

51. On reaching Nanda's Vraj, Vasudeva found all the cowherd men there fast asleep. Putting his son down on Yaśodā's bed and picking up her daughter, he again returned home.

52. Vasudeva then put the infant girl down on the bed of Devakī, re-fastened his leg-shackles, and remained as he was before.

53. Afterward, Yaśodā, Nanda's wife, aware of the birth but exhausted, and with her memory stolen by sleep, could not recall the gender of the child."

Vātsalya Bhāva: Kṛṣṇa as Mischievous Child

The Vision of Kṛṣṇa's Cosmic Form

Bhāva Blueprint

In these beautiful passages we feature the vātsalya bhāva, where the participants assume a parental relationship with Kṛṣṇa. This bhāva is not just limited to Kṛṣṇa's actual (foster) parents, but pertains to all the elder gopas and gopīs of Vraj. The defining feature of this bhāva is that it is God who is perceived as dependent on His bhaktas for protection and well-being! The passage begins with sage Garga implying that Kṛṣṇa is Viṣṇu and has had numerous previous incarnations. However, the main feature of this passage, in addition to giving a sense of the delightful nature of this type of parental relationship with Kṛṣṇa, is that it provides an excellent example of the workings of Yogamāyā. Notice how Yaśodā's intimate mothering of Kṛṣṇa is shattered when Yogamāyā lifts her spell and Yaśodā realizes who Kṛṣṇa actually is: her vātsalya bhāva is destroyed. It is replaced by the formal Vedānta-type rhetoric uttered by Kṛṣṇa's birth parents when He was born. It is only when the spell is again recast that Yaśodā can again reenter into the intimacy of this bhāva.

[Preamble: Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are now toddlers scurrying around Vraj.]

Book X, Chapter 8

1. Śrī Śuka, said:

"On being invited by Vasudeva, Garga, the purohita [family priest] of the Yadus, went to Nanda's Vraj, O king. He was a very austere person.

2. Seeing him, [Nanda] was overjoyed, considering him to be [equal to the Supreme Lord] Adhokṣaja [Viṣṇu]. Nanda rose up to greet him with folded hands, and worshipped him by falling down in full obeisance.

3. The sage was comfortably seated and given a hospitable reception. After pleasing him with agreeable and honest words, [Nanda] said: 'What arrangements can we make for one who is already fully complete, O *brāhmaṇa*?'

4. The wanderings here and there of great souls, O Lord, are for the ultimate benefit of the common people, who are householders and poor in spirit. They never have any other purpose.

5. That knowledge of astrology, the movement of the stars, has been composed by yourself, sir, and is beyond sense perception.¹⁵ By this knowledge, a person becomes aware of both imminent and distant events.

6. You are certainly the most eminent of the knowers of *Brahman*. You should please perform the purificatory rites of these two boys. *The brāhmaṇa* is the *guru* of men, by birth.'

7. Śrī Garga said:

'I am well-known everywhere on the earth as the spiritual preceptor of the Yadus. If your son is consecrated by me, He will be revealed to be the son of Devakī.

8.-9. Kāṁsa has a sinful mind. He has heard the words of Devakī's daughter, and his suspicions are aroused. After deliberating on your friendship with Vasudeva, and on the fact that the eighth pregnancy of Devakī was not supposed to be a female he will kill [your son]. This might, therefore, be a bad course of action for us.'

10. Śrī Nanda said:

'Perform the purificatory rites of the twice-born and utter words of blessing in this cowpen in secret. It will not be observed even by my own relatives.'

11. Śrī Śuka said:

'Appealed to in this way, the *brāhmaṇa*, unrecognized, secretly performed the name-giving ceremony of the two boys. He had in any case wanted to perform it personally.

12. Śrī Garga said:

'This one, the son of Rohiṇī, gives pleasure [*rama*] to His loved ones by His qualities, and so will be known as Rāma. Because of His ex-

cessive strength [*bala*], He will be known as Bala, and, because of His association with the Yadus, He will also be named Saṅkarṣaṇa [the uniter].

13. Bodies of three different colors, according to the *yuga*—white, red, and then yellow—were accepted by this other one.¹⁶ Now He has come with a black (*kṛṣṇa*) complexion.

14. Previously, this son of yours was born of Vasudeva, and that is why the learned refer to Him as beautiful Vāsudeva.¹⁷

15. There are many names and forms of your son, according to deed and quality. I know them, but common people do not.

16. This boy, who is the delight of Gokula and the *gopas*, will bring good fortune. Because of Him, you will all easily overcome every obstacle.

