava cūnarī meṁ, jhalakata hai śyāma gāta ||
hāthana meṁ cūrī, māthe mutiyana kī māṅga bharī,
kānana meṁ jhumakā paga bichiyana dhuni atī suhāta
nārāyaṇa bāra bāra, prītama kī chabi nihāra,
acarā mukha daike pyārī, manda manda hāsata jāta ||
26||

Today the beloved youth looks
splendid beside a wondrous young
maiden of Braj.
Her eyes shine with kohl, and she
speaks with very sweet words. Her
bodice enchants the heart, shining like
lightning in beauty.
Through her delicate new veil, the
dark complexion of her body softly
glimmers. Bangles adorn her hands,
pearls fill the parting of her hair,
earrings swing in her ears, and the
anklets on her feet ring with a sweet
sound.
O Nārāyana! Again and again she
gazes at her beloved's beauty.
Covering her face with her veil, the
lovely girl walks along with a gentle
smile.

वार्त्तिक

लालजी बोले- हे प्यारी ! आपने तौ कही हुती कि अब तुम्हारे छल में हम
कभू न आवेंगी अब कैसे आई ?
श्रीजी ने कही तिहारे प्रसन्न करिबे कूँ ॥ २७॥

lālajī bole- he pyārī ! āpane tau kahī hutī ki aba tumhāre chala
mem hama kabhū na āvenḡī aba kaise āīn ?
śrījī ne kahī tihāre prasanna karibe kūṅ ॥ 27॥

Lālajī (Kṛṣṇa) said: “O
beloved! You had said that
you would never again fall
into my tricks—so how
have you come here now?”
Śrījī (Rādhā) replied: “Only
to make you happy.”

दोहा

यह लीला श्रीलाल की, चारि पदारथ देत ।
नारायण गावे सुने, युगल प्रीति के हेत ॥ २८॥
इति श्रीनारायण स्वामीजीकृत श्यामविरहिनी लीला सम्पूर्ण ॥ १५॥
yaha līlā śrīlāla kī, cāri padāratha deta |
nārāyaṇa gāve sune, yugala prīti ke heta ॥28॥
iti śrīnārāyaṇa svāmījīkṛta śyāmavirahinī līlā sampūrṇa ॥28॥

This divine play of Kṛṣṇa grants
the four spiritual goals of life.
Nārāyaṇa says: whoever sings
or listens to it does so for the
love of the divine couple.

Wordlist-

- तिय tiy [strī-], f. Brbh. Av. = स्त्री.
- कौतुकी kautukī [S.], adj. 1. festive, merry; cheerful. 2. having an interesting art or skill (as a juggler, or dancer). 3. mischievous.
- डगर ḍagar [cf. *ḍag-2], f. a road, track; path.
- प्रीतम prītam , m. = प्रियतम (dearest)
- बेगि vegi [conn. vegena], adv. Brbh. Av. swiftly, quickly; soon.
- अचरज acāraj [ad. āścarya-], m. & adj. 1. m. a wonder, a miracle. 2. surprise, astonishment.

- बूझना būjhnā [budhyate], v.i. 1. to understand, to perceive. 2. to consider, to think. 3. to ascertain; to enquire (of, से).
- संभारना sambhārnā , v.t. pronun. var. = संभालना (taking care)
- रटना raṭnā [*raṭyati], v.i. 1. to repeat; to learn by rote. 2. to importune. 3. Brbh. to make a repeated sound.
- साँवला sāmvla [śyāmalaka-], adj. 1. dark-complexioned. 2. title of a lover or husband; specif. title of Kṛṣṇa. — साँवला-सलोना, adj. dark and savourous: attractive (a dark complexion).
- सजनी sajanī [cf. H. sajjan], f. mistress, sweetheart; lady.
- ललचाना lalcānā [cf. H. lālac], v.t. & v.i. 1. v.t. to awaken desire in; to tantalise. 2. v.i. Brbh. to feel desire or longing (for) (= ललचना).
- निरखना nirakhnā [nirīkṣate], v.t. to look with care at, to observe.
- ताक tāk [cf. H. tāknā], f. 1. look, glance. 2. fixed look, stare; peep. 3. watch, expectation (for: of an opportunity). 4. view, aim (at, पर); scrutiny.
- ढिग ḍhig [*ḍhigga-2], m. vicinity; quarter, side. — ~, ppn. **near** (to, के).
- इकली f., इकल्ला ikallā , adj. = अकेला (alone)
- गहना gahnā [*grahati: Pk. gahai], v.t. & m. 1. v.t. to seize; to lay hold of, to take up/ गहनि gahani [cf. grahaṇa-, and H. gahnā], f. Brbh. seizing, taking.
- बीर bīr [vīra-], adj. & m. 1. brave, heroic, &c. (= वीर). 2. friend, brother (esp. as term of address).
- बावली f., बावला bāvlā [vātula-: ? w. vyākula-, or vāyura-], adj. 1. mad, crazy. 2. raging, furious.
- मतवार matvār , adj. Brbh. = मतवाला matvālā [*mattapāla-: Pk. mattavāla-], adj. & m. 1. intoxicated
- बैन bain [vacana-], m. word, speech.
- दृग ḍṛg [S.], m. esp. in comp. the eye
- दुराव durāv -, v.t. Brbh. Av. = दुराना durānā [cf. H. dūr], v.t. 1. to remove, to make away with. 2. to put away (fear, &c.); to have done with. 3. to conceal (a matter)

