

Kṛṣṇa's Return to Vṛndāvana

In Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī's Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta (Pūrva-khaṇḍa 5.467), he describes Kṛṣṇa's return to Vṛndāvana:

*vraje prakāṭa-līlāyām
trīn māsān viraho 'munā
tatrāpy ajāni visphūrṭiḥ
prādurbhāvopamā hareḥ
tri-māsyah paratas teṣām
sākṣāt kṛṣṇena saṅgatiḥ*

“During the Lord's prakāṭa pastimes, the people of Vraja were separated from him for three months. Lord Kṛṣṇa then reappeared among them and spent three months with them.”

[Garga-saṁhitā (5.19) elaborately describes how Kṛṣṇa returned to Vṛndāvana from Mathurā after killing Kāmsa and comforted the Vraja-vāsīs for three months]

The words *kṛṣṇena saṅgatiḥ* therefore indicate the Vraja-vāsīs' meeting with Kṛṣṇa. Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī explains the word *saṅgatiḥ* in two ways: “appearance” and “return.” He then gives substantial śāstric evidence to support both readings. [Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta 1.5.468] But in whichever way one understands the word *saṅgatiḥ*, Rūpa Gosvāmī's conclusion is that after Kṛṣṇa left Vṛndāvana for Mathurā, he again met the Vraja-vāsīs in Vraja.

Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam thrice records Kṛṣṇa's promise to return to Vṛndāvana. [In Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Kṛṣṇa promised to return to Vṛndāvana three times: (1) while leaving for Mathurā he promises the gopīs (10.39.35); (2) after killing Kāmsa he promises Nanda Mahārāja (10.45.23); (3) in the letter that Uddhava delivered to the gopīs Kṛṣṇa promises to return (10.46.34–35)] But with the exception of one śloka (1.11.9), which alludes to his visiting Mathurā district, there is no mention in the Bhāgavatam of Kṛṣṇa fulfilling his promise. Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta, however, firmly establishes Kṛṣṇa's return to Vṛndāvana. And had Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī not done so, it would have appeared that Kṛṣṇa did not keep his word.

Of all revealed scriptures, Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam carries the greatest authority. Therefore, Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī goes to great lengths to prove how the aforementioned Bhāgavatam verse (1.11.9) clearly substantiates that Kṛṣṇa repeatedly returned to Vṛndāvana. Śrīla Prabhupāda translates this verse as follows:

yarhy ambujākṣāpasasāra bho bhavān
kurūn madhūn vātha suhṛd-didṛkṣayā
tatrābda-koṭi-pratimaḥ kṣaṇo bhaved
ravim vinākṣṇor iva nas tvācyuta

“O lotus-eyed Lord, whenever You go away to Mathurā, Vṛndāvana, or Hastināpura to meet Your friends and relatives, every moment of Your absence seems like a million years. O infallible one, at that time our eyes become useless, as if bereft of the sun.”

The Dvārakā-vāsīs spoke these words when Kṛṣṇa returned to Dvārakā after the Kurukṣetra war. Among those present at the time were the florist Sudāmā, the barber, and others who had served Kṛṣṇa directly. [Prīti-sandarbhā 92] The word yarhi (whenever) indicates Kṛṣṇa’s repeated outings to the land of the Kurus and Madhus.

No one argues that Kṛṣṇa visited the Kurus. Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam clearly describes his visits to the Pāṇḍavas. But how should we understand the word madhūn, which refers to the land of the Madhu clan? Rūpa Gosvāmī explains as follows:

“O lotus-eyed Lord (bho ambujākṣa), you have gone (bhavān apsasāra) to Mathurā (madhūn), eagerly desiring to see Nanda Mahārāja and your other friends and relatives there (suhṛd-didṛkṣayā).” [Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta 1.5.480]

There may be some doubt about the interpretation of the word madhūn, since it may mean either Mathurā or Vṛndāvana. Rūpa Gosvāmī therefore says, “The word ‘madhūn’ means ‘the village of Vraja in the district of Mathurā.’ Because the city of Mathurā cannot be meant here, the friends referred to are the Lord’s friends in Vraja.”