17. Previously, O lord of Vraj, in times of anarchy, the righteous were harassed by bandits. Protected by Him, they were strengthened and conquered the bandits.

18. People who are very fortunate place their affection in this boy. Enemies cannot overpower them, just as the demons cannot overpower those who have Viṣṇu on their side.

19. Therefore, O Nanda, this son of yours is equal to Nārāyaṇa in qualities, splendor, fame, and authority. Protect Him with great diligence.'

20. Śrī Śuka said:

'After he had been instructed about himself in this way and Garga had gone to his own home, Nanda was filled with joy. He considered himself full of good fortune.

21. After a short time had passed, Balarāma and Keśava [Kṛṣṇa] roamed about Vraj, crawling around on Their hands and knees.

22. The two of Them crawled in the dust of Vraj like snakes, dragging Their legs, which [from Their anklets] gave off sweet sounds and tinkling noises. They delighted in that sound, and so They followed people, but then scurried back to Their mothers as if frightened and confused.

23. Their two mothers, whose breasts were seeping milk from affection, picked their two boys up in their arms. The boys looked adorable with the mud smeared on Their bodies. After offering their breasts and gazing at Their faces and Their tiny teeth as they suckled, the mothers fell into a blissful state.

24. When the women found the boys' childhood *lilā* worth watching, the ladies of Vraj would leave their households and enjoy themselves, looking and laughing as the two were dragged hither and thither by the calves whose tails They had grasped.

25. The two boys were very active and Their play [sometimes] took Them out of bounds. When their mothers could not safeguard their sons from horned or fanged animals, fire, swords, water, winged creatures, and thorns, nor even perform their household duties, they became very anxious.

26. After a short time, O kingly sage, Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa were walking easily in Gokula and no longer had bruised knees.

27. Thereafter, *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa, along with Balarāma, played with the boys of Vraj of the same age, arousing rapture in the women of Vraj.

28. Observing the delightful childish activity of Kṛṣṇa, the *gopīs* gathered and spoke tongue in cheek as follows [in the presence] of His mother, who was listening:

29. 'Sometimes, he releases the calves at the wrong time, and laughs when cries [of protest] are raised. Moreover, he eats the tasty milk and whey that he steals by means of his thieving devices. He divides [the curds and whey] and feeds the monkeys. If he does not eat, he breaks the pot. When there is nothing available, and he leaves angry with the household, he blames the children.

30. When he cannot reach, he devises a system [to get things] by arranging benches and rice-husking mortars. Knowing what has been placed inside the pots hanging on rope slings, the cunning boy [makes] a hole [in them] at that time of day when the *gopīs* are absorbed in household chores. His own body, which bears clusters of precious jewels, functions as a light in the dark house.

31. While he is engaged in such audacities, he passes urine and other things in our houses. Although his deeds are carried out by theft, he outwardly appears virtuous.' In this way, these affairs were related by the women as they gazed at Kṛṣṇa's beautiful face with its fear-stricken eyes. With a smile on her face, Yaśodā did not want to scold Kṛṣṇa.

32. Once, when Balarāma and the other cowherd boys were playing, They complained to mother Yaśodā: 'Kṛṣṇa has eaten mud.'

33. Yaśodā was concerned for His welfare, and scolded Kṛṣṇa, whose eyes seemed to be full of fear. Grasping Him in her hand, she said to Him:

34. 'Why have you secretly eaten mud, you naughty boy? These young friends of yours are saying so, and so is your elder brother.'

35. 'Mother, I didn't eat any mud. They are all spreading false accusations. If you think they are speaking the truth, then you look into my mouth yourself.'

36. 'If that is the case, then open wide,' she said. Lord Hari [Kṛṣṇa], whose supremacy cannot be constrained, but who is God assuming the form of a human boy for play, opened wide.

37.-38. Yaśodā saw there the universe of moving and non-moving things; space; the cardinal directions; the sphere of the earth with its oceans, islands, and mountains; air and fire; and the moon and the stars. She saw the circle of the constellations, water, light, the wind, the sky, the evolved senses, the mind, the elements, and the three *guṇa* qualities.¹⁸

39. She saw this universe with all of its variety differentiated into bodies, which are the repositories of souls. She saw the time factor, nature, and karma. Seeing Vraj as well as herself in the gaping mouth in the body of her son, she was struck with bewilderment:

40. 'Is this actually a dream? Is it a supernatural illusion, or is it just the confusion of my own intelligence? Or is it, in fact, some inherent divine power of this child of mine?'

