CHAPTER- IV

THE CONCEPT OF LĪLĀ IN SANKARADEVA’S PHILOSOPHY
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Anybody who meaningfully uses the term Līlā expresses positively a certain activity which is supposed to be a mere sport and negatively a certain absence of any purpose, but both are aspects of one and the same Reality — the God.

Līlā itself, and many activities that share important characteristics with play, are central to Hindu cult, and particularly to the Bhakti cult of North India. Sankaradeva ascribes an important role to Līlā in his philosophy. He identifies Brahman — the Puruṣa with Viṣṇu or Bhagavān or Śrīkṛṣṇa — the highest God of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and the Gītā. He is Sat (Existence), Cit (knowledge) and Ānand (Bliss).

Sankaradeva believes that the creation of the world is a cosmic game of the Puruṣa according to His will or sport. He says —

"ekesware ācho āmi ādiniranjana /
ṣṛṣṭi ye nāhike mok nakare śubhaṇa //
māyāra hātāte korāu jagata prakāśa /
karo sṛṣṭi līlā ābe binoda bilāsa /”

(He said unto Himself — ‘Alone do I exist as sportless primal person. There is no creation and I have no manifestation. Everything abideth unconscious and none is vigilant.........Let the individual souls come out of my body and let me manifest the worlds through Māyā and enjoy the luxurious sport of creation). Līlā of Sankaradeva signifies the play of Lord or Divine will to get pleasure without any purpose. As Līlā means only play to get pleasure which is internal, it needs nothing outside mind to play or for sport. Lord is immanent as well as transcendent of all. Therefore, to get pleasure,
the Lord takes upon play or Līlā for which Lord Himself becomes efficient as well as material cause of Līlā.

Sankaradeva places Lord Kṛṣṇa in the highest position. He uses this term Kṛṣṇa indiscriminately. His Śrīkṛṣṇa is the Brahman or the Absolute. The Bhāgavata has stressed the Brāhmaṇhood of Śrīkṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa is Bhagavān Himself (1.3.28). Kṛṣṇa is Parama Puruṣa or Supreme Being (1.7.7). “He is the soul of all beings (X.13.61).” “He is the Supreme Being concealed in the human form.” Certain libidinous amusements of Kṛṣṇa among mortals on earth and His adventures or the activities on the earth are termed as Līlā in Sankaradeva’s philosophy. In such treatments of Līlā, Kṛṣṇa is personified.

This Līlā not only covers creation of the world, it covers all creations static as well as dissolution. Regarding Līlā, Kṛṣṇa in his message to the women of Vrajas, says— “I create myself out of Myself; I preserve and dissolve Myself through the agency of My own Māyā. I am absolutely pure, indeterminate Ātman, having consciousness as My essence. The world exists in Me but I transcend this world.”

Sankaradeva says in Anādi pātan as —

“sṛṣṭi sthitī layā Mādhavar mokṣhālīlā
kṛṣṇara kinkare pode Sānkara bāndhilā//”

(Creation, preservation and destruction are the sport of Mādhava — Lord Kṛṣṇa and this is written by Sankaradeva, the servant of Lord Kṛṣṇa).

Thus Sankaradeva maintains that God manifests Himself as many by His will or sport. God is eternal omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. He is immanent in all things and beings of the universe. He is the creator — preserver and destroyer of the universe. So, God’s Līlā is the act of creation, preservation and destruction of the
universe. Sankaradeva is anxious to explain that Lord Kṛṣṇa's humanity is not real but merely a conscious exhibition of His Divine sport or Līlā. As a child He (God) finds amusements in the display of His universal form. In almost all his poems, the poet compares him to an actor who plays on the stage in various disguises but Himself remains what He really is all the time. Again the chanting of the name of Kṛṣṇa—singing the activities of Lord Kṛṣṇa with love and devotion is called Kīrtana. This Kīrtana of Kṛṣṇa is also called the Līlā-mālā in Sankaradeva's philosophy. As he says—

"sankare rachitā dhari kṛṣnara charan / līlāmālā nām iṭokṛṣṇara kīrtana II 5"

(Sankara bowing at the feet of Kṛṣṇa, chanting the glory of the Lord signifying the same as Kīrtana under the banner of Līlā-mālā).

I. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF LĪLĀ:

Līlā should be such as to exemplify the various attributes of Bhagavān. The Bhagavān is one in whom we find the elements of majesty, virtue, fame, splendour, knowledge and non-attachment in their entirety. The Līlā of Kṛṣṇa in Sankaradeva's philosophy have all these attributes. He embodies majesty, virtue, knowledge, splendor, reputation and every other desirable trait incarnate. Sankaradeva says—

"samasta bhūtara tumi prāṇobala / jagatake āchā dhari / srastāro srastā tumi sarba draṣṭā / udhāri dhariḷā bhumi / jīvaro niyantā parama ātmā / mṛtyuro antaka tumi"7
(Thou art, the vital life of all material objects, to hold the whole universe. Thou art the creator of all creations — perceiver of all — saviour of the earth. Thou art the supreme soul — director of all individuals and bringer of death).

The *Lilās* of God indicate how far the Supreme Being goes to make Himself acceptable to the beings. To make *Kṛṣṇa* as attractive as possible for the common people, Sankaradeva has described variously His supreme generosity, supreme kind heartedness and supreme benevolence. He is called *ananta* as there is no end of His virtues. Sankaradeva, thus glorifies Lord *Kṛṣṇa* — “Thou art tapa, japa, virue all are void without Thee. The three worlds experience darkness in the day light without Thee.”

Again Sankaradeva says —

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pranāmo ananta mūrti duranta śākati
lilāye samhāri prabhū karā sriṣṭi sthiti
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(Thou art Infinite, supreme power. Through *Lilā* Thou dost the action of destruction to create and sustain the creations).

Regarding the characteristics of *Lilā*, Johan Huizinga, in his definition of play, gives five formal characteristics, as —

1. Play is activity, that is done as an end in itself; it is completely voluntary one plays simply to play.

2. Play is superfluous, nonutilitarian. It is useless activity, a ‘waste of time.’

3. Play take place outside ‘ordinary life.’

4. Play proceeds in an orderly way within its own limits of space and time in accordance with its own rules.

5. As play tends to surround itself with secrecy and emphasizes its otherness, from ordinary life, it may lead to cohesive social groups.
Huizinga suggests three other characteristics of play in the cult, as —

1. He adds that play is commonly pervaded with a sense of make believe or pretending.

2. Second, in play there operates a process that he calls ‘actualization by representation’ by which he means an imaginative process whereby words are created by imitative actions or symbolic representation.

3. Third, play is characterized by a joyous mood.\(^{11}\)

In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, the characteristics of \textit{Lilā} are found in the following ways —

(a) \textit{Lilā} is spontaneous and superfluous

The spontaneous and superfluous nature of play is eminently appropriate to express the freedom of gods, who are entirely self-satisfied and complete. Sankaradeva says—

\begin{verbatim}
"krṣṇar adbhūta lilā carīt
ananta bīryara yata mahimā
kune kohi pāwe tāhāra simā"\(^{12}\)
\end{verbatim}

(The play fullness is the wonderful character of \textit{Kṛṣṇa}. It is the Infinite and Supreme Glorious Energy of God. No body can speaks of the boundary of His \textit{Lilā}).

Thus for Sankaradeva, \textit{Lilā} is the spontaneous and superfluous acts of \textit{Kṛṣṇa}.

(b) \textit{Lilās} are infallible

Sankaradeva’s concept of \textit{Lilā} as infallible. \textit{Lilā} is action of God done only for playing. As the action of Perfect Being, it is free from errors. As a human being \textit{Kṛṣṇa} shows various sports or \textit{Lilā} to us which are always infallible. He says He is the soul of the universe. He is the Lord of all deities like \textit{Brahman}. But He does \textit{Lilā} as a human being, \textit{dekhāyā aneka Lilā monuṣwar chole}\(^{13}\) (He shows the infinite number of \textit{Lilā} in
the guise of the human form). Līlā — the activities of God is unknowable to common people. The greatness of Līlā is not understandable. So, Sankaradeva says that we the unintelligent people do not know His action i.e. Līlās. He again says —

\[ \text{kone bujibeka tomarhāra līlā /} \\
\text{katākshe bhūmira bhār harilā l}^{14} \]

(Who can understand Thy Līlā? Only the Lord can free the earth from the pressure of vices).

Sankaradeva stresses on devotion only by which we can know the Līlā tattva and then we can realize the ultimate truth — that the Lord is in the very midst of His devotees. There is no restriction of caste, virtue, beauty, wealth, age, sex etc. for gaining His favour. Even the human form is not necessary.

(c) Līlā is inscrutable (aprameya)

None can be compared with Kṛṣṇa. So, He is inscrutable. The knowledge of Līlā is the knowledge of God. By the sense of Līlā (Līlātattva) we can remove the difference between mind and matter or cause and effect which will lead to the ultimate truth.