- उपाव = उपाय upây [S.], m. 1. means, recourse; scheme, plan; device; measure. 2. med. Ayur. treatment. — ~ करना, to devise a scheme; to try an expedient.
- रोग rog [S.], m. 1. illness; disease; an illness. 2. fig. an evil, worry, plague.
- सकल sakal [S.], adj. 1. all. 2. entire, the whole; gross (amount).
- पीर pīr f. Brbh. Av. = पीड़ pīṛ [pīḍā-], f. 1. pain. 2. suffering.
- अरुण aruṇ [S.], adj. & m. 1. adj. reddish brown; tawny. 2. m. the sun. 3. reddish glow, flush (of dawn); red or tawny colour.
- अधर adhar [ad. adhara-], m. & adj. lower part: 1. m. the lower lip; the lip.
- लर = लड़ lar [*laḍa-], f. 1. a string (as of pearls); a strand (of a rope or cord). 2. row, line, series. 3. a chain.
- पाँति pānti , f. Brbh. Av. = पाँत pānt [paṅkti-], f. 1. line, row; rank. 2. mil. line
- पसन - पस्सा
- भोर bhor [*bhorā-], f. m. daybreak, the period just before dawn. — को, or होते, adv. at daybreak.
- पनिया panīyā [cf. H. pānī], adj. 1. having to do with water; aquatic. 2. watery; diluted; adulterated (as milk).
- सलोना salonā [salavaṇa-], adj. 1. salted; savoury. *2. attractive (esp. of a darkish complexion).
- तिलांजली देना (को), to perform last rites, to part for ever (with); to make an end (of: as of a practice).
- पलटा palṭā [*pallatṭ-: Pk. pa(l)laṭṭai], m. 1. turning over. 2. turning back, return; retreat
- औरी-बौरी aurī-baurī [cf. H. baurā, bāvlā], adj. reg. mad, crazy.
- सुकुमार su-kumār [S.], adj. & m. 1. adj. soft, tender (esp. hands, feet, limbs); delicate. 2. youthful. 3. m. a handsome or beautiful youth.
- चिद्- cid- [S.]. see s.v. चित्त citt [citta-1], m. 1. the understanding; the mind. 2. thought, reflection. 3. the soul; the heart.
- हाय hāy [hāyi], interj. & f. 1. interj. alas! 2. f. distress, suffering. 3. envy. — ~ करना, to sigh; to lament.
- चितेरा citerā [citrakara-], m. a painter, an artist; an engraver.

