

Śrī Dāmodarāṣṭakam Notes
Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī
Verse 1

*namāmīśvaram sac-cid-ānanda-rūpaṁ
lasat-kunḍalam gokule bhrājamaṇam
yaśodā-bhiyolūkhalād dhāvamānaṁ
parāmṛṣṭam atyantato drutya gopyā*

1) To the Supreme Lord, whose form is the embodiment of eternal existence, knowledge, and bliss, whose shark-shaped earrings are swinging to and fro, who is beautifully shining in the divine realm of Gokula, who [due to the offense of breaking the pot of yogurt that His mother was churning into butter and then stealing the butter that was kept hanging from a swing] is quickly running from the wooden grinding mortar in fear of mother Yaśodā, but who has been caught from behind by her who ran after Him with greater speed—to that Supreme Lord, Śrī Dāmodara, I offer my humble obeisance.

ॐ Before describing the essence of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s divinity in the distinctive character, form, activities, and qualities of its Gokula manifestation, Satyavrata Ṛṣi devotionally bows down to the Lord in prelude to his prayers -- *namāmīśvaram sac-cid-ānanda-rūpaṁ*. He humbly begins by paying his respects to invoke auspiciousness, as per the rules.

ॐ To whom does he offer respects: to Īśvara, the Supreme Lord.

ॐ What is the nature of the Supreme Lord? Concentrated bliss, sentience, and eternity.

ॐ These characteristics prove the Lord’s supreme position.

ॐ Next, Satyavrata Muni establishes the Lord’s supreme position by portraying His extraordinary charm -- *lasat-kunḍalam*. His earrings, engaged with Him in eternal childhood pastimes, endlessly play on His cheeks when He flees from his mother, Yaśodā.

ॐ The he proves the Lord’s supreme position through the exceptional qualities of His associates -- *gokule bhrājamaṇa*. He shines in Gokula, the land of the gopīs, the gopas, the cows and the calves.

ॐ By using the verb “shines” Satyavrata Muni indicates that Śrī Kṛṣṇa further enhances the already wonderful land of Gokula with His presence.

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ॐ He further promotes the Lord’s supreme position by sketching one of His exquisite pastimes in one and half verses: *yaśodā-bhiyolūkhalād dhāvamānaṁ parāmṛṣṭam atyantato drutya gopyā*. Śrī Kṛṣṇa, standing on top of grinding mortar, was snatching yogurt from a hanging jar. Seeing his mother coming, He climbed down the mortar and ran in fear of punishment for the mischief of breaking the earth ware.

ॐ The word *gopyā* reminds that this rare fortune belong to the cowherd people only and owes to the expression of their love.

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Verse 2

*rudantaṁ muhur netra-yugmaṁ mṛjantaṁ
karāmbhoja-yugmena sātaṅka-netraṁ
muhuh śvāsa-kamṭha-trirekhāṅka-kaṇṭha-
sthita-graivaṁ dāmodaraṁ bhakti-baddham*

2) [Seeing the whipping stick in His mother's hand,] He is crying and rubbing His eyes again and again with His two lotus hands. His eyes are filled with fear, and the necklace of pearls around His neck, which is marked with three lines like a conch shell, is shaking because of His quick breathing due to crying. To this Supreme Lord, Śrī Dāmodara, whose belly is bound not with ropes but with His mother's pure love, I offer my humble obeisance.

- ॐ This is the sequel to the previous verse: *rudantaṁ muhur netra...*
- ॐ The words *sātaṅka-netraṁ* suggest that if His eyes were frightened, His mind was ever more so, or, just that a cowed expression was in His eyes.
- ॐ In either case, the Lord was showing fear, trying to escape
- ॐ Moreover, His gasps shoot the ornaments such as the strings of pearls on His smooth necklace which is marked with three lines like a conch.
- ॐ His belly and the mortar were equally tied by the rope. This incident again emphasizes Śrī Kṛṣṇa's supreme position, but from the perspective of His peculiar dependence on His devotee.
- ॐ Alternatively, the Lord wants to teach that only devotion can capture Him. This meaning, however, culminates in the previous one (he was bound by His mother's devotion and not by ropes).
- ॐ His mother was wet with perspiration and her flower fillet slackened. Seeing her so exerted, He mercifully agreed to be bound.
- ॐ Brahmā, Śaṅkara, and even Lakṣmī, who resides on the chest of the Lord, cannot win the mercy that Yaśodā got from Kṛṣṇa, the grantor of liberation.
- ॐ Even ascetics, scholars and yogis cannot reach Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the son of Yaśodā, as easily as devotees.

