

Krishna-Radha: History or Myth

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Abstract: Scholars have tried to construct the biography of Krishna on the basis of the enormous corpus of myths contained in the epics and the Puranas. B. B. Majumdar tried to present a chronological life history whereas Asha Goswami reviewed the progress of his career from one text to another. Milton Singer, an Anthropologist also tried to deal with the complex phenomenon of Krishna. Dr. R. C. Majumdar asserted that there is now a general consensus of opinion in favour of the historicity of Krishna. Dr S.R. Rao wrote about his undersea finds: "The discovery is an important landmark in the history of India. It has set to rest the doubts expressed by historians about the historicity of Mahabharata and the very existence of Dwarka city." N.S. Rajaram, a mathematician and former NASA scientist, wrote that names of people and places contemporaneous to Krishna are found on some Harappan seals. Dr Narhari Achar, professor of physics at the University of Memphis, Tennessee, has dated the Mahabharata war using astronomy and placed the year of Krishna's birth at 3112 BC. An inscription from a Mora, 11 kms west of Mathura records the construction of a stone temple by a royal woman, named Toshu, in the honour of Five heroes of the Vrishini clan i.e. Krishna and Balarama and Krishna's sons Pradyumna, Samba, Aniruddha (Krishna's grandson). There are no easy answers to the questions related to historicity of Krishna, says historian K M Shrimali. The scale of the event described as the Mahabharata war and its historicity is also suspect, he says. Prof. R.S. Sharma also believes, Although Krishna plays an important role in the Mahabharata, inscriptions and sculptural pieces found in Mathura dating back to 200 BC and 300 AD do not attest to his presence. Because of this, ideas of an epic age based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata have been discarded. According to Dr. Amartya Sen, Ramayana and Mahabharata do not have any historical value. These two epics are simply mythology and neither Ram nor Krishna was a historical personality. David R. Kinsley has looked at the Krishna myths to work out the relationship between play and religion in Hindu Tradition, play representing positive religious symbol and activity.

The present paper tries to deal with this complex problem of historicity of Krishna and Radha, taking into account a variety of sources.

KEYWORDS: Myths, Historicity of Krishna, Mahabharata, Dwarka, Mathura, Religious symbol.

Harivamsa, Vishnu and Bhagwata Puranas associate Yadavas with Mathura. The founding of city of Mathura by Satrugana is described in Vishnu Purana and the Ramayana. Bhagwata Purana narrates the story of Krishna in detail, starting from the episode of his birth to the eventual migration away from Mathura. A variant of Krishna-Kamsa episode also occurs in the biography of Krishna.

History of Mathura, as a focus of Surasena activity is referred to in Mahabharata, Manusmriti, Jaina texts, Buddhist texts [Anguttara]; by Megasthenes, Arrian, Pliny. Ptolemy refers to Madura, the city of Gods. Panini¹ and Patanjali² refer to worship of Vasudeva. The history of Marhura as a focus of Surasena activity is described in Mahabharata.³ Buddhist texts list Surasena as one of the Sixteen Mahajanapadas and state that it had close links with Matsya, i.e. Macca.⁴

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had written Sri Krishna Charitra, a scientific study of the life of Krishna. Shrimad Bhagvatam declares that Krishna arrives on earth towards the end of the Dwapar Yuga. The earliest text to provide detailed descriptions of Krishna is Mahabharata.

- In Bhagvad Gita, Krishna is adored as Supreme God.
- Vishnu Purana and Bhagvat Purana describe him as Supreme personality of Godhead.
- Chandogya Upanishad refers to Vasudeva-Krishna as the son of Vasudev and Devaki and the disciple of Ghora Angirasa.
- Jain Tradition refers to Vasudev and his elder brother Baladev.
- Yaska's Nirukta, etymological Sanskrit dictionary, refers to Krishna.
- Panini's Ashtadhyayi refers to Mathura as a stronghold of Andhaka Vrishini Samgha and to Vasudeva as the famous legendary personality or hero of the Samgha.⁵
- Buddhist literature records Krishna as an ancient Ruler of India.
- Patanjali in his Mahabhashya praises Krishna and Samkarshana [Balrama] and mentions killing of Kamsa.
- Megasthenes identifies Krishna with Greek God Herakles.

