Chapter 4.

**Rās Lilā as a playful process of self fulfilment**

4.1. **Localization of Rās Lilās to Braj.**

The previous chapter has delineated the theoretical background required to study the Rās Lilā performances of Braj. There, it was shown how, according to Gaudiya Vaishnava poetics, experience of Rāsa in theatre is continuous with and complimented by the experience of Rāsa in daily life. This chapter shows how the Braj culture provides for this continuity and complimentarity between theatre and daily life.

One significant aspect of Rās Lilā performances, the special variety of Lilā, is that it has been an activity strictly localized for a region called Braj Mandal (covering a circumference of 168 Kms) which covers the shrines such as Gokul, Barsana and Nand Gaon, located around the famous shrine Vrindavan and which come under the Mathura district in Uttar Pradesh. Such a localization has been traditional in the sense that Rās Lilās performances have been performed in Braj for generations and for all these generations it has been considered ideal to localize Rās Lilās to Braj Mandal.

The thinking behind this consideration can be grasped by observing the culture of Braj. All the places discussed above are associated with the legends of Kṛṣṇa, the cowherd boy incarnation of Nārāyaṇa-Veṣṇu, as described in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. Though it is said that these shrines were founded during the sixteenth century by some devotional saints (for example, Caitanya Caritamrta, Antya Lilā 218 and Bhakti Ratnakara, 1992: fifth wave), these places are popularly believed to be the same places where Kṛṣṇa lived His cowherd boy life, during the mythological
dvāpara age and what the sixteenth century saints did, is considered to be a `rediscovery' of those mythological places, in the various locations within Braj. The legends associated with these places go beyond the stories narrated in the Bhagavata Purana and include those Purāṇa-s like the Bramha Vakavarta Purana, a huge number of popular versions of Kesna stories, some prevalent as folklore and some described in the lyrics of the medieval devotional poets of this region like Surdas, Swam Haridas and Hit Harivams. One noteworthy aspect of these popular legends is that all of them, not only invariably include the cowherd (gopi) beloved of Kesna called Radha, but they bring a great significance to the name Rādhā itself.

Today, these shrines are one of the most crowded pilgrim centres of India, where apart from a buzzing floating population, there are a considerably big number of Kesna devotees, who have, once for all, settled in these places and live in their cottages, houses, hermitages, temples and so on. One cultural continuity between the present day life of these places and the Bhagavata Purāṇa is the word vraja (of which Braj is considered to be the local pronunciation). Today, Braj culture is a strong local cultural identity of these places, usually identified through the rural dialect of Hindi called Brajbhasa, spoken in these places. For example, residents of these places are referred to as Brajavasi-s and Brajbhasa, the rural dialect spoken in these places, is claimed as a strong mark of their cultural identity. Brajbhasa as a vernacular language has been in vogue for the last several centuries. Famous literature, like the songs of devotional poets like Surdas mentioned above, were all composed in Braj dialect only. Whatever might have been the traditional culture of these places before their `rediscovery' during the sixteenth century, today, the predominant culture of these places is that of various devotional cults like Vallabha Sampradaya, Nimbarka Sampradaya, and Radha Vallabha Sampradaya (see Mital, 1968: Ch.S 5-7, for a discussion on these devotional cults) and this is what is today referred to as Braj culture in general.
Vrindavan, the shrine, is the most crowded and developed of all these places and is almost a centre of activity of the entire Braj Mandal. Entry into Vrindavan makes the individual to enter into the world of Radha and Krsna. At every few steps, the visitor can spot either a temple of Radha and Krsna, or a temple like asram (covenant). Just within Vrindavan, there are more than five thousand temples of Radha and Krsna and asram-s (plate 4).

In fact, it is in Vrindavan that the significance of Radha mentioned above, is more explicitly manifest. For the Brajvasis, Radha is Vrindavanāvāri, the Queen of Vrindavan and Krsna is Her Beloved and they - Their servants. The attachment of the devotees to Radha is expressed in many ways. Every wall and tree in Vrindavan is painted with the name of Radha (plates 5-7). The devotees of Vrindavan greet each other with 'Radhe Radhe.' A rickshaw wala (tricycle puller) shouts 'Radhe' even to a person who blocks his way on the road. The telephone calls in Vrindavan are also received with a Radhe Radhe, instead of Hello! The prominence of Radha can also be seen by the way the deities are named. The deities in the temples are called Radha Raman, Radha - Madan Mohan, Radha - Vinoda, Radha - Gopinatha, and Radha - Śyamsundara. Whatever form Krsna takes, such as Śyamsundara (beautiful dark complexioned boy), Madan Mōhan (one who charms even the cupid - Madan) and so on, for the devotees of Vrindavan, it is for Radha that He takes it, because He belongs to Her. (The Gaudiya Vaisnava explanation for the significance of Radha, it may be noted, has been discussed while discussing the schematic choice of self knowledges and the greatest superiority given to Radha in this scheme in section 3.5.3 of the previous chapter).

The Braj culture of Vrindavan comprises of intense devotional activities like worshiping the deities of Radha and Kṛṣṇa in the temples and the asram-s, chanting the names of the Kṛṣṇa on the beads (plates 8 & 12-13), performing congregational chanting of the names of Kṛṣṇa (sankirtan. Plates 14-15) and attending discourses on the Bhagavata Purāṇa.
4. Vrindavan is a cluster of temples and *asrama-s* (covenants) on the bank of river Yamuna. The tower seen is the Radha-Madannsohan temple built by Sanatana Goswami (3.5.1).

5-7. Every wall and tree in Vrindavan bear the name of Radha.
5. Each of the row of trees in Raman Reti street with an inscription of the name of Radha in Sanskrit and English
6 A wall with the sbgan of 'repeat (the name of) Śrī Radha.'

7. Painting the name of Radha and Kṛṣṇa on the walls is the pastime of Radhā Baba (Nimbārka Sampradāya).

Source: Researcher's own documentation.
8 The local Brajvasis’ rustic simplicity of these natives of Braj Mandal which is considered to be the
reminiscence of the ebullience inspiring form of Krishna and His cowherd associates is the model for emulation
for the devotees with elitist affluent backgrounds also. All the locals are relaxing at the end of a day.
Note the bead bags in some of the hands.
Source: Researcher’s own documentation

9. Certain spots in Vrindavan treated as the exact places where the incidents described in Bhagavata
Purana occurred in the past.

9. Shows a tree, which is considered to be the tree from which Krishna jumped into the pond of Kaliya (see
Appendix 6). This place is called Kaliya Dah
10. A temple at Kaliya Ghat. Note Krishna on the hood of Kaliya.

11. Cī cī Ghat on the banks of River Yamuna. This is believed to be a place where Krishna stole the clothes of gopī-s bathing in Yamuna (Bhāgavata Purana X.22). This story is considered to be instructing surrenderence of ego to Bhagavan, symbolized by relinquishing of clothes. Pieces of women’s clothes seen hanging/tied by the women as a gesture of surrender of their ego to Krishna.
12. An āśrama (Sri Chatanya Prem Samsthan) at Bhramara Ghat (the lake of bumble bee), a place on the bank of river Yamuna, which is considered to be the place where gopi-s sang the famous lyric called bhramara git (bumble bee song), treating the bumble bee as a messenger of Kṛṣṇa, during their pangs of separation, during uddhava’s arrival at Vrindavan (Bhagavata Purāṇa, 10.47) (4.3.5.2. V). The backdrop of the wall shows Radha (elevated) and gopi-s singing bhramara git. Note the bumble bee at the feet of Radha. The picture shows a sankirtan session inside Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthian.

Sources: 9-11 Researcher’s own documentation. 12 Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan.
Discussing Vrindavan, Gelberg quotes Klaus Klostermaier as saying,

"The atmosphere is filled with the drone of drums, the tinkling of bells and the incessant, chorus-like invocations of Krsna and Radha: in the temples, in the houses, on the streets, in the fields. Everywhere and everybody sings the praises of the divine couple....Everywhere, their picture hangs, everywhere their statues stand, everywhere there is a tree, a stone, a temple, a square connected with a particular incident in the life of Krsna." (in Rosen, 1992:11).

The point is that Rās Līā performances are also, only a part of this entire Braj culture. It is a different matter that within Braj culture Rās Līā performances are considered to be the most interesting, attractive and juicy. Prabhudayal Mital, explaining the place of Rās Līā-s within Braj culture opines,

if the culture of Vrindavan is compared to a big tree and the various aspects of its culture to the branches of the tree, then Rās [Līā] can be compared as its mellifluous fruit (1983:5).

For Gaudiya Vaisnava followers, the significance of rasa and Līā ('playfulness') (3.10) can be seen to be rooted in the localization of Rās Līā to Braj culture itself. Firstly, the rusticity of the Braj culture as reflected in the affinity for the Braj dialect and the rural lifestyle is part of the 'playfulness' in the sense of closeness inspiring (3.5.3), non-pompous, non-showy simple, nature (plate 8). Even eloquent scholars in Sanskrit and Sanskritic śāstra-s (literature), elite individuals from privileged class and families in their adaptations to Braj culture, develop an affinity for the rustic aspects of Braj culture, including the use of Braj bhasā (language). It may be noted here that Rās Līā performances, in which even such scholars and elite individuals participate, are invariably performed only in Brajbhasā. This adaptation is also motivated by the belief that Braj Mandal is, in fact, the same Braj Mandal where Krsna and His associates performed their cowherdly activities.
(plates 9-12) and Braj bhāsā is the language in which they spoke. Because of the same belief
goseva (taking care of cows) has become one of the prominent ways of life for a lot of the
devotees settled in Vrindavan (plate 17). This cow service, it may be noted, is not done, as in the
case with occupational cattle rearers, as a job for payment or for the gain of milk and milk
products to be used as saleable commodities. The whole activity is just without any material
purpose and merely with an attitude that it is the best pastime, which helps them in the emulation
(3.6) of the cowherdly associates of Kṛṣṇa.

Secondly, the most frequent purpose, that is mentioned, during the invitation for any activity in Braj
Mandal is ras īṭā (‘taking,’ i.e., relishing ‘rasa’). A devotee invites the other devotee to go to a
temple, to participate in a festival; or to watch a Līlā performance saying, for example, āiye! āiye!
ras īṭāyē (please come! please come! please ‘take,’ i.e., relish rasa). Gaudiya Vaisnava’s explanation
for the localization of Ras Līlā to Braj Mandal can now be easily understood on the basis of the
centrality of Līlā and rasa concepts, in Gaudiya vaisnava theology (3.10). As mentioned in the
previous Chapter (3.5.1), for Gaudiya Vaisnava’s too, Braj Mandal is the same Braj Mandal of Bhāgavata
Purāṇa. Thus, for the Gaudiya Vaisnava followers, all the transcendental loving affinities between
the selves as Selves and Bhagavan take place in Braj Mandal eternally and it is for the devotee to
develop an ability to See’ them. It is believed that those devotees who attain the self fulfilment in
the form of ātma self knowledge can ‘See’ such happenings in Braj Mandal which remain invisible
for the ordinary devotees who are yet to attain this self fulfilment (3.5.1). Watching Ras Līlā
performances is one of the best means to develop such a self fulfilment according to the
followers Of Gaudiya Vaisnava school (3.6). The followers Of Gaudiya Vaisnava School also consider
that the simplicity and rusticity of Brajvasi way of life, when followed, are also part of the
emulation of the choosable self knowledges as they are “playful” self knowledges (3.6).
4.2. Norms of Ras Lila performances found in the daily life of Brajvasis.

In the last chapter, it was mentioned that watching the Ras Lila performances is only part of a daily routine of devotional activities for its audience. Brajvasis, whether travellers, residents of asram-s, shopkeepers or others, have a systematic daily routine which, in one form or the other, is centered around Radha Krsna devotion and keeps them engaged in devotion, round the clock. Brajvasis get up early in the morning (around 4 A.M), take their bath (some of them in river Yamuna on which lies the Vrindavan) and go to different temples (either of their choice or according to their cult affiliation or according to convenience), to attend mangala arati (literally, camphor flame refreshing, here, the early morning watching of the deities, freshly opened for public). Returning from the temple, some of them sit down to chant (jap) the names of Krsna (turning the beads in the hand) (Plates 13), some others participate in sankirtan, i.e., congregational singing of names and lyrics in praise of Radha and Krsna (plates 14 & 15) and others get engaged in their daily course of the study/recital of Radha Krsna bhakti literature (around 6 A.M. to 9 A.M)(plate 16) with occasional visits to temples by those of them who are interested in participating in some special daily services. Now, the Brajvasis prepare themselves for taking food. Those of them who have a vow to take only the food collected through begging from the other Radha Krsna devotees, go to beg and others who cook their own food, set off to cook their food. After this, most of the Brajvasis disperse to get engaged in the daily service chosen by them. Quite often, the service chosen for this is gosava, taking care of cows (plate 17). But some people prefer more chanting or singing or study of Radha Krsna bhakti literature for the day. Those of the Brajvasis who are engaged in jobs like working for asram-s and shopkeeping, consider these jobs as part of their Radha Krsna devotional service and get engaged in them (10 A.M to 5 or 8 P.M). These services are interrupted by a visit to a temple at noon, to participate in raj bhog (grand meal) service, afternoon full meal offered to Krsna. In the evening, Brajvasis collect again in temples for sandhya arati (literally evening camphor flame refreshing, here, evening watching of the deities)(6 P.M) and from there they disperse to take part in
13-17. The daily routing of Bravasi’s is one or the other activity of devotion to Radha and Krsna.  
13. A devotee of Gaurangdas babaii asrama engaged in chanting  
14. Devotees performing sankirtan (congregational chanting) at the samādhi (tomb) of Gopala Bhatta Goswami (an associate of Rupa and Sanatana) attached to Sri Radha Raman temple built by him.
15. A blind devotee loses himself in *kirtan* (singing the names of *Radha* and *Krṣṇa*) under a tree.

16. Residents of Gaurangadas *bābāji āśrama* (in Raman Reti) engaged in the *Bhagavat Pathan* (reading out *Bhagavata Purāṇa*). One of the residents is seen reading out, while the other two listening.
17. Haridas Shastriji, one of the rare surviving erudite traditional shastric scholars of Gaudiya vaisnava tradition, engaged in gőśeiva (serving cows).
Sources: 12-16 Researcher's own documentation. 17 Haridas Shastriji, Vrindavan.

18. A typical pravacan (discourse) session during the festival season. Purushottamdas Gosvami, on the elevated seat, is giving a lecture on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. The accompanying singer and orchestra, to the right of the dias, add devotional singing in between.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan
19 and 20. The audience respond with raised hands to the slogan *jay jay śrīradhē* during a *Bhāgavata* discourse.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthyan.
21. An event of collective ecstasy. **Purushottamdas Goswami**, the priest of **Radha Raman** temple (in front), conducting a **sankirtan** session. Devotees respond ecstatically experiencing freely and **variously**.

Source: Sri Chaitanya **Prem** Samsth, Vrindavan.
activities like *sankirtan* or discourses (*pravacan*) on *bhakti* literature or to *Līlā* performances during festival occasions. After meals, they go to bed after a few minutes of gossiping relaxation, where the gossip is, again, usually centered around their daily activities of *Rādhā* *Krṣṇa* devotion, or after a few minutes of chanting on the beads.

This is the daily routine of *Brajavāsī*-s except on festivals days like *janmastami* (the *birth/appearance* of *Krṣṇa* which falls in the month of August. See 3.5.1), *rādhāstami* (the *birth/appearance* of *Radha*, which falls fifteen days after *janmastami* in the month of August - September), *hārī* (festival of colours, which falls in the month of March), *huli yātra* (swing festival, which falls in the month of July - August), the *birth/appearance* and *death/disappearance* of *saints* of the respective *sampradaya*-s, during different periods of the year, when some additional activities such as *parikrama* (*circumambulation*) around holy places like *Vrindavan*, *Goverdhan hill* (in Mathura which is about 25 Kms from *Vrindavan*, which is considered by *Brajavāsī*-s as the same hill, which as discussed in 4.3.5.2.III, is lifted by *Krishna* with His hand, during His *Avatāra*) and *Braj Mandal*, and attending discourses in the *Bhāgavata saptaha*, a week long discourses (*pravacan*) on the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, delivered at various venues in and around *Vrindavan* (plates 18-20), are performed with increased mood of celebration, revelry and joy (plate 21).