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ॐ Furthermore, the Lord thought: Śrī Nārada is my devotee. I shall grant to these two sons of Kuvera whatever he promised them

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Verse 3

*itīḍṛk sva-līlābhir ānanda-kunḍe
sva-ghoṣam nimajjantam ākhyāpayantam
tadiyeṣita-jñeṣu bhaktair jitatvam
punaḥ prematas tam śatāvṛtti vande*

(3) By such childhood pastimes as this He is drowning the inhabitants of Gokula in pools of ecstasy, and is revealing to those devotees who are absorbed in knowledge of His supreme majesty and opulence that He is only conquered by devotees whose pure love is imbued with intimacy and is free from all conceptions of awe and reverence. With great love I again offer my obeisances to Lord Dāmodara hundreds and hundreds of times.

ॐ *Iti* means “in this way”. It relates the present verse to the Lord’s dependence on His devotee, mentioned in the previous verse

ॐ Therefore the import is that by showing such dependence from His devotee He flooded Gokula in a lake of bliss.

ॐ Alternatively, *iti* relates this verse to the pastime of being bound with a rope; then the meaning would be “by such charming infancy pastimes he flooded Gokula in a lake of bliss.”

ॐ By enacting such pastimes, Śrī Kṛṣṇa also revealed his dependence on his devotees. To scholars who are absorbed in studying his majestic aspects he declares: Behold I’m captivated by the devotees, not by those who pursue the path of knowledge.”

ॐ He disclosed it to scholars who know well the influence of the Lord’s associates (on the Lord), and not to others, because esoteric bhakti and its glories are not to be revealed to sophists who pursue mere erudition and who are ignorant of the devotees’ greatness

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Verse 4

*varam deva mokṣam na mokṣāvadhiṃ vā
na canyam vṛṇe 'ham vareṣād aṣiha
idaṃ te vapur nātha gopāla-bālam
sadā me manasy āvirāstām kim anyaiḥ*

(4) O Lord, although You are able to give all kinds of benedictions, I do not pray to You for the boon of impersonal liberation, nor the highest liberation of eternal life in Vaikuṅṭha, nor any other boon [which may be obtained by executing the nine processes of bhakti]. O Lord, I simply wish that this form of Yours as Bāla Gopāla in Vṛndāvana may ever be manifest in my heart, for what is the use to me of any other boon besides this?

- ॐ After glorifying the Lord's supreme position in two verses, Satyavrata Ṛṣi formulates his prayer in two verses, beginning with -- *varam deva mokṣam na mokṣāvadhiṃ vā...*
- ॐ The import of the direct address *deva* is “O Supremely Brilliant” or “O hero of sweet pastimes.”
- ॐ “Although You could grant any boon, I'm not entertaining the fourth goals of human life, liberation, even in its topmost expression – a place in the spiritual world, where the ultimate happiness is experienced – and I'm not hankering for other (*anya*) achievements such as the nine-fold practice of *bhakti*.
- ॐ Alternatively, the word *anya* indicates “that which is desirable by others,” or whatever else could be coveted here (*iha*) in Vṛndāvana.
- ॐ The verse also shows the comparative value of the three mentioned goals: eternal life in the spiritual planets is superior to liberation, as expounded in *Bṛhad Bhāgavatamṛta*, the nine-fold *bhakti*, *śravaṇam*, *kīrtanam*, and so on, is in turn a higher achievement than the spiritual realm. Statements such as “Let us take birth even in infernal forms (3.15.49, the Kumāras speaking to Lord Nārāyaṇa) provide we remember your lotus feet,” prove that the absorption in *śravaṇama*, *kīrtanam*, etc. is more desirable than life in Vaikuṅṭha, because the spiritual world is everywhere when such absorption is present.
- ॐ Śrī Kṛṣṇa may ask: Then which boon do you choose.