He describes an Indian tribe called Souraseni [i.e. Shurasena Yadava], who worshipped Herakles in their land which had two cities, Methora [i.e. Mathura] and Kliesobora [i.e. Krishnapura], and a navigable river, the Jobares [i.e. Yamuna]. Baudhayana-Dharma-Sutra: Three names of Krishna are mentioned - Kesava, Govinda and Damodara. But there are more in this quote: "Madhva, Madhusudana, Hrshiksha, Padmanabha and Vishnu", usually describing Krishna in the Bhagavad-Gita as well as in Srimad Bhagavatam. Quintus Curtius, who mentioned "Poros" (Purus) with an image of Herakles i.e. Krishna before the battle with Alexander the Great.

Artha-Shastra of Kautilya: Krishna and Kamsa, the birth history of Krishna, the Vrishnis, Balarama and devotees of Krishna with shaved head and tuft of hair (sikha).

Marine archaeological remains in the Gulf of Cambay, off the coast of Gujarat have revealed an entire submerged civilization which has been carbon- dated to somewhere around 7500 BCE.

What can be reasonably linked to Krishna is the discovery of another submerged city close to the present city of Dwarka which is believed to be the original city of Krishna because of the plethora of the archaeological findings matching the scriptural descriptions.

In his book⁶ Dr S.R. Rao, an emeritus scientist at the marine archaeology unit of the National Institute of Oceanography, Goa, writes about his undersea finds: “The discovery is an important landmark in the history of India. It has set to rest the doubts expressed by historians about the historicity of Mahabharata and the very existence of Dwarka city.”

Conducting 12 expeditions during 1983-1990, Rao identified two underwater settlements, one near the present-day Dwarka and the other in the nearby island of Bet Dwarka. This tallies with the two Dwarkas mentioned in the epic.

The Greek exchanged ambassadors with Indian kings and one such ambassador was Heliodorus, the son of Dion who was sent from Taxila by the King Antialkidas to the court of King Kashiputra Bhagabhadra at Vidisha (Besnagar, Central India). On his visit to Vidisha, Heliodorus erected a Garud- Pillar in the honor of his ‘God of Gods’ Krishna which is one of the earliest direct archaeological evidence of Krishna. The Ghosundi and Hathibara inscriptions of 2nd century BC record the construction of an enclosure around Narayana Vatika where lay a fossilized stone called the Shaligram for the divinities of Samkarshana & Vasudeva in the east of village Nagari in Udaipur district of Rjasthan.

Another discovery of the Indo- Greek period, are the gold coins of Agathocles(200 BCE) bearing the images of Balaram holding his plough on one side and Vasudev Krishna holding the discus (Sudarshan Chakra) on the other.

In the first century BC, there is also evidence of worship of five Vrishni Heroes- Krishna, Balaram, Pradyumna (Krishna’s son), Samba (Krishna’s second son) and Anirudh (Krishna’s grandson).

An inscription from a Mora, 11 kms west of Mathura records the construction of a stone temple by a royal woman, named Tosho, in the honour of Five heroes of the Vrishini clan i.e. Krishna and Balarama and Krishna's sons Pradyumna, Samba⁷, Aniruddha (Krishna's grandson).

The best-known Pancharatra doctrine concerns the four spiritual forms of God: the absolute, transcendent state, known as Vasudeva; the form in which knowledge and strength predominate (known as **Samkarshana**); the form in which wealth and courage predominate (known as Pradyumna); and the form in which power and energy predominate (known as Aniruddha). Sealings of Vrishini represent Musala and Cakra, the attributes of Samkarsana [Balarama] and Krishna.⁸ The cave Inscription of Queen Nagnika of Satavahana Dynasty refers to Samkarshana and Vâsudeva. The last great Kushana King of North India and Bactria, took the title of Vasudeva I (c.200 AD) and minted coins in honor of Hindu Gods. Inscription of Sodasa, Indo-Scythian ruler of Mathura in Mathura refers to Krishna Vâsudeva. The Aihole Inscription of Chalukyan King Pulakesin II dated 634 AD states that the Mahabharat war was fought 3735 years before the engraving of the inscription which gives the date of 3735-634=3101 BC.

