

Raas Leela



Meaning:

Leela is an act/play/dance performed by Thakorji, purely for the benefit- **sukh** of the Vaishnavs. Examples of Leelas are Daan Leela, Gowcharan Leela, Chirharan Leela etc.

Raas means - aesthetic, i.e pleasing/beautiful/artistic.

So Raas Leela would roughly translate to "play of aesthetics" or more broadly as "Dance of Divine Love"

It is one of the most wonderful leelas of Shree Thakorji and has a great presence in Hindu scriptures such as Shree Bhagavat Purana and literature such as the Gita Govinda. It marks a culmination of all the efforts of a soul to be in unison with Shree Thakorji, as we will see later on. In the Krishna Bhakti traditions, the Raas Leela is considered to be one of the highest and most auspicious of Shree Krishna's Leelas.

Commentators have written volumes on this singular leela and orators have spoken non-stop for days at a time just on this one leela.

In its most basic and physical form, it is the circular dance of the Lord and the gopis, in Vrindavan during the autumn full moon, but there is much more to it than that. The Raas has deep esoteric meaning and has nothing to do with materialistic pleasures. Once the spiritual meaning of the dance is illuminated, it removes any misunderstanding of desires for materialistic sensual pleasures.

Where and when

It occurred in the forest - **Vaan** - in Vrindavan around 5000 years ago during Shree Krishna's presence on earth.

Let's try to transport ourselves back to that period and visualise the setting:

- the night of Poonam in our calendar with a full moon.
- in the Auspicious month of Aaso, in Shukal Paksh, the beauty of autumn in its full glory which is our Sharad poonam night.
- the rains have stopped.
- rivers & streams of the forest are full of fresh clean waters
- the fragrant breeze blowing in Vraj
- ponds are adorned with lustrous blooms of lotuses and lilies
- flowers and trees are in full bloom
- sweet sounds of birds and honey bee
- the cows are grazing in the background and peacocks in full glory.

Shree Krishna has created this as perfect setting for this most enchanting Leela, which He supernaturally stretches to the length of one Night of Brahma, a Hindu unit of time lasting six months.

The Participants

Thakorji had his to call the Gopis; again you need to visualize this - under the Kadamb tree, Murlidhar plays the bansi, standing in a beautiful tribhang (when the head, the hips and the legs are all at different angles to each other).

This is **Venu-Naad** - the enchanting music from the bansi which created a magical effect on everything around - stopping the flow of Shree Yamunaji, stopping the birds from singing and the calves from drinking their mothers' milk. Even the moon stopped in awe and the chariots of the demigods above stopped still. The intended targets, Gopis heard it also and made their way to the source having totally lost track of time, space, their parents and husbands and their senses.

A great circular formation was created in which the Lord and the Gopis danced in unison. The Lord danced with such agility and grace that each Gopi felt that He was dancing exclusively with her and for her. This is the **Lagoo Raas**, where there was only one Krishna dancing with all the gopis.

Significance

To fully appreciate this Leela, one has to look at the events before and after it.

Before the Leela, what is the true identity of Shri Krishna and the Gopis. Shri Krishna is the ultimate and true personality in all completeness, Purna Purshottam. He is eternal. In earlier avatars, he had met the Gopis who were rishis or sages, and being unable to satisfy their desires in that manifestation, the Lord promised that when He comes in His Complete form, He will award these rishis the ultimate bliss. This was the Raas Leela itself! So, the Raas Leela celebrates an amazing achievement of several life times.

As for the events after the Raas Leela, The Lord after giving the Gopis the ultimate joy was about to give them the absolute experience of bliss - one even more powerful than the one they had just experienced.

In His various Leelas, the Lord slowly but surely cleansed the souls and carefully removed each layer of worldly attachment - **maya** that covered them. In the pan-ultimate Leela - Chir-haran Leela - the Lord removed the dvaita - the duality - from their mind. The super-refined souls of the gopis were deservedly ready to immerse in the Raas-Leela.

There was however one maya that had not been cleansed. As the Raas Leela commenced, the gopis started feeling immense sense of pride - **abhimaan** - that Krishna would be not be able to perform the Raas without them. Upon manifestation of this maya, the Lord became **antar-dhayan** ,i.e vanished.