The routine described above, is repeated everyday almost in the same way. For persons valuing change and variety in life, this routine looks to be strange. But for *Brajavāsī*-s, there is not a pinch of feeling of monotony or boredom found in doing the same thing repeatedly, day and night, through out the year. *Huberman* articulates the feeling of the non-*Brajavāsī* observers when he says,

"Each day follows, exactly like the preceding one, with no desire for change or hope for something better in the future" (*in Rosen*, 1992 : 125).
The attitude of Brajvasis towards all these activities is devoid of any material gain or purpose. All activities are looked at as the best way to vire away time, before they reach what they want to attain. This attitude of activities as ‘pastime’ is another important meaning of the word ‘Līlā as play’ (3.10). Almost all the Brajvasi-s share the feeling. They have nothing else to do than to participate in these pastimes, that is, ‘Līlā-s. The biographical information of several devotees settled in Braj as Brajvasi-s, collected during the present research work reveals that most of them were well off and busy, doing extremely well in their earning activities and later gave up their careers, for settling down in Braj. Huberman quotes Brooks as commenting about this attitude of Brajvasi-s as follows:

"History, progress, achievement, betterment, ideals, theories, and mass movements all belong to the world of time. But in this land, there is nothing but the Lord’s play, his "game" so to speak..." (in Rosen, 1992 :128).

Gelberg also expresses a similar feeling about the attitude of Brajvasi-s towards their daily activities when he says,

"People living in the earthly Vrindavan do not see themselves as participating in normal activities, but rather taking part in the esoteric drama completely arranged by Kṛṣṇa himself" (in Rosen, 1992 :13).

The word drama’ used by Gelberg is important and interesting. Obviously Gelberg refers to theatre in general by that word. He also refers to a feeling of amusing excitement and desired wonder by using the word ‘drama.’ This feeling of transportation into a spiritual plane of experience can be seen to be expressed by Brajvasi-s in their day to day expressions during their activities.

Best examples for such expressions can be found in the celebrations of festivals like janmāṣṭami, jhulan yātra, and holi, which are performed during the respective occasions. During janmāṣṭami,
Brajvāsī-ś collect at temples and wait for the moment of the birth of baby Kṛṣṇa (which is midnight on the janmāstami day). Once the moment of Kṛṣṇa’s birth arrives, there is a spurt of joy and its expressions and all the services which are performed for a new born baby, like bathing the baby, are enacted by the priest in the temple through offering special sacred bathing to the deities in the temple. The theatricallikeness in the rituals of the temple with the priest becoming the director, the deities, the actors and the devotees, the audience, is worth noting. The immobile and mute actors, which the deities are, are capable enough to become the characters in the experience of the audience called devotees. Right from the evening, there is a reverberating mood of celebrations. Devotees greet each other saying badnai ho (congratulations). Special songs called badhai (congratulation) songs are sung in the evenings throughout the week, ending with janmāstami (plates 22-23). The whole mood is that they are the cowherds, who gathered at the house yard of Nanda and Yaśoda, awaiting the birth of Kṛṣṇa. The deity is intensely felt and treated as a real new born baby and all the close affection is poured through various expressions by Brajvāsī-ś over the deities.

Thus, janmastami celebrations best illustrate the feeling of transportation experienced by the Brajvāsī-ś. It may be noted that this feeling makes the Brajvāsī-ś participate in the theatre of deity worship presented by the priest, by directly entering into the stage as actors’/characters’ breaking the play - audience barrier which otherwise exists during their daily visits to temples. A similar transportation and the merging of play - audience barrier can be seen in holi celebration, where the Brajvāsī-ś, apart from sprinkling colors on to each other, notably, only as a participation in a play (krē = sport) of holi with Śyām (the dark one, i.e., Kṛṣṇa), offer colors to the deities of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with the feeling of sprinkling colors on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa Themselves. This friendliness is another meaning of ‘playfulness’ which Brajvāsī-ś experience with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.

A similar evidence of transportation feeling can be seen in faeunjian yatra festival. In this festival
22 and 23. A badha Singing session inside Radha Raman temple during janmastami.

22. Lead singer is Purushottamdas Gosvami, one of the priest of the temple.

23. The lead singer in close-up, his left hand gesturing badha ho! (congratulations). The book in front of him is the book of badha songs.

Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan
Brajvāsī-ś swing the deities of Radha and Kṛṣṇa in jhūs- (swings) with a feeling that they are assisting Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in their conjugal pastimes.

If these festival participations transport the Brajvāsī-ś into the mythological time of occurrence of the respective episodes of Kṛṣṇa’s life, there is another activity which transports them into the place of occurrence of the activities. It is the pārkrāma (circumambulation) mentioned above, in which this happens. In this activity, Brajvāsī-ś go around either Vrindavan shrine (covering about 5 miles) or the Goverdhan hill (covering about 14 miles) or the entire Braj Mandal (covering about 128 miles) or around each of them on separate occasions. Since different spots, which they come across in this going around, are considered to be the actual places where Radha and Kṛṣṇa performed their pastimes in the past, Brajvāsī-ś again get transported into those activities and become ecstatic.

This feeling of ecstasy and manifestation of involuntary responses like tears, screaming and crying loud chants of the names of Radha and Kṛṣṇa are found throughout these daily and festival time activities of Brajvāsī-ś. These expressions are, obviously, indicators of the intensity of transportation experienced by them. This intensity of experience, though is mainly rooted in the feeling of being at the actual place and/or time of Radha and Kṛṣṇa and Their activities, and to an extent, in the reinforcement effected by a long and continuous repetition of activities, another factor can be seen to be contributing to this intensity. It is the collective participation of Brajvāsī-ś in most of these activities and the emotional intensification such a collectivity generates. Brajvāsī-ś enjoy this transportation and resultant ecstatic emotions and the collective relishing of them.

In fact, that is what is expressed in their inviting each other to come and take Vas’ ras lēna (4.1)- and in their congratulating each other. It is for this bliss and for nothing else, that they participate
in all the Brajvāsi activities. It is in this sense that the whole Brajvāsi life is just playful' (3.5).

From a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava point of view, this daily routine is the execution of the principle of always remembering Bhagavān and never forgetting Him (3.9) and an exercise of emulation of the āśīs self knowledge through the method suggested by Rupa in the form of sixty four items of bhakti (3.9). All the key concepts of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology like rasa and Līlā, in both the senses of closeness and 'acting without purpose' (3.5 & 3.10), can be seen to be embedded in all the activities of Brajvāsi life.

It is with this background of a daily routine that a Brajvāsi becomes an audience of Ras Līlā performances, which, as mentioned above (3.9), are, in fact, only one of these items of routine for them

Producers, directors, actors and audience, all come from those Brajvāsi-s sharing this culture all the time. This way Ras Līlā shares another feature of Natya, i.e., all the participants in the performance share the worldview presented in the performance. If in Nātya for Tnvarga, the central notion of that culture is dharma (2.7), in Līlā-s, the participants share the culture of which prīti (transcendental love beyond Tnvarga), rasa and Līlā are the key concepts (3.5). Because of this reason, rāsdhārī-s (literally, those who hold the Ras, here, directors of Ras Līlā-s) are supposed to have a saintly personality and are usually referred with a prefix Svāmī (saint). For example, some of the well known rāsdhārī-s of contemporary Ras LIB theatre are referred to as Svāmī Har Govind, Svāmī Ram Svānup, and Svāmī Fateh Krishna (plate 24).

The script of Ras Līlā-s is said to have evolved from the texts of the sixteenth century poet-saints like Svāmī Haridas, Svāmī Hita Hāṅvams, and Surdas. Even today, most of the contents of Ras Līlā, like songs and basic plots are chosen from the literature composed, again, by saints
24. Fateh Kṛṣṇa, one of the rāsdhārī-ś. Rāsdhārī-ś are respected as Svāmī-ś. The costume represents him as a saint. (see intro. & 5.1).
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan.

25. Child performers in the middle of a make up session. The squatting boy is being asked to face the camera, while he shies in blushes to do so. These boys are locals of braj mandal and hence rural in culture.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan.
mentioned above and the later saints like Caca Vrindavandas, Nagaridas Babaj, Bhagavat Rasik and Albeli Ali (18th. cen.), and Narayan Svami, and Lalita Madhuri (19th. cen.) (Hein, 1972:155). Even the actors are chosen from among the Brahasi-s and the reason mentioned by the Ras Uli groups for this choice of actors is quoted by Hein as follows:

"And who are more qualified than the actors of the Braj country, Krishna’s fellow countrymen and neighbours, to present these scenes authentically?" (1972:131).

One of the most interesting aspects of Ras Liśa performance production is that roles like Radha, Kṛṣṇa, gopa-s and gopi-s are essentially played by boys below the age of sixteen only (plate 25). This is said to be done for the sake of avoiding interference on the part of the actors, of their sexual urges, with their performances, as most of the themes deal with ‘conjugal’ affairs of Rādhā and kr. This care to avoid sexual stimuli is manifest even in the separation of male and female audience into two different physical spaces in front of the stage.

On the whole, all the participants including the audience being Brahasi-s with the daily routine described above, bringing all the key concepts of Gaudīya Vaisnava poetics such as priti, rasa and Liśa into Ras Uli performances.

4.3. The Format of Ras Liśa: Ras Liśas Nātya adapted to Braj Culture.

Ras Uli performances, at a broader level, are part of traditional Indian theatre and share the features of traditional Indian theatre along with the other forms of it found all over India. But the distinction of Ras Liśa performances can be seen to be rooted in the localization of Ras Liśa performances to Braj and the adaptation of these performances to the local culture. How the features of Ras Liśa performances are complimented by the features of the general Braj culture can
be understood only by taking an elaborate look at the details of the Rāsūrn performances. The following section is devoted to this purpose.

4.3.1. **Origin and components of Rāsūrn performances.**

The past researchers like Vasant Yamadagni, Ramnarayan Agrawal and Prabhudayal Mital have identified that the present form of Rāsūrn performances has evolved during the past 400-450 years. These scholars observed that the devotees of Vrindavan of the 15th-16th centuries who belonged to various Sampradāyas such as Vallabha, Nimbārka, Radha Vallabha, and Gaudiya took everything that was available to them, such as Vaiḍānta, art, poetry, music, sculpture, dance and theatre, and transformed them for their devotional purpose. And Rāsūrn was one of their creations and a most important form of devotional practice for them. However, some of these scholars hold that theatre with Kṛṣṇa themes could be older. For example, Hein opines that

"...the stage tradition of the Kṛṣṇa cult of Māhrā goes back to origins as old as those of any known theatre of India" (1972: 276).

He argues that Kṛṣṇa plays in vernacular flourished in the 2nd cen. B.C. and thus the form which is seen now is a modified version of the older forms which were already available for the saints. (see Hein, 1972: Ch. 9 and Agrawal, 1981: part 1, for a discussion on the history of theatre with Kṛṣṇa themes).

Devotees of different Sampradāyas claim the origin of the present day Rāsūrn to a saint connected with their own Sampradaya (see Agrawal, 1981: Part 1. Ch 8, for a discussion of the origin of sixteenth century Rās). Each of them quote certain legends which are recorded in some of the works such as Rāṣ Sarasvata of rāśchārī Radha Kṛṣṇa (1872), which involve the names of the saint of their Sampradāya. (For Rāṣ Sarasvata's account of the origin of sixteenth century Rāsūrn
theatre, see Hein, 1972 : 224-5, Mital, 1983 : 49-53, and Jamadagni, 1980 : 154). Whatever Sampradāya the devotees may belong to, for all these devotees, participation in the Ras Līlā performances is the most important aspect of devotional service. Once they become part of the audience, the individual identities of their Sampradāyas get submerged under the broad and dominant single identity, the ‘rasā’ - the relisher of the Līlās.

The forthcoming analysis of the performance of Līlā-s is based on the participant observation during the years 1993-1997. The following description is of the average of common features of various versions of performances of Ras Līlā-done in Vrindavan by various Ras mandal-s (Ras Groups).

A Ras Līlā-performance of each day, in fact, has two parts apart from the margāśarana (invocation ritual). The first part is Ras which consists of a routine dance sequence which is the enactment of the dance performed by Kṛṣṇa with Radha and the gopi-s. This is, more often, called nitya Ras (eternal Ras), probably based on the idea that Kṛṣṇa performs such a dance as part of His eternal activity in Gokula. The tradition originally began with the performance of nitya Ras only, i.e., originally, this dance was performed everyday in the sixteenth century by the saints of Vrindavan. This, probably, is another reason, why it is called nitya Ras (here, daily Ras). Just as the conception of the devotees, of themselves as nitya Kṛṣṇa das (eternal servant of Kṛṣṇa) (3.5) led to their daily activities such as visiting temples, reading the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and performing sankīrtan among other things (3.9 & 4.2), this nitya Kṛṣṇa das identity probably led to the performance of and participation in Ras everyday.

The second part of the Ras Līlā performances, that is, Līlā, is a story form play.’ According to Varadapande, the Līlā part was introduced by a Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava saint called Narayana Bhatta (1982 : 52). Since then both Ras and Līlā were performed by the devotees everyday. According
to the *bhakti* traditions of Vrindavan, *Krṣna* performs the other activities too, eternally (For example, *Gōvinda Līlāmṛta* by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava scholar *Krishnadasa Kaviraja* describes certain *Līlā*-s and calls them the eternal *Līlā*-s of *Krṣna*). Probably, this is why they considered it appropriate to add *Līlā* part to the *Ras* part. The devotees developed a format of performance in which they performed *Ras* everyday along with a new episode selected from the *Līlā*-s of *Krṣna* after the *Ras*. Each *Ras Līlā* performance, in *fact*, is an independent entity. Though the *Ras Līlā* performances of all the forty days together form a cycle, a body, except for the first and the last few *Līlā*-s, the *order* of the *Ras Līlā* performances within the body is not *fixed*.

At a broader level, the every day performance of *Ras Līlā*-s has almost disappeared except at two not so crowded places called Bansivat and Topi Kunj. After the extinction of the habit of the daily performance of *Ras Līlā*-s, they are now performed during the festival seasons in Vrindavan. The choice of festivals as the occasion to perform the *Līlā*-s may be seen to be part of the tradition. Abhinava too considers the festival time as the best occasion for the performance of *Nāṭya* (of which *Līlā* is a kind). As mentioned earlier (4.2), this has also got to do with the transportation of the participants into the time of occurrence of the activities depicted in the *Ras Līlā*-s, since, usually, the *LIB* with which the festival is connected is performed on the respective festival day. *Ras Līlā*-s are performed for the longest duration in the period generally beginning with the New moon in the month of *Sravaṇa* (which generally falls in June-July) to the eighth day of waning half of *Bhādrapada* (which generally falls in July-August). However, different *mandai*-s start *Līlā*-s performances on different days. The most famous groups perform them for about forty days extending to a few days *after Janmāstami* (the *birth/appearance* day of *Krṣna*) or even *up to Radhāstami* (the *birth/appearance* day of *Radha*). There are, at least, a dozen places in Vrindavan where *Līlā*-s are held during this festival period. Another important time for *Līlā* performances occurs during the *Hūrī* festival, which is also the appearance day of *Chaitanya*. Apart from these two times there are several other festive seasons such as the
month of *kārtika* (October - November) and a few special days which occasion the performances of *Liśā-s*. These festivals, as mentioned above (4.2), are special times which allow the devotees to spontaneously enter the *time* of the *Liśā-s*.

The *Rās Liśā-s* are rich in poetry, music, dance, speech and other elements required to make a theatrical performance pleasurable both as a visual and auditory experience (according to *Nāṭya*) (2.2.2). *Ras Liśā* shares the features of *Natya* described in the *Nāṭya Śāstra*, namely, being a dance theatre and a composite art performance incorporating several skills as said in the verses of the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (1.116-117) such as "śāstra (scripture), 'art,' 'craft' and all branches of learning' different arts and actions." The theoretical fitness of *Liśā* within the framework of *Natya* has already been discussed in the last chapter (3.6). The technical similarity between *Natya* and *Liśā*, being discussed here, can be understood on that basis.

Scholars hold that though *Rās Liśā-s* are written in the vernacular *Braj* language, their standard cannot be considered as being inferior to Sanskrit theatre. Hein, for example, says,

"When one considers their function in the regional culture one realizes that one should not speak of them as the rustic folk drama' as some *modern* Indian writers of bygone generations have done. The dignity of the dramas [sic] approaches that of literature, with which they have a close connection. The stage people of Braj are literate, and they or their playwrights draw upon the society's recognized religious writings - not on its Sanskrit scripture, true, but on the transformation of the Sanskrit heritage in Hindi works of the highest literary understanding. They do not cater to the dead levels of mass tastes, but inculcate traditional ideals which are approached by the society's honoured classes. Their dramas [sic] are refined, in most or all senses of that word" (1972 : 273).

Elsewhere he notes,
"What makes the rāṣīla remarkable is the treasure of literature on which it draws, the refinement of language and feeling which it derives from generations of literate stage people, and its consequent power to attract and influence relatively sophisticated and cultured audience" (1972 :157).

As mentioned earlier (4.1), this use of Braj language is part of the adaptation of Braj culture, and as mentioned earlier (4.1), this is part of the affinity for closeness, based on the reasons such as simplicity, rusticity and the resultant playful (non-pompous) feeling and most importantly, the consideration that it is Kṛṣṇa's own language.

In fact, according to Agrawal, one cannot expect Rās Liṅga-s without the Braj language. He says that if Rās Liṅga theatre leaves Braj language and starts using khadi baulī (Hindi used in North Indian states like UP and Delhi) then it would definitely lose its popularity (1981 : 267).

The dance appears like Kathak but rāsdhāri-s say that it is different. For them, it is the Rās style of dance (plates 26-27). They argue that, in fact, it is Kathak which borrowed a few steps from Rās and hence both appear similar. Both Agrawal (1981 : 241) and Mital (1983 : 109) hold the same opinion and conclude that Rās is much older than Kathak. More conspicuous than this similarity with Kathak is folk styles adapted in the dances used in Rās Liṅga performances (plate 28). The dance consists, mostly, of delicate steps as almost all the Liṅga performances show the loving pastimes of Kṛṣṇa and His associates. These are performed, mostly, by Radha, Kṛṣṇa and Their young cowherd associates. The children are trained in the dance regularly.

The songs are taken from the Braj devotional poetry written by the saints such as Surdas and others mentioned earlier (4.2). Even though the poetry is very sophisticated, the child actors have the ability to render the verses with amazing clarity. They are trained too in the art of
26 and 27. Such postures in \textit{Rās Līlā} dances have a classical touch.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan.
28. A circular dance by Kṛṣṇa and cowherd boys.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan.

29. The samajis (the orchestra) of a Rās performance. The lead singer standing in front of the podium is Fateh Krishna. (Intro. & 5.1), the rāsdhūri of the team. Also note the use of electronic gadgets (right projecting from the wing curtains) in contemporary Rās performances (see fn.17).
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan
rendering the poetry too by the rasdhari-s. Singers in most cases are rasdhari-s (the directors) themselves and are usually seated with the instrumentalists on the left side of the performers. Senior members, such as Svāmi Śrīram, are given an elevated seat or sometimes they even stand up and sing. The singers play the Harmonium in accompanyment to their song. Usually, there are one or two accompanyists who repeat the lines which the lead singer has sung. Pakhavāj, a North Indian instrument, is used for the drupad style of songs as a percussion accompaniment. For Hindustani light classical style of songs, tabī is used. Flute is used as melody accompaniment. Jhāṛḥ (big cymbals) are used for marking out the important beats of the rhythmic cycle (τā)(plate 29). Earlier sārangī, a stringed instrument, was used which has the capability of producing a continuous and melodious music. But due to lack of players, it is no longer in use now. Various styles of singing are used such as drupad, ṭhumri, dadra, kavīta, savaiyyā and eōkhand (folk metres). The songs are composed in the various raga-s and syllables such as tha thai are interspersed in the songs to give rhythmic support to the dances. (See Thielemann, 1998, for more details on the music of Rās Līlā-s).

Since taking part in sankirtan, badhai and other kinds of congregational singing is a regular practice among the devotees, the singers develop an expertise in singing devotional music and rendering Brāhmaṇ poetry. The devotees are initiated, right from the childhood, into these activities, due to which they develop a natural flair for devotional singing. In fact the singing of devotional songs becomes a second nature to the devotees. The belief that Kṛṣṇa and the gopi-s themselves are musicians, makes the devotees to take intense pleasure in singing.

The singers sing in high pitched mellifluous voices. There are two reasons for singing in this high pitch. In the olden days, there was no microphone system available. Since the singers are trained to sing to a huge audience, they are used to singing in a loud and high pitched voice. Now, with the introduction of microphones, the singers sing softly suitable for the microphone
even though they continue to sing in high pitch from force of habit. The other reason is as follows. Most of the *Līlā*-śrevolve around child characters. The range of the children (who also sing as they play their parts) is usually four or five notes higher than the normal male range. In Western musical terminology their tonic pitch is between F# and Ab (four and half to five and a half in Carnatic musical terminology and *kāṭi tin*, i.e., black three to *kāṭi car*, i.e., black four in Hindustani musical terminology). So, to match this pitch, the singers have to start high. If there are any older actors, who can not take high notes, they sing one octave lower. Earlier the actors also spoke in high pitched voices. Now that they have adapted to the microphone system, they speak their lines in their natural pitch.

The distinction of *Rāṣasi Līlā*, in its greater leaning towards folk rather than classical features of Indian art, as has been noted in the use of *Braj* dialect, folk dances, folk music, and folk style of enactment, can also be understood on the basis of this theoretical discrimination discussed in the last chapter. It may also be noted that all these folk, rural and rustic features of *Ras Līlā* performances are, in fact, part of the adaptation of the devotees settled in *Braj* Mandal to *Braj* culture. As mentioned earlier (4.1), this adaptation is rooted in the affinity for playful, i.e., non-pompous and closeness inspiring features for the devotees of *Rādhā* and *Kṛṣṇa*. And as noted earlier (4.1), for the followers of *Gaudiya Vaisnava* school, this is in accordance with their scheme of choice of self knowledges and their consideration of closeness-inspiring and non-pompous features as the most choosable features (3.5.3 & 4.1).

### 4.3.2. The pre-stage of *Rāṣasi Līlā* performances: *Līla* as a devotional ritual.

It has been discussed in the second chapter (2.7.2) that the poetics of *Nāṭya* considered that *Nāṭya* should not begin without worshiping the gods in the *pre-presentational* ritual (*pūraṇarīga vṛtta*) and the Sanskrit poets followed this ritual by composing *nandi* at the beginning of their plays.
in the glory of the gods. A similar Sanskrit verse is found in Natya for Jnāna also. The Ras Līlā performances, being rooted in the Vedic worldview, follow the rule of including the pre-presentation ritual. A Ras Līlā performance begins with a ritual of offering hymns in praise of Radha and Kṛṣṇa called mangalacarana (invocation ritual).

During the mangalacarana, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are seen sitting on the simhasana (throne) indicating Kṛṣṇa as the Absolute Himself and Radha as His consort (3.5.3). The closest associates and hand maidens of Radha, the eight sakhi-s (3.5.3), are seen engaged in Their service. Two of them take up camara-s (hand-made fan with silk tassels or with hand-made cloth laced with peacock feathers) and fan Radha and Kṛṣṇa. Sometimes, the renounced mendicants (bābāji-s) can also be seen fanning Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with camara (plate 30). This ritual is carried to the stage from the temple, where the deities are served in this manner (plate 31).

The scene is supposed to be located on a circular area (Mandal) in the forests of Gosiṅka, which, as mentioned in the last chapter (3.5), is considered as the eternal abode of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. This arrangement, according to Varadapande, is based on the description of the pastimes of Kṛṣṇa in the Bramha Vaivarta Purāṇa. Varadapande describes the scene from the Bramha Vaivarta Parāṇa as follows:

"It says that the open-air Ras stage was situated on the bank of a beautiful lake - Kridasarovara [a lake for play] - in the Vrindavana forests. Being circular in shape it was called Ras Mandalam: Vartulakaram Tatraiva Ras Mandalam.' The circular dance floor was spacious Susvistama', of equal level all over Susama', and soft 'Susnigdham'. It was decorated with green mango leaves, garlands of jasmine, coconuts and banana plants. Mangala Ghatas, auspicious pitchers full of water, were kept at appropriate places. There was also a jewel
30. Sripad bābājī, one of the most familiar devotees of Vrindavan, fanning Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with camara during a Ras performance.

Note treating the performers as dieties.

Source: Svāmī Ram Svarup, rāsdhāriṇī of Sri Krishna Līla Samsthan, Vrindavan.

31. Kṛṣṇa in His intimate company with Rādhā on simhāsana, while the sākhi-s arrange for their enjoyment. The picture is found abundantly in paintings, calenders and photo frames all over Braj Mandal. Brajāsī-s endeavour to get an entry as sākhi-s into this scene of Gālīka (3.5.3).

Compare with plate 32.

Source: International Society for Kṛṣṇa Consciousness, Vrindavan.
The above locale is suggested in the Ras Līā performances through attractive backdrops rich in colour. The popular Ras mandai-s which find wealthy patrons for their shows, decorate the stage with attractive curtains and also provide excellent lighting.

The characters are dressed in the same way as the deities in the temples are dressed in Vrindavan. Kṛṣṇa wears pīṭāmbara - a yellow dhoti and kati kacanī - a full high waisted shirt made of silk. He wears mor mukut - a crown with a peacock plume, a small turban called pag on the head, tulasi mālā (beads made of sacred basil) around the neck, a garland called bajayanti mālā (made of wild fragrant flowers and leaves), ghūṅgu Ṽ - anklets with small beads that make a tinkling sound around His ankles, and of course flute in His hand. Rādhā also wears a crown which is a jeweled tiara. She and Her sakhi-s wear necklaces, artificial hair with long plaits, a nose pendant (būjak), ear rings (kuṇḍal) and garlands. They wear lehnga-s (thick clothed skirts) and veils that cover half of their heads. Another conspicuous aspect of the costume of the Ras Līā performers is the face make up, with alternative dotted decorations on the cheeks and dotted fringes along the eyebrows, usually made up of sandal paste. The Ras mandai-s have their own tailors (who stitch a variety of costumes for Radha and her Sakhī-s, and Kṛṣṇa) and a śīrgārī (make up man).

One of the most important features of Līā-s is that the characters are considered and treated as Radha and Kṛṣṇa Themselves and are referred to as svāru-p-s, i.e, own forms (of the deities). This can be seen to be happening in the case of deities in the temples also. Thus, the actors on the stage can be seen to be treated on par with the deities in the temple. The devotees believe that the real characters (Kṛṣṇa and His associates) enter into the actors while they are performing. They feel that Kṛṣṇa and His associates have kindly appeared before them on the stage to present to them their Līā-s' (from a speech given by rāsdhāri Kishan Lal, rāsdhān of Sri
32 and 33. Love for Kṛṣṇa spreads on to the Kṛṣṇa role playing performer. The performer becomes a star (32) and a pet (33). In 32, the audience try to have a photo with Kṛṣṇa. In 33, the audience lift Kṛṣṇa in their arms affectionately.

Sources: Plate 32 Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan. Plate 33 Svāmī Ram Prasad, rāsdhānī of Braj Ras Līla Mandal, Vrindavan.
34. One of the devotees prostrating in front of the Kṛṣṇa role player during one of the US performances. (Orchestra and a section of the audience are also seen).

Note treating the performers as deities.

Source: Svāmī Bade Thakur (Dr. Krishna Vallabhu), Krishnanchal Lok Kalabharati, Vrindavan.
Haribol Ras mandai, belonging to Vallabha Sampadbāya, at the beginning of a Ras Līlī performance, 4th August 1995. Even outside of the theatre the children are addressed as thākurī (Master) and thākurāni (Mistress) by the local people, which is the way they often address the deities (plates 32-33).

The members of the orchestra (called samāj) and rasdhari offer prostrated obeisances (dandavat-s) to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, who are seated on the throne, to take their permission to start the performance. Then they go to their respective places. Even though the singers/directors are guru-s (teachers) and elders (in fact, Svāmi Fateh Krishna is the father of the actor who plays Kṛṣṇa for his mandaii and Svāmi Sriram is the guru of Fateh Krishna himself), they pay respects to the characters by prostrating before them, at the beginning of the performance.

The audience too offer obeisances before settling down (plate 34). It is considered very offensive, an insult to the tradition of Ras Līlī, if they do not do this. Agrawal says that earlier the audience used to stand up with folded hands when Ras Līlī was being performed and would sit only when the characters sat on the simhāsana (1981: 156).

The mangalācaraṇa ritual consists of singing various verses in Sanskrit and in Braj, the glory of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the associates of Kṛṣṇa and the places related to Him. The common verse sung in the glory of Kṛṣṇa is:

śrī brajāraj ki mūn var gaivaul sing the glories of the king of Braj.

śrī lālī lālā vara garyaul sing the glories of one who is dear to Radha (who is called lālī: the dear one)

śnbraj kau jīvāna dhan gaivaul sing the glories of the wealth of life of Braj.

bhaktanakau mana bhamatau gaytyell sing the glories of one who gives pleasure to his devotees.
35. A scene during *mangāścarana* (invocation ritual), which is a prelude to a *Ras Liśṭa* performance. One of the *Sakhi-s* sings and offers *arati*, as others sing with Her. Compare with plate 36. Note the recreation of an iconic picture in theatre. (For the significance of the scene ref. 3.5.3).
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan

36. Sripad *babāji*, one of the most familiar devotees of Vrindavan, offering *arati* to *Rādhā* and *Kṛṣṇa* during a *Ras* performance. Note treating the performers as *dieties*
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan.
The other common songs in mahagaiacarana include songs singing in the glory of Radhā and Kṛṣṇa in yugal vandana (yugal = couple, vandana = prayers), of gopī-s in gopīvandana, of the spiritual master in guru vandana (guru = the spiritual master), of the place of performance in Ras sthai vandana (sthai = place), and of Vrindavan in dhām vandana (dhām = shrine).

Then an arati (a kind of devotional song associated with camphor flame refreshing) on Kṛṣṇa is sung by the samājī-s in the same way as in temples, which is taken up by the sakhi-s. The beginning of the song is:

arati kunja bhāri kil arati to the wanderer in the groves
ki girvar Kṛṣṇa murari kil [to that mountainholding Kṛṣṇa, Muru’s enemy.]

gale me vaijayanti mālā adorned in the neck by the vaijayanti garland

bajāvi murali madhur balāl the boy who plays on the flute sweetly.

sravana me kundal jhalakālai in the ears the earrings glittering.

Wanda ke nanda hi nandalal Nanda’s dear lad who pleases Nanda.

ki gindham Kṛṣna muraś kil [to that mountainholding Kṛṣṇa, Muru’s enemy]
The remaining part of the song is also a sequence of similar glorifications.

As the arati is sung, a sakhi carries a brass plate containing earthen lamps of camphor flame, takes it around the faces of Radha and Kṛṣṇa in order to invoke the mercy of the deities into the light (plate 35-36), which is then passed on to one of the members of the mandālī, who then carries it to everyone in the audience. The members of the audience touch the palms to the fire and then press it to their eyes. This act of the audience represents receiving the mercy of the deities. (See Agrawal, 1981: 157-160, for a detailed description of the margaiacarana).

Then each of the sakhi-s comes before the microphone and sings a few verses in Sanskrit, gloryfying Radhā and Kṛṣṇa (who adorn the simhasana) and repeats them in Braj dialect so that the
audience understand the meaning. While one sakni recites her verse in praise of Radhā and Krishna, the other sakhi-s say in a chorus jay ho (all glories). One of the verses sung by the sakhi-Sis:

Just before us in Vrindavan some wonderful, inexplicable thing [anivacaniya vastu] is shining. Believe me; a blue lotus and a yellow lotus are sprouting or two moons with sixty four kaal-s [parts] are rising. One is a golden moon [gaura candra. Radha has a golden complexion] and the other is dark moon [Krṣna candra. Krṣna's complexion is dark]. In other places the lotus is on the earth and the moon is in the sky. But in Vrindavan dhām [shrine] both the lotus and the moon have risen simultaneously at one place on the earth. And look at this wonder sakhi-s. The two; moon and lotus are making each other happy experiencing the bliss. (See Agrawal, 1981 : 160-64 and Hawley, 1981 : 167-170, for a detailed description of the glories sung by the sakhi-Sis).

All the songs are sung in light classical Hindustani raga-s. The mangaiacarana takes about fifteen minutes and gives time for the audience to settle down.

Thus, it may be noted that though this mangaiacarana ritual in many ways is similar to the nandi of Natya for Trtvarga and a similar prepresentational ritual in Natya for Jnana (2.7.2), it has several distinct features of its own. Firstly, since the performers see Krṣna as the Absolute, who presides even over the gods, it is He who is glorified in the mangaiacarana. Secondly, in the case of Ras Liīā performances, the subject whose themes are performed and the deity who is glorified are one, i.e., Krṣna. Thirdly, in the case of Ras Liīā performances, the deities who are glorified are present on the stage itself, in the form of characters. However, it may be noted that just as the performance of Natya for Trtvarga/Jñāna itself can be considered as yajna performed for Trtvarga/Jñāna (2.7), Liīā performance can also be considered as a yajna performed for the attainment of Priti.
4.3.3. **Maharas Liia, the genesis, the prototype and matrix of the daily Rās Liīā-s.**

On one of the days *during* the forty day festival, usually on a *pumima* (full moon day which fell on the tenth of August in 1995) and on the *sarat pumima* (full moon day in the month of *kartika*, i.e., October - November which fell on seventh of November in 1995) of every year, a special *us* called *Maharas Liīā* is performed by the *Rās mandai-s*. (According to the *Bhagavata Purāṇa X.29.1-2*, Kṛṣṇa performed His phenomenal *Maharas* on *sarat pumima* on the banks of the *Yamuna*).

This *US* was composed in the middle of this century (Hawley, 1992 : 148). Though, this *US*, like any other *Liīā-s*, is an enactment of an activity performed by Kṛṣṇa with His cowherd associates in *Vṛndāvana*, it acquired its special significance for three reasons. Of course, it is a *Liīā* which involves *Rās* dance (whereas, the other *Liīā-s* are separated from *Ras* dance). But the first reason for its significance is that, this is supposed to be the presentation of the *um* believed to be the first *Ras US* performance. Secondly, this has a format from which the general format of all *Rās Liīā* performances can be seen to be derived (Hawley, 1992 : 149). In fact even the cycle of *Rās Liīā* performances can be seen to be only an elaboration of a *Mahārās Liīā*. Thirdly, this *Liīā* has a charming and fantastic quality of the dance which is presented during this performance.

This *US* shows Kṛṣṇa playing the flute to attract the *gōpī-s* from their respective homes to dance the *Ras* (circle dance) with Him. The *gōpī-s*, though engaged in their household duties, with their minds being fixed on *Kṛṣṇa*, can hear *Kṛṣṇa* calling them. They leave their work and run to *Kṛṣṇa* in an intoxicated condition to join Him in the ecstatic *Ras* dance in the forests of *Vṛndāvana*. While performing the *Ras* dance with the *gōpī-s* in the forest groves of *Vṛndāvana*, Kṛṣṇa suddenly disappears because they have become proud of His company. The *gōpī-s*, who are in the peak of their ecstasy, can not tolerate this separation. They search every grove, speak to
37. *Mahārās* (the great circle) dance. Each pair in the circle has a *Kṛṣṇa* with a *gopi*. At the center are *Radha* and *Kṛṣṇa*.

Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan.
trees and the deer in desperation ask every bird and animal if they have seen Krsna. They find that He has gone away with Radha. After spending some time with Radha, Krsna finds that she too is proud and so He vanishes from there as well. The gopi-s who come there looking for Him find Rādhā who is shocked at the disappearance of Krsna.

Then Radha and the gopi-s begin imitating the pastimes of Krsna, because of extreme pain of separation they feel for Him. One of the gopi-s becomes Krsna. Others take her as Krsna Himself and start taking other roles and perform all the Līlās which Kṛṣṇa performed with them."

As the gopi-s continue this imitation, Kṛṣṇa appears among them, pleased by their transcendental love for Him. After the re-union, Kṛṣṇa dances Rās with the gopi-s. This is the longest of all the Līlās and the most festive. The performance lasts about six hours. Radha and Kṛṣṇa of various groups (mandaii-s) are invited. Different pairs of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa perform Ras with different patterns of dances peculiar to that mandaii. When a pair from a particular mandaii dances, the rāsdhāri of that mandaii sings the songs describing Ras. At the end of this, all the Kṛṣṇa-s and gopi-s from the different groups form a circle. Each Kṛṣṇa is seen paired with two gopi-s with Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa of the host group in the middle of the circle. This dance is called Mahārās (the great circle dance) (Plate 37). Thus, it can be seen that unlike the other Līlā-s where a story without dance is presented, Mahārās Līlā is a story involving dance itself.

The Ras Līlā-s, which are performed on each of these forty days, follow the pattern of this Līlā. Every day, the performance shows the Ras part of the Ras Līḷā in which Kṛṣṇa performs Rās dance with the Rādhā and gopi-s. At the end of the Ras the curtain closes and raises again for the us part of the Ras Līḷā performance. This can be understood as an imitation of Kṛṣṇa Līḷā by the gopi-s. So what the actors present in Ras Līḷā-s, is the imitation of the imitation by the gopi-s.
Hawley observes,

"What Krsna, Radha, and the gopis do on stage in modem-day Brindavan is really just an imitation [anukaran] of what the gopis did in an archetypal past - in illo tempore - and that action is understood as the Bhāgavata Purāṇa reports it" (Hawley, 1992:149).

It can be seen that for the devotees of Vrindavan, who choose to emulate the self knowledge of the gopi-sto attain their kind of transcendental love for Krsna, the emulation of the imitative play of the gopis is the most choosable theatrical play. The purpose of Bravasi-s in performing this theatrical 'play' is the same as that of the gopis during their imitation of Krsna's activities which is to 'regain' the 'lost' company of Krsna.

Thus, it can be observed that on the one hand, Mahārāsa Lilā of the Bhagavata Purāṇa is believed to be the origin of Ras Lilā performances by the participants and as such, the description of Mahārāsa Lilā in the Bhagavata Purāṇa, serves as a model for the entire body of Ras Lilā performances. Further, the one day performance of Mahāra Lilā can be seen as a microcosm of the entire body of Ras Lilā performances or reciprocally the entire body of Ras Lilā performance can be seen as a Mahārāsa Lilā performance spread over forty days.

4.3.4. Ras, the non-narrative and the most choosable play.

The Ras, which as mentioned above (4.3.1), is performed everyday as the first part of the Ras us performances, has a different format than its presentation in the middle of a Mahārāsa Lilā performance. If in the middle of the Mahārāsa Lilā performance the Ras begins with Krsna's invitation on flute to gopi-s (4.3.3), in the everyday Ras performances, Krsna is shown sitting with Radhā on a simhāsana (throne).
After the margalācaraṇa the sakhi-s go near the simhāsana and make a request to Radha and Kṛśna:

he sri priyā pritanjū, apke nitya ras vilas ki samay hay gayau hay. so kripā kar ras mandal me padhar kei, ap sukh pāva. tatha sakhi parvār kō sukh dec.

Yeh lover [Radha] and beloved [Kṛśna] time is up now for your daily 'play' of Ras. As such, kindly adorn the stage of the Ras, enjoy the Wiss and give us, the group of girlfriends, the same Wiss.

Then Kṛśna looks at Radha and requests her:

he kisōrī/u. apke nitya ras vīhar kausamay hayi gayau hay. so kripā karike ras mandal me padharau.

Yeh My dear juvenile girl! Time is up now for your daily 'play' of Ras. As such, kindly adorn the stage of the Rās.

Rādhā agrees to His request and They both come down to the stage front which represents the Rās Mandal [dance floor].

The singers sing a pada (poem) describing the Rās dance to which Radha, Kṛśna and the sakhi-s dance simultaneously.

The dance consists of many different kinds of sequences (about five to ten variations), which are repeated everyday. A circle dance is performed by characters holding hands to form a circle and by revolving in circles. In some sequences, the characters stand side by side, to make two lines along the two side wings of the stage and make dancing movements in opposite directions, to exchange their positions. Similar simple sequences incorporating folk dance patterns are performed (plates 38-39). (See Hein, 1972: 146-50, for a description of different kinds of dances used in Ras).

Some mandal-s perform a special dance called the mor nac (the dance of peacock) regularly. Kṛśna dances, holding an open plume shaped bunch of peacock feathers tied in to His waist,
38 and 39. Various kinds of dance configurations employed in Rās Liā performances.

38. Flower like dance with sticks.

39. Another circular dance by Kṛṣṇa and gopi-s. Note rotation along with revolution.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan
40. Môr Nāc (the peacock dance). The peacock dance performed by Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa dances holding an open plume shaped feathers tied in to His waist, imitating a dancing peacock.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthana, Vṛndāvana.
imitating a dancing peacock. This dance is done to the accompaniment of the following song:

\[53 \text{gupālīyē bra/vat, suras racyau bansivat chaiyyal} \]

today Gopal [Krṣna] along with the Braj dwellers, He plays to compose the Ras, under the shades of the bamboo groves!

\[\text{bin pakhavaj baṅsuri ki chuti ananda sindhu badhyau tehi thāyya}] \]

to the accompaniment of vina [harp], paknavaj [the drum] and the baṅsuri [the flute] He, the ocean of bliss dances tehi thāi!

\[\text{bhav uthāyu hiya radhiya ke bani mor nacau nandarai kau chayya}!\]

the dear lad of King Nanda dances becoming the peacock of Pāḍhīka [Pāḍhā] who is excited in Her transcendental love!

\[\text{ur antar jani hiye ke har jahanay gayau bani mor kanhayya}.\]

As the song is sung Krṣna, the lad, plays the peacock knowing fully well in the heart who and where!

Krṣna sits on His knees and makes movements of His shoulders (plate 40). In the end, He makes wide circular movements quickly rotating on His knees and covers the whole stage. This dance is greatly admired by the audience. The actor has to be very adept at this, so as not to fall down while spinning.

After performing the (various kinds of) dance, Radha and Krṣna return to the simhāsana. Krṣna is shown readjusting Pāḍhā’s dress, garland, ear rings and other items of Her attire. The sakhi*s are also engaged in the service of Radha and Krṣna. The Ras ends with some prayers sung in the glory of Radha and Krṣna.

It may be noted that if Ras, which occurs in the middle of the Mahārāṣ Urn, is a prelude to the
disappearance of Kṛṣṇa, the Ras which is presented as the first part of the daily Ras Liīa performance is nitya Rās and is conceived to be eternal central situation of Kṛṣṇa with Radha and Her sakhi-S.

This performance has a central significance for a Gauḍiya vaisnava practitioner (which is shared by some other Brajvāsi Sampradāya-s too), because it is the presentation of the most choosable self knowledge, namely, self as Self in a conjugal relation (madhura bhāva) with the closeness inspiring form of the Absolute (para mādhurya rupa), namely, Kṛṣṇa, that too in the most choosable parakiya (otherly) form (3.5.3). More significantly, Ras is simply in its pure, i.e., non-story play (activity) form where 'play' (activity) is just for the sake of 'play' (activity) and has no other purpose than to be just a 'play' (pastime/sport). This is in what a Gauḍiya vaisnava practitioner would aspire to be eternally established (3.5.3). This is what is lost and desperately sought by the gopi-s in the Maharas episode (4.3.3). It is in this performance that the sakhi characters, with whom the Gauḍiya Vaisnava practitioner would choose the most to identify, are presented as engaged in arranging the conjugal pastimes of Pādhā and Kṛṣṇa in Ras, which is the most choosable situation as explained earlier (3.5.3). Thus, for the Gauḍiya vaisnava practitioners, Rās gives rasa in its most choosable form.

4.3.5. Liīa as the narrative play translation of the ways of Priti.

4.3.5.1. The content, form and performance of Liīa-s.

Liīa-s are the story form plays' presented, as mentioned above (4.3.1), after the Ras, which, as mentioned above (4.3.4), is the non-story play.' Each day the Ras mandai-s perform an episode from Kṛṣṇa’s Liīa-s Starting with the pastime Of Kṛṣṇa’s appearance (Janma Liīa - Janma = appearance) and ending with the pastime in which Kṛṣṇa leaves Vṛndāvana for Mathura, upon Kamsa’s invitation to kill him (Kams vadh Liīa - Vadh = kill) and Uddhava Liīa, which takes place
41. Kṛṣṇa stealing butter from a pot with the help of cowherd friends. Note Fateh Kṛṣṇa (intro.& 5.1), the rāsdhan and singer, playing on the harmonium, engaged in a joking conversation with Kṛṣṇa. Compare with plates 42, 58 & 59.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan

42. One of the cowherd boy characters running away after stealing the butter. Note, as part of a humorous scene of the fun of teasing and being chided by the cowherd women, the performer has come down the stage into the audience, enacting the mischievous fleeing and hiding the butter smeared mouth with one of his hands and looking back at the chasing cowherd women. Audience enjoying the fun (4.4). Note the ecstasy in the smiles of the women with big smiles are of western origin settled as Ebaraśīs. Compare with plates 41, 58 & 59.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan
after Krsna leaves Vṛndāvana. The Līlās are not presented in a sequential order, except the first few episodes, which show Krsna's birth at Mathura, His arrival to Vṛndāvana, and His pastimes as Mākhan Cōr (Butter Thief) and so on.

The Līlās are very simple themes full of ‘play’ (sport), with Krsna stealing butter in Mākhan Cōr Līlā (plates 41-42), He teasing the gopi-s, gopi-s and Krsna trying to outdo each other with witty arguments, playing puns, wearing each other’s clothes to reach out to each other, stealing each other’s ornaments as in Bansi Cōr Līlā (where Rādhā steals Krsna’s Bansi = flute) and Mudāryā Līlā (where Krsna steals Rādhā’s mudāryā = ring) and so on. These Līlā-s, as mentioned above (3.5.3), in Gaudiya vaisnava school are seen as the manifestation of Krsna’s madhurya rupa (sweet = close) nature. There are other Līlā-s like Gowardhan Līlā where Krsna lifts Gowardhan hill on his hand, Yamāyūna Uddhār Līlā (See appendix 5) where Krsna liberates the two sons of Kubēra from their tree bodies, all of which go to show His opulence aspect and extraordinary qualities as the Absolute. In the language of Gaudiya Vaisnava school, in all these Līlā-s, the selves as Selves are seen expressing the various kinds of transcendental love for Kṛṣṇa and experiencing the different Bhakti rasa-s which are discussed in the last chapter with examples (3.7).

Most of the examples mentioned in the last chapter (3.5.2-3), as examples of bhakti rasas, can be seen in the Līlā-s. For example, cowherd boys, who, in Mākhan Cōr Līlā go to steal butter, along with Kṛṣṇa and play with Him, are considered to be experiencing sakhyā rasa (the rasa of friendly relationship). Gopi-s who, in Maharak Līlā (see 4.3.5.2.11) dance with Kṛṣṇa are considered to be experiencing madhurya rupa (sweetness) in madhura rasa (the rasa of conjugal relationship). Gopi-s who in Mathura Pravas Līlā chide Akrūra for taking away Kṛṣṇa along with him from Vṛndavana, are considered to be experiencing raudra rasa (the rasa of the anger). The cowherds, who, in Kāliya Daman Līlā (see appendix 6) feel pathos as Kṛṣṇa get enveloped in the poisonous snake Kāliya's
hoods are considered to be experiencing karuna rasa (the rasa of pathos).

Not all these themes that are presented in the Rāsā ṭīṭā-s are taken from the Puranas. Hein (1972: 163-178) gives brief synopses of about 106 ṭīṭā-s. (His list includes the ṭīṭā-s mentioned in this work). Most of them are original and are not found in any of the Purāṇa-s. Hein says that he found only twenty eight of them in the tenth canto of the Bhagavata Purana (1972: 156), which describes the pastimes of the Kṛṣṇa form. Many of the ṭīṭā-s are built on the pada-s (poems) written by the medieval devotional poets of Vrindavan such as Surdas, Paramanandadas, Nagaridas, Vrindavandas, Hita Harivams, Svāmī Haridas among others. (For the discussion on the literature of ṭīṭā-s, see Agrawal, 1981: Part 2.Ch.2, and also Mital, 1983:Ch.3).

The Svāmī-s have their own manuscripts for the ṭīṭā-s. They, or their assistants, rehearse regularly with the children. They keep enough ṭīṭā-s rehearsed for about 30 to 40 days. If any new pada appears interesting to them, they build up the speech for it and intersperse it with some related pada-s and make it into a Us. There were also some playwrights such as Keshavdev rasdhari and Radha Krishna rāsdhāri (19th and 20th cen) who wrote ṭīṭā-s. (Hein, 1972: 154).

Most of the speeches contain spoken verse and their translation in prose. The Svami sings a couplet and the actors repeat it after which they translate it into ordinary speech. Us are interspersed with song and in some cases dance throughout. If any new songs written by contemporary devotional poets are good for the ṭīṭā-s, the Svāmī-s introduce them by replacing the older ones. They select the song and fit it into one of the popular tunes (from ṭīṭā-s) and then use it for ṭīṭā-s.

The scene change is brought about by dropping the curtain, changing the scenery and again
raising the curtains, while the rāsdhārī sings a song which indicates the forthcoming scene. He also narrates the story for continuity. The Līlā for the day ends with the same arati, ārati kūṛī bihra ki, which was sung at the beginning (4.3.2). As the arati is sung, the audience go on to the stage and touch the feet of the svara-s (characters). After the ārati the audience participate in the sankirtan (congregational singing of the holy names) led by the Śvāmi.

Significance of these story form Līlā-s lies not only in their ability to give various rasa-s identified by the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava poetics, as mentioned earlier, but in instructing the audience in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology through a narrative theatrical form (3.8).

4.3.5.2. Līlā stories as narrative form presentation of theology.

That Līlā-s are looked at as narrative theatrical form presentation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology by the followers of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava school, has been mentioned in the previous chapter (3.5.1). It is interesting to see that the Līlā episodes, which are chosen from various different sources and presented by Rās mandai-s belonging even to non-Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava traditions, work perfectly well as the narrative theatrical form translations of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology. All the intricate issues of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology such as the conjugal relation between Bhagavān and His gopi associates, being characterized by transcendental love rather than eros, choosability of mādhurya rupa (sweet form = closeness inspiring form) and of parakiya madhura bhāva (non-wifely conjugal relationship) (3.5.3), can be seen to be available in these stories to such an extent that these stories by themselves can serve as an articulation of Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava theology, independently, without any discursive commentary. Or, in other words, the stories enacted in the Līlā performances are structured in such a way that the instructional commentary for them is in built into the story itself and as can be seen in the forthcoming discussion, internal evidences for the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava interpretations of the instructions are readily available in Līlā stories.
(I) Killed demons as selves without self knowledge.

For example, Līlā-s such as Pūtana Uddyān Līlā and Kamsa Vadh Līlā show demons such as Pūtana and Kamsa who attempt to kill Kṛṣṇa but get killed by Him in the process. The performances of these Līlā-s are structured in such a way that in each performance, apart from killing the demons, Kṛṣṇa `plays' with His associates such as the cowherds and parents. This structure can be seen to be the narrative form presentation of the Gaudīya vaisnava principle that the self devoid of the das self knowledge suffers from miseries and the self with the das self knowledge enjoys the company of Bhagavan (3.5.3).

(II). Internal evidence in Mahārāṣtras, for the absence of eros.

Mahārāṣtra Līlā, discussed above (4.3.3), self-evidently instructs the audience to reject kāma (sense gratification) and to seek pṛiti (transcendental love) for Kṛṣṇa in order to experience bhakti rasa (3.5.2 & 3.7). Recognition of this self evidence in Līlā-s is specially significant for one reason. Things like `instinctual gratification' `instinctual exhilaration' `wildness' and `madness,' seen in the story of Dionysus of Greek mythology are quite often being read into the stories of Līlā-s. This is one of the most common and conspicuous misunderstandings of Līlā-s. Rectification of such misunderstanding of Līlā-s is one of the important aims of the present research work. The self-evidence being discussed here helps this.

Many scholars have interpreted the pastime of Kṛṣṇa inviting the gāpī-s on His flute to the forest groves and the gāpī-s running to the forest from their respective houses to participate in the pastas dance with Kṛṣṇa (4.3.3), by placing it out of the cultural context from which this theme is born. David Kinsley, a historian of Religion, for example, compares the ecstatic Rās dance of
gopi-s described in the Bhagavata Purana (10.29-33), to the Bacchic rites of the followers of Dionysus in Greek mythology. Kinsley, who, in his book The Divine Player (A study of Krsna US) (1979), otherwise displays a careful understanding of several intricate issues of bhakti traditions such as Līā ("playfulness") strangely calls the followers of Dionysus, who are "wild and mad...," who ... torn from their homes at the sound of his (Dionysus') flute, dash to the forest, and join Dionysus in ecstatic dancing' and singing as if intoxicated,' without caring for law or custom' and who in their madness even 'tear apart the wild animals,' as reminiscent of the gopi-s' (1979:260).

Almost in a similar vein, Sudhir Kakar, a prominent psychoanalyst, applying psychoanalysis to these stories, observes,

"Krsna's promise, like that of Dionysus in ancient Greece, is one of utter freedom and instinctual exhilaration" (1981:142).

Elsewhere, he says that Krsna's dalliance with the gopi-s and His other similar Līā-s reflect a pursuit of 'libidinous desires.' Upon making this analysis of Krsna Līā he adds,

'The cult of Krsna affords his devotees all manner of fantasied instinctual gratification through an unconscious identification with him" (1981:144).

Thus, both the critics identify certain elements in the Ras Līā stories, which for them are similar to the elements found in the themes of Dionysus, the Greek god. It is true that many common features can be found in these instances. Both of them show women, who, being intoxicated by the influence of a character, run away from their respective homes, breaking all "law or custom," in order to join the dance with that character.

But the comparison of the stories of Līā-s to the stories of Dionysus can be shown to be mistaken on account of the following reasons:
(i). The similarities of motifs in these stories is only superficial. For example, the myth of Dionysus, at least as represented in the play *The Bacchae* by Euripides, depicts the women as participating in the Bacchic rites in the midst of 'revelry, drink,' who creep to bed down with some man in a quiet corner (1988: 119-20). The characters in this play are depicted as ripping off bulls, cows and calves with bare hands. And overwhelmed by the madness that results from the influence of Dionysus, one of the characters, Agave, dismembers her son Pantheus with her own hands. It may be noted that in no version of *Līlā* stories, motifs such as 'drinking,' creeping to bed down with someone in a quite corner, 'ripping off bulls, cows and calves with bare hands' and 'dismembering the son with one's own hands,' which show an inebriated condition, sexuality without a concern with whom it is, destructive and cruel tendencies, are found.

(ii). These comparisons do not critically take into account the convention in *bhakti* literature that the devotees' are those who identify with the devotee characters in the stories and not with the *Bhagavān* character.

(iii). In the *Bhagavata Purāṇa*, which is the prime source of these stories, the author, towards the end of the narration of the pastimes of *Kṛṣṇa* with *gopī-s*, clearly adds the following statement:

"He who full of reverence hears in the proper order of sequence or recounts the story of the aforesaid amorous pastimes of *Śrī Kṛṣṇa* with the women of *Vraja* is blessed with supreme devotion in the Lord and, becoming a master of his self before long, speedily overcomes lust [which is a malady of the mind]" (X. 33. 40)

This shows that even the narration in the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* of this episode does not give scope and rather positively prohibits meanings like instinctual gratification."
43. Kamdev is aiming his arrows at the gopi-s engaged in Rās dance.
Source: Researcher’s own document.
(iv) Kakar seems to set aside the theology to emphasize that whatever be the 'intended'
theological meaning, these stories are received the way he puts it. But, at least in Liñā
performances, special care is taken within the text of the performance itself, not to leave a pinch
of scope for the audience to take either consciously or unconsciously things such as instinctual
gratification' from the stories.

The Mahārāśa Liñā achieves this by introducing the character Kamdev (also called Madan), who is
described in the Puranas as the instigator of erotic desire in the individual and who is capable
of influencing even the gods, sages and ascetics, activating the sensual desires in them. In
Maharas UlS, Kāndēv boasts of these powers. He attempts to influence the gopī-s and Kṛṣṇa by
targetting them with the five arrows which he generally uses to victimize the individuals (plate
43)." But gopī-s and Kṛṣṇa can not be influenced by his arrows. By thus showing the gopī-s as
being immune to the influence of Kamdev, this Liñā shows gopī-s as being free from the desire of
instinctual gratification.' It can be observed that the gopī-s even emphasize this point in their
conversation with Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa, trying to tease the gopī-s, says that they have come to Him in
order to fulfill their sexual desire. To this, one of the gopī-s replies,

'It is not pleasure that we want but it is You. To ask for sensual desire is kama
whereas, our desire is to serve you alone. What we have for you is prema
[transcendental love. This word is a synonym of prīti].' (Source: Vraja Rāśa UlS
Samthan conducted by Svami Har Govind).

The issue of rejection of custom has also been dealt in this UlS, as a scene shows Kṛṣṇa
attempting to test the gopī-s by trying to send them away using the pretext of Vedic injunctions.
He tells the gopī-s that according to Vedic injunctions it is the duty of every woman to be satisfied
with her husband alone. Hence the desire of the gopī-s to be with Him is wrong. To this the
gopi-s reply as follows:
Until now we have been serving the clay forms [indicating their husbands] in your absence. Now that you, who is our real husband, have come, why should we go back to the service of those clay models. Though it is true that according to the Vedic injunctions, a woman must serve her husband, according to religion, you are the actual husband of each one of us' (Vraja Ras us Samtha conducted by Svami HarGovind)

Thus, this text of Lilā performance is compelling the following meanings:

(a). What gopi-s have for Kṛṣṇa is priṭī, i.e., transcendental love, i.e., prema of Chaitanya (Caitanya Caritāmṛta, Madhya Līlā 23.3)” but not kāma, i.e., desire for sensual gratification.

(b). Relations of tvarga (which includes kama) bound self plane are being considered not actual and hence the word clay,’ and relations (of self as Self) with Bhagavan are the actual’ relations.

(c). Activities like serving a husband dutifully and sincerely are only tentative replacements for the actual’ activities for serving Bhagavan;’ in His absence’ and hence, the word ’clay model.’

The principle of Vedic worldview that the Karma Kanda leads to the Jnana Kanda (2.8 & 3.6) and the principle of Gaudīya Vaisnava school that bhakti activities are performed for the emulation of actual self knowledge (3.6 & 3.9) can be seen as being suggested here. Corning away from husbands or in Kinsley’s words not caring for law or custom¹ is being clearly explained as relinquishing the Karma Kanda activities in preference for the Jnana Kanda activities.

(d). Thus, it may be said that words like husband used in the story need not be taken in the literal sense of those words, but should be recognized as metaphorical usages referring generally to ‘relation’ between self and self, self and Bhagavan etc. In other words, relations like part and
whole relation between the self and the Absolute can be, in a narrative language, described with the help of words like husband and wife. Since these narratives are considered to be narrative form expressions for the theology (4.3.5.2), it may be seen that this story gives a narrative form expression for the interpretation of the Mahārāṣ story of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (10.29-33).

(v). It may also be noted that as mentioned above (4.2), the norm of only boys below sixteen to play gopa-s and gopi-s is intended to avoid interference of sexual desires on the part of the performances. Since, as part of a folk theatrical atmosphere, the audience know the performers personally, the awareness of audience that the performers are boys below sixteen years avoids sexual attitude on the part of the audience also. This is one of the senses in which the Līlā performance becomes just a 'play.'

(vi). Atleast in the case of Līlā performances of Braj, it should be remembered that all the participants including most of the audience are those who come to settle down in Braj renouncing their lives of 'instinctual gratification' (4.1).

(vii). As has already been mentioned (4.3.1), physical separation of male and female audiences in a Līlā performance clearly indicates conscious efforts to avoid the interference of possible sexual stimuli.

(viii). It may also be remembered that atleast Gauḍiya Vaiṣnava followers are instructed to strictly identify with the devotees, for example, the sakhi-s and emulate the self knowledge (3.5.3 & 3.7.2) involving, by definition, a love which is transcendental to eros (3.5.3 & 3.5.1).

(ix). Another frequently misunderstood aspect of Līlā performances is the meaning of apparent illicit relationship between Kṛṣna and gopi-s. Atleast in literature such as fāvya-s (poetry), fiction,
and short stories, plays and films in India, these stories are shown to be used by individuals to justify their illicit relations. (Probably this is a reflection of real life happening too). Perhaps this understanding of the 'parakiya (non-wifely) relation of gopi-s with Krsna led certain authors of poetics to consider the rasa situation here has rasabhasa (2.6.3). Sudeva, without quoting the names of these authors of poetics, counters this view by saying that it is true that the description of the amorous dealings of a parodha nayika (heroine married to someone else) with the paramour, would not provide śṛṅgāra rasa and hence is only rasabhasa (pseudo rasa) - but this applies only to the heroines of the phenomenal world - but not with respect to the gopi-s who play with Krsna. This argument of Sudeva in his Ras Viśāsa is quoted and is corroborated by Rupa in his Nātaka Candrika (1964 : 4). It may be remembered that Jiva explains this position by considering the disinterest of gopi-s in any this worldly and the otherworldly benefits of their relation with Krsna (3.5.3). It may also be remembered that in the last chapter (3.5.3), it was shown that not all the gopi-s participating in ras are married, some of them are unmarried. What is common between the relation of all of them with Krsna is a non-wifely nature of that relation and that the 'othery' (non-kinly) mood of the gopi-s in aprakata (unmanifest) Liś-s, when manifest in the phenomenal world, is considered to be able to take only the form of the mood of the women who maintain a non-wifely relation with Krsna (Priti Sandarbha, section 278).

Thus, non-desiring, non-kinly and non-sensual nature, which is the actual meaning of us and which is just the opposite of instinctual gratification,' is the defining feature of the very meaning of the pamkiya relation. Hence, depiction of relation between gopi-s and Krsna as pamkiya can be seen to be another compelling evidence and strategy for communicating only a non-erotic relation.

(x). The story of Mahārāṣ Līlā (4.3.3), when seen from the perspective of Gauḍiya Vaṣṇava school, is also symbolic of the individual self's position in the phenomenal world. The selves in the
phenomenal world have lost the company of Krsna, as they have developed an identity independent of the dās self knowledge, which is referred in this ātis as 'pride' of the selves as Selves (the gūpī-s)(4.3.3). The selves experience misery due to the separation from Kṛṣṇa and look for Him in everything. The search culminates as the selves start symbolically imitating the activities of Kṛṣṇa in the form of various devotional activities which are discussed in section 4.2. The goal of such acts of imitation is to attain the association of Kṛṣṇa, the object of transcendental love (4.3.3). The theatre called Rās Liṅga-s is one such act of imitation. This level of symbolism more clearly establishes the mistake of reading things like instinctual exhilaration' which could, at the most be, the literal meaning appearances of the story into it.

(xi). Finally, there is another important difference between the theme of Dionysus and the theme of Kṛṣṇa. The theme of Dionysus presents a god, who punishes the citizens of Thebes (for not recognizing him as a god), by evoking passionate desire in them with his power (1.2.1). On the other hand, the theme of Kṛṣṇa shows the Absolute - presiding over the gods (3.2 - 3.5) - who blesses His devotees by evoking transcendental love in them with His charms.

In essence, this Mahārās Liṅga may be seen to be instructing the following:

(a) the rejection of kāma by a tvarga bound self, for the attainment of Kṛṣṇa, leads to the fulfilment of self as Self in playful association with Him (3.6).

(b). Justification for the rejection of the activities of the Karma Kanda from the point of view of bhakti sāstra (3.6).

(c). Need to overcome kāma in order to relish bhakti rasa (3.6).

(III). Breaking Karma Kanda rules for prema, as process but not as problem.

There is another story which more conspicuously narrativizes the playfulness' of the activities of
Krṣna and His cowherd associates in the sense that the cowherd associates reject even the benefits of *Karma Kanda* and do not mind the punishment therefrom and perform activities pleasing to Krṣna. In this story from the *Bṛgava Purāṇa*, all the cowherd associates of Krṣna, including His father who is the chief of the hamlet of *vṛndavaṇa*, set out to perform a ritual to appease *Indra* so that he would bless them with rain which in turn, would give fodder for the cows. Krṣna, seeing this, counsels them to give up that ritual and instead worship the Govardhan hill on which their cows graze, because it is reasonable to display gratitude to the hill which nurtures the cows. All the cowherds immediately accept the advice daring the wrath of *Indra* because it pleases Krṣna. *Indra* sets out to avenge this rejection by sending down a shower of stones. It may be seen that the analogy of Dionysus in the play *The Bacchae* (4.3.5.2.11) suits to this *Indra*, who, like the former is the one who avenges the violation of his authority. In order to protect His associates from the shower of stones, Krṣna immediately lifts the Govardhan hill with His hand and all the cowherds take shelter beneath it. This act benumbs *Indra*. Realizing Krṣna as the Absolute Himself, he comes down to earth, falls down at His feet and begs forgiveness. Krṣna forgives him and sends him away. After *Indra* leaves, Krṣna and His associates continue the worship of Govardhan with great pleasure and express and experience transcendental love for each other. (On the stage, the lifting of Govardhan is not usually demonstrated. The Govardhan is shown on a huge backdrop and the *Govardhan pānkrāma* - circumambulation of Govardhan by the gopas is shown as part of the worship to Govardhan).

In this way, the *Govardhan* Liṅga story simultaneously instructs the following:

(i) The chosability of *bhakti* activities and dāsa self knowledge vis-a-vis *Karma Kanda* activities (3.6).

(ii) Position of gods like *Indra* vis-a-vis the Absolute (3.2).

(iii) Assurance that the rejection of *Karma Kanda* in preference for *bhakti* activity does not lead to misery as it does in a *trīvarga* bound self plane. Moreover, it leads to closer association with Krṣna (3.6).
44. A scene from *Mākhan Cēr Liā*. Kṛṣṇa jumps into the arms of Yasōda saying, "I want to sit in your lap which I prefer to Brahmān".
Source: Svāmī Bade Thakur (Dr Krishna Vallabh), Krishnanchal Lok Kalabharati, Vrindavan
(iv) Chosability of the non-pompous, natural (in contrast to civilized) entity like a hill

(IV) **Playfulness’ as reward and formlessness as punishment**

As mentioned in the last chapter (3.5.1), another significant distinguishing feature of *Līlā* performances vis-a-vis the other forms of *Nāṭya*, especially *Nāṭya* for *Jñāna*, according to Gauḍiṭya Vaishnava school, is its consideration of the self-knowledge of *self* as *Self* in association with divine form of the Absolute as more chosable than the self knowledge of *self* as *Self* non-different from the formless aspect of the Absolute. This idea is repeatedly expressed in narrative form in different *Līlā* performances. In one of such instances which is a non-puranic, probably improvised version of the *Butter Thief* *Līlā* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (10.8), Kṛṣṇa Himself is made to express this preference.

In this *Līlā*, once Yasoda (Kṛṣṇa’s mother) asks Kṛṣṇa to go to gunukula (study place) for studying śāstra (scriptures). Kṛṣṇa questions her about the use of studying sastra. Yasodā replies that such study would lead to an understanding of the Absolute Truth (*tattva jñāna*) which is in the form of the all pervading Bramhan. She says that by attaining the knowledge of Bramhan one can attain mukti (liberation) and experience *bhmmhananda* (bliss of the realization of non-difference from formless Bramhan). Kṛṣṇa asks her then, if there would be butter, gopi-Ś, Yasoda and the cows after the attainment of liberation. Yasodā laughs at this and replies that *bramhan* is formless and has none of these things. To this Kṛṣṇa asks her,

> Are you so annoyed with me for stealing your butter [At the beginning of this performance, Kṛṣṇa is depicted to be stealing butter prepared by His mother] that you want to send me to such a place. I don’t want that *Bramhan*. O Mother! I just want to sit in your lap and eat butter’ (plate 44) (Source: *Vraj Pās Līlā Samthān*)
Here, the subtle wit of narrative lies in presenting Krsna to be an innocent child asking for things like butter, gopi-s, Yasoda and cows in preference to bramhananda. At an apparent level this is quite natural of a child as it does not understand issues like Bramhan, moksa and bramhananda. From an Advaitic point of view, this preference is quite foolish, though childlike. The laugh of Yasoda represents this point of view. But from a Gaudiya Vaisnava point of view, butter, gopi-s, Yasoda and cows indicate all the variegated, juicy richness of the world of playful activities and the resultant variegated richness of rasa experience. Even an oldest Gaudiya Vaisnava would have said what the child Krsna said here. (The ecstatic response from the audience during the performance of this Līlā shows their empathy for this).

Though making Krsna express this point of view affords authority to it, making a child express this in a childlike way is a theatrical strategy to communicate the beauty of Līlā-ness (playfulness), in the sense of childlike nature, inherent in the Gaudiya vaisnava's preference for 'playful' (childlike) activity to formlessness (3.5.3).

(V) The glory of the rustic and the poverty of the glorious.

One of the most popular Līlā-śis uddhava Līlā which is significant not only for the intensity of ecstatic experience expressed by the audience during this performance, but also for the effective narrative theatrical form instruction it gives to choose the self knowledge of the gopa - gopī/Braj type and especially gopi type, vis-a-vis self knowledge of self in association with the awe inspiring form of Bhagavān and the Advaitic self knowledge (3.5.3). With a few improvisations over the story of Uddhava's visit to Vrndavana, described in the Bhagavata Purana (10.46-47), this story articulates Gaudiya vaisnava point of view in an impressive manner.
The Uddhava us shows the gopi-s feeling intense separation due to the absence of Krsna who left Vrndavana to become a king in Dvaraka. After the passage of some time, Krsna, the king of Dvārakā, sends His minister and friend Uddhava to give jñāna (wisdom) to the gāpī-s to pacify them so that they can bear His separation and carry on with their normal life. When Uddhava comes to Vrndavana, the inhabitants of Vrndavana rush to him on learning that he is Krsna’s friend. When they relate to him their unhappiness and question him as to why Krsna has not come to Vrndavana, Uddhava begins to instruct them.

He tells them that Krsna is the all-pervading Absolute and asks them to meditate on Krsna as the all-pervading formless Absolute to overcome misery. But the gāpī-s want nothing but Krsna and they want Him in the form of the flute-wielding youth whom they know so well. Rejecting his teachings, they take him around Vrndavana narrating the incidents that took place there between them and Krsna. They then question him on the possibility of seeing Him as something else (as a formless Absolute) when each of these places remind them of His beautiful Līlā-s (pastimes). Uddhava tries various arguments with the gāpī-s and each time they defeat him with their nascent expression of transcendental love for Krsna. Wherever they go and whatever they do, they are always absorbed in the transcendental sweet (madhuya) loving Līlā-s (pastimes) of Krsna which He performed with them.

Uddhava then asks them to go with him to Dvāraka to see Krsna as a solution to their suffering from separation. The gāpī-s reject this solution too and ask Uddhava to communicate to Krsna their urge to see Him again in Vrndavana, to perform all the Līlā-s (pastimes) that He used to perform near the river Yamuna, in the forest groves (kūnja-s), with the cows, stealing butter, teasing the gāpī-s, getting bound to the transcendental love of Yasoda and so on.
In this process, Uddhava is enamoured by the intensity of the gopi-s' love for Krsna. Though Uddhava finds all the Braj associates of Krsna, like His parents, friends, elders and neighbours, express their intense longing for the company of Krsna, he acknowledges the greatest intensity of that longing in gopi-s. Struck by the unparalled transcendental sweet love of the gopi-s for Krsna, uddhava prostrates at their feet, though he is Krsna’s friend and a minister in His court.

This story adapts the strategy of making a city dwelling, high positioned, knowledgeable associate of the awe inspiring form of Krsna (in Dvaraka) accepting the superiority of the rustic, simple, ignorant gopi associates of the closeness inspiring form of Krsna, by acknowledging their transcendental love as superior to his. This, in the language mentioned in the last chapter (3.5.3), is a narrative form instruction of the superiority of madhurya rupa (sweet form) Of BhagavSn (Krsna in Vrndavana) over the association With the aisvarya rupa (opulent form) of BhagavSn (Krsna in Dvaraka) (3.5.3). Similarly, by showing the gopi-s rejecting Uddhava's proposal to meditate on the formless Bramhan aspect of Krsna, this Lila instructs the chosability of gopi-s' self knowledge to the Advaitic self knowledge (3.5.3).

(VI) Ignorance of Krsna as the Absolute as most choosable.

The establishment of gopi-s in the self knowledge of self in association with the closeness - inspiring form of Bhagavan and the 'rejection' of His being the Absolute (3.5.3) is expressed, in a way, in a scene from the Dan Lila (the pastime of donation). This episode from a non-puranic source probably collected from the songs of some medieval Braj poets, employs techniques similar to the Mäkhan Cäri Lila mentioned above (4.3.5.2.4).

In this Lila, the gopi-s are seen taking butter to the Demon king Kamsa as tax. Krsna stops them on the way and demands that they can proceed only after giving Him some of the butter. The gopi-s in turn try to frighten Him by referring to the demon Kamsa to which Krsna replies, ‘I am
45. *Krsna* pleading innocence saying, mother! I did not eat butter' (see Appendix 5). Note the childlike crying. His associates in Vrindavan can not believe that such an innocent mother fearing child can be the **Absolute**
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan.
Bramhan (referring to the Absolute in an Upanisadic language) and hence Kamsa can not do anything to Me' (Source: Vraj Ras Liia Samsthän conducted by Svami Har Govind).

To this statement of Krsna, the gôpi-s retort sarcastically,

If you are such a powerful Bramhan, the owner of the three worlds, the all pervading principle in everything, then why do you go to every house to steal butter? I once caught you stealing and snatched away your pitambara [yellow cloth that Krsna wears]. When your mother bound you with a rope for stealing curd and breaking the pots [depicted in the Udrkh Bandhan Lin - the pastime of binding to the mortar], remember, it was us, who saved you from your bondage.

And now you say you are Bramhan' (Vraj Ras Liia Samsthän conducted by Svami Har Govind).

This story is structured as if it is a narrative form elaboration of statements such as - 'gôpi-s take the closeness inspiring form of Bhagavan so much to be His only form, that even if the Absolute Himself comes and tells them that He is the Absolute (indicated by the word Bramhan) who presides over all the gods and has unlimited supernatural powers and so on, they would not accept it and make fun of Him (3.5.3). Even when Krsna manifests His opulence by lifting the Gôvardhan, in the Gôvardhan Liia (4.3.5.2.III), or by showing the universe in His mouth to Yasoda, in the Mrtiikā Bhaksana Liia or dances on Kâliya snake, in the Kâliya Daman Liia, the associates of Krsna think that He is being protected by the gods, to whom they pray for His protection. They cannot believe that such a delicate child can be the Absolute (plate 45). This is also an indication of how perfectly Bhagavan manifests His closeness inspiring form, enacting exactly whatever is expected of such an ordinary simple rustic human being.

At one level, the reaction of the gôpi-s, in the Liia discussed here, looks to be a reflection of
their unlearned or ignorant nature and provokes laughter from that point of view. But the audience of these Līlā performances, who consider this kind of bhakti as ideal, get an ecstasy out of empathy while watching this performance. This story can be seen to be instructing the supremacy of the self knowledge of self as Self in association with the closeness inspiring form of Bhagavān, reaching the limit of the self as Self being ignorant of the closeness inspiring form, in fact, being the Absolute (3.5.3). The laugh provoking, fun making resorted to by Kṛṣṇa, is seen by the audience as His deliberate play (sport) enacted with a dear knowledge of the answer to come from the gōpī-s, with an aim to demonstrate the intensity of the belief of gōpī-s in his cowherd boy form.

(VII). The luck of the stolen: story showing the superiority of Radha.

One of the incidents of Mahārāṣṭra Līlā narrated above (4.3.3), which deserves a special attention, is Kṛṣṇa's taking away Radha along with Him while His disappearance from among the gōpī-s. Gōpī-s on the stage laud Rādhā for her good fortune of being able to be chosen by Kṛṣṇa to go away with Him and to be with Him even at a time when He decides to desert all others. Based on this choice of Kṛṣṇa, they come to the conclusion that she must be the best of the gōpī-s and must be serving Kṛṣṇa in the most likable way for Him, and they mention this point to each other in their conversation of sharing of suffering of separation from Kṛṣṇa. This incident from the Mahārāṣṭra episode is to be found in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa (10.33) also, but for the name Radha given to the “anonymous gōpī,” described to have been taken away by Kṛṣṇa. This incident can be seen to be a narrative form depiction of the Gauḍīya vaisnava principle of the greatest superiority of Rādhā among the gōpī-s mentioned (3.5.3). In fact, this superiority is made to be mentioned by Kṛṣna Himself in a discourse which He gives preceding the Maharas Līlā performance.

One of the principles mentioned in the last chapter, which is conspicuously absent in the
narrative form presentation is the greatest choosability of the self knowledge of the sakhi-s (attendants) of Radha. One place where this principle finds mention in the Līlā performances is the speech made to be given by Kṛsna as a prelude to the Mahārāṣṭra Us performance. Based on the fad that it is part of everyday talk of most of the Braivasi-s to acknowledge the greatest choosability of sakhti self knowledge, it can be assumed that, this principle is taken for granted and not considered necessary to be presented in a narrative form by rāsdhāri-s. In other words, the identification of Braivasi audience with the sakhi-s of Radha, whenever they are presented on the stage, in performances like nitya Ras and Līlā-s where the intimate conjugal activities between Radha and Kṛsna are presented, and sakhti-s are the only characters who have an opportunity to be present during those intimate moments and assist them in those activities, is taken for granted by the rāsdhāri-s.

4.3.5.3. Scope for taking different meanings.

Thus, it can be seen that the stories presented in Līlā performances, sometimes in their puranic versions themselves and sometimes in their improvised versions, as composed by either the medieval devotional poets or sometimes by the rāsdhāri-s themselves, communicate effectively the principles of theology (4.3.5.2). But in spite of all care taken in the narrative structure and method of presentation of these Līlā-s, there is possibility of certain audience not taking the intended meaning of Līlā-s. For example, audience who are not involved in Braivasi devotional practice and watch Līlā-s, may take different meanings depending on their background. An audience looking at it as just one of the plays like Sanskrit plays may look at them as the stories of Kṛsna as hero, Rādha and gopi-s as the heroines and demon killing activities of Kṛsna as His heroic deeds. It may be noted that this is a Natya for Tāvargya point of view. A follower of Advaita Vādānta may like to look at Kṛsna as the manifestation of formless Bramhan and all the Līlā-s as one kind of formful manifestations of Bramhan (3.3, 3.5.1 & 3.7.1). It may be noted that this is a Natya for
Jānā point of view. The audience who are used to watching the plays of Western theatre and watch Līlās as one of those plays, may look at Līlās as stories of *instinctual* exhileration (4.3.5.2.11). To put it the other way, if any of the meanings, mentioned here, are being taken by any of the audience of the Līlās, they are not the intended meanings, but are meanings being taken on account of the various cultural backgrounds of the audience. The intended meaning of these performances is well communicated to the Brajāsī audience, again, because of their cultural background. Atleast, one of the most prominent traits of the intended meaning of Ras Līlā performances is that of the Gaudīya Vaiṣṇava theology (discussed in the third chapter), which is communicated or which is received by the Gaudīya vaisnava audience, again, because of their cultural background.


An interesting aspect of the format of Ras Līlā performances is that it incorporates various elements of the day to day life of Brajāsī into it.

For example, the element of deity worship can be seen in the ritual of *margāvaraṇa* discussed above (4.3.2). As mentioned earlier (4.3.2), the Brajāsīs treat the characters as they do in the case of deities in the temple and interact with them just as they do with the deities in the temple.

A similar kind of interaction with the deities can be seen in a ritual called *darsan* (audience) or *jhaṅki* (beholding), which is performed during the interval after the Ras part is performed and before Līlā part begins and sometimes in between the Līlā performance. In this ritual, Radha and Kṛṣṇa are seen standing on the throne resembling the deities in a temple (plates 46 & 47). The audience are invited by the *rāsdhārī* to come on to the stage to get Their blessings. Almost the
46. Radha and Krsna standing in a darsan posture during one of the Ras Lila performances. Note the attempt to make the performers look like the dieties. Compare with plate 47. Note stage of a lila performance becoming a temple.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan

47. The dieties of Radha and Krsna opened for darsan (audience) in Krsna Bawra temple. Compare with plate 46.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan.
48. One of the audiences bending to touch the feet of the 
Krsna role player during one of the 
darśan occasions in the 
Līlā performances. The crowd of the audience are waiting for their turn to 
worship Kṛṣṇa. Note the stage becoming a temple.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem samsthan.

49. A family among audience takes the privilege of feeding sweets to the 
Kṛṣṇa role playing performer during an interval. Note the treatment of performer as deity and attitude of feeding the child with a parental affection.
Compare with plates 31, 37, 47 & 48.
Source: Śvām Ram Prasad, rāsdhārī of Braj Ras 
Līlā Mandal, Vrindavan.
50. One of the audience offers ice cream to Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa during the interval (between the Ras and Līlā performance). The backdrop of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma eating butter, though incidental, matches with the incident on the stage. Compare with plates 30, 36, 46, 47 & 49. Note the continuity of the feeling of devotion with closeness even in a flexible shift to a modern food product.

Source: Researcher’s own document.
entire audience go on to the stage and touch Their feet with the same feeling of closeness as they have for the deity (plate 48). The practice of offering money to the deities (by moving the money in a circular fashion around the actors and placing it at their feet), called nyauchāvar (contribution), is also followed in a way in which it is done during deity worship in temples (plates 49 & 50). The darsan changes depending upon the Līlā of the day. For Ulīkh Bandhan UIS, in which Yasōda binds Kṛṣṇa to the waist for His mischief, the darsan of Yasoda and Kṛṣṇa is arranged. Sometimes Kṛṣṇa and Balarama (Kṛṣṇa's elder brother) stand on the throne with crossed legs (a scene which can be seen depicted in the paintings and in temples of Vrindavan), with Their right hands raised in the form of a blessing mudrā (posture). In Govardhan Līlā, darsan of Kṛṣṇa and Balarama along with Govardhan is arranged. The famous mandāra-s spend a lot of money on the clothes so that the characters look very attractive during the darsan-s. All this is because the audience, who feel the performers to be none other than Rādhā, Kṛṣṇa and others, can be convinced only when the depiction is up to their expectations about the characters. Usually the performers are quite successful at creating an aura of divinity and as a result the audience get into the ecstasy of having had the privilege of beholding Radha, Kṛṣṇa and others directly.

Thus, the stage of the Ras Līlā performances can be seen to be occasionally transforming into a temple, the performers becoming deities, rāsdhrā-s becoming the priests. As mentioned above (4.2), the ritual in the temple has its theatrical features and with theatre becoming the temple ritual their mutually allomorphic relation is established.

One of the conspicuous elements of daily Braj activities found in Ras Līlā performances is pravacan, the discourse (4.1 & 4.2). In Ras UIS performances two kinds of discourses are found. One, is speech given by some rāsdhrā-s as a prelude to Līlā part of the Ras Līlā performances or during the interval between Ras and UIS parts of the Rāṣ Līlā performances. This lecture usually contains
an orientation part, where the greatness of Brahmā eulogized, the efficacy of performing bhakti activities in Vrindavan is highlighted, keeping the freshers to Vrindavan in mind. A request is made to look at the Rāśī Līlās as part of spiritual practice and not just as a general theatre, and various intricacies of bhakti theology (probably from the perspective of specific tradition to which the rāṣṭrā and ṛṣi-maṇḍai belongs) are explained and the audience are requested to watch the Rāśī Līlā performances with such a theological understanding.

The second kind of discourse is found in Mahārāṣṭrā Līlā performance in which, as mentioned earlier (4.3.5.2.VII), Kṛṣṇa is made to come on to the stage before the actual US performance begins and give a lecture. This lecture contains, again, the glory of Vrindavan, theological aspects such as the relative superiority of gopi-s, the sakhi-s of Rādhā and Rādhā, the transcendental love of Kṛṣṇa for Vrindavan, and gopā-gopi-s, the sakhi-s and Radha (3.5.3). This technique of making Kṛṣṇa Himself say these things, because of the treatment of performers as deities, brings a great amount of authenticity of what is said. Especially, when Kṛṣṇa says that He plays, runs after the Brajvāsi-s (the gopa-s and gopi-s) as part of the play1 not simply to play with them, but, in fact, so as to allow the dust from their feet to fall on His head (to take the dust of the feet on the head is a symbol of extreme salutation in almost all the traditional cultures in India), almost all the audience scream, shout and shed tears in ecstasy overwhelmed by this expression of extreme love by Kṛṣṇa. This extreme glorification of the gopa-s and gopi-s with whom the audience identify, as mentioned above (3.5.3 & 4.3.52), by none other than Kṛṣṇa Himself, makes the audience ecstatic and usually the audience respond frivolently to such statements made by Kṛṣṇa in His speech.

Discourses have become frequent inclusions in Drama and modern Indian theatre too. In both these, either a director or a narrator-character comes on to the stage to give a discourse in the beginning, middle or end of the performance. In some of the experimental forms of these two,
even one of the characters is made to give a speech usually at the end of the performances. But in Ras Lila performances this technique has a different function. On the one hand, it serves the function, as in case of Drama and modern Indian theatre, to explain the perspective with which the performance is sought to be watched. But apart from this, the discourse in Ras Lila performances establish a continuity between the daily Brajavi activities and the Ras Lila performances. The performance turns out to be a visual aid to the discourse in the Ras Lila performance, whereas, such a visual aid is lacking in the discourses such as the Bhagavata saptaha which the Brajavis attend (4.2).

The other element of daily life found in Ras Lila-s which needs to be highlighted next is the sankirtan or congregational chanting of the names of Krsna. Rasdhari-s and performers lose no opportunity to make the audience participate in congregational chanting throughout the Ras Us performances. Especially, during the interval between Ras and Lilas, when the darsan is arranged and the audience go on to the stage for darsan, the rasdhari starts singing a devotional lyric and requests the audience to join him. The audience join him spontaneously and the sankirtan goes on all through the quarter of an hour during which the darsan takes place.

During the occasions of scene change, if there is time needed for the scene change, the audience are requested to join the sankirtan so that their mood does not deviate. Similarly, as mentioned above (4.3.5.1), at the end of the Urm performance, the audience participate in the sankirtan led by the rasdhari. One of the most popular lyrics used in sankirtan goes: govinda bold gopala bold (say Govinda say Gopala), radha ramane hari govinda bold (say Radha Ramana, Han and Govinda) or hari bol hari bol (say Hari say Han).

If some of the audience, who are freshers to Vrindavan, begin to leave without participating in the sankirtan, the rasdhari stops them and requests them to participate in the sankirtan. One of the
speech is as follows:

“This jiva [self] is lost in this world since millions of years. It is possible to attain the lotus feet of Radhā and Kṛṣṇa by watching Their love sports. Vrindavan is very glorious and those who attain it are glorious. Madhusudana Saraswati [3.7] said, “I read Vedicānta, I meditated on the Absolute, I searched all the leaves of the Vedic tree But when I went to Vrindavan I heard about Kṛṣṇa for whom everyone is searching. When I hear that Kṛṣṇa requests his mother for some butter, my mind runs towards Him and forgets all else.’ [Obviously, the rasdhari wants to show it to the audience that even an Advaitic scholar of the stature of Madhusudana Saraswati has an attraction for the bhakti in the Lilā stories]. So when you have come to Vrindavan, kindly watch the tīrī performances, which alone can give you pṛiti [transcendental love] for the lotus feet of Kṛṣṇa. Keep your minds fixed on Radhā and Kṛṣṇa and participate in singing Their glories in sankīrtan (Rasdhari svamī Kishanlal, age 60, Vallabha Sampradāya, rasdhari of Sri Haribol ras mandal, on 10.8.1995).

Then the audience stop and participate with raised hands and dap to jay rādhā raman han bōiśī rādhā raman han bōi (say Han, one who gives pleasure to Radha. Say Han, one who gives pleasure to the glorious Radha).

This element of sankīrtan, though as mentioned above (4.3.5.1), has theatrical performance strategy such as providing time for scene change, can also be seen to be a technique of involving or drawing the audience into the performance. Though such techniques are not so frequent in Drama or modern Indian theatre, they have become common practice in performances like Rock concerts (plate 51. Also see plates 19 & 20). But the function of this in RasLilā performances has a different aspect. As in the case of darsāns (visions) on the stage and pravacanās (discourses), this too provides a link between the daily Brāvāṣī activities and the Ras
51. *jay jay sri radhe*. The audience respond with raised hands to this slogan by *rasdhari*. This technique of involving or pulling the audience into the performance is found in Rock concerts. Source: Sri Chaitanya *Prem Samsthan*.

52. *Sakhi-s* swinging *Radha* and *Krishna* in a swing during the performance of *Jhulam Lila*. Compare with plates 53. Note the festival type activity in the *theatrical* performance.
53. Two women among the audience climb on to the stage and take the pleasure of swinging Radhā and Kṛṣṇa with their own hands. Compare with plates 52. Note the audience playing the role of Sakhī-s.
Source: Bade Thakur (Dr. Krishna Vallabh), Krishnanchal Lok Kala Bharati, Vrindavan.

54. Hālī Līlā performance. Radha and Kṛṣṇa accepting by bending the throwing of yellow flower petals. Compare with plates 55 & 56. Radha and Kṛṣṇa are yet to be totally submerged under the petals.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan.
55. *Holi* Līlā performance. The audience come on to the stage to play *holi* with *Radha* and *Krsna*. The play is in the form of showering yellow flower petals from the baskets in their hands over the performers.

Compare with plates 54 & 56. Note the glee of privilege in the faces of the audience. An example of barrier breaking between audience and performers.

Source: Svāmī Ram Swānap, Rasdhan of Krishna Līla Samsthan, Vrindavan.

56. Performance of *Hsū Sū*. The cowherd characters on the stage submerged the characters of *Radha* and *Krsna* under a heap of pale lemon flower petals. Note the rush out of excitement in the tragectanes of flower petals.

Compare with plates 54 & 55. Note the festival enacted on the stage of Līlā performance.

Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan.
Another element of Ras Liṅga, where involvement of the audience of the performance goes to the extent of breaking the performance-audience barriers, is the recreation of festivals employed by rāsdhāri during the performances. Festivals like jhūian yatra (swing festival), and hōi (festival of colours) are recreated as part of the performance and audience participate in them almost as they do in those festivals. During the performance of Jhulian Liṅga, a jhūja (swing) is made which is very beautifully decorated with garden fresh leaves and flowers. Radha and Kṛṣṇa sit in it while the sakhī-s move it gently for Their pleasure (plate 52). As in the case of the festivals (4.2), the audience go on to the stage and themselves 'become' sakhī-s to swing Radha and Kṛṣṇa (plate 53).

Another Liṅga which is a best example for the festival like Ras Liṅga performance is Hōi Liṅga. Hōi is one of the major festivals in Vrindavan in which all the devotees participate with great exuberance. The Hōi Liṅga consists of Kṛṣṇa and His associates sprinkling colours at each other. This Liṅga is completely playful. Gōpi-s and Kṛṣṇa tease and mock at each other, fight and then shower colours as a sort of competition. In the place of colours the actors shower flower petals at each other which represent the colors. Some of the audience join the characters as they sing the hōri songs (songs describing the hōri pastimes performed by Kṛṣṇa). At the end of the performance, the whole crowd goes on to the stage to shower flower petals on 'Radha and Kṛṣṇa,' who are seated on the throne, till they are totally submerged in them (plates 54 - 56). Flower petals are heaped by the patrons for the use of the audience. After playing' with Radha and Kṛṣṇa, the audience pick them up and throw them at each other and play hōi for a long
time.

Though these mock festivals do not transport the Brajväsís into the time of the story of the festival, except when these performances are conducted on the festival day itself, the festive atmosphere which these Rās Līlā performances bring has a great impact on the effect of the performance. The details of these mock festivals are exactly the replica of the details of the festivals as they are performed in Vrindavan. On the one hand, these Ras tli performances give a narrative and theological context for the festivals and on the other, they bring the Brajväsí life into Rās Līlā performance more intensely than any other of such elements being discussed here.

Govardhan Līlā, though to an extent is like the performances based on festivals discussed above, differs from them, in that the parikrama (circumambulation) around the Gōvardhan hill, which takes place on the actual festival day is an actual going around, whereas, in the Gōvardhan Līlā performance, the audience only mentally circumambulate around Govardhan hill (in the form of the backdrop screen).

In Govardhan Līlā, discussed above (4.3.5.2.11), when the Brajväsís decide to Worship Govardhan hill and not Indra at the insistence of Kṛṣṇa and the audience, the characters circumambulate (do parikrama) around it, which, as discussed above (4.2), is the custom even today. The rasdhārī requests the audience to: "kindly say jay (hail or all glories) with words, and within the mind do parikrama with Kṛṣṇa and His associates" (Source: Vraja Rās Līlā Sansthan conducted by Svami Har Govind). Following the request of the rasdhārī, the audience get transported into the Līlā and by imagining themselves to be part of the characters, perform parikrama with them mentally.

Fifty sixty kinds of food (chappan bhōg) are offered to a Gōvardhan sākrāma (a stone picked up
57. Offering of chappan bhog to Govardhan. Hill is shown as heap of stones at the backdrop. The deity in front of the backdrop is Srinathji (the deity of Krsna built by the medieval saint Vallabhacarya on the Goverdhan hill). The devotee is offering ārat (4.3.2) to the Govardhan hill (4.3.5.2.iii). Note the stage of performance becoming a temple.

Source: Svāmī Ramprasad, rasadhān of Braj Ras Lila mandal, Vrindavan.
from Govardhan (hill representing the hill) in pots which is donated by the wealthy patrons. At the end of parikrama, abhisek (bathing) and puja (worship) are performed for Govardhan. Pots of milk and other fluids are poured on Govardhan as Krishna helps His associates. Everything is done here in a way in which it is done in the temples during garaj mahotsav, the grand festival of Govardhan (plate 57). It is here that the audience break the barriers, and go on to the stage and become part of the stage. At the end of the Lilas, prasad (literally, mercy, here, food offered to the deity of Govardhan which is received as his mercy) is distributed to the audience. It may be noted that this has the element of temple rituals too. In fact, even the actual garaj mahotsav is conducted in a makeshift temple structure.

Though Ras Lilas performances have many more details which are not limited to the above mentioned elements which are incorporations of Brajvasi daily life, these elements nevertheless have got a mark making impact on the Ras Lilas performances and make the entire Ras Lilas performance context a microcosm of the day to day life of Brajvasi-s. In other words, though Ras Lilas performance context has got a distinct function, colour, and structure of its own, vis-a-vis the other day to day activities of Brajvasi-s, this microcosm incorporation of the other elements of the Brajvasi life provides a strong continuum between the other daily activities of Brajvasi-s and the Ras Lilas performances. It may be noted that it is this continuum which is one of the main consequences of the localization of Ras Lilas performances to Braj (4.1). This is one significant way in which the theatre of Ras Lilas performances looks very much different from the other forms of theatre.

4.5. **Character of Ras Lilas performances as a consequence of their localization to Braj.**

After having seen the components of daily routine of Braj way of life incorporated into Ras Lilas
performances, it can be now be seen that such an incorporation leads to the distinctive (see Intro.) features of Ras Līā performances, which have been shown (4.2) to be contained in the componants of Braj daily routine also.

What immediately catches the eye of a stranger in a Ras Līā performance is the way the performance is treated just as a play.' Hawley, for example, talking about the actors of Ras Līā performances says,

'The people who played the sacred children's roles really were children, and their play was not just play in the dramatic sense but in the childish sense as well'' (1992:161).

He adds that the children (playing the roles of Radha, Kṛṣṇa, gopas and gopis) "do what they do for its own sake, for the fun of it; they are truly at play" (1992:161).

This applies to the other participants of the performance like rasdhari and the audience also. Taking it as a play does not mean that the participants do not get involved in it at all. In fact, the participants get totally involved, immersed and totally get transported into the spiritual realm being presented in the Ras Līā performances. This transportation is what makes them participate in the performances in such a collective way as to frequently break the barriers between the performance and the audience, and it is this transportation which makes them experience intense levels of ecstasy, which is usually described as experience of 'rasa.'

For example, when Radha's scene is prominent in the US, a song is sung addressing Her as Priyā (beloved), Śyāmā (the dear one of Śyām, i.e., Kṛṣṇa), the names which signify Her unalloyed love for Kṛṣṇa. At the end of the song, the rasdhari says 'jay jay śrī rādhē.....ēē' (all glories to Śrī Radha) with raised hands inviting the audience to glorify Radha, to which the audience join enthusiastically. Whenever Radha appears on stage this is repeated. And when Kṛṣṇa appears
the rasdhari sings ‘bōlyē kṛṣṇaḥbhagavān ki...jay’ (say all glories to Lord Kṛṣṇa) and the audience join him. When both Radha and Kṛṣṇa are present, the rasdhari and the audience sing ‘bōlyē jukā sārkār ki...jay’ (say all glories to the divine couple) (plate 51). Some devotees are seen folding hands at the sight of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with ‘bhāv (feeling). When Kṛṣṇa is carried away by Vasudēv (Kṛṣṇa’s father) on his head from Mathurā to Vṛndāvana in Janma Līlā (see appendix 4), the audience shout ecstatically, without the singer asking them, ‘bōlō bāla kṛṣṇa bhagavān ki...jay’ (hail child Kṛṣṇa, the Lord), raising their hands.

The actors too speak directly to the audience. For example, in a scene from Ulūkh Bandhan Līlā, Kṛṣṇa jokingly asks Yasoda to get Him married. He then turns towards the audience and says, ‘will you all come to my wedding.’ The audience participate in the joke saying ‘hi...’ (yes) smilingly. Kṛṣṇa then turns specifically towards the women audience and says, ‘will you sing at my wedding.’ The women blush at this and shyly respond by saying ‘haa...’ (Source: Svāmī Fateh Krishna Ras Maṇḍai). These tactics of the performers make the transportation of the audience into the place and time of Līlā effective, intensifying the feeling of the audience of really being present in front of Kṛṣṇa and Yaśoda. Another instance of such techniques, employed by the performers for transportation of the audience can be seen in Mākhān Cor Līlā, in which, sometimes the Kṛṣṇa role player and some times the role player of His cowherd boy associate comes to the stage front or comes down the stage and distributes the stolen butter. Audience rush towards them to take their share of butter (plates 58 & 59)

A similar transportation tactic on the part of the performers, can be seen in taking the audience into community gathering of the cowherds to settle a dispute. In such dispute settling gatherings in Indian villages, the parties in dispute turn towards the participants in the gathering or in other words the members of the community for a supporting vote. Gōvardhan Līlā, as discussed above (4.3.5.2.III), shows Kṛṣna and His associates celebrating the gīrāj mahōtsav, the grand
58 Audience eagerty rushing towards \textit{Kr\textsc{na}} asking for the butter stolen by him.
Compare with plate 59.
Note the excitement of privilage in the faces. Note also breaking of barriers between the
audiences and the performers (audiences are playing the cowherd friends of \textit{Kr\textsc{na}} here). Note
also performance is just a play. The urban elite pilgrims look on this participation of the
traditional audience.
Source: Sv\textit{\textacuteni} Ram Prasad, \textit{r\textsc{asdh\textacuteni}} of Braj Ras \textit{Lilamandal}, Vrindavan

59. Children among the audience eagerly asking for butter and a cowherd character is seen
distributing butter. Note the smiles of fun and excitement in the faces of the children. Note the
performance becoming just a play, with all the banners of performer - audience vanishing.
Compare plates 41, 42, & 58.
Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem \textit{Samstan}, Vrindavan
The flood of beaming nascent smiles in the ecstasy of the child audience during a Rās Līlā performance. These children are the students from Bhaktivedanta Swami International Gurukula (study place). Two of the children devotees in front are of western nativity.

Source: Sri Chaitanya Prem Samsthan, Vrindavan.
festival of the king of mountains - Govardhan. As Krsna and the cowherd community have discussions over the worship of mount Govardhan, one of the characters who insists on the worship of Indra turns towards the audience and says,

`Dear Bravasi-s. This is a question of prestige. [Pointing towards a character] He says that we must worship girij Govardhan. I say we must worship Indra. So we have decided to depend on your support.'

When the character seeking the vote of audience says `indraki...' (Hail Indra) no one responds. When Krsna says `girij govardhan ki' (hail Govardhan, the king of mountains), 'thousands among the audience simultaneously shout `yaaa...y' (hail). Then some of the audience pick up `girij govardhan ki.: and to this the rest respond with raised hands `jaaa..y' (hail)'.

This kind of transportation, many a time, makes the audience express ecstatic symptoms. The audience participate in the humour of the characters (plates 60 & 42), feel excited as the characters are excited and feel sad when they are sad. During the scenes of separation, they totally empathize with the characters who feel lost at the separation of Krsna and can not control their tears. This can be observed in Lila-s such as Uddhava Lila (4.3.5.2.V). While watching this Lila the audience are in uncontrollable emotion. They become very emotional as the gopi-s defeat Uddhava.

Donna Wulff narrates her observation saying,

"In a performance of the Lila representing Yasoda's grief at Krsna's departure for Mathura, which I saw in Brindavan in 1972 during the 40 - day festival surrounding Krsna janmastami the emotional response of the audience grew so
intense that the lilás was somewhat abruptly cut short. Afterwards I was informed that the gosvāmin [the priest of the temple] presiding over the occasion feared that the devotees watching the lilás who had been weeping throughout, would not be able to bear any more grief. It is such an experience of total absorption in the eternal lilás of Kṛṣṇa of complete self-forgetfulness through communal participation in intense emotions toward the Lord like those expressed on the stage, that is the cherished goal of this form of Kṛṣṇa devotion; and this, at least for a few brief hours the lilás make possible" (1977:44-45).

Even though these lilás are known to everyone of the audience (who have been hearing them since their childhood, studying and watching them daily in some form or other), every year the lilás are still a grand success. The devotees eagerly await the festival which brings them the Ras performances. One can hear local people saying, the festival of lilás is coming. Take pleasure.' This form has survived hundreds of years, when in the West and in urban places, the practitioners of theatre constantly need a new form to depict the forces of determinism hitherto not realized (1.4). Most of the audience don't even watch any other theatre and the performers perform the same lilás all their lives.

It may be noted that all these distinct features of flas lilás performances such as (i) playful' participation; (ii) getting transported into the spiritual realm; (iii) a collective participation without performance - audience barriers; (iv) intense expressions of emotional experience; and (v) recurrent practice of the same thing again and again, are all noticed in all the daily activities of Brajāsī also (3.2). The continuity between these daily activities and the Ras Us performances (4.4) can easily be assumed to be the cause of these commonnesses between the two. Though, playfulness' in the daily Brajāsī activities is in the sense of treating activities just as a pastime, performed without any gainful motive, and 'playfulness' in the Ras lilás performances is in the
sense that the performers and the audience alike treat the performance as a child's play among themselves, i.e., they do not employ extraordinary skills of acting and so on, but simply talk as they do in general conversation (being, on the other hand, totally immersed in the performance as the children are in their play), but both the 'playfulnesses' are part of the same Bṛāvāsī nature of happy-go-lucky simple disposition, coupled with a devotional transcendence of worldiness.

It is this transportation into the spiritual realm and the feeling of moving and acting in that realm, which makes the Bṛāvāsī-śś participate in both daily life activities and Ras Līlā performances collectively, seldom maintaining the barriers of performance-audience. Though the methods employed by priests in temples, the speakers in discourses, leaders of congregational chanting and rāsdhārī-śś have an important role in the effectiveness in this transportation, the voluntary submission of the participants to this effectiveness, with a relish for rasa (3.7), is equally responsible for that magic of that transportation. All the participants feel rewarded for their all the way coming to Vrindavan and submitting themselves to the spell of it, whenever they get the ecstasy of rasa, either in daily activities (3.2) or in Ras Līlā performances (3.7). Both in daily life and in Ras Līlā performances, recurrence is not monotony (4.2), but rather a reinforcement or abhyāsa (an exercise through repetition). Chanting, i.e., repeated utterance of Bhagavān's names, which is considered to be the central devotional activity, is symbolic of such a repetition of all activities including Ras Līlā performances.

As mentioned earlier in the last chapter (3.8), Līlā performances give rasa not only to the individuals with the self fulfillment of das self knowledge, but also aim at transforming the individuals without this self knowledge. Hein gives three remarkable examples of the effectiveness of Ras Līlā-śś in such a transformation:

'There is the story of Aibhagavan, converted to Krishnasim in the theatre, and of Mir Mādhava, once a wealthy muslim, who went with a devotee to see a performance in
Mathura and was so affected by it that he settled in Vrindavan and became a devotee and a writer of poems in Krishna's praise. A companion story is the tale of Canda, the bandit, who swooped down upon a rasmandai to rob the actors of their jewels but stayed to become a devotee" (1972:158).

In other words, a Ras Lili performance can be as such, only when it is performed in Braj Mandal because of the entire atmosphere and effect, and every bit of life and existence that Braj Mandal provides. To put it differently, Ras Lili performance, though well performed with exactly the same format and structure, if performed at a different place than Vrindavan as an evening recreation in an auditorium for the participants coming there after a daily routine not at all related to the practice of Radha and Krsna devotion, loses its character totally. Even if a replica of Braj Mandal is created at a different place and all the provisions are made for the atmosphere available at Braj Mandal, one point which still significantly misses is the belief in the ksētra mahima (supernatural power of the very place Braj Mandal) as part of which every bit of the place is believed to be the place of activities of Krsna and reminds those activities. Probably, another aspect of Braj which cannot be created, is the centuries old rural and rustic Brajvasi language, and culture which evolved in Braj mould (plate 8). That is why, it may be understood that Ras Lili performances for the last four centuries have been traditionally and ideally localized to Braj Mandal.

4.6. Conclusion: Ras Lili of Braj as cut out for the Gaudya Vaisnava process of self fulfilment

The ksētra mahima concept mentioned above (4.5), is basically a devotional concept and is common to all devotional cults. But as mentioned in the last chapter (3.3), most of the prominent schools of Bhakti Vādaṇta are Vaishnavite and hence are associated with the shrines of
(incarnations of) Lord Visnu. Braj Mandal is, among them, the choice of those Bhakti Vedantin-s who love the Krsna incarnation more among the incarnations of Lord Visnu. As mentioned earlier (4.3.5.2.VII), this choice of Braj Mandal, and especially Vrindavan within that, is articulated by making Krsna Himself express that He likes Vrindavan the most among all the places on the earth. Here, Krsna explains His choice of Vrindavan by saying that he gets a chance to serve the cows and cowherdmen and women, who bind him by their sweet transcendental love by calling him Butter Thief (indicating, in the language of Gaudiya Vaisnava school, that the love that He experiences is full of madhurya = sweetness = closeness). For Gaudiya Vaisnava-s, who, as mentioned in the last chapter (3.5.3), consider the flute wielding cowherd form of Krsna as the most primary form of Bhagavan, and Vrindavan as the very place where He performed His activities along with His cowherd boy and cowherd girl friends (3.5.1 & 4.1), Vrindavan is naturally the best choice among all the shrines of Bhagavan.

For example, a shrine of Narasimha is the shrine of awe inspiring form of Bhagavan, in contrast to Vrindavan, which is the shrine of the closeness inspiring form of Bhagavan, to use the Gaudiya Vaisnava categories, mentioned in the last chapter (3.5.3). As mentioned earlier (4.1), the Brajvasi language and culture, its simplicity rusticity and 'playfulness' also fit into this Gaudiya Vaisnava scheme of choice. Gaudiya vaisnava practitioners, as mentioned above (4.2), look at all the daily routine of Brajvasi-s and Ras Liila performances from the point of view of their theology. Everything that happens here suits it. Especially, the two central notions of Gaudiya Vaisnava theology, namely, Liila-ness (in both the senses of activity without gainful motive and closeness) and rasa (manifest through the symptoms of ecstasy) are also, as shown in this chapter (4.1 & 4.5), central to Braj culture including Ras Liila performances. Though, according to Gaudiya Vaisnava theology, the symptoms of ecstasy found among general Brajvasi-s are not the manifestation of rasa unless the Brajvasi-s concerned have attained fulfillment of the self knowledge of Self in one of the forms of das self knowledge (3.5.2 & 3.9), Brajvasi-s as part of their day to day language, use
words like 'bhāv' and 'rasa' to describe these symptoms and the experience. These usages might have seeped into the day to day Braj language from the theological literature of the devotional traditions of Vrindavan, at least, the Gaudiya Vaisnava tradition. From a Gaudiya vaisnava point of view, the emulation of dās self knowledge, which is manifest through these symptoms, bares fruit in the form of the actual self fulfilment of das self knowledge and actual experience of rasa because of the exercise through repeated experience. Rās Līlā performances have a significant role in the exercise of repetition within a Gaudiya vaisnava framework, especially on account of their theological nature, especially keeping in view the theatrical metaphor/analogy predominant in Gaudiya vaisnava theology (3.5.2). It may be noted that this theatrical metaphor/analogy, as shown earlier in this chapter (4.2), suits even for the other daily practices of Brajvāsi-s. It may also be noted that, the distinct features of Gaudiya Vaisnava theory such as rasa being the result and means of rasa in the play (3.7.2) and rasa being considered to be possible in daily routine also (3.9), all fit into the Brajvāsi culture, as explained earlier (4.2). It has been shown in the earlier sections (4.3.4 & 4 3.5.2 VII) that Ras Līlā structure suits greatly for emulating the sakhi self knowledge and the associated rasa (parākiya madhura rasa, i.e., non-wifely conjugal rasa) which is the best among all the various dās self knowledges and the associated kinds of bhakti rasa-s according to the scheme of choice of bhakti theology (3.5.3). Thus, it may be seen that the daily routine of Brajvāsi life and the Ras Līlā performances compliment each other in their ultimate purpose of helping the Gaudiya vaisnava practitioner achieve the self fulfilment of das self knowledge.

The tendency in the performers of Līlā, of not presenting the constantly changing situation in the world and of holding on to one particular form and content, may be explained as rooted in the belief that if the world changes and if the self experiences newer kinds of miseries and newer kinds of conflicts (which is the content of Drama), they are still in accordance with the same laws of nature which function under the supervision of the Absolute (3.5.3). As shown
in this chapter (4.3.5.2). *Līlā*-s successfully present, in a narrative form, these laws of nature believed by the *Gaudiya vaisnava* practitioners.

However, it goes without saying that it is not intended in this work to conclude that *Bṛhat*-s first learn *Gaudiya Vaiśnavī* theory (3.5) and set out to implement it perfectly by living the *Bṛhat*- life including the participation in *Rāsa* US performances. It only means that what happens in Vrindavan can perfectly be understood and explained through the theory of *Gaudiya Vaiśnavī* school or if one wants to see the manifestation and reality of the philosophy of *Gaudiya Vaiśnavī* school, what happens in Vrindavan serves as a perfect model for that purpose.¹⁷
End notes:

1. The principle of considering the selves as Selves participating in associational activities with the incarnation of Bhagavan on earth as 'appearances' of the entities of spiritual realm in the phenomenal realm is extended to all.

2. Of course, the audience include even short time visitors who are constituted of pilgrims, researchers and other types of enthusiastic travellers.

3. Though, the performers also perform Gauranga Liš-s (the pastimes of Chartanya) and other Liš-s, the directors are called rāsdhāri-s because they are primarily associated with Rās Liš-s.

4. Occasionally, even rigorous dances are performed to suit the context. For example, in Mahādev Liš (the pastime of Lord Šiva, who is also referred to as Mahādev-the great Lord), tandav dance (a vigorous male dance) is performed.

5. Dnapada is a north Indian style of music which is considered to be having a more ancient tradition than what is called Hindustani music today. Now, it is sometimes seen as one of the styles of Hindustani music along with khayāl, dādrā, ťhumri, hōrī, tappa and so on.

6. Singers and instrumentalists also take roles sometimes. For example, Fateh Krishna, one of the rāsdhāri-s and a lead singer for his group, plays Šiva in Mahārāśs Liš and Uddhavain Uddhava Liš.

7. Literally, refreshing of God. It comes from the root ram which means resting.

8. The mountain referred to here is Gōvardhan. Mura is a demon whom Kršna killed.
9. The sixty four kalās is a traditional phrase under which sixty four skills are listed. This is considered to be the list of all the skills constituting perfection of creativity in an individual. Though the origin of the number sixty four is considered to be linked with the number sixteen of the phases of moon in a fortnight, the phrase sixty four has always been used just as a metaphor for the exhaustive coverage of all the skills. The nayaka (hero) and nāyikā (heroine), here, are being described with this metaphor indicating that they are perfect personalities.

10. Flute is the predominant accompaniment in this Līlā. Sometimes it is played solo when Kṛṣṇa is depicted playing it to call the gōpī-s for the Rās Dance. At certain occasions such as Kṛṣṇa calling the gōpī-s through his flute, the flute is the only instrument played in the background.


12. Five flowers, namely Aravinda, Asoka, Cūta, Navamallika, Nilotpala are listed in Puranas as the five arrows of Kāmdēv. Arrow here may be a metaphor referring to the means or instrument of erotic provocation and to shoot an arrow may refer to provoke a particular type of erotic symptom. The words madan or umadana (punch or kick in eros), modana (the joy, cheer or ecstasy of eros), sōsana (exhaustion or feeling of extreme tiresomeness in eros), sthambhana (immobility of limbs resulting from eros) and monana or sammonana (losing oneself due to immersion in eros), mentioned as the (qualities of) arrows of Kamdev, can be seen to be symptoms of eros (see Vettam Mani, n.d.: 378-9).

13. It may be noted that the use of the word Prēma in Līlā performances is in the meaning close to
that of the technical term *Priti*, used by Jiva -atleast so far as it refers to a transcendental love.

14. The hamlet *Vrindavana*, the place of living of the *gāpī-s*, forms part of *Kamsa's* kingdom (see appendix 4). Hence the *gāpī-s* were expected to a share of their produce as tax.

15. *Chappan bhōg* is a word indicating the most glorious food offering. *Chappan bhōg* is performed on Annakut festival, related to the worship of Goverdhan, in important temples like *Rādhā Raman* in Vrindavan.

16. The researcher has witnessed such performances at Hyderabad.

17. One thing that needs mention at this point is that this thesis was talking only about the ideal of the *Ras - Līlā* theatre of Vrindavan. What has been explained is the concept of *Ras - Līlā* theatre as it exists in the minds of the devotees of Vrindavan as *'original.'* The devotees claim that when *Ras - Līlā* was originally performed in the sixteenth century (4.3.1), it was true to the ideal. This ideal has been reconstructed through the conversation with the devotees and the other senior residents of Vrindavan. In the modern day performances, there are certain deviations' from this ideal. The traditional practitioners of the devotional culture of Vrindavan consider the use of modern gadgets such as blinking flood lights and color shades, that focus on the performances and the use of amplifiers to magnify the sound of the accompanying instruments, which can be seen to be a trend now - a - days in some *mandai-s*, as degeneration.' Scholars such as Vasant *Yamadagni* note that due to the use of the modern stage craft, the *Līlā* performances have lost their naturalness and they have become superficial without any devotional mood in them (1980: 233). However, most of the performers are still able to maintain the traditional norms to a large extent and are able to effectively evoke playfulness' and ecstasy among their audience.