Kṛṣṇa, as the master of Yoga, did miraculous acts or Līlās throughout His life. If we try to reflect upon His life we will find that there were sufficient elements therein that could infuse confidence in the most oppressed of human beings. He was born in a prison and found Himself against the mightiest elements of His time. Thus we can get the most important factor of Kṛṣṇa’s personality.

(d) Līlā is the actualization of Beauty

Beauty is a symbol of divine. Beauty ennobles the hearts that come closer to it. Kṛṣṇa’s beauty has this sublimating influence. He was so handsome that even the moon,
who is supposed to be beauty incarnate, became amazed, along with her fellows, at the indescribable beauty of Sīkṛṣṇa. In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, as in the Bhāgavata, Kṛṣṇa was the quintessence of charm. Kṛṣṇa’s beauty was the support of the wealth of attractiveness and His limbs were so captivating that they beautified even the ornaments. Kṛṣṇa was the beautifier of the world—Bhubana sundara. In Sankaradeva’s description of Kṛṣṇa we have the following—

\[\text{"śārata kālata bhailanta udita}
\text{yena pūrṇimāra chānd}
\text{sukumārśyām tanu pīṭabastre}
\text{dekhite ati sucānd \(15\)\} }

(The Lord Kṛṣṇa rises as the Full Moon in the Autumn night. The beautiful dark body with yellow dresses He looks most charming).

He describes—

\[\text{"jwalāi pīṭabastre ati śyāmal śārīra}
\text{sajala megha yena bijulī suthira}
\text{prasanna badana padma dekhante tripiti}
\text{śīrata kirīṭi kuti surujar jyoti \(16\)}\}

(His dark beautiful body with yellow dresses shines like a lightening in the cloudy sky of rainy day. His joyous lotus shaped face gives satisfaction to all. His crown of head shines like the shining of crores of sun).

Kṛṣṇa was that beauty incarnate that captivates even the heart of the god of beauty. The divine harmony of his features begged all descriptions.

Kṛṣṇa’s Līlā is both divine and transcendental. But many fail to understand the real import of Līlā and the heavenly, nay the super-divine beauty of Kṛṣṇa as these persons are lacking in mental maturity. This feature, in turn, gives rise to innumerable
doubts and even lead to vehement protests objecting to Kṛṣṇa's Līlās—like the Rāsa-Līlā between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs. Kṛṣṇa, then was hardly seven-eight years old and the gopīkas were much older. Moreover, Rāsa-Līlā was in reality Bhāva-Līlā—completely devoid of corporeal sensations. It was the celestial, atomic form of a gopī that used to participate in ras. For above the carnal plane, it was a divine communion between souls (gopīs) and the supreme soul—Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa's Līlā is 'Eko Aham Bahu Śyāma', one manifested as Many.17 Again (through Līlā) it seeks to demonstrate that God is attainable through attachment too. Even Freud has conceded that devotion is the sublimation of the sex instinct.18 Kṛṣṇa's life was an excellent illustration of leading a non-attached life in the world of Māyā and His acts or Līlā of super-human nature clearly shows that it was God who moved, who did Līlās in the form of Kṛṣṇa.

Līlā has the psychological truth, because the constant association of a person with God's activities (Līlās) fixes his mind on God. This is a psychological truth. Thus a devotee of the lowest type, the most impious of men, can by earnestly devoting himself to the listening to the Līlās reach the highest bliss.

II. THE PURPOSES OF LĪLĀ:

Regarding the purposes of Līlā, there arises two questions, as—why God performs Līlā or what the purposes of Līlā are? As God is omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent why Līlā is necessary in the case of creation?

In response to the first question of Līlā's purpose, we have to mention the meaning of this term. Līlā means 'sports' or 'play'—a certain activity of the Divine without any purpose or interest. Play, indeed, seems a particularly divine activity, as it is the opposite of work and the gods by nature have no need to work. Although it is a
logical contradiction to say so, it seems as if it is almost necessary for the gods to play. Although play which is not voluntary, is not play at all nevertheless the gods have no needs or desires, but only to exert themselves in superfluous aimless spontaneous activity which is so well done in play.

In Brahma śūtra, we find that Brahma's creation has no motive behind it except a sportive impulse — Lokówāt Tu Lilā kaiwalyam.¹² It means that Brahma's creative activity is Lilā. Even as kings without any motive are seen to engage in acts for mere pastime, or even as men breathe without a purpose, for it is their very nature, or even as children play out of mere fun, so also Brahman without any purpose engages Itself in creating the world of diversity. Sankaradeva says that Brahman or Nārāyana creates the universe in the way of playfulness of achieving Ānanda or joy, i.e. Lilā. Hence, even Lilā has the purpose of helping souls in bondage to win their highest end. This attainment by the jīva also helps the Lord to experience His Ānanda. Sankaradeva says this in the Anādipāta.²⁰

Thus Sankaradeva maintains that God manifests Himself as many by His will or sport. He is anxious to explain that Lord Kṛṣṇa's humanity is not real but merely a conscious exhibition of His Divine sport or Lilā. As a child Kṛṣṇa finds amusement in the display of his universal form. Regarding this Sri Aurobindo also feels that 'Delight' can be the only reason for creation. It is for the sheer joy of things that the Absolute expresses Itself in various forms and in everything, there is the delight of existence which constitutes the essence of every activity. In this regard we can cite Aurobindo's view — "From Ānanda, says the Upaniṣad, all existents are born, by Ānanda they remain in being and increase, to Ānanda they depart. Therefore, it can be said that
creation is nothing but a joyful game — a Līlā. On the other hand created for the sake of joy (Līlā) is Māyā. Sankaradeva says in the Anūdpātan that —

"sṛṣṭi sthiti loyā Mādhavar Mokṣha Līlā
apuni toribā tumī ānako torilā"2′

(Creation, preservation and destruction are the main part of the Lord Mādhava. By it preserves all including Himself).

Thus we get the concept that the Absolute or God is the creator of the whole. But here a question naturally arises. Why did the Absolute create the universe? If the individuals are nothing but Himself why this bondage and misery of the creation? The answer offered by the Bhāgavata as well as Sankaradeva, is that it is all Līlā. God creates maintains and destroys this world by Līlā without being attached, enjoys all the objects lurking in the jīvas non-attached by Līlā. According to Sankaradeva the God accepts Prakṛti to do playful acts whereby this creation goes on. God is playing making Himself a toy (II.4.7). He accepts Prakṛti by Līlā (I 11.26.4). This entire universe is His play material (IV.6.23). He assumes many forms to play on this earth (X.40.10). Thus, it seems that Līlā is the explanation of the relation between the Absolute, which is the unchanging, One and the world — the changing and the many.

But by this, it is impossible to explain the phenomena of creation. Līlā means sport. Sports or play is the outer expression of the internal dynamic consciousness of joy, beauty and fullness of the player. According to Sankaradeva also — the free unmotivated i.e. purposeless self-expression in a spatio-temporal order of His supraspatial, supra-temporal, perfect self-enjoyment. The analogy of play means the free overflow of the Divine into the universe. Out of the abundance of the Supreme joy, the world is created as such. It is the Infinite who plays everywhere as finite and transitory
objects. The entire creation is a place of enchanting joy and bliss. Only an enlightened person sees every thing as ‘Divine Līlā’, for him the supreme is everywhere. He realizes that everywhere God is fulfilling Himself in many ways. So, Sankaradeva lays much stress on ‘God’s Līlā’, because to became (the changed man)—enlightened one should understand the play of God.

But Līlā is not the play of ordinary conception. “Līlā is not to be taken in the sense of a pastime or play or sport, as there cannot possibly be any motive or necessity for Him to resort to them. It only suggests that He has no special purpose, and that He is not constrained by any external agency or desire. His activities are only a spontaneous overflow of the fullness of His own bliss like the activities of a man of realization. It also suggests the effortlessness, ease and pleasure with which He undertakes activities, and complete independence of others for help.”

In chapter 7 skandha 3 of the Bhāgavata, Vidiūra expresses a definite doubt before Maitreya as to how the Great Lord could even think of a sport? He is devoid of any desire and want to be free from attachments; why should any thought of a sport enter into His mind? (III.7.2-7). The same question of Vidiūra also arises in our mind that if God is omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent etc., why should the concept of sport came into His mind — why is Līlā necessary? In response to these questions, we find that it is all Māyā. We can use the term Līlā as such in the sense of mysterious act or shown act. The sense of sport goes to show the actual nature of God’s act. Līlā as such throws the light on the acts of God. No better language can be found for the purpose. Sankaradeva has probably used the term Līlā mainly to distinguish human acts from
Divine acts. The term *Līlā* construed thus gives a seeming reality to the creation and at the same time emphasizes the ultimate unsubstantiality of the universe.