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na canyam vṛṇe 'ham vareṣād apīha
idam te vapur nātha gopāla-bālam
sadā me manasy āvirāstām kim anyaiḥ*

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ॐ Reply: *idam te vapur nātha gopāla-bālam..* O Lord! Please, enter my mind forever with the Bāla Gopāla form of these Vṛndāvana pastimes. Although you are already present in my heart as the Supersoul, let Your form be manifested in my meditation in its full fledged beauty.

ॐ Kṛṣṇa: Liberation, residence in Vaikuṅṭha, and nine-fold bhakti are also extremely useful, why don't you accept those too?

ॐ Answer: *kim anyaiḥ.* What is the value of any other boon? I do not need other privileges such as liberation. Your presence is the perfection and it implies every possible pleasure.

ॐ On the other hand, in this Bāla Gopāla form You are so wonderful that to obtain something as insignificant as liberation without seeing you would just cause deep regret.

ॐ Kṛṣṇa: You are right, salvation should be rejected. Why then don't you choose to see me in one of my perfect four-handed figures? You could contemplate me, converse with me and so forth.

ॐ Reply: What would then be the vault of other blessings? I am entirely devoted to this splendid form, and I cannot relate to anything else.

ॐ The desire expressed in this verse is so sublime it turns this prayer into a glorification. This applies to the next verses too.

Śrī Dāmodarāṣṭakam Notes
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Verse 5

*idaṁ te mukhāmbhojam atyanta-nīlair
vṛtaṁ kuntalaiḥ snigdha-raktaiś ca gopyā
muhūś cumbitaṁ bimba-raktādharaṁ me
manasy āvirāstāṁ alaṁ lakṣa-lābhaiḥ*

(5) O Lord, Your lotus face, which is encircled by locks of soft black hair tinged with red, is kissed again and again by mother Yaśodā, and Your lips are reddish like the bimba fruit. May this beautiful vision of Your lotus face be ever manifest in my heart. Thousands and thousands of other benedictions are of no use to me.

- ॐ Thinking, “I am particularly eager to see your enchanting face,”
Satyavrata Muni keeps praying -- *idaṁ te mukhāmbhojam atyanta-nīlair...*
- ॐ Although the beauty of this meditative vision is such that it cannot be phrased, he tries to indicate what he experienced with a metaphor: “Your countenance is a blooming lotus which extinguishes every affliction with the nectar of supreme bliss. May it be present in my mind, again and again. This fully blown lotus is encircled by your dark-blue, glossy, and red-hued curls, which are like bumble-bees humming around a corolla.”
- ॐ The word *gopī*, refers to Yaśodā or Rādhā.
- ॐ The adverb *muhuh* is related to the past participle *cumbitam* and the verb *āvirāstām*. The meaning is May his lotus face, kissed again and again by Yaśodā (or Rādhā), enter my mind again and again.
- ॐ Alternatively, if we stick to the sequence of the words, *muhuh*, is in syntactical relation with *cumbitam* only and the meaning is the following: “She is blessed with rare fortune, hence she can kiss him again and again may this lotus face enter my mind at least once.”
- ॐ Or again, the word *sadā* could be dragged from the previous verse, reinforcing the sense in this way: “May this lotus face, kissed again and again (*muhuh*) by Yaśodā (or Rādhā) always (*sadā*) enter in my mind.”
- ॐ The compound *bimba-raktādharam* (having lips as red as bimba fruit) is used as an adjective for *mukham* (face).

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ॐ “Therefore hundreds of thousands of other boons are just insignificant.”
Here the word *lakṣa*, hundreds of thousands, denotes “every possible” and not a fixed number.