41. Therefore, I offer homage to His feet, which are the support of this world. From them, and through their agency, this world manifests. Their true nature cannot be known by the senses nor by reason. They are very difficult to perceive by thought, words, deeds, or intellect.

42. He is my refuge. Through His illusory power arise ignorant notions such as: "I am me; he over there is my husband; and this is my son; I am the virtuous wife, protectress of all the wealth of the ruler of Vraj; and all the *gōpas* and *gopīs*, along with the wealth derived from the cattle, are mine."

43. Then the omnipotent Supreme Lord cast His *yogamāyā* [divine power of illusion] in the form of maternal affection over the *gopī*, who had come to understand the truth.

44. Immediately, the *gopī*'s memory was erased. She sat her son on her lap and returned to her previous state of mind, with her heart full of intense love.

45. She considered Hari [Kṛṣṇa], Whose glories are sung by the three Vedas, the Upaniṣads, Sāṅkhya *yoga*, and the Sātvata sages, to be her very own son."

46. The king said:

“O supreme *Brahman*, what did Nanda do to obtain such great fortune? And what did the greatly fortunate Yaśodā do, that Hari drank from her breast?

47. His mother and father did not fulfill their desire of experiencing the wonderful childhood activities of Kṛṣṇa. These can eradicate the sins of the world. Even to this day, sages sing of them.”

48. Śrī Śuka said:

“Once, previously, Droṇa, best of the Vasus, accompanied by his wife, Dharā, said to Brahmā: ‘I will follow the orders of Lord Brahmā.

49. When we are born on earth, supreme *bhakti* [devotion] to Hari, the Lord of the Universe, and the Supreme God on earth, will flourish. Through this *bhakti*, one can easily overcome the miseries of this world.’

50. ‘Let it be so,’ was the reply. He, the greatly fortunate Droṇa, of wide renown, was born in Vraj and became known as Nanda, and she, Dharā, became Yaśodā!

51. Thereafter, O Parīkṣit, descendant of Bharata, eternal devotion to Lord Janārdana [Kṛṣṇa], who had become their son, was manifest in the husband and wife and in the *gopas* and *gopīs*.

52. In order to fulfill the order of Brahmā, Lord Kṛṣṇa resided in Vraj together with Balarāma, and enchanted them by His *līlā*.”

Kṛṣṇa’s Favor to the *Gopī* Yaśodā

Bhāva Blueprint

This passage continues the vātsalya bhāva. Here we find God in the mood of a naughty child, fearful because of His mischief, and Yaśodā in that of a loving, chastising parent. Despite Yaśodā’s failed attempts to bind Kṛṣṇa with all the rope in her household, she still remains unaware that anything is untoward in the nature of her child. Such is the power of yogamāyā. The passage ends with Kṛṣṇa becoming compliant in His own binding: bhakti is reciprocal, and from His side, Kṛṣṇa is just as committed to succumbing to His devotees as they are to succumbing to Him.

Book X, Chapter 9

1. “One time, when the house servants were busy with other chores, Yaśodā, the wife of Nanda, churned the milk herself.
2. Remembering the songs about the activities of her child, she sang them while she was churning yogurt.
3. Yaśodā churned, swaying back and forth. Her bracelets were moving on her arms, which were tired from pulling the rope, and her earrings were swinging to and fro. *Mālatī* [jasmine] flowers dropped from her hair, and her face, with its beautiful eyebrows, was sweating. She wore a linen cloth bound by a girdle on her broad, sloping hips, and her quivering breasts were leaking milk out of affection for her son.
4. Hari approached His mother as she was churning, desiring to drink her breast milk. Grasping the stirring stick, He obstructed her, demanding her love.
5. He climbed on her lap. Looking at His smiling face, she allowed Him to drink from her breast, which was leaking milk from affection. But before He was satisfied she put Him down in a hurry and rushed off when the milk that had been on the fire boiled over.
6. Furious and biting His quivering red lower lip with His teeth, Kṛṣṇa broke the butter-churning pot with a stone. With false tears in His eyes He went inside to a hiding place and ate the freshly churned butter.
7. Yaśodā removed the boiling milk and came in again. Noticing the broken vessel, she saw what her son had done. Not finding Him there, she laughed.
8. She spied Him standing on top of the base of a rice-husking mortar. He was wantonly giving fresh butter to a monkey from a hanging pot, looking anxious on account of His thieving. She approached her son stealthily from behind.
9. Seeing her with stick in hand, Kṛṣṇa hastily climbed down from there and fled, as if in fear. The *gopī* ran after Him whom the minds of *yogīs*, directed by the power of asceticism, are not able to reach.
10. The slender-waisted mother chased Kṛṣṇa, her progress slowed by the burden of her broad, moving hips. A trail of flowers falling from her loosened plait in her wake, she seized Him.
11. Grasping His arm, she chastised Him, scaring Him. Looking up with eyes agitated with fright, the guilty boy was crying and rubbing His eyes, smearing the mascara with His hands.