Regarding the creation of the world-phenomena nobody has given a satisfactory answer. Augustine once, was asked — "What was God doing before He made heaven and earth?" He answered 'preparing hell for the over-curious.' Time was with creation and as such the question of 'before' does not arise. According to Plato, creation sprang up from the fact that God wished to share His goodness with others. But this answer leads to many difficulties. Is creation different from perfection? If it is not, we have, really speaking, no creation but repetition. If it is, in what sense is it so? Is it bad or good? If it is bad then it follows that perfection produced imperfection and if it is good, then nothing is new for perfection which includes all that is good. If to avoid this difficulty we state that God is not perfect without His creation, or that creation is essential for His full expression, then God ceases to be perfection or without mincing words, we can say that He is devoid of absolute reality. That means God Himself is imperfect. Hegel's Absolute is Absolute in name as He is so much dependent on the process of realization. The fact is that there cannot be a better reply than the concept of *Līlā* to explain the world phenomena.²⁶

**III. SIGNIFICANCE OR IMPORTS OF LĪLĀ:**

The obvious and apparent act of God which is called *Līlā* has supreme importance to the worldly man. Among Indian ancient gods *Kṛṣṇa* is certainly the most playful. The whole range of *Kṛṣṇa*’s *Līlās* indicates that the *jīva* (individual) must strive for the development of his spiritual life. He should never allow his base elements to dominate him. God never allows the elements of vile depravity to continue their
shameless march, there comes a time when He arrests the growth of degradation. When *Kaiśa, Śiśupāla, Jarāsaṁdha* and *Duryodhana* appear as demons and try to spread a wave of depravity in the universe, divine energy i.e. *Līlā* appears is same form, subjugates it and lends a new life to the religion of advancement.

The *Līlā* of God shows that God is very generous and quickly pardons even the gravest of sins and shortcomings if He is approached with an open heart.

God’s *Līlā* shows that He is very generous and His forgiveness is not generated out of any partiality. He is the protector of religions. He is the friend of all beings. *Līlā* is the sport or enjoyment of God — It is the manifestation of joy of the Absolute. Sankaradeva says about the *Virodhakti* in his concept of *Līlā*, as —

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baira bhābe chintibāhā mok
alpakāle pāibā ehi lok /
duhkhar karibo moi anta
ehiboli pāchek bhagyavanta // ~27a
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(Think of Me as enemy of yours, soon you will be back here sure, I will remove all pains of heart — so saying Lord Bhagawanta did apart).

Regarding *Līlā* as an enjoyment of God, Sankaradeva says in his writings —

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satvare kario māyā jagata prakāś /
āmiu karibo tāte binoda bilās // ~27b
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(Māyā, you soon express yourself as the universe as soon as I can create it to enjoy and play).

Thus *Līlā* is the delight or activities of God. God is called *Vaikuntha* since even a *cāndāla* becomes purified by bathing in His nectar reputation. So, *Līlā* means to bring a golden reign of perfect peace to the globe. It is impossible to narrate the countless
Līlās of the Infinite – in the form of Kṛṣṇa. The devotees sing Kṛṣṇa’s Līlās to know His character and to satiate their heart’s sentiments for an eternal bliss. Līlā is the source of ever-fresh and ever-enchanting joy, for which devotees drink the nectar of His Līlās repeatedly, to enjoy the eternal bliss of the one who is rasa incarnate. The Līlās have their ennobling side. One who sings Līlās repeatedly becomes attached to God, which also leads him on the path of that illuminating knowledge to attain liberation.

To acquire knowledge from the divine actions of incarnations, we need divine vision to see the cosmic form of Kṛṣṇa like Arjuna, who attained the divine eye. It is only through the Divine eye that one can know the divine nature of Kṛṣṇa and His Līlās. In the Bhāgavata it is said — “All the worshippers should seek the company of the loving devotees (bhagavatas), thereby they shall inculcate in themselves unwavering (acalā) love for God. In the company of such devotees, the accounts of the various Līlās or the sportive deeds of God are heard, this brings quite in the disturbance that is caused by the waves of the world ocean; a bliss is felt, passion for the senses is exhausted and bhakti-yoga that leads to salvation is obtained (II.3.12). That man is worse than a dog, a swine, a camel and an ass, who has not attended the narration of Śrīkṛṣṇa’s Līlās (II.3.19). The juice of Bhagavān’s Līlās is to be tasted again and again (I.1.3), thereby our attachment to God becomes stronger and stronger.”28

A man who is devoted to God is not afraid of this fierce river of the saṁsāra as he is immersed in Divine Līlās. It is impossible for anybody not to be satiated by hearing God’s Līlā for those who have devoted their hearts upon Him feel ever new joy in His Līlās. They are immersed in His Līlās like the gopīs in rāsa.
In Sankaradeva’s Prahlād Carit — Prahlāda describes six ways of God’s service or devotion wherein listening to the stories of God’s Līlās has been mentioned. God’s Līlās are the purifying element of the three worlds. Because they are so enchanting that the human mind is perforce attracted towards Him once those Līlās are listened to (X.90.26). Līlās destroy sins through listening by the ears as — “The hearing of His Līlās purifies man (X.1.6.42). By hearing His Līlās, one can go beyond the veil of ignorance. God’s Līlās are so luscious that once a man tastes them, he does not like anything else. Thus only by ever listening to God’s Līlās, one can attain intense devotion for Kṛṣṇa.”

Sankaradeva attaches utmost importance to God’s Līlās. Because constant association of a person with an account of God’s activities fixes his mind on God and thereby one can reach the highest bliss — Truth is ultimately realized. Therefore, Sankaradeva exhorts all to drink the nectar of God’s Līlās or listen to the life stories of God respectively. So, he says —

“śūnā naratanu mukuti miloka
krṣṇara Līlā carīt
iṭu naratanu nakarā bijāla
iśvarata diyā citta //”

(Dear people, listen to activities of the Lord, which will give you liberation. This life would be unsuccessful without hearing the activities and qualities of God).

IV. THE RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF LĪLĀ:

In Hinduism, we see that play i.e. Līlā has an important role. Līlā of gods in its abundance and variety shows that it is an appropriate means of expressing the otherness of the divine sphere.
Sankaradeva, as a religious preacher finds merit on such religions which looked forward and made Isvara the symbol of infinite love and patience, fore-thought and tenderness. In his religion, Sankaradeva humanized Isvara, who had been shoved away into the far off limbo of transcendence by the aid of the metaphysics of the scholastic, Sankaradeva asserted that God is gracious and merciful and both the virtuous and the vicious shall receive Divine blessings. The religion preached by Sankaradeva is called eka ārāṇa nāma dharma. The phraseology of these terms indicates the theme of this religion. To dedicate one's self and everything and seek refuge in one Supreme i.e. Kṛṣṇa, and utterances of the holy names of the deity, are the primary lessons of the creed. Sankaradeva is very keen in depicting the various activities of Kṛṣṇa and praises the glories termed as Līlā of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The play or Līlā is the Divine activity of Kṛṣṇa. The Divine player par excellence of Indian religion is the most unambiguous example of Līlā in Sankaradeva's religion also.

The Great Being Kṛṣṇa has no reason to produce this universe. The entire creation is but Kṛṣṇa's Līlā. Though He has been variously described, His reality and His actions are always a mystery for created being. Sankaradeva has made Kṛṣṇa his Personal God (īśa devatā). Nobody can deny the necessity of such a Personal God for the purpose of worship or ārādhānā. As personal God, He is the replica of Brahman or the Brahman Himself. But unless a Personal God is as big as the Brahman, He is likely to make a devotee's mind dogmatic and restricted. In fact, such a petty god is not worthy for any philosophical consideration. So, he establishes Kṛṣṇa as the only and One God to be worshipped.
The Personal God is described by Sankaradeva more or less in human form. He calls this God — *Nārāyaṇa, Viṣṇu, Hari, Mādhava* etc. It has personality and the qualities of a human being, but it has neither birth nor death. At the time of dissolution — *mahāpralaya*, everything gets merged in Him.³¹

The main purpose of Sankaradeva’s concept of personal God and His activities which are called *Līlā* is to describe the God in positive terms. This God is one, first cause, which gives reality to all modifications. God is also the soul of the universe — the object of worship. Sankaradeva devotes himself as a religious preacher, to popularize the *Kṛṣṇa* cult — which declares that *Kṛṣṇa* is the only God — the God of flesh and blood — shares the pleasure and pain of the masses.

From the religious point of view, an *avatāra* (incarnation) means God’s coming down to rescue or protect His earnest devotees whenever necessary, which is a case of emotion rather than of the intellect. From this religious point, the etymological sense of *avatāra* is a necessity. When the impossible becomes necessity human by nature creates something. The concept of *avatāra* as well as *Līlā* are the products of such necessity. Sankaradeva’s religion is meant for the mass of people and as such the doctrine of incarnation was very much helpful in making his religion popular. He well realized that a man is a religious animal. Thus Sankaradeva’s religion mentions the different *avatāras* of *Viṣṇu* or *Nārāyaṇa*, who is one without a second. Whenever there is a doctrine of religion and the ascent of the vicious, the Lord *Hari* (dispeller of ills) who is the Lord and *bhagavān* creates Himself. *Kṛṣṇa* was also born to lighten the weight (from the back) of the earth.
Kṛṣṇa, in human form had all the qualities of a man. He was born of a woman and died like an ordinary man. Yet some supernatural powers were ascribed to him in which all find the supremacy of Kṛṣṇa. From the supernatural activities which are called Līlās, Kṛṣṇa’s uniqueness, non-duality and Brāhmaṇhood have been clearly established.