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Verse 6

*namo deva dāmodarānanta viṣṇo
prasīda prabho duḥkha-jālābdhi-magnam
kṛpā-dṛṣṭi-vṛṣṭyāti-dīnam batānu
gṛhāṇeṣa mām ajñam edhy akṣi-dṛśyaḥ*

(6) O Supreme Godhead, I offer my obeisances unto You. O Dāmodara! O Ananta! O Viṣṇu! O master! O my Lord, be pleased upon me. By showering Your glance of mercy upon me, deliver this poor ignorant fool who is immersed in an ocean of worldly sorrows, and become visible to my eyes.

- ॐ In a sudden wave of love aroused by the glorification, he now hopes to see the Lord directly. Aware that the chanting of Śrī Kṛṣṇa’s names is the supreme resort in this circumstance he prays with humility - *namo deva dāmodarānanta viṣṇo*
- ॐ “Obeisance unto You.” “To You” is not used explicitly because of awe and fear, or because of the agitation provoked by love. After bowing down, he entreats: “O my Lord! Concede me your grace.” [*prasīda prabhu*]
- ॐ Expressing his need he says -- *duḥkha-jālābdhi-magnam* “I’m drowning in the perpetual ocean of births and deaths,” or “I’m afflicted by the pangs of separation from Your vision.”
- ॐ *Ati-dīnam*: “I am absolutely helpless, incapable of finding remedy.” Or “I am about to die.” Or “I am as good as dead.”
- ॐ *Ajñam*: “I am utterly ignorant and unable to find a solution.”
- ॐ Next he defines the grace he expects (*kṛpā-dṛṣṭi-vṛṣṭyā*): “Please look at me with mercy, again and again.” Or “Shower upon me the nectar of your merciful glance.”
- ॐ Finally he asserts his desire (*edhy akṣi-dṛśya*): “Please appear before me.”
- ॐ He expresses his pleas only gradually, because this last request is so lofty that it would be improper to mention it abruptly.
- ॐ He further justifies his aspiration by using a series of direct addresses: “O Deva! You have a divine spiritual form, hence I desire to see you.

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“O Dāmodara! Because of your special affection for the devotees you will certainly appear.

“O Ananta! You bestow unlimited merciful glances.

“O Prabhu! You are endowed with limitless, inconceivable, amazing and great powers. Thus, even if not perceivable with mundane senses, You can appear to me!

“O Iśa! You are supremely independent.” (Since His mercy can be directed even to the unfit (according to His will), this independence should be understood to be absolutely causeless.)

“O Viṣṇu! You are all pervasive.” Or “You are expert in entering the groves and forests of Vṛndāvana, (consequently), You can as well appear before me without great effort.””

ॐ Alternatively, “You are undivided (*ananta*), and all-pervasive, (*Viṣṇu*). However, O Dāmodara, the intensity of your supreme affection makes everything possible.”

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Verse 7

*kuverātmajau baddha-mūrtyaiva yadvat
tvayā mocitau bhakti-bhājau kṛtau ca
tathā prema-bhaktim svakām me prayaccha
na mokṣe graho me 'sti dāmodareha*

(7) O Lord Dāmodara, just as the two sons of Kuvera—Manigrīva and Nalakūvara—were delivered from the curse of Nārada and made into great devotees by You in Your form as a baby tied with rope to a wooden grinding mortar, in the same way, please give to me Your own prema-bhakti. I only long for this and have no desire for any kind of liberation.

