I. INTRODUCTION

The ritual performance Kṛṣṇanāṭṭam [1, 2], a votive offering at the famous Kṛṣṇa Temple at Guruvayur in Kerala is based on the sanskrit poem Kṛṣṇagīti, written by Mānavedan, the Zamorin (Sāmūtiri) King who lived in Kerala in the seventeenth century. Kṛṣṇagīti (completed in 1658 A.D.) deals with the life of kṛṣṇa told in eight cantos: Avatāram, Kāliyamardanam, Rāsakrīḍa, Kaṁsavadham, Svayaṁvaram, Bānayuddham, Vividavadham and Svargārohanam. It consists of slokas and gītis set to appropriate rāgas and tālas. Kṛṣṇagīti integrates incidents from Bhāgavata, Mahābhārata and Harivaṃśa. The performance begins in the temple after the last pūjā (trppuKa) is concluded and the sanctum sanctorum is closed for the day (usually after 10 PM). Preliminary rituals involve placing musical instruments (ceṅgila, ilattālam, śuddhamaddalam and toppimaddalam) on the ground, lighting of the big lamp (kaḷiwijakku) which itself is a representation of the deity, a few beats on the maddalam invoking śabdabrahma, recitation of a maṅgala śloka and the performance of the auspicious dance toṭayam behind the hand-held curtain. It is to be noted that there is no special stage set for the performance and the audience sit on the ground in front of the lamp. The performance takes place behind and around the lamp. The statue of Mānavedan with his prayerful hands offering praṇām to the deity is a permanent witness to the performance, usually about three hours.
II. THE PERFORMANCE

\textit{krṣṇaduṣceṣṭitakāthanam} occurs as the last scene [3] of the first play \textit{avatāram}, after the dance sequence known as \textit{mullappūccarval}. As a prologue to the scene, few ślokas are sung by the two musicians to the accompaniment of \textit{ceṅgila}, \textit{iḷattālam}, \textit{iṭakka}, \textit{suddhamaddalām} and \textit{toppimaddalām}:

\begin{quote}
alamalamayi līlālola gopālabālaḥ  
saha vividhavīrāiṣteyamāhārakālaḥ  
pranayavivaśayetthāṁ prārthito ’pyaṁbayā’gā  
nā tu navanavanātōdgandhivaktrāraṇindaḥ (1-54)
\end{quote}

(Even though the mother affectionately called several times saying, \textit{listen my playing child, it is time for you to eat; stop playing with the gopa boys, you did not go to her since your mouth was smelling of fresh ghee.})

\begin{quote}
navamanavamājyaṁ prājyaharṣam jihiṣuḥ  
kvacana vadanaṇṭenāsu nirvāya ādīpaṁ  
valayamanānīghājālabhagnābhīlāso  
niśī nivavrṭīse ca mānaṇakṛtāntaujanmā (1-55)
\end{quote}

(During one night, wanting to eat the freshly prepared ghee stealthily, you blew off the lamp. But then there was illumination of the sparkle of bangles. Hence, losing hope, you abandoned your effort and returned.)

***************

\begin{quote}
mandaṁ vinyasya pādāṁbujamaticakito jātu maṇijīrṇādāt  
tatrātye gehākṛtye nirāta iha janē gūḍhamantaḥ praviśya  
śīkyāudhṛṣṭya dugdhaṁ sasakhī samāpibastāvadevaṅganābhīr- 
drṣṭo dhāvaṇ grhīto ’ntikamatha gamito māturuktā ca saivam (1-60)
\end{quote}

(One day, when all were busy with their household work, you entered a house, with silent steps, took milk from hanging pots and happily drank it with your friends. Then the gopis found you. You ran away. But the gopis caught you and brought you to your mother and...
After the last śloka is sung, the hand-held curtain is removed to reveal the scene in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2 where krṣṇa is caught red-handed in the act of stealing by the gopi women and brought to yaśodā. The kathanam follows in padas sung in todi rāga and cenipa tāla. There are twelve padas in the text but only two are sung in the performance (Fig. 3 and 4).

\[
tvatsutenāmūnā yat smā no bhidyate \\
tadaraje kutracid vidyate no \\
dugdhadadhinanātatakraghītarakṣaṇam \\
niyatamasmābhiriha śakyaṇte no
\]
(There is nothing left here which is not broken by your son. We are unable to keep milk, curd, buttermilk or ghee safely.)