To establish that Kṛṣṇa has the great influence on the inanimate elements, full of formidable energy and peculiar prowess, capable of doing and undoing anything and everything, can certainly transgress the natural laws — Sankaradeva has narrated miraculous acts of Kṛṣṇa known as Līlā. Sankaradeva says —

"Līlāye hariba prithibhir mohābhār"  
(The Lord freed the earth from all vices only through Līlā).

He again says — "The name and praise of the Lord, can shave the worldly life. Through Līlā the Lord shows only His endeavours as a human being. Thou only save the world religion and appear only for liberation of the world."  

Sankaradeva further says — "The Lord is the only resort of all the creatures of the crores of universes. He is the cause of all creation, manifestation and destruction of the universe and as a Bhagavān only the resort of all."  

As Sankaradeva’s Neo-Vaiṣnavism is a form of practical religion, his intention is to propagate a religion easily communicable to the lay people of the society to practice in an age of degradation, i.e. Koliyuga. Kṛṣṇa as the incarnate of Viṣṇu, considered the only God to be propitiated and worshipped with absolute sense of surrender and chanting the names of the Lord with detachment and absolute devotion. In devotion, hearing and chanting the Divine activities of God i.e. the Līlās are very
necessary: because in Sankaradeva’s religion, in the company of loving devotees which have unwavering (acala) love for God, the accounts of the various Līlās or the sportive deeds of God are heard, this brings peace in the disturbance that is caused by the waves of the world-oceans, a bliss is felt, passion for the senses is exhausted and salvation is obtained. Thus according to Sankaradeva hearing the Līlā of Kṛṣṇa enhances the devotion to Kṛṣṇa—

"kesāvar śīśu līlā mokṣa pūtanār /
āka śīni gobindat roti bārhe yār ī"

(The activities of Kṛṣṇa—as child and His killing Putanā, the devil are the chief Līlās. Hearing these, we can increase our love and devotion to God).

Because Sankaradeva says—

"śūnā sarvajane śīśulīlā mādhavar /
māṇṣyar sīrṣṭha dharma nāhi āta par ī"

(Hearing the activities of the Lord as a child i.e. the śīśulīlā is the best religion for man).

A man who is devoted to God is not afraid of this saṁsāra which is like a fierce river, as he is immersed in Divine Līlās. The ṛṣes requested Śūta to narrate the auspicious Līlās of Hari which He performs by His Yoga Māyā. It is not possible to be satiated by hearing an account of Kṛṣṇa’s Līlās, for those who have set their hearts upon Him feel ever new joy in His Līlās. Those who are devoted to Him because immersed in His Līlās like the gopīs in rāsa.

In the Prahlāda Carit, Sankaradeva says hearing the glories and activities of Kṛṣṇa will purify our minds. Therefore we should always do the Kirtana of Kṛṣṇa. Nṛsiṁha- the incarnation of man in the form of lion is also a Līlā to kill the king of Asura and save His devotees. So, he says—
nrisinghar līlā itu badh dāityendrar
prahlādar pūnya kothā śune yiṭu nar //

(The killing of the king of daily is also a Līlā of God the nrisingha Līlā and this the words virtues Learning of which one can attain happiness).

Thus it has been stated at many places, that whatsoever attends God’s Nrisinha Līlā attain heaven. But His actions very difficult to comprehend and are beyond ratiocination. It requires a devoted heart to understand them like Prahlād - a five years old boy’s devotional heart. God’s nectar like narration (Līlā) destroys sins when listened to by the ears and purifies man. By hearing His Līlās, one can go beyond the veil of ignorance. Intense devotion for Kṛṣṇa can be attained by ever listening to His Līlās.

Kṛṣṇa always submitted Himself to His devotees. The people of Bṛaja were His devotees. So, He always tried to give them pleasure and happiness- Ānanda. Sankaradeva says —

“bhakatara baisya moi dekhāyā lokat /
khelāvānta mālādi gopagaṇar āgat //
nānābidha sīśulīlā kari hriṣikeśa
brajar bodanta Hari hariṣa asēsa //”

(The Lord appears as a servant of His devotee in the world. He plays different games as a human child with children of Bṛaja. Thus He creates pleasure more in the mind of Bṛjabāṣī.)

Madhavadeva, also says in his Nāmghoṣā that God appears in play form (incarnates) to teach the way to self realization, He states —
"parama dur bodhya atma tattva
tara jhana arthe hari yata
lila avatara dharar tumi krpa moya II" \textsuperscript{40}

(The knowledge of \(\text{\textit{Atma}}\) is unintelligible. For this knowledge, Thou takes the
incarnations of \(\text{\textit{Lila}}\) as Thou art the Beneficial).

SANKARADEVA holds that God as a moral governor judges man's action according
to his actions. People has faith on God that He gives reward to people for their good
actions and punishment for their bad actions. So, SANKARADEVA narrates various stories in
which God takes \(\text{\textit{Lila avatara}}\).\textsuperscript{41}

Thus like in Hindu religious tradition, in SANKARADEVA's religion, the importance
of play as Divine activity indicates that play in a positive activity, an activity that
partakes of the other realm of the gods. In the human sphere, therefore, it is not
surprising that play is also understood as peculiarly religious activity in man's religious
quest. Play itself, and many activities that share important characteristics with play, are
central to the Hindu cult and particularly to the \textit{Bhakti} cult of North India as well as the
Neo-Vaisnavism of Assam.

\textbf{V. MYTHOLOGICAL ASPECT:}

The entire creation of the Lord is called \(\text{\textit{Lila}}\) and it is possible to interpret the
entire \(\text{\textit{Lila}}\) of \textit{Krsna} allegorically i.e. mythologically too. Mythology of all nations and
peoples abounds in personalities of a heroic nature performing exploits that are super
natural and far beyond the comprehension of general human endeavour. As Rudolph
Otto says — "......parables and myths in philosophical works are to be understood as
merely allegorical representations of philosophical truths."\textsuperscript{42} Dr. N.K. Brahma states
that, the Pura\‘nic legends "signify deed spiritual truths which become revealed through
Sankaradeva also has adopted the metaphor of depicting the Absolute as the cosmic person. To describe His activity—Him action, creation Sankaradeva employs some myths, legends, fictions which are the mythological aspects of the Līlā of God.

In Sankaradeva's writings, the play of Kṛṣṇa as a child is of three varieties, each more or less associated with a stage in his maturation. It is in the form of a child that Kṛṣṇa expresses the spontaneous, pure play of the Divine. As a child, he is the expert player. For the very nature of a child is to play. As an infant his play is highly unstructured. He moves his arms and legs erratically, wants one thing or another, crawls around aimlessly in his mother's yard, and covers Himself with dirt. As a child his play centers around his tricks, the most common of which is his repeated theft of butter from his mother and other women of braja. As a boy or adolescent his play is more varied. He plays games with his friends, teases the gopīs, imitates various animals, and gambols in the forest. God, as the boy Kṛṣṇa is so absorbed in his own play that the world order has begun to run down. As this infant, God acts solely to amuse himself with no thought of the world and cares only to behave as he pleases. The infant god is that god who does not know work or responsibility, who passes his time in play. The child Kṛṣṇa is dancing bewitchingly and all the men and women of the braja are beating time with their hands and Nanda, Yośādā and Rohini are joyfully looking at the child's face. Sankaradeva writes—

"स्वभावे गकुलाते कृषिलो अपार /
साधिलो अनेका प्रति नंदो योशदोर ॥" ॥

(At Gakula, as a child Thou hadst endless plays; that pleased Nanda and Yośādā in various ways).
As a child, varying in age from five to ten, a new element is introduced into Kṛṣṇa’s youthful sports. He is constantly disobeying his parents and becomes notorious throughout Vṛndāvana as a thief and prankster. His habit of stealing butter is a favourite theme of almost all those who dote on his childhood. When Kṛṣṇa reaches adolescence he becomes the leader of a frolicking band of cowherd boys. They spend most of their time in the forests of Vṛndāvana gamboling in imitation of animals and playing games among themselves. They are no longer tied to their parents and create a world of their own, where Kṛṣṇa leads their play. The boastful, brash and indomitable spirit of Kṛṣṇa’s play makes the world around him sparkle with aliveness. The playful actions of Kṛṣṇa and his friends burst forth to tumble and romp like the wind in the trees, unpredictable and free. Kṛṣṇa playful realm is a description of a heavenly world of the gods and a description of divine activity that is anarchical in its freshness and tumult.

The happy adolescent Kṛṣṇa expresses this facet of divine sport in unique ways among Hindu gods. Kṛṣṇa shows His mother Yasodā, the world in His mouth. When Yasodā ask Kṛṣṇa to open His mouth to check whether he had eaten a lump of earth or not, then she sees the universe is in His mouth.45

The whole life of Kṛṣṇa since infant is full of Līlā. His scheming uncle Kāṁsa, who has been told that Kṛṣṇa will one day cause his death, repeatedly sends various friends to Vṛndāban to kill the boy, and each time Kṛṣṇa dispatches them with case and playful imagination. Sankaradeva says —

“acintya mahimā hari puruṣa purāṇa /
Līlā kari aneka dāityar lailā prāṇa //
kaṁsar pānçhāni pāi yata dāitya āse /
tumi aganita yena puḍi more jāse //”46
Thou art Hari, Thou the Supreme Self. Thy actions are wonderful. Thou killed many demons. All the demons appointed by Kamsa are burnt alive in the fire of Thy making.