- ॐ After praying for a direct vision with intense devotion and ardent expectation, Satyavrata Ṛṣi is now stirred by devotional emotions, and he realizes that the Lord is achieved only by a few, and only by loving devotion. Thus he recites the verse – *kuverātmajau...*
- ॐ Alternatively, these are his thoughts: “My heart will not find solace in a single vision and the anguish of separation will follow. Only by loving devotion I may have Him forever. But I am a great offender how can this possibly happen to me?”
- ॐ Still certain the Lord’s affection is so glorious that it fulfils even the impossible, he asks for loving devotion discarding liberation – *kuverātmajau...*
- ॐ The sons of Kuvera were thus delivered from the curse of Śrī Nārada and from the cycle of births and deaths. Not only that: they obtained supreme devotion as well. Therefore he says *bhakti-bhājau kṛtau ca*
- ॐ “*Bhakti*, the ultimate perfection, had always been their shelter.” This indicates, indeed, that *prema-bhakti* was granted to them.
- ॐ Having cited the example of Manigrīva and Nalakūvera, Satyavrata prays *tathā prema-bhaktim svakām me prayaccha*: “O Lord Dāmodara, in the same way give me the exclusive shelter of Your lotus feet,” or “invest me with the devotion by which you become the exclusive focus of one’s life.”

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- ॐ The Lord may suggest: “Why do you neglect liberation? You can accept it along with devotion, as the two sons of Kuvera did; otherwise you will have the problem of births and deaths.
- ॐ Preventing such a proposal, he states *na mokṣe graho me 'sti*: “I’m longing for devotion, not liberation. If births and deaths cease upon achieving devotion, let it be, and if they don’t, it is still fine with me. This is certainly not my preoccupation.”
- ॐ The esoteric meaning is: the owner of a cintamani gem knows that everything he may ever need is included in the gem. Why shall he covet anything else separately?
- ॐ Another meaning is – upon hearing, “O Dāmodara, give me your supreme devotion,” the Lord may grow suspicious – “I’m tied to this mortar... Does he want to keep Me bound forever?”
- ॐ Therefore the words *na mokṣe graho me 'sti*. “Isn’t it my urgency to free You from these ropes?”
- ॐ The tone of his voices makes it clear that he will certainly unfasten Him. “But please bestow on me the unique loving devotion for this very form of Yours.”
- ॐ Or the tone could be, “Please give me devotion here in Vṛndāvana.” In order to witness the Lord’s pastimes, he craves to reside eternally in Vṛndāvana where devotion permeated with bliss, appears unparalleled and where this exclusive manifestation of Śrī Kṛṣṇa can be directly experienced.”

Śrī Dāmodarāṣṭakam Notes
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Verse 8

*namas te 'stu dāmne sphurad-dīpti-dhāmne
tvadīyodarāyātha viśvasya dhāmne
namo rādhikāyai tvadīya-priyāyai
namo 'nanta-līlāya devāya tubhyam*

(8) O Lord Dāmodara, I first of all offer my obeisances to the brilliantly effulgent rope which binds Your belly. I then offer my obeisances to Your belly, which is the abode of the entire universe. I humbly bow down to Your most beloved Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and I offer all obeisances to You, the Supreme Lord, who displays unlimited pastimes.

- ॐ Concluding this glorification, Satyavrata Ṛṣi pays homage to the Lord's extraordinary bodily features, retinue, intimates, etc., one by one. Hoping to fulfill his ambition, or out of devotion, he says *namas te 'stu dāmne sphurad-dīpti-dhāmne*: "I bow down to this magnificent rope, source of dazzling light, which binds Your belly."
- ॐ This image evokes the quintessence of Brahman, which is inherent in the Lord and in the rope which surrounds Him.
- ॐ And then he continues, *tvadīyodarāyātha viśvasya dhāmne*: "Thereafter I bow down to Your belly by being tied in these exceptional circumstances it displays the beauty and the tenderness of these infancy pastimes."
- ॐ How is this belly? "It is the substratum of the whole universe." It includes the manifestation of all moving and non-moving objects: the lotus stem containing all the fourteen planetary system springs up from this very abdomen. This evokes the universal form which as shown twice to Mother Yaśodā. In fact by fastening Kṛṣṇa's belly, Yaśodā subdued not only Kṛṣṇa, but also the entire universe contained in it. The Lord displayed His exclusive affection for His devotee by allowing her to tie Him, although it is impossible otherwise to bind the unlimited Lord. The inconceivable fact of fitting the whole universe within the ties educes His mind-boggling potency.
- ॐ The reason of offering respects first to the rope and then to the belly is the position of the rope over the tied abdomen, or the intention to express the superior status of the belly.