Each padam is followed by the pallavi

\[
gokulaidhādihome sūnurayi te \\
gokule sakalamapi rahasi harate.
\]
(Listen, queen of gokul, your son is stealing almost everything.)

\[
nandapatn-ha te nandanenāhitam \\
vyāprtaṁ balacāpalamitidam \\
akṣamāmahi vayaṁ śikṣyate'yaṁ na ce \\
dakṣamā raksituṁ samamaṇḍīdam
\]
(Wife of Nanda, we pardoned all pranks of your son, considering that he is a child. If you do not chide and punish him, you may not be able to safeguard all these.)

The śloka

\[
śrutvā tāsāṁ vilāpaṁ bhagavivaśadṛśaṁ mlānanamrānanāhjaṁ \\
drṣṭvā cāsaktapuṇidvayamadhijalamurvyāṁ likhantaṁ padena \\
śokasnehānukampāvivaśitahṛdaya śikṣaṇe śikṣaṇe vā \\
neśā sūnūṁ nyagādīdatirusamabhiniyamadhyamya daṇḍam (1-61)
\]
(She (yaśodā) heard their complaints and saw her son standing with frightened eyes, lowered face, hands pressed on his neck and drawing on earth with his feet. Overwhelmed by sorrow, love and pity, she was unable to decide to punish or not. Taking a stick, she said) follows (Figs. 5 and 6).

This is followed by a *hitopadeśa* by yaśodā in few padas sung by musicians in mukhārī rāga and atānta tāla (Figs. 7 and 8). There are five padas in the text but only two are sung during the performance.

\[ \begin{align*}
    \text{mahitavāṁśe vīhatajāte} \\
    \text{ratiraho te kathamakārye} \\
    \text{kathaya caurye kalinikāyye} \\
    \text{tanaya vāryo paramanārye}
\end{align*} \\
\]

(Son! Tell me, born in a great race, how could you think of stealing, which should not be done, which is deplorable, avoidable and which is a reason for quarrel.)

\[ \begin{align*}
    \text{jananasārān janaya sūnū-} \\
    \text{nītyanāthatā bhuvananātham} \\
    \text{jananacoraṁ tanayamāpam} \\
    \text{vidhibalāt tvāṁ vīhitanātham}
\end{align*} \]

(I prayed to the Lord of universe to give me sons who are good from birth. But due to fate, I got you as my son who begs for anything and steals everything.)

The śloka

\[ \begin{align*}
    \text{praṇayabharuparītāṁ bhāratīṁ māturetā-} \\
    \text{majita madhuravādi tvāṁ niśamgyavādiḥ} \\
    \text{‘vacasi tava varişṭhe sarvadāṁbāvatiṣṭhe} \\
    \text{śarpa iha caraṇābhāyāṁ tat prasīdāmukābhāyāṁ’ (1-62)}
\end{align*} \]

(Hearing this affectionate *hitopadeśa* of mother, you said: *Mother, henceforth I will obey your words. Touching your feet, I promise. Kindly be pleased with me.*)

is sung and enacted next (Fig. 9) followed by the śloka
Hearing these pleasant words from you, yaśodā said happily: 
Gopis, be happy. Henceforth, 
you will not face any problem from my son. yaśodā comforted the gopies, compensated their losses, threw the stick away and kissed your face affectionately.) (Figs. 10 and 11).