The first friend to be sent is the demoness Putanā, who disguises herself as a lovely woman and when Yasodā allows her to feed him, she poisons her nipples and tries in this way to kill infant Kṛṣṇa. But the body Kṛṣṇa turns the tables on the demoness by sucking the life out of her. Putanā gets salvation and that is the philosophy of Sankaradeva. He comments that as Putanā suckled infant Kṛṣṇa, she got salvation. He writes —

"kesāvar śīśu līlā mokṣha putanār /
āka śūni Govindat roti hārhe yār ||"48

(The liberation of Putanā is also the Līlā of Kṛṣṇa and hearing of these activities of the Lord increases our devotion and affection to God).

The demon Tṛṇāvarūṭa, sent by Kaṁsa, appears in the form of a tumultuous whirlwind and sweeps the baby Kṛṣṇa into the air. Kṛṣṇa, however, clings tenaciously to the demon’s neck, and the demon exhausted, falls to the ground like a rock, shattering himself. Kṛṣṇa defeats the demon Bāṭāsura who comes in the guise of a calf, by hurling him by the tail outs a tree. In the form of a huge crane, the demon Vakāsura, swallows Kṛṣṇa but the boy becomes so hot that the giant bird is forced to spit him out, then Kṛṣṇa easily attacks and kills the demon. Aghāsura, the younger brother of Putanā and Bāṭāsura, assumes the form of a huge snake to kill Kṛṣṇa. lying on the ground opening his mouth, which covers the earth and reaches the sky. The cowherd boys, mistaking the friend for the presiding deity of Vṛndāvana, fearlessly enter into its mouth and are swallowed up. Kṛṣṇa rescues his friends by allowing the snake to swallow him also and then, once inside, increasing his size so the creature is torn apart from within.
The demon Dhenukā, in the form of a giant ass, is also killed by Kṛṣṇa and his brother Balarām. Kṛṣṇa, in this way displays His Līlā in various ways.

Once, the petulant Indra, is humbled when he sends a torrential rainstorm to Vṛndāvana, to chastise the cowherds for neglecting him, and Kṛṣṇa protects the people by holding aloft Mount Goverdhana as a huge umbrella with his little finger for seven days. Sankaradeva says about this in Kīrtana. The motive of this mythical story and that of lifting up the mountain Goverdhana indicates the cessation of homage (possibly in the form of human sacrifice) paid to the mountain. Kṛṣṇa sets aside the sacrifice to Indra and upholds the popular worship of the mountain.

The point whether Kṛṣṇa actually lifted up the mountain, it is, rooted in the mythological concept. It is also possible that Kṛṣṇa helped the whole locality to reside in various caves of the mountains on the day of the torrential rains which was also the day of sacrifice to the mountain thus making the mountain a shelter for the people. It is probable that sometime after propitiating the mountain for even rains, torrential rains actually followed which was interpreted to be the wrath of Indra. But Kṛṣṇa upholding the cult of mountain sacrifice at a time when the influence of Indra was fading established faith in the mountain sacrifice, elevating both the Mountain and the upholder of its cult.

The theme of combat as play persists after Kṛṣṇa leaves Vṛndāvana. Kṛṣṇa's nature as a sporting warrior was most vibrant in Vṛndāvana during his youth. And his sportive conquests were epitomized by his combat with the deadly many healed serpent Kāliya, who had poisoned the waters of the Kālindī and killed many cows. Kṛṣṇa jumped into the poisonous river to save his friends. At first Kāliya seemed to get the
upper hand and gripped *Krṣṇa* in his coils. But finally *Krṣṇa*, the master of all kinds of
dance, began to dance on the hood of that serpent, till the body of the serpent, was
smashed to bits and pieces.

"*deva caḍilanta kālira māthe
śateka śirata nācanta hari /
bavai bidyādhare mridaṅga dhari
jagata ādhāra tomhāra bhire //"\(^{50}\)

(With jumping *Krṣṇa* got upon *Kālira*’s head and He began to dance upon (*Kāli*’s)
hundred heads. The *Vidyādhara*s began to play on *mrdanga*s..... At Thine weight as
container of universe......).

This mythology also shows the super natural power of the Lord by which He
makes His devotees wonder. In this mythology, which represents the greatness or
ferociousness of serpent *Kāliya* and the subduing of *Kāliya* by *Krṣṇa* and evicting him
from his haunt at the *Yamunā* indicates the cessation of homage (possibly in the form of
human sacrifice) paid to the serpent deity. *Krṣṇa* nullifies the control of the serpent
deity, thus setting at naught the bloody homage to him.

Thus various powerful demons appeared and created disturbances in the boys’
games and *Krṣṇa* killed them all by various playful methods which only added to the
pleasure of His playmates. For the cowherd boy these battles are another form of His
*Līlā*, a mere diversion. They are imaginative and playful.

In Sankaradeva’s writings, one of the most striking features of the cowherd
*Krṣṇa* in his fantastic beauty. While beauty itself is not necessarily playful, the physical
attractiveness of *Krṣṇa* and its centrality in his myths and cult is a fitting concomitant
to his sportive nature. For like play, beauty is an end in itself. It strives for nothing
achieves nothing. Kṛṣṇa is beauty itself—his appearance alone transcends the world of the ordinary. His every characteristic, furthermore, is the most relishable.51

The charming, youthful God who entrances all by his beauty is the hero of the love—Līlā of Vṛndāvana, the central episode of the Kṛṣṇa cult. Other gods in Hinduism indulge in erotic sports and amorous diversions, as has been mentioned, but Kṛṣṇa stands supreme among the gods as the Divine Lover. As the lover par-excellence Kṛṣṇa expresses in its every facet the playful nature of love and love making.

The Rāsa dance with the Gopīs is the greatest Līlā of Kṛṣṇa. It was the manifestation of the greatest might of His Love, the might possessed by the Supreme Being alone, by the Lord of the Lords of Yoga, by the Supreme source of Yoga itself. Gopī means a milk maid. But the milkmaid of Braja were extraordinarily spiritual beings born as milk maids to serve the Lord in His earthly Līlā. The love of these gopīs for Kṛṣṇa was absolutely selfless. They loved him for the sake of the spontaneous, causeless love they felt for Him and which His personality inspired in them, for Kṛṣṇa was that causeless Love itself. The Rāsa Līlā between Kṛṣṇa and the gopīs, was in reality bhāvālīlā, completely devoid of carnal, sensuous love. It was the celestial spiritual (atomic) form of a gopī that used to participate in rāsa. Thus rāsakriyā as a Līlā is a fabled dance of Kṛṣṇa with the Gopīs. Sankaradeva describes in his writings.52

Sankaradeva clearly brings out the age old traditional idea of the nature of the Highest who pervades the whole universe but still remains hidden which is also His Līlā. In order to check the various naughty activities of the child Kṛṣṇa, Yasōdā tries to bind Him to a mortar by means of a string, but fails in her attempt because of the string getting shorter every time by the length of two fingers. She is left completely by
baffled. She takes more pieces of string but in vain. Ultimately *Kṛṣṇa* ties Himself to the mortar and *Yaśodā* heaves a sigh of relief. Then *Kṛṣṇa* casts a glance at the two *Arjuna* trees standing nearby. Thus *Kṛṣṇa* shows that even the Highest God can come within the reach of a devotee who has fixed his mind and the soul on Him.\(^{53}\)

*Kṛṣṇa* bound to mortar, dragged it along with Him and passed swiftly in between the trees but the mortar got stuck there. As *Kṛṣṇa* gave a quick jerk to the mortar, the trees got uprooted and lay on the ground with their leaves and branches turned into disorder. The two sons *Kubera-Nalakubera* and *Moṇigrīva* had become the twin *Arjuna* trees and they are released at the hands of the child *Kṛṣṇa*.\(^{54}\)

The underlying idea of this myth which is universal is that the tree has life or that it possesses a soul or spirit. The *Arjuna* trees can be seen from this perspective. The trees were twins and hence were considered inauspicious. Moreover, they were *Vanya* (wild) trees. Therefore their presence, in the vicinity of the house was considered inauspicious. It remains as the duty of *Kṛṣṇa* to topple the trees and release the spirits from their haunting place. This seems to be the idea behind the myth. The idea of the Highest Lord as the annihilator of the of the ‘Evil’ seems to have arisen first. That the Evil genius had its faith pinned on the Highest Lord for its release comes afterwards.\(^{55}\)

*Kṛṣṇa* was considered the Highest Lord and miracles got attached with His name. We have the belief that mighty beings have supernatural powers by which they can work wonders. *Putanā* and other demons get salvation in the hands of *Kṛṣṇa*. These are the fine instances of the *Virodhakti* in Sankaradeva’s concept of *Līlā*.\(^{56}\) Thus in the Mythological aspect of *Līlā*, we see *Kṛṣṇa* as having power superior to the God heads.
VI. METAPHYSICAL ASPECT

The idea of Līlā is associated with the ultimate Reality, because this term expresses positively a certain activity which is supposed to be mere sport and negatively a certain absence of any purpose, but both are aspects of one and the same Reality.