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*namas te 'stu dhāme sphurad-dīpti-dhāme
tvadīyodarāyātha viśvasya dhāme
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namo 'nanta-līlāya devāya tubhyam*

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- ॐ Now he offers obeisance to Śrī Bhagavatī, Śrī Rādhā, knowing that by the mercy of the most dear associate of the Lord every desire, albeit unrealistic, may be fulfilled (*namo rādhikāyai tvadīya-priyāyai*).
- ॐ By mentioning Her name with *upalakṣana*, he refers to all the other cowherd girls as well, although she is named alone because of Her prominence. (*Upalakṣana* is a type of statement in which a word is used to indicate related objects. It can indirectly hint to the whole if it a part, to the qualified if it is a quality, or to the universals if it is an individual, as in this case, where by naming the individual gopī, Rādhikā, all other gopīs are included by *upalakṣana*.)
- ॐ Her appellation, Rādhikā, reflects her character She ceaselessly worships (*ārādhana*) the Lord. Consequently she is very dear to Him.
- ॐ Alternatively, Rādhikā may be taken as her proper name, as opposed to the above said etymological sense. In this case Her name is not the result of a particular worship and her status doesn't have external causes. She is externally the Lord's beloved.
- ॐ In Sanskrit linguistics, the meaning of words (*vṛtti*) is analyzed chiefly in three ways: *yaugika*, *raudhi*, and *yoga-raudhika*.
- ॐ *Yaugika* is the etymological meaning derived from the analysis of verbal root and suffixes as in the case of *pācaka*, "cook," where the word is formed by the root *pac*, to cook, the suffix *ṇaka*, used to form a noun in the sense of an agent.

Śrī Dāmodarāṣṭakam Notes
Śrīla Sanātana Gosvāmī
Verse 8

*namas te 'stu dhāme sphurad-dīpti-dhāme
tvadīyodarāyātha viśvasya dhāme
namo rādhikāyai tvadīya-priyāyai
namo 'nanta-līlāya devāya tubhyam*

(8) O Lord Dāmodara, I first of all offer my obeisances to the brilliantly effulgent rope which binds Your belly. I then offer my obeisances to Your belly, which is the abode of the entire universe. I humbly bow down to Your most beloved Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī, and I offer all obeisances to You, the Supreme Lord, who displays unlimited pastimes.

ॐ *Raudhi* is the conventional or popular meaning, as in the case of Kṛṣṇa, which means “the son of Yaśodā” because He is traditionally accepted and famous as such.

ॐ *Yoga-raudhika* is a combination of *yaugika* and *raudhi*, as in *paṅkaja*, or lotus flower, which etymologically means “born (*ja*) in the mud (*paṅka*).” A lotus indeed grows in muddy waters, as other plants do. But conventionally on the lotus is called *paṅkaja*.

ॐ Here Rādhikā was interpreted through its *yaugika-vṛtti* and *raudhi-vṛtti*.

ॐ With the words *tvadīya-priyāyai* (“I bow down to her because she cares for all your associates due to the intensity of her devotion for You—what to speak of how much she cares for You!”)

ॐ Alternatively, “Your dear ones ought to be worshipped. She is Your beloved, therefore I bow down to her.”

ॐ Then, wishing to close with a supreme glorification of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa’s pastimes, such as the Rāsa Līlā, but to keep it confidential at the same time, he concludes with this same gesture, as for the maxim “a meal should terminate with sweets” -- *namo 'nanta-līlāya devāya tubhyam*

ॐ If *devāya* is in apposition *ananta-līlāya*, the sense is, “I bow down to the Divine One, Whose pastimes are also divine.” Otherwise the meaning is, “You are absorbed in eternal pastimes with Śrī Rādhikā, therefore I bow down to You.”

ॐ “Having thus indicated the whole Gokula pastime, I bow down to it.”