12. Yaśodā was fond of her child, and so threw away the stick when she realized her son was frightened. Unaware of the power of her son, she wanted to bind Him with a rope.

13. Kṛṣṇa has no beginning and no end, no inside and no outside. He is the beginning and end and inside and outside of the universe. He is the universe.

14. The *gopī* tied Him with a rope to the mortar as if He were a common being. She considered Kṛṣṇa, who is the unmanifest truth beyond sense perception in the form of a human, to be her own son.

15. The rope for binding her guilty child was short by two fingers. So the *gopī* joined another one to the first.

16. When that also was too short, she joined another one to it, but however many ropes she brought out, they were always two fingers lacking.

17. In this way, while all the *gopīs* chuckled with amusement, Yaśodā joined together all the ropes in her household. Smiling, she was struck with wonder.

18. Seeing the efforts of His mother, whose limbs were sweating and whose wreath of flowers had fallen from her hair, Kṛṣṇa became compliant in His own binding.

19. Indeed, by this act, dear Parīkṣit, the quality of submission to [His] devotee was demonstrated by Hari [Kṛṣṇa] despite the fact that He is only constrained by His own free will. By Him this universe, along with those who control it, is controlled.

20. Neither Brahmā, nor Śiva, nor even Śrī, the Goddess of Fortune, despite being united with His body, obtained the benediction which the *gopī* obtained from Kṛṣṇa, the giver of liberation.

21. God, this son of the *gopī*, is not attained as easily in this world by embodied beings, nor by the wise, nor by the knowers of the self, as He is by those who have devotion.”

The Killing of the Calf Demon

Bhāva Blueprint

In our final vātsalya bhāva passage, we again see a variety of delightful examples of Kṛṣṇa reciprocating with His beloved bhaktas, submitting out of love to their control “like a wooden puppet.”

Book X, Chapter 11

[Preamble: In the previous chapter, after numerous attempts on Kṛṣṇa’s life by various demons, Yaśodā had tied Kṛṣṇa to a mortar for His safekeeping. Kṛṣṇa then dragged the mortar between two trees. It wedged between them and eventually uprooted both trees as He kept crawling. Two celestial beings emerged from these trees: owing to their inappropriate behavior, they had been cursed by Nārada to take birth as trees, but blessed that these trees would be in Nanda’s courtyard, where they would be liberated by Kṛṣṇa.]

1. Śrī Śuka said:

“After hearing the thundering sounds of the falling trees, all the *gopas*, headed by Nanda, approached the place full of fear of an earthquake, O Parīkṣit, best of the Kurus.

2.–3. There, they saw the pair of *arjuna* trees fallen on the ground. They were bewildered, unable to understand the cause of their fall even though it was in plain view—the child, bound by a rope and dragging the rice-husking mortar. But they were doubtful, saying: ‘Whose [work] is this? How has this amazing calamity come about?’

4. The boys said: ‘[It was done] by Kṛṣṇa over there as he was going through, dragging the mortar, which then fell crossways. And we also saw two beings.’

5. The *gopas* were unable to accept what was said: ‘That could not have happened,’ they declared. Some found it incredible that such an uprooting of the trees could be caused by the small boy.

6. Naturally, after seeing His own son bound and dragging the mortar by a rope, Nanda, smiling, freed Him.

7. Applauded by the *gopīs*, *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa would sometimes dance like a child, and sometimes sing innocently. Like a wooden puppet, He was controlled by them.

8. Sometimes, on command, He would carry a stool, measure, or slippers, or He would sometimes throw His arms about, arousing the love of His relatives.