Why cannot the word madhūn refer to Mathurā City? Because when Jarāsandha attacked Mathurā City, Kṛṣṇa took his close friends amongst the Madhus to Dvārakā. Thus, the only “friends” the Dvārakā-vāsīs could have been referring to at the time they spoke this verse were the Vraja-vāsīs.

Śrīla Śrīdhara Svāmī, in his commentary to this verse, also says that the word “madhūn” refers to “the residents of Vṛndāvana, which is situated in the district of Mathurā.”

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī further substantiates Kṛṣṇa’s return to Vṛndāvana by quoting a passage from the Padma Purāṇa (Uttara-khaṇḍa 279.24–26). These verses narrate Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s fight with Dantavakra in front of the gates of Mathurā and Kṛṣṇa’s subsequent visit to Vraja, where he gives pleasure to the Vraja-vāsīs for two months before returning to Dvārakā.

Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.77.37, 78.1–13] and Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, [Ibid., 10.78.13–16, purport] in their commentaries to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, also confirm this episode of Kṛṣṇa’s return to Vṛndāvana. And Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī goes one step further to base the final portion of his magnum opus, Gopāla-campū, entirely upon the historical authenticity of Padma Purāṇa. In nine lengthy chapters, Jīva elaborates in detail Kṛṣṇa’s Vraja pastimes in the two months following Dantavakra’s death.

Such evidence presented by highly respected ācāryas should eradicate any doubt that Kṛṣṇa returned to the Vraja-vāsīs.

The question now arises, why does the Bhāgavatam not discuss Kṛṣṇa’s return to Vraja? Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura answers this question in his commentary on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.78.16: [The identity of the Vraja-vāsīs’ plenary expansions and how they were transported to the spiritual world is described later in this introduction, in the section called “The Ontological Background of Kṛṣṇa’s Associates.”] “When Kṛṣṇa returned to Vṛndāvana, he gave great pleasure to his relatives and childhood friends. And before returning to Dvārakā, he miraculously expanded himself and took the plenary expansions of the Vraja-vāsīs to the spiritual world.

“... Śukadeva thought that Parīkṣit Mahārāja might wonder how Kṛṣṇa, who caused the cowherds to attain Vaikuṅṭha in their selfsame bodies, could also have caused the residents of Dvārakā to attain such an inauspicious end in the mauṣala-līlā. Thus, Śukadeva withheld this pastime from Parīkṣit—even though the Uttara-khaṇḍa of Śrī Padma Purāṇa recounts it—because Parīkṣit Mahārāja, due to his own affinity for the Yadus, might have considered Kṛṣṇa unfair.”

Yet even without the substantial evidence given by Śrī Rūpa, the reasoning of Śrī Viśvanātha, or the testimony of other ācāryas, devotees familiar with Kṛṣṇa’s personality accept his own integrity as evidence enough that he kept his word. Such devotees know that wonderful Kṛṣṇa is truthful, grateful, gentle, and compassionate. They know that he is completely honourable, that he is the protector of surrendered souls, that he is the well-wisher of his devotees—and that ultimately love controls him. [These are some of Kṛṣṇa’s 64 qualities listed in The Nectar of Devotion,] Such endearing qualities make it impossible for Hari to deceive his dearest devotees.

Both Rūpa and Jīva Gosvāmīs quote Uddhava, who reassured Nanda Mahārāja and Mother Yaśodā of the truthfulness of their son’s words: “Kṛṣṇa has promised that he will come back to Vṛndāvana after finishing his business in Mathurā. This promise he will surely fulfil.” [Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.46.35]

Śrī Jīva comments on this quote: “Kṛṣṇa... must have returned to Vraja, for otherwise Uddhava would have spoken a lie... .” And after Kṛṣṇa’s declaration in the Gītā that his devotee never perishes, [Bhagavad-gītā 9.31] it appears even more unlikely that he would make his devotee into a liar than lie himself.

It should be doubtlessly clear, then, that after having promised the Vraja-vāsīs he would return to Vṛndāvana, Kṛṣṇa did return. But, as will be disclosed in Kṛṣṇa-saṅgati, the reason Kṛṣṇa came back was not that he was a moralist concerned for his reputation, or even that he possessed a wealth of transcendental qualities that made him unfailing in his word. Kṛṣṇa returned to Vṛndāvana because of his most endearing characteristic, prema-vaśyaḥ—love controls him.