In his book⁹, N.S. Rajaram, a mathematician and former NASA scientist, writes that names of people and places contemporaneous to Krishna are found on some Harappan seals. For example, words like Paila (Ved Vyasa's pupil), Akrura (Krishna's friend), Vrishni (Krishna's clan), Yadu (Krishna's ancestor), Sri tirtha (old name for Dwaraka) are found on seals, some of which go back 5000 years. Dr Narhari Achar, professor of physics at the University of Memphis, Tennessee, has dated the Mahabharata war using astronomy, using regular planetarium software. According to his research conducted in 2004-05, the titanic clash between the Pandavas and the Kauravas took place in 3067 BC. Using the same software, Dr Achar places the year of Krishna's birth at 3112 BC. Dr Manish Pandit, a nuclear medicine physician in the UK, after examining the astronomical, archaeological and linguistic evidence, agrees with Dr Achar's conclusions. Dr Pandit, who is also a distinguished astrologer and has written several books on the subject, traced the route of Krishna's journeys to shoot the documentary, "Krishna: History or Myth?"

According to historian S.M. Ali, the author of Geography of Puranas, "The geographical matter contained in the Mahabharata is immense. It is perhaps the

only great work which deals with geographic details and not incidentally, as other works.”
“There is now a general consensus of opinion in favor of the historicity of Krishna.” – R. C. Majumdar in *The History and Culture of the Indian People*. “That Krishna himself was a historical figure is indeed quite indubitable.” – Rudolf Otto in *The Original Gita*

Dr. Bimanbihari Majumdar, 1968: "The western scholars at first treated Krishna as a myth... But many of the Orientalists in the present century have arrived at the conclusion that Krishna was a ksatriya warrior who fought at Kuruksetra,..."¹⁰

Dr. R. C. Majumdar, 1958: "There is now a general consensus of opinion in favour of the historicity of Krishna. Many also hold the view that Vāsudeva the Yadava hero, the cowherd boy Krishna in Gokula... were one and the same person."¹¹ Horace H. Wilson, 1870: "Rama and Krishna, who appear to have been originally real and historical characters,"¹²

Thomas J. Hopkins, From a strictly scholarly, historical standpoint, the Krishna who appears in the Bhagwad-Gita is the princely Krishna of the Mahabharata.... Krishna, the historical prince and the charioteer of Arjuna.¹³

The New British Encyclopaedia: Vasudeva- Krishna, a Vrisni prince who was presumably also a religious leader levitated to the godhead by the 5th century BC.¹⁴ How much of the epics is fiction and how much history? There are no easy answers to these questions, says historian K M Shrimali. The scale of the event described as the Mahabharata war and its historicity is also suspect, he says.

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According to Gandhiji, Ramayana and Mahabharata are simply religious works. He further said, Krishna of Gita is the embodiment of pure and divine knowledge, but

without having any physical existence. By this the Avatar Krishna is not denied at all, but only it is said that he is mythical.

Vedic scriptures also confirm Krishna as being a person, but not a person like us. The scriptures portray him as an unlimited person. Unlike human beings, he is supposed to have unlimited beauty, unlimited knowledge, unlimited wealth, unlimited strength, unlimited fame and unlimited renunciation. Krishna's body is considered to be transcendental, which means his body does not get influenced by the material nature. When Krishna was in the battlefield of Kurukshetra, he is supposed to have had great grand children, but looked only about 16 years old. It is also believed that sometimes Krishna sends his representatives to teach humankind about Him. Sometimes, he chooses to come himself, as he is supposed to have done when he spoke the spiritual and philosophical teachings known as the *Bhagavad-Gita*.

In *Bhagavad-Gita* (4.6) Krishna himself says, "Although I am unborn and My transcendental body never deteriorates, and although I am the Lord of all living entities, I still appear in every millennium in My original transcendental form."