The gopis who had just experienced the most blissful unison with Thakorji could not now bear the pain of separation from Him. They cried and cursed their fate in vain. The forest that seemed so beautiful a minute ago, now seemed ghostly. Gopis started to search for Him and upon seeing various markings in the sands, and upon the trees, imagined the Leela of the Lord. Their feeling of separation was so intense, they began to see the Lord everywhere, in each other and in the world around them.

Not being able to see their beloved Krishna, culminated in the most wondrous hymn - the **Gopi-Geet** - the most intense form of separation ever expressed. This is well documented within Shri Vallabhacharya's Subodhini.



Shree Krishna, seeing that the gopis had now reached yet another peak of experience, became **pragat** - ie He appeared in their midst and yet none could tell how he got there !

He then awarded them the ultimate fruit, the Maha Raas Leela. The significance of this Raas is that the Lord made himself appear in several forms to make sure each Gopi had the chance to interact with him personally. He met all of them at the same time yet each Gopi maintained their individuality to enjoy the Lord's bliss. Not only is there a Krishna in the middle, as was with the earlier Raas, but He also appears as a partner for each and every gopi. There are as many Krishnas as there are gopis.

The Krishna in the middle represents Paramatma in His absolute form. The Krishna dancing with each and every gopi represents His Antaryami form.



In conclusion, the Raas Leela is as spectacular as it's auspicious; it provides an amazing insight into how deserving souls can attain unison with Shri Krishna, through attainment of Pushti or Thakorji's Grace. The Lord is forever in our midst, He is not hidden from us, it is us who have closed our eyes and hence can't see Him !

In our daily lives, the seva that we do all year culminates in the attainment of the fruit during the 15 days of the **Aaso Maas, Shukal Paksh**. Shree Swaminiji's charan has a chinha of jaav (wheat), which signifies the pain of separation that the Gopis suffered - **virah taap**. Shree Thakorji with his venu-naad, makes the jaav grow, so as to relive their pain. That is the significance of the **Javara vavani** ceremony. so the three stages in achieving the fruit are - Thakorji's venu naad is the planting of the seed, the grown Javara represents the tree and the fruit is the opportunity to play Raas in front of Thakorji - as we did at our Vrajdham Haveli on the day of Sharad Punam Friday before last, until midnight.

=====

Another interpretation:

The gopis are considered to be Sati. The word Sati can also refer to “realized souls”.

Krishna plays the flute to call the gopis. The flute is given the status of a teacher, Acharya. The music is knowledge which is Brahma-Vidhya. The music flowing from the flute awakens the thirst for spiritual knowledge in the gopis.

Once the knowledge, Brahma-Vidhya is awakened, the gopis abandon their husbands to reach Krishna. The husbands represent our selfish materialistic desires. True knowledge kills these selfish desires. The gopis want only that which is true and approach Krishna.

The Raas takes place in a circle. The gopis represent the jeeva atma. There is one Krishna in the middle surrounded by the gopis. Not only is there a Krishna in the middle but He also appears as a partner for each and every gopi.

The Krishna in the middle represents Paramatma in His absolute form. The Krishna dancing with each and every gopi represents His Antaryami form. As antaryami He exists as our soul. He is always with us. He exists in each and every one of us. Thus the entire Raas represents the Vishwaroop Swaroop of God; He exists as antaryami (soul of every soul) as well as the Absolute God head.

The Raas is performed with the gopis who are women. This means that all jeevatmas are feminine. The only male in this entire Universe is Paramatma Sri Krishna. He is known as the Purna Purshottam or the great Purusha. This relationship is a spiritual relationship and differs from the type of spousal relationships we are familiar with.

The gopis encircling Krishna on either side represent students and Krishna is the object of knowledge sought by them. If we look at the two Krishnas encircling a gopi then we see the student in the middle. Knowledge gains importance only when there are students to learn. The two Krishnas encircling a gopi show us the importance of the student or the jeeva atma. The two gopis encircling a Krishna show us the supremacy of the knowledge or Paramatma.

The Raas has deep esoteric meaning and has nothing to do with sensual indulgence. When the esoteric meaning of the dance is illuminated, it helps us to shed our desires for materialistic sensual pleasures. It awakens the thirst to learn Brahma-Vidhya in us; with the help of this knowledge we can reach the lotus feet of Paramatma. The dance takes place at night to show us that the union with Paramatma is beyond time and space. At nighttime the normal boundaries of time and space are not illuminated. Night here represents the transcendental nature of the union of a jeev atma with Paramatma.

=====