We find that the object of Sankaradeva’s philosophy is to describe the Nirguṇa Brahmān. The concept of Nirguṇa means that He is that Non-dual quality less Supreme Reality, which is termed Brahman, Paramātmā and Bhagavān. Brahman denotes that He is ‘Transcendental’—transcends the universe; paramātmā expresses the fact that He is the immanent principle of the world for ‘Ātman’ is from the root or to breathe; and Bhagavān suggests that He is the cosmic Lord. The Absolute who is beyond the grasp of the human mind and speech is given a certain name and a certain specific form. As the Purāṇas were written to popularize the philosophical ideas; there in the philosophy was brought down from heaven to earth. The Bhāgavata has compared the saguṇa with a rain bow without a bow (X.20.4). The comparison is very significant. From where does this rainbow spring? From the sky which is limitless, formless and beyond human access. The sky is suggestive of the Brahman and the rainbow is of course the product of this sky. People cannot see the sky (leaving apart the case of poets and philosophers), but they are enchanted at the very sight of a rain-bow; again, a rainbow is without a bow. The sky, as it were, becomes a rainbow to fill the hearts of the people with pleasure. Similarly, the Nirguṇa becomes saguṇa without any string of guṇas. The rainbow lasts for a while and then disappears and merely the limitless sky remains; so
also from the mind of a true worshipper, ultimately the saguna disappears and the Nirguna downs. Thus the simile of the rainbow is very suggestive and puts the view of the Bhāgavata before the reader very graphically. The Brahma is essentially Nirguna—say the Bhāgavata, “but becomes saguna for the devotees.”

The beginningless and endless Nirguna Kṛṣṇa takes the action of creation—sustenance and preservation of the universe through the saguna form only for the exhibition of Līlā. Sankaradeva says—

"yadyapi nirguna janma rahīta īśvara /
   tothāpito prakṛti korāi sacetan /
   karanta guṇar hāte srajan pālan //"58

(The birthless Nirguna (qualityless) Kṛṣṇa takes the action of Prakṛti—the nature to be conscious to create—to maintain and to destroy the world).

This view of the saguna is no doubt subject to criticism. But if this saguna is a petty God and is supported to be the final form of Divinity, it will be the right criticism. It can not be criticized that saguna is merely a step in the attainment of the Nirguna. Because to see God in the sense of the Absolute, in human or Divine form, is not a misconception, an illusion like mistaking a piece of rope for a snake. It is on the other hand like attending to ornaments only and forgetting that they are made of gold. Here the conceived object is identical with the original. What is Nirguna from the point of thought is saguna from the point of view of feeling. What is unmanifest becomes manifest for the sake of the devotees.

Līlā, as the activities of the Lord, is the saguna, form of Nirguna, Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme is the human form of Supreme Reality. Sankaradeva stresses Kṛṣṇa's
supremacy and His act of creation is called Līlā. He says that Līlā is a playgame of the Lord —

"tumi si gaḍura ketu aponār krīyā hetu
trailokya nirmilā nirantar /
muhura jane eri lāj bole sabe mur rāj
moi āre swatantra Iśwar ḫ"

(Thou art the master of gaḍura, creator the three worlds endlessly for Līlā or play. But the ignorant people shamelessly think of it as their own).

Kṛṣṇa is almighty. He is full of formidable energy and peculiar bravery and capable of doing acts on which it is difficult even to reflect, and capable of doing and undoing anything and everything. Therefore, it is only the God, who can certainly transgress the natural laws, as it is impossible in this world for anybody to change the natural laws. To establish this very fact, Sankaradeva has narrated miraculous acts of Kṛṣṇa. The Yamālarjuna story indicates His victory over the earth element, the stories of getting the release of Nanda from Varuṇaloka and getting the release of Sandipaṇa’s son from the clutches of death by rescuing him from the sea show His control over the water elements, Sankaradeva says about the Kīrtana-Ghoṣā.

Kṛṣṇa’s putting out the wild fire and saving the people of Vraja show His control over the fire elements; His killing of Tṛṇāvarta shows His power over the air element, His revelation of the entire universe is His mouth to Yaśodā shows His control over the ākāśa element.

Sankaradeva narrates some incidents by which we can easily appreciate mastery over the Jīvas. His capacity of assuming as many forms as He likes, making Indra and the other higher Jīvas praise Him, His marrying thousands of women, His appearing
with every goti while doing the rasakriyā and many other things of three kinds indicate
His mastery over the Jīvas —

“tumise parama dev trijagata pati
tomāra carāne janme janme hauk gati”61

(Thou art the supreme Puruṣa, the master of the three worlds we want to take birth
again and again in the feet of Thee).

VII. LĪLĀ AND AVATĀRA

Avatāra is also called Līlā of God. In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, it is said that
the Supreme Being is incarnated descends from the highest pedestal of the Absolute for
the interests of the common man, to lighten the earth’s burden, to rid the universe of its
ills and to enable the devotees to have his meditations and to attract the mind of the
people. Sankaradeva says —

“jagatar hitaka cintiyā bārambār /
līlāye dharāhā nānābidha avatār ||”62

(Thinking about the welfare of the world again and again, Thou take the various
incarnations through Līlā).

Sankaradeva believes that- Incarnation of God is said to be sort of Līlā on the
part of the Divine Being to bring the light the real nature of the soul. This was expressed
by Madhavadeva also.63

As Brahman pervades the whole universe, the ‘avatāra’ does not descend. There
is no place from which He comes and no place to which He goes. That is why the
avatāras are called Līlāvatāras i.e. there is merely an appearance what happens is
something like this. The subtle form, the real form of God, is not known to the people of
average tendencies. The Supreme Being comes down as it were to a level where a lay person can find sufficient glory to enable him to follow Him.

Etymologically, *avatāra* is descent of God into finite form, sometimes a human being, sometimes a sub-human or animal. According to Dr. Radhakrishnan, "an *avatāra* is a descent of God into man and not an ascent of man into God." Philosophically speaking, all human beings can be such descents. "The human being is as good as an *avatāra* provided he crosses the *Māyā* of the world and transcends his imperfections." And "God is interference (by assuming a finite form) from time to time, especially at the time of peril is not a happy position. If we take an *avatāra* as 'an ascent of man into God' and which is practically done, it is not disagreeable." Philosophically, an *avatāra*, in the etymological sense is impossible. What is *Nirguna* from the point of thought is *saguna* from the point of view of feeling an unmanifest becomes manifest for the sake of devotees. For, "all His incarnations are for the betterment of the being" (VIII. 24.29). When the Great Lord sees that the *devas* (*div* means to shine, hence *devas* means shining or spiritually illumined persons) are being troubled by their enemies (i.e. *tāmasic* people), then though *nirvikāra* (without change or perturbation), He takes birth in every age in the form of a god, sage, bird, animal or human being, etc. by adopting His *Māyā* (VI. 926) whenever there is decline of religion and the ascent of the vicious, the Lord Hari (dispeller of ills) who is the Lord and *Bhagavān* creates Himself (IX. 24.56) *Kṛṣṇa* was also born to religion the weight from the back of the earth. (X.49.28).

Ronald Huttington states that 'Avatāra' signifies the 'divine descent into earthly form' and symbolizes the passage from the "unconditional to the conditional, from the
infinite to the finite, from eternity to the temporal sphere. Thus the avatāra is treated on the metaphysical plane.

Sankaradeva in the opening chapter of the Kīrtana Ghoṣā, mentions twenty four incarnations of the Lord Nārāyana. All these twenty four incarnations are taken from the Bhāgavata purāṇa and have been rearranged by Sankaradeva with some additions and alternations. There Kṛṣṇa is listed a the nineteenth avatāra of Viṣṇu and the context of His incarnation is that of rescuing the world from the tyranny of Kaṁsa. Sankaradeva stresses much importance on the ten out of twenty four incarnations, which are called by him dasavatāra of Kṛṣṇa. Madhavadeva states—"Thou art, taken the appearance of fish, tortoise, nṛhiṁs (lion man), bāmaṇa (dwarf), Paraśurām, Halirām, Varāha, Śrīrām, Buddha Kalki these are ten incarnations of the Lord. Therefore we should salute Him."

In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, like other Vaiṣṇava theology, Kṛṣṇa the Absolute God is the source of all avatāras. It is to be understood as the complete and essential manifestation of what is usually unmanifest, the revelation of the Absolute in his essential and complete form. The Absolute is revealed as a cowherd boy who sports with cowherd boys and girls in the sylvan setting of Vṛndāvana. Kṛṣṇa is identical with Bhagavān. Brahman is unqualified and therefore, never expressed, while Bhagavān is infinitely qualified and infinitely perfect and is considered the best aspect of all.