RADHA

Radha in Hinduism, the favourite mistress of Krishna. In devotional religion she represents the longing of the human soul for God.¹⁵

Literary evidence abounds for the existence of Krishna, says Rajaram. This is because, he says, ancient authors have taken enormous pains to preserve accounts of Krishna's life, times and philosophy even if they did embellish some details like the presence of Radha, who was probably never a historical figure. Although later literature attributed as many as 16,000 wives to Krishna, there's no evidence to show that he had any other wife, apart from Rukmini. We have seen how on one occasion in the *Bhagavata Purana*, Krishna disappears taking with him a single girl, how they then make love together in a forest bower and how when the girl tires and begs Krishna to carry her, he abruptly leaves her. The girl's name is not mentioned but enough is said to suggest that she is Krishna's favourite. This hint is now developed. Radha, for this is the girl's name, is recognized as the loveliest of all the cowgirls.

She is the daughter of the cowherd Vrishabhanu and his wife, Kamalavati, and is married to Ayana, a brother of Yasoda. Like other cowgirls, her love for Krishna is all-consuming and

compels her to ignore her family honour and disregard her husband. Krishna, for his part, regards her as his first love. In place, therefore, of courtly adventures and battles with demons, Krishna's adulterous romance is now presented as all in all. It is the moods, feelings and emotions of a great love-affair which are the essence of the story and this, in turn, is to serve as a sublime allegory expressing and affirming the love of God for the soul.

VALLABHA and Gaudiya Vaishnava sects, which regards Radha as the original *Goddess* or *Shakti*. Radha is also the principal god of worship in the Nimbarka Sampradaya, as Nimbarka, the founder of the tradition, declared that Radha and Krishna together constitute the absolute truth. Nimbarka seems to have been the first well-known religious leader to regard Radha as central to his cult (thirteenth century)]. Radha is the most important gopi in Raas (Special kind of dance) with Lord Krishna. Radha is often referred to as **Rādhārānī** or "Radhika" in speech, prefixed with the respectful term 'Srimati' by devout followers. Gaudiya Vaishnavas, believe that in fact Radha is the original source from whom Goddess Lakshmi emanated.

Radha, it was held, was the soul while Krishna was God.

Gita Govinda—the Song of the Cowherd—a Sanskrit poem written by the Bengali poet, Jayadeva, towards the close of the twelfth century.

Its subject is the estrangement of Radha and Krishna caused by Krishna's love for other cowgirls, Radha's anguish at Krishna's neglect and lastly the rapture which attends their final reunion. In Bengal, the poets Vidyapati and Chandi Das flourished in about the year 1420, while in Western India, Mira Bai, a local princess, began a wide-spread popular movement. Mira Bai was followed by Vallabhacharya (born 1478) who in turn inspired four poet disciples—Krishna Das, Sur Das, Parmanand Das and Kumbhan Das. All these were at their height in the middle of the sixteenth century, writing Hindi poems in which Radha's adventures with Krishna and their rapturous love-making were devotedly described. Barsana and Vrindavan¹⁶ in *Mathura*¹⁷ District contain a large number of temples dedicated to both Radha and Krishna, including the Radhavallabh Temple.

Maybe Krishna-Radha really lived. Maybe they didn't. Whether or not Krishna ever had a physical body and walked this earth, he exists through **Bhagavad-Gita** in the minds of countless worshippers.

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embraces also Vrindavana, Govardhana, and Gokula, associated with Krishna from the time immemorial. Many millions of Krishnabhaktas visit these places every year and participate in the numerous festivals that re-enact divine scenes from Krishna's life on Earth, of which were spent in those very places Vrinda means Tulsi (A sacred specie of flora) and van as forest, therefore Vrindavan is a holy forest of Tulsi.

17. **Vraja, another synonym of Mathura region specifies literally a land of roamers and a station of cowherds; Vraja also means a herd from the root Vraj – constant moves of nomadic pastoral groups. Gokula means originally a herd of kine; Govardhana , a rearer of kine – pastoral character of Mathura. The word Mathura is also connected with the Sanskrit root, math [to churn]. Harivamsa describes it as resonant with the voice of the sputtering churn and flowing with the butter milk. Mathura is also referred to as an allusion to Madhu-manthara, a title of Krishna, implying the destroyer of Madhu, the demon. [F. S. Growse, Mathura: A District Memoir, p.73].**
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