

### A comparative analysis of the Kaṁsavadha episode in select Sanskrit Mahākāvyas

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#### Abstract

The Kaṁsavadha episode in the 10<sup>th</sup> Skandha of the Bhāgavatam (Chapters 39-44) describes Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's journey to Mathurā and their confrontation with Kaṁsa. Spanning 217 verses, the narrative includes key moments such as Akrūra's vision at the Yamunā, the breaking of the ceremonial bow at the dhanur-yāga, and the defeat of Kaṁsa's wrestlers, culminating in his prophesied slaying. This study offers a comparative analysis of how the Kaṁsavadha episode is reinterpreted in ten major Sanskrit mahākāvyas: Yādavābhyudayam, Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam, Rukmiṇīśa-vijayam, Mukundavilāsam, Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ, Yādavendramahodayam, Śrīkṛṣṇacaritam, Nārāyaṇīyam, Śaurikathodayaḥ, and Daśavatāracaritam. By examining these works, the study explores the diversity of poetic techniques and approaches employed by different poets in reshaping this central narrative. Each poet emphasizes different facets of the story, whether through the portrayal of Kṛṣṇa's emotions, the