Does Kṛṣṇa Really Leave Vṛndāvana?

The evidence cited in the previous section overwhelmingly supports the argument that after leaving for Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa returned to Vraja. And that evidence and its conclusion are correct.

However, Kṛṣṇa's leaving Vṛndāvana is but one perspective of his inconceivable pastimes. It is the perspective manifest on the earth over five thousand years ago.

Yet there is another perspective, the unmanifest perspective, which enjoys equal support from scripture and the ācāryas. According to Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī, a complete understanding of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes must include knowledge of this second perspective. [Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā 153.5]

Śrīla Prabhupāda describes these two aspects of Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in the following way: "Śrī Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in this material world are called prakāṣa-līlā (manifested pastimes), and His pastimes in the spiritual world are called aprakāṣa-līlā (unmanifested pastimes). By 'unmanifested' we mean that they are not present before our eyes." [Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 15.237, purport]

Śrīla Rūpa Gosvāmī [Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta (1.5.435) states: prakāṣaprakāṣā ceti līlā seyam dvidhocyate, "The Lord's pastimes are said to be of two kinds: 1. prakāṣa (manifest), and 2. aprakāṣa (not manifest)."] has described the subject of prakāṣa and aprakāṣa, and Śrīla Jīva Gosvāmī has presented it even more extensively in his writings, especially in Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā. The terms prakāṣa and aprakāṣa are applicable to Kṛṣṇa's presence, his dhāmas, as well as his pastimes.

The aprakāṣa-līlā is eternally taking place in the aprakāṣa-dhāma, Goloka-Vṛndāvana in the spiritual sky, beyond the vision of the souls living in the material world. When the unmanifested pastimes become visible in the prakāṣa-dhāma, the terrestrial counterpart of the aprakāṣa-dhāma, they are known as prakāṣa-līlā. In the prakāṣa-līlā, Kṛṣṇa and his associates are visible to everyone, even conditioned souls.

In Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā (153.7), Jīva Gosvāmī clarifies the distinction between the prakāṣa and aprakāṣa pastimes: "The Lord's unmanifested (aprakāṣa) pastimes are completely distinct from the material world, being free from the limitations of matter and material time. In his aprakāṣa-dhāma, Lord Kṛṣṇa eternally enjoys pastimes. Day after day, he enters the assembly hall of Dvārakā as the king of the Yadus, and day after day, he grazes surabhi cows as the young prince of Vraja.

"Although Lord Kṛṣṇa's pastimes are always free from the influence of matter, in his manifested (prakāṣa) pastimes, by his own will and by the workings of his internal potency, those pastimes appear to be material. In that prakāṣa-līlā, both the Lord and his pastimes appear to be under the jurisdiction of time and thus display a beginning, growth, dwindling, and an apparent end."

The description of Kṛṣṇa's departure from Vṛndāvana given in this book, and recorded in Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, takes place in his prakāṣa-līlā. In that pastime everyone, from his eternal associates to the conditioned souls, observed Kṛṣṇa leaving Vṛndāvana. In fact, even Kṛṣṇa was convinced that he had gone to Mathurā.

But in his aprakāṣa-līlā, Kṛṣṇa remained in Vṛndāvana, as he does eternally.

In view of these two perspectives, prakāṣa and aprakāṣa, how should we understand Kṛṣṇa's departure from Vṛndāvana?

It should be understood in this way: Kṛṣṇa simultaneously went from Vṛndāvana to Mathurā in his prakāṣa pastimes and stayed in Vṛndāvana in his aprakāṣa pastimes.

And how are we to comprehend the simultaneous occurrence of two contradictory events?

In this regard, Śrīla Prabhupāda quotes Jīva Gosvāmī: "Unless you accept [the] inconceivable power of the Supreme Lord, there is no [possibility of] understanding [him]." [Śrīla Prabhupāda's lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 7.9.6, 26 February, 1977, Māyāpur] Thus, in order to understand something that defies both logic and our experience, we must accept Kṛṣṇa's inconceivable potencies, which effortlessly harmonise simultaneous contradictory events in what Śrīla Prabhupāda calls "two kinds of existence" [Śrīla Prabhupāda's lecture on Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 1.15.33, 11 December, 1973, Los Angeles]—the manifested and the unmanifested.