9. For those who could understand, *Bhagavān* Kṛṣṇa manifested the condition of [submitting] himself to the control of His dependents in this world. Truly, He brought joy to the residents of Vraj by His childhood activities.

10. [Once], upon hearing, 'Hey! Come and buy fruits!' Acyuta [Kṛṣṇa], the bestower of all fruits, grabbed some grains [as exchange] and rushed out, desiring fruit.

11. As the grain was falling from His hands, the woman fruit-seller filled both of Acyuta's [Kṛṣṇa's] hands with fruit, and Kṛṣṇa filled the fruit container with jewels.

12. [On another occasion] Kṛṣṇa, who had shattered the trees, went to the bank of the river and was absorbed in playing with the boys. After some time, Queen Rohiṇī called both Him and Balarāma.

13. The two boys did not present themselves when called, because of their absorption in the game. So Rohiṇī sent Yaśodā, who had great affection for her son.

14. Yaśodā called her son, who, along with his elder brother, was still playing with the boys even though Their time for play had run out. Her breasts were leaking milk out of love for her son:

15. 'Kṛṣṇa, lotus-eyed Kṛṣṇa, my young one, come, drink from my breast. Enough games! You are hungry and exhausted from playing, O son.

16. Hey, Balarāma, my son, the darling of the family, come quickly with your younger brother. You have had only breakfast early in the morning, so you must eat.

17. O Dāśārha [Kṛṣṇa], the chief of Vraj is waiting for you, wishing to eat. Come, bring us both your love. Boys—return to your own homes.

18. Your body is black with dust, my son. Come and take your bath. Today is your birthday; clean up and donate cows to the *brāhmaṇas*.

19. Look, look at the boys your age—they are scrubbed clean by their mothers and adorned beautifully. You, too, should enjoy yourself after you are bathed, nicely adorned and well fed.'

20. In this way, Yaśodā, her mind bound by affection, considered Kṛṣṇa, who is the Absolute Truth, to be her son. Grasping Acyuta [Kṛṣṇa] along with Balarāma by the hand, she led Them to Their own compound, and then performed the rites for prosperity."

21. Śrī Śuka said:

"After experiencing the great disturbances in Bṛhadvana, the great forest (Gokula),¹⁹ the elders of the cowherd men, led by Nanda, gathered together and deliberated on the affairs of Vraj.

22. In that gathering, a *gopa* by name of Upananda, who was advanced in age and knowledge, spoke up. He was a well-wisher of Kṛṣṇa and

Balarāma, and someone who understood time, place, and the cause of things:

23. 'We, who desire the welfare of Gokula, should depart from this place. Major calamities are on their way here aimed at the destruction of the boys.

24. Somehow or other, that boy was saved from the child-slaughtering demoness.²⁰ What is more, by the grace of God, the cart did not fall on top of him.

25. Then he was whisked up to disaster in the sky by the demon in the form of a whirlwind.²¹ He fell on a rock over there, but was saved by the powerful demigods.

26. That this boy or someone else was not killed after finding himself between the two trees is also owing to the protection of Acyuta [Viṣṇu].

27. For as long as such calamitous misfortunes overrun Vraj, let us take the boys away from here and go somewhere else along with our followers.

28. There is a forest called Vṛndāvana, which is fit for habitation by the *gopas*, *gopīs*, and cows. It has fresh groves, plants, grass, and sacred mountains.

29. Therefore, if this is pleasing to you all, let us go there this very day. Yoke the carts without delay. Our herds of cows should set out and go in front.'

30. When they heard this, the *gopas* unanimously declared: 'Well said! Well said!' They fastened together their respective cowpens and set out, laden with their domestic chattels.

31.–32. After placing the elderly, the children, women, and chattels on the carts, and with their cows in front, the cowherd men set out with their priests, O king. Fully alert with bows in hand, they blew their horns in every direction and made loud trumpet sounds.

33. Seated on the carts, the *gopīs* looked beautiful. Dressed attractively with golden ornaments at their necks, and with fresh *kun̄kuma* powder on their breasts, they took pleasure in singing about Kṛṣṇa's *līlā*.

34. Yaśodā and Rohiṇī were seated on the same cart. They were delighted by Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, and eager to hear those narrations.

35. They entered Vṛndāvana, and set up their cowherd camp there, with their carts arranged like a half-moon. It was a place that brings happiness in all seasons."