The essential nature of the Absolute is bliss- (ānanda). Kṛṣṇa’s beauty is infinite and attracts all beings. And so it is that his actions are the result of the overflowing of bliss, vis. a-vis the idea of creation, this means that the creative activity of God is sport. Indeed, all actions of Kṛṣṇa are consistently referred to as Līlā, as He is completely self
satisfied and acts from no discernable motive. His actions proceed only from bliss. As such they shine forth or overflow endlessly and unpredictably. 

From the metaphysical point of view, it is seen that Līlā means the entire creation of God. Sankaradeva believes that Līlā means the will of the Lord i.e. Divine will. So, the creation is the cosmic game of the Puruṣa according to His will. He says about this in the Anādipātan.  

Here Līlā is an effect. All effects have material as well as efficient causes, but Līlā needs not material causes. Līlā signifies the play for pleasure and this pleasure is internal, so it needs nothing outside mind to play. God is immanent as well as transcendent of all. Therefore, to get pleasure Kṛṣṇa takes play or Līlā for which He Himself became efficient as well as material cause of Līlā.

Thus the entire creation is nothing but a joyful game i.e. Līlā and as the entire rhythm of the universe it is an expression of delight. This delight of the world process in relation to the Saccidānanda is called Līlā. God is Satcitānanda. He is sat, that is, He exists for ever. Cit means consciousness or knowledge. God has been described as ānanda. Ānanda is bliss. Life proceeds from bliss-exists, because of bliss and disappears in bliss. Bliss. Bliss is boundless – limitless – fathomless. This bliss is expressed as Līlā.

According to Sankaradeva, Līlā not only covers the creation of the world, it covers all creations as well as sustenance and dissolution. This Kṛṣṇa addresses the women of Vrajas — “I create Myself out of Myself. I preserve and dissolve Myself through the agency of My own Māyā. I am absolutely pure, indeterminate Ātman,
having consciousness as My essence. The world exists in Me but I transcend this world.”

Sankaradeva maintains that God — Puruṣa is One, but that He manifests Himself as many by His will or sport — the Līlā. Kṛṣṇa’s activities and creations are merely a conscious exhibition of His Divine sport or Līlā.

VIII. THE RĀSA DANCE OR RĀSA LĪLĀ

As Līlā means actions of God, the Rāsa dance with the gopīes is the greatest Līlā of Śrīkṛṣṇa. It was the manifestation of the greatest might of His Love, the might possessed by the Supreme Being alone, by the Lord of the Lords of Yoga, by the Supreme source of Yoga itself. Gopi means milkmaid. But the milkmaid of Braja were extra ordinarily spiritual beings — born as milk maids to serve the Lord in His Earthly Līlā.

The Love of these gopīes for Kṛṣṇa was absolutely selfless. They loved Him for the sake of the spontaneous causeless love they felt for Him and which His personality inspired in them, for Kṛṣṇa was that causeless Love itself. The Rāsa dance represented the Vibrations of the soul-absorbed Mind. Vibrations which filled the universe with the nectar of Bliss and destroyed its karma of a whole kalpa.

Kṛṣṇa danced separately with each gopi. Each gopi had her own Kṛṣṇa beside her. One Kṛṣṇa became as many as there were gopīs and yet it was the self-same Kṛṣṇa. The One soul played like so many souls with so many hearts and yet the hearts saw but One soul. Each gopi saw only her own Kṛṣṇa and was unconscious of any other, as she danced absorbed in that Kṛṣṇa.
Nature (creation) is the materialized Will Force of God. The Will Force of God is a reflection of God Himself — the objectified phases of the semblance of manifoldness of the Absolute One. The Rāsa dance that is being performed every moment within Nature is hidden from our views. What is true of the great Universe is true also of its microcosm, man. Within our heart of hearts is the forest of Vṛndāvana in which the microscopic blue river of love, Yamunā, flows, lapping with thrills of joy on the banks of the bowery lawn where Kṛṣṇa — our soul — with His gopīes — our ensouled mental aspirations — is performing His ever favourite, never-ending Rāsa dance. And we are unconscious of it all, because our mind’s outer ken is employed outside of us with outer objects. If we can draw the mind’s vision from outward and direct it into the depth of our heart then will belief come in the Rāsa dance of Kṛṣṇa with its practical realization.

IX. LīLĀ AND MĀYĀ:

In apparent view, Līlā is same as Māyā. Māyā is the eternal power and a part of God.72 a magical power of God, through which the world appears as real to us. But Līlā is not a material part of God. In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, Prakṛti is the force — eternal power or sākī of God. The God head is beyond Prakṛti. Though He is beyond Prakṛti and its guṇas, He pervades everything. He created this universe by His guṇamayī Māyā which exists from the point of view of this universe but is non existent from the point of view of reality. His Yogamāyā has been clearly termed as His Force and this Māyā is responsible for His play of creation, maintenance and destruction of the universe.

The creation of the universe which is arisen from three guṇas is the product of His Māyā. Sankaradeva says that God was alone before creation. with His force of
Māyā He created all. Prakṛti is His Māyā sākṣi and is imperceptible. This Māyā which creates the universe with its guṇas is concealing His Supremacy Sankaradeva makes no difference between Māyā and Prakṛti. Etymologically, Māyā is same as Prakṛti. The word Māyā has been derived from root, mā ‘to build’ ‘to form’ and Māyā means ‘the capacity to produce forms’. Similarly Prakṛti can be derived from the root Kṛ – ‘to make’ while the preposition pra means excessive. Thus Prakṛti also means a capacity of excessive making.

Māyā or Prakṛti is the magical power of God and just as a magician is not affected by his tricks, God is totally unaffected by the act of Māyā or Prakṛti. The word niranjana and nīlēpa which means the God head is devoid of any element of Māyā. In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, both Māyā and Līlā are related to the creation of the universe. The concept of Māyā seems to have more metaphysical significance where as Līlā displays mythological overtone. As Sankaradeva puts it —

“yāhāra māyāta howe sriṣṭi sthiti loy /”

(Through the Māyā of Thee, the creation, maintenance and destruction are occurred.)

Again he says — “Creation, maintenance and destruction are the main play or Līlā of the God Mādhava”

Yet Māyā is different from Līlā. As etymologically Māyā means ‘the capacity to produce forms’ i.e. through Māyā the universe is created. On the other hand, Līlā means sport or play- the Divine sport. Through Māyā God has created the universe and this creations is Līlā – the activity or play of God. So, Māyā is the instrument- the magical power but Līlā is the action- the effect of God. it is pure bliss- Ānanda. The effect creation is play the spontaneous activity of God.
Māyā is the eternal magical power of God though which the universe appears as real to us. But Līlā is not the material part of God. God is Sat Cit Ānanda — Līlā is the expression of Ānanda. Creation is the effect of Māyā, the play of the God head. But even in this play He has given the Jīvas (the individuals) an opportunity to get release from the snare of this universe, through repeated flow of births and deaths, the perpetual play of misery and unhappiness. So, every birth is an opportunity to know the supreme Reality. This human body is the product of Prakṛti or Māyā. God too uses Prakṛti for His Līlā avatāras, to perform Līlās that can be worthy of recitation and remembrance. Thus Māyā or Prakṛti acts as an agency to bring the God head and the ignorant Jīvas together. The devotees really speaking desire to be born again and again to watch and enjoy the Līlās of God.

Thus, the human body becomes the means of achieving emancipation and eternal bliss. Thus, regarding Māyā and Līlā, we get two different entities in Sankaradeva’s philosophy. In the same manner in the Upaniṣads, creation has been described as the Līlā of the Absolute. Līlā is described as a joyful and sporting game in which certain limitations are imposed upon oneself just for the sake of joy. “According to Radhakrishnan, Creation is Līlā, but he adds that this Līlā is real. Then Radhakrishnan has to face a logical difficulty. Because if creation is a real Līlā, then it follows that creation is necessary to the Absolute for which the free character of the reality is affected. According to Radhakrishnan, the distinction between ‘necessity’ and ‘accident’ is unwarranted in the context of reality. Therefore it can safely be said that “.... it is in the nature of the Absolute to grow into the world — the world is the affirmation of the Absolute.” In that sense creation is necessary. But it is not necessary
for the Absolute to have this very creation, in that sense creation is an accident.” In the Advaita Vedānta, it is said that in reality there was never a creation and that this cosmic delusion is nothing but a sporting and joyous act — a Līlā.

Aurobindo’s conception of creation is different from Advaita. His description of creation does not make the world essentially unreal. The world has been given a status and a reality by Sri Aurobindo, but regarding the creation of the world, the two words Māyā and Līlā are used. Like the ancient Indian seers Aurobindo also says that creation is nothing but an expression of joy. Delight is the secret of creation. Delight is the root of birth. Delight is the cause of remaining in existence. Delight is the end of birth and that into which creation ceases. Therefore, it can be said that creation is nothing but a joyful game- a Līlā. For him, the world appears to be most casual and obvious insight as a movement of Force, which also appears to be consciously creative- as creating and giving expressions to newer and newer forms. But when we reflect upon the purpose, reason and creation of these forms- we come to realize that the entire rhythm of the universe is an expression of delight. The delight of the world process in relation to Saccidānanda is called Līlā by Aurobindo.