The above explanation may be acceptable in a philosophical discussion, but how should readers adjust to the dual perspectives of prakāṣa and aprakāṣa as they read Kṛṣṇa-saṅgati?

I have already quoted Śrīla Prabhupāda, who clearly indicates that in hearing about Kṛṣṇa, the reader should be aware of the principles of rasa, the emotional tastes, and tattva, the philosophical truths underlying Kṛṣṇa's pastimes.

Now let us examine in more detail the principles of rasa and tattva a person should be aware of while reading this book.

It is important to hear Kṛṣṇa's pastimes in the proper mood. [Kṛṣṇa states in Bhagavad-gītā (4.10) that the correct mood in which to serve him is obtained through knowledge and practice] Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura advises that Vaiṣṇavas worshipping Kṛṣṇa should be in harmony with the moods of his revealed pastimes. [Rāga-vartma-candrikā 2.6] In other words, the hearer's moods should reflect those of the pastimes themselves as they unfold. Thus, when Kṛṣṇa plunges himself and his associates into the pastime of leaving Vṛndāvana, the reader should be absorbed in the moods that Kṛṣṇa establishes in that līlā.

There is another subject the reader must consider before understanding Kṛṣṇa's pastime of leaving Vṛndāvana. Kṛṣṇa, in his original form, replete with all the qualities of Godhead, appears only in Vṛndāvana. All other forms of Kṛṣṇa—whether in Mathurā, Dvārakā, or any other place outside Vṛndāvana—are expansions of that original form of Śyāmasundara in

Vraja. These extra-Vṛndāvana forms of Kṛṣṇa do not reveal all the qualities of Godhead. In fact, in his prakāṣa-līlā, even when Kṛṣṇa is seen by everyone to leave Vṛndāvana, he does not actually leave Vṛndāvana, his expansion does.

We should understand the last paragraph in the following way: In Vṛndāvana, Mathurā, and Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa displays different natures to reciprocate different moods cherished by his associates in those respective dhāmas. [This concept corresponds to Kṛṣṇa’s promise in Bhagavad-gītā 4.11: “In whatever way My devotees surrender unto Me, I reward them accordingly. Everyone follows My path in all respects, O son of Pṛthā.”] This principle holds for both the prakāṣa- and aprakāṣa-dhāmas. For instance, devotees whose love is dominated by awe of Kṛṣṇa’s opulence reside in the realm of opulence, Dvārakā; whereas, devotees whose love is drawn to Kṛṣṇa’s sweetness, reside in the land of sweetness, Vṛndāvana.

Thus in Vṛndāvana, Mathurā, and Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa is said to display three different natures. And the distinct nature of each place arises from the distinct qualities Kṛṣṇa manifests in each place. In Dvārakā, Kṛṣṇa, although complete in every way, does not manifest all his divine qualities. In Mathurā, he is more complete, for he manifests all his qualities, though not fully. But in Vṛndāvana, he is most complete, for there he manifests all the qualities of Godhead in full. [This paragraph and the next are based on Caitanya-caritāmṛta, Madhya-līlā 20.401–402]

The conclusion of learned Vaiṣṇavas, and of revealed scripture, is that Kṛṣṇa is the most complete Personality of Godhead only in Vṛndāvana. Elsewhere, all his expansions are either complete or more complete.

This is what scriptures mean when they say that Śyāmasundara, the original, full-fledged form of Godhead never leaves Vṛndāvana, for only in Vṛndāvana do his devotees possess the quality of love that makes him display all his personal qualities in full.

The famous śloka of the Yāmala Tantra describes the difference between Kṛṣṇa’s appearance in Vṛndāvana and his appearance in Mathurā and Dvārakā:

kṛṣṇo ‘nyo yadu-sambhūto
yaḥ pūrṇaḥ so ‘sty atah paraḥ
vṛndāvanam parityajya
sa kvacin naiva gacchati

“The Kṛṣṇa known as Yadukumāra is Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa. He is different from the Kṛṣṇa who is the son of Nanda Mahārāja. Yadukumāra-Kṛṣṇa manifests his pastimes in the cities of Mathurā and Dvārakā, but Kṛṣṇa the son of Nanda Mahārāja never leaves Vṛndāvana at any time.” [As quoted in Laghu-bhāgavatāmṛta 1.5.461]

This raises another question: If the original form of Kṛṣṇa never leaves Vṛndāvana, what happens in his manifest pastimes when the time arrives for him to leave Vraja?