- सगरा *sagrā* [ad. *sakala-*], adj. reg. = सकल.
- सवेरा *saverā* [**savela-*], m. early morning; morning. — बड़े, or बहुत सवेरे, adv. very early in the morning; at or soon after dawn.
- उजेला *ujelā*, m. = उजियाला, उजाला *ujālā* [**ujjvālaka-*], m. & adj. 1. m. light; daylight; daybreak, day; light of moon or stars. 2. brightness, splendour; glory. 3. adj. light, moonlit, clear (night). 4. bright, radiant.
- भट्ट *bhaṭṭ*, f. 1. Brbh. a woman. 2. reg. interj. woman! lady!
- व्याधि *vy-ādhi* [S.], f. 1. disease, illness. 2. affliction; anguish.
- कपट *kaṭaṭ* [S.], m. 1. insincerity, dissembling. 2. deceit. 3. trickery; trick.
- बेदर्द²⁸² *bēdarda* वि० [फ्रा०] जिसके हृदय में किसी के प्रति मोह या दया न हो। जो किसी की व्यथा को न समझे। कठोरहृदय। निर्दय
- चितवन *citvan* [cf. H. *citavnā*], f. a look, glance
- उकलाना = अकुलाना *akulānā* [cf. *ākula-*; Pa. *akkula-*], v.i. 1. to be agitated; to be uneasy. 2. to tire (of, से); to become averse (to). 3. to be restless (for, के लिए). 4. to feel nausea or sickness.
- महबूब *mahbūb* [A. *maḥbūb*], adj. & m. 1. adj. loved, beloved. 2. m. loved one.
- ठार *ṭhār* [? H. *ṭhaur* × H. *ṭhām̐v*], m. Brbh. a place (= ठौर).
- नाहक²⁸³ *nāhaka* क्रि० वि० [फ्रा० ना + अ० हक] वृथा। व्यर्थ। बेफायदा। बेमतलब। निष्प्रयोजन।
- मराल *marāl* [S.], m. a species of goose.
- हेरना *hēranā* [**herati* (← Drav.): Pk. *herāi*], v.t. 1. to look (at), to gaze. 2. to investigate. 3. Brbh. to detect (a fault). 4. to search for; to hunt, to chase.
- शिरमौर²⁸⁴ *śiramaura* संज्ञा पुं० [सं० शिरस् + सं० मुकुट, प्रा० मउड़] १. शिरोभूषण। मुकुट। २. श्रेष्ठ व्यक्ति। मुख्य व्यक्ति। प्रधान।

²⁸² Dasa: Hindi sabdasagara (p. 3552)

²⁸³ नाहक *nāhaka* from Dasa: *Hindi sabdasagara* (p. 2600)

²⁸⁴ Dasa: Hindi sabdasagara (p. 4746)

Appendix II

Śrīpremasampuṭa by Viśvanātha Cakravartī (selected verses)

Original Text	Translation
प्रातः कदाचिद् उररी-कृत चारु-रामा-वेशो हरिः प्रियतमा- भवन-प्रघाणे । गत्वारुणांशुक-तटेन पिधाय वक्त्रं निचि न लोचन-युगः सहसावतस्थे ॥ १ ॥ <i>prātaḥ kadācid urarī-kṛta cāru-rāmā-veśo hariḥ priyatamā-bhavana-praghāṇe gatvāruṇāṁśuka-taṭena pidhāya vaktram nici na locana-yugaḥ sahasāvatasṭhe (1)</i>	Verse 1: Sometime in the morning, Hari (Krishna) accepted (urarī-kṛta) the appearance (or dress) of a beautiful woman (cāru-rāmā- veśo), came at the porch of the beloved's palace. Covering his face with a red cloth, he quickly sat down. Veiling his face with the border of a crimson garment, he stood there all at once, his eyes lowered.
आराद्-विलोक्य तम् अथो वृषभानु-पुत्री प्रोवाच हन्त ललिते! सखि! पश्य केयम् । स्वस्यांशुभिर् हरि-मणि-मयतां निनाय मत्-सद्म पद्म- वदनाद्भुत-भूषणाढ्या ॥ २ ॥ <i>ārād-vilokya tam atho vṛṣabhānu-putrī provāca hanta lalite! sakhi! paśya keyam svasyāṁśubhir hari-maṇi-mayatām nināya mat-sadma padma-vadanādbhuta- bhūṣaṇāḍhyā (2)</i>	Verse 2: Then, seeing him from afar, Vṛṣabhānu's daughter said: "Ah, Lalitā! Friend, look—who is this? This lotus-faced woman, richly adorned with wondrous ornaments, has made my house attain the radiance of emerald-like brilliance through her own rays (beauty)."

श्रुत्वा सखी-गिरम् अथो ललिता विशाखे तं प्रोचतुर् द्रुतम्
अवाप्य तदाभिमुख्यम् ।

का त्वं कृशोदरि! कुतः किमु वाथ कृत्यं ब्रूहि त्व् असौ
प्रतिवचस् तु ददौ न किञ्चित् ॥ ३ ॥

*śrutvā sakhī-giram atho lalitā viśākhe taṁ
procatur drutam avāpya tadābhimukhyam ।
kā tvaṁ kṛṣodari! kutaḥ kim u vātha kṛtyaṁ
brūhi tv asau prativacas tu dadau na kiñcit ॥*

3॥

Verse 3: Having heard the sakhi's speech, then , Lalitā and Viśākhā quickly having reached, they spoke to him face to face. “Who are you thin-waisted one? Where are you from? For what is your purpose? Speak!” But he did not give any response.

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