To conclude the play properly, according to the rules of the classic Indian Theatre, three actors (yaśodā and two gopi women) perform the auspicious dance dhanāsī (Fig. 12). While the concluding maṅgala sloka is being sung, they offer pranāms to the sacred ground, to the flames of the sacred lamp and finally to the deity in the sanctum sanctorum. A few beats on the musical instruments conclude the play.

III. TEXTUAL SOURCES

We note that the description of krṣṇa’s childhood pranks in Krṣṇagāti has some similarities with Śrīkrṣṇavilāsam kāvyam which is an earlier work. It is interesting to search for the source(s) for the account in both these works. In śrīmadbhāgavatapurāṇa, dvitīya khaṇḍa, daśama skandha, aṣṭama skandha, aṣṭamo’dhyāya we find a very brief account, in a total of four slokas.

Harivāṁśa, the khila to Mahābhārata contains a more detailed account of krṣṇa’s life than Bhāgavata. However, the episode we are looking for, is missing in the editions available in print, as well as the celebrated Chitrashala Press edition. In these editions, there is only a very brief description of krṣṇa’s childhood pranks occurring in the seventh chapter of viṣṇuparva titled yamalārjunabhāṅgah. We find somewhat disconnected sequence of slokas atiprasaktau tau drṣṭvā sarvavrajavicāriṇau
nāśakattau vārayiturī nandagopah sudurmadau (2-7-12)
tato yaśodā sanukruddhā krṣṇaṁ kamalalocanam
ānāyya sakaṭimūle bharatsayanti punah punah (2-7-13)
According to the editor of the BORI Critical Edition of Harivaṁśa, between these two ślokas, the southern recension has two full chapters which the editor has relegated to Appendices 9 and 9A. We find that a detailed account of kṛṣṇa’s pranks occurs in the southern recension of Harivaṁśa in two chapters named kṛṣṇasamārkṣaṇayorvālakrīḍā (15 ślokas) and yashodāyai gopīnāṁ kṛṣṇaduṣceṣṭītakathanam (23 ślokas). The summary is as follows:

kṛṣṇa used to enter the houses, steal milk, curd, ghee etc., eat as he pleased and distribute the rest to other boys. Sometimes he used to pour milk into buttermilk pots and buttermilk into milk pots. He used to break the pots indiscriminately. Also, he used to untie calves and leave them free to drink milk from cows. He used to tie the hairs of several boys together and create havoc [5].

Fed up with these pranks, the gopīs, in a group, met yaśodā and complained to her, describing the incidents in detail. One said: kṛṣṇa broke ten of my pots. I do not have any milk, buttermilk, curd or ghee at home. Another: Your son broke all my fifty pots. I am left with none. Another: All my pots are gone due to your son. What do I do? Your son freed the calves and they drank all milk from cows. Another: I prepared sweet dishes for my boys. Your son ate it all leaving nothing. Another: Your son released all my cows and calves and I have nothing. The chapter concludes saying that yaśodā comforted and compensated all gopis for their losses [6]:

atha tābhya yathānaśtaṁ yaśodā dattavatyalam
samāśvāsyā tataḥ sarvāṁ svāṁ svāṁ vēśma vyākālayat (9A-23)

As is well-known, the southern recension of Mahābhārata is more consistent and complete than the northern recension. We find that the same is true of Harivaṁśa. Interestingly, only printed edition of the southern recension of Harivaṁśa available to the BORI editor was in Grantha lipi. This may partly account for the ignorance prevalent in Mahābhārata scholarship regarding many gems [7] in the southern recension of Harivaṁśa. In the light of its extreme importance, it is mandatory to have a printed edition of this text in Devanāgari lipi. We hope that Mahābhārata scholars will initiate an effort towards this goal.
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[1] Krṣṇanāṭṭam, is a votive ritual theatre offering at Guruvayur temple, Kerala, India. For more information, visit the site:


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