The answer is that Śyāmasundara rides on Akrūra's chariot to the boundary of Vraja, but goes no further. Kṛṣṇa's expansion as Vāsudeva crosses the border of Vṛndāvana and continues his pastimes in Mathurā and Dvārakā. [In chapter 39 of the tenth canto of Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam, Kṛṣṇa's journey to Mathurā is described. When Akrūra went to bathe in the Yamunā at Brahma-hrada, he saw Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma in two forms—their original forms and their expansions as Mahā-Viṣṇu and Śeṣa. From the sequence of events in the pastime, it can be deduced that the original form of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma remained in Vṛndāvana and that their expansions continued the trip to Mathurā with Akrūra. This is evidence that Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa separates himself from Śyāmasundara upon leaving Vṛndāvana. The former is seen in prakāṣa-līlā while the latter remains unmanifest.

Śrīla Prabhupāda, in his purport to Śrīmad-Bhāgavatam 10.3.48–49, quotes Viśvanātha Cakravartī Ṭhākura, who explains that Kṛṣṇa took birth simultaneously from both Devakī and Yaśodā. The son of Devakī was Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa, which is obvious since he displayed a Viṣṇu form. When Vasudeva took Devakī's baby to Gokula, unseen to Vasudeva, that baby merged into the body of Yaśodā's son. This is evidence that when Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa enters Vṛndāvana in prakāṣa-līlā, he merges into the body of Śyāmasundara, who was aprakāṣa up to that time] As Vāsudeva's pastimes unfold in prakāṣa Dvārakā, Śyāmasundara stays in Vṛndāvana in his aprakāṣa form and enjoys his aprakāṣa pastimes. During those times, however, the Vraja-vāsīs in prakāṣa Vṛndāvana accept the pastimes Kṛṣṇa has with them to be merely dreams. Thus they display even more intense symptoms of separation from their Śyāmasundara.

The Vraja-vāsīs' love in separation draws Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa back to Vṛndāvana. At the border of Vraja, Śyāmasundara appears from his aprakāṣa-līlā and Vāsudeva merges into his body. Kṛṣṇa, in his original form, enters Vṛndāvana again to be visible in his prakāṣa-līlā. [In every account of Kṛṣṇa's return to Vṛndāvana, whether it be in Padma Purāṇa, Gopāla-campū, or Garga-saṁhitā, Kṛṣṇa changes from the dress of a king, into the dress of a cowherd. This episode is more than a symbolic gesture of Kṛṣṇa's change of mood. It displays Śyāmasundara's return to his prakāṣa-līlā, just as the incident at Akrūra-ghaṭṭa did]

To review this section: In Kṛṣṇa's prakāṣa-līlā, he only appears to leave Vṛndāvana. What actually happens is that Kṛṣṇa's Vāsudeva expansion continues his pastimes outside Vṛndāvana. His original feature of Śyāmasundara, tied by bonds of pure affection to his original dhāma and his original associates, [In Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta (2.6.202–203), Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī describes that Kṛṣṇa's Goloka associates are his original associates who expand themselves to serve his pastimes in Vaikuṅṭha, among the demigods, and on earth. The cowherd boy Śrīdāmā in Goloka, for instance, expands to become Garuḍa (the associate of Lord Nārāyaṇa in Vaikuṅṭha), and a second Garuḍa (the son of Vinatā), amongst the demigods] does not leave Vṛndāvana. Instead, Śyāmasundara enters his aprakāṣa-līlā and stays forever in his aprakāṣa-dhāma.

The same principle applies to any of Kṛṣṇa's dhāmas. When he is not visible in a particular dhāma in prakāṣa-līlā, he is always present in his aprakāṣa-līlā in a state of completeness complementary to that particular dhāma. Externally, Kṛṣṇa appears to come and go, but from the aprakāṣa point of view, he is eternally present in each of his dhāmas.