In Sankaradeva’s philosophy, the idea of Līlā bridges the two Brahman and the world- the nature. The world of the creatures- the nature is created out of His own being by God – the Absolute, though His playful game, and unconstrained by anything external to Himself. But it is also maintained and destroyed by God through Līlā and reduced to nothing. Unlike Rāmāyaṇa and Aurobindo, the world of Sankaradeva is thus redeemed from the taint of absolute unreality. But it does not share the truth of supreme changeless reality. Līlā thus brings together two distinct and powerful intellectual
traditions. God's activities are awesome and sublime and belong to the phenomenal world as the ultimate Reality is One and Changeless.

X. LĪLĀ AND MYTH:

Regarding the purpose of Līlā in Sankaradeva's thought we may refer to Myths which have been used in different philosophies by different philosophers in various ways. Sankaradeva uses Līlā in his philosophy with various purposes. His prescription of the way to get ultimate truth is the logical corollary of his concept of the ultimate Reality. The ultimate Reality is no other than Kṛṣṇa Viśvudeva in whose wonderful personality and wonderful activities called Līlā. Sankaradeva could combine Metaphysical Absolutism and personal theism. This concept of Līlā is comparable to Myths of language philosophy.

Language is the best vehicle of our thought, because language is that is which our thought and its meaning and inherent ideas are dependent and through which we are expressing ourselves. The English word 'Myth' is traceable to the Greek word 'muthos' which stands for speech, word, tale, legend and their cognates. Its exact etymology is doubtful. Myth is similar to Purāṇa also. Purāṇa has been said to be an element of Itiḥāsa, which literary means what really happened, referring to both events and ideas of the past. In this sense myth as Purāṇas, contrary to popular belief, does not stand for what is fictitious or necessarily supernatural. For example, when one speaks of 'the myth of deluge' it has an underpinning of the palaeo anthropology of North West Asia, from the legend of Noah, to India's Viṣṇu purāṇa and beyond, extended to the corroborative and similar myths in the Mid Pacific and South Pacific islands. Further.
when one speaks of the myth of Cupid and Psyche one can easily discover its allegorical implications. 79

Myths retain their understanding in symbolic and metaphysical languages. It is instructive to note that most of the Natural forces have been deified by them and given the names of Gods and Goddesses. Many metaphysicians as well as many insightful pro-scientific modern philosophers regard myth as chaff or husks having grains or seeds hidden in them. 80

Some anthropologists and sociologists like Durkheim, Marcel, Levy-Brühl and Levi strauss are of the view that myths are ‘collective representations’, ‘a vague reference to race-memory’ — mystical, anti-causal, pre-logical and non-testable. Thus it is clear from these that myth cannot be accorded the dignity of scientific views.

Borislav Malinowski and Mircea Eliade, the famous social anthropologists have specially emphasized the non-fantastic or non-fictitious aspect of myths. According to Malinowski, ‘Myth is not merely a story but a reality lived. by ‘reality’ he means that ‘myths are characters of extent social institution, so, his myth is cultural. Aliade described myth is mystical as he ascribed it as ‘sacred reality’ which is distinguished from ‘profane reality’ to the mythical world. Myths embody supernatural but not unreal, level of existence. It presents a sacred history. C.G. Jung offers a psychological theory of myths. For him, myths are not mere allegories of physical processes, these have vital meaning. He says that the primitive mind does not invent myths, but experiences them. So, myths are expressions are ‘psychological universals’, ‘archetypal’ or ‘primordial’, not culture-specific and language-bound. Thus like Levi-strausies and Chomsky, C.S.
Jung came to the conclusion that myth is universal — myth has its own universal and rational account of myth logic.

In Indian tradition, we can see a very ancient linguistic turn to so called mythical gods and goddesses. The god Agni (Fire) which is derived etymologically from agre (forward) which means the first created and forward moving. In the same way Indra the god head, means etymologically the 'kindler', because he kindles vital airs, bodily sense-organs (indriyas) and uses thunder (vajra) as his main weapon against darkness (symbolized by black clouds). Thus both Agni and Indra as fire and light are energy symbolizing power.

Vedic cosmology and cosmogony may be largely reconstructed from the fire—light—and sun related Vedic myths. For example, the Finite visible world, dīti is said to be derived from aditi (Infinite). It is well known that the relation between the Finite (dīti), visible and spatial world — being and the boundless infinite being is central to the emergence of the world of sense and science. These metaphysical concepts are found meaningfully entangled into several mythical trappings, involving several godheads, male and female. In Indian philosophy, both Samkaracharya and Aurobindo utilized and interpreted the symbolic view of myth and recognized the mystical and constructive implication of myth. Mythic knowledge is logical i.e. symbolic way. To make the point clear Māyā or the so-called magic is the principle of individuation, actualization and materialization, partly suppressive or āvaraṇī and partly expressive or Viksenaṇī. The root word of Māyā is mā, indicative of 'measure' as evident from the Sanskrit words like 'man', parimāṇ and pramāṇ. The upholders of the mythic and symbolic mode of knowing highlight the essential identity of the knower and the known in the primordial
consciousness, the matrix of all forms of knowledge and beings. The scientific knowledge pre-supposes a pragmatic distinction or a separation between the subject and the object of knowledge.

The problem of myth has concerned western philosophers from the time of Plato and the Sophists. Plato used myths and allegories for a variety of purposes. Frutiger draws a distinction between myths properly so-called and allegories, which for example, lack the element of story, among allegories he would include the account of the cave in the 'Republic' or the noble lie about precious and base metals in the souls of different types of men.

Plato uses 'myth' where he wishes the precise extent of his own intellectual commitment to remain unclear. Plato's use of 'myth' helps us to understand how the break with mythological thought forms involves the raising of sharp questions about truth and falsity which the mythological forms themselves are able to evade.

Plato has used the word sense perception in the sense of pure sensation which has no element of reason in it. Even according to modern psychology, pure sensation, without a rational element is a myth and non-existent. To explain the origin of ideas, Plato takes the help of the myth of the immortality of the soul, its fall into this world of rebirths and transmigration of soul.

With regard to the world, Plato takes recourse of myths all through. For Plato, God is the creator of the world. In this connection, Plato mentions that God has created the world out of chaos, but of what was absolutely disorderly. In theology, Plato abounds in myths and to support the notion of God leans on the verdict of wise men.
ancient thinkers and so on. Naturally, there is really no knowledge of God, but mere ‘opinion’ about God.

Each Idea is one and unique. In his mythic way, Plato declares that God has created each Idea as One and yet again each is its unique nature. Of course, the Idea of beauty is One, but it is limited or copied by many beautiful things. Thus in order to explain the realm of Reality Plato takes the help of a myth.

With regard to the Platonic Myth, Professor John Theodarakopoulos writes — “It is essential to over-come some day the division (between logic and poetry in the philosophy of Plato) that is to transcend (both) rational approach and poetry, and interpret them not separately but in the light of their profound mutual relationship.”82

Myth and similes, images and more generally poetry are used, in the Upaniṣads as well — The well known Indian philosopher and commentator of the sacred texts —A Coomaraswamy observes:

“The myth is the nearest point to absolute truth which can be reached by the human language.”

“The method they adopt (the Upaniṣads) is more poetic than philosophic. Even when the language is prose, the poetic quality is only too evident.”83

Plato, in his philosophy, uses different myths for different expressions of his teachings. So, Platonism has come to be thought of as exhibiting the very type of a metaphysical philosophy, particularly of one directed towards a transcendental reality. Regarding the purposes of using myth in philosophy, we see that when he fails to express the reality, he uses the myth which is nothing but symbol, i.e. language is symbolic. In this context, Plato has an affinity with Sankaradeva and his using of Līlā in
his teachings. Sankaradeva uses Līlā profoundly in his teachings. The purpose of using Līlā in his thinking is also because of the absence of reasons. When logic fails to give certain conclusions regarding the concept of Brahman and His creation—the world—the Jīvas—the different incarnations, Sankaradeva uses Līlā in different cases that have no element of reason. Plato employs myth to express certain truth in which he believed. In that way, Sankaradeva's Līlātattva is not explicable to logic, because when logic reason fails to give explanation, Sankaradeva takes the help of Līlā. There is no possibility of reason or explanation of Līlā. But we cannot say that Līlā is irrational and illogical. The Pure Being is beyond the rational; it is the supra-rational, numinous. Hence, the speculative part of Sankaradeva's system is only a plank to the higher idea of the Being. The Reality cannot be 'conceived' and the intuitive awareness of it is not amenable to proper expression.

Līlā—the activities of God—which is symbolic as well as superhuman is like a bridge between Nature and super Nature—Human and superhuman.

Līlā is not a Vād i.e. a doctrine, because it is not a teaching like Māyāvāda of Advaita darsāna. Līlā is the manifestation of Ānand—the Bliss of Brahman. It cannot be logically explained. But, on the other hand we cannot say that Līlā is illogical or irrational.

Notes and References


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33. Ibid., Verse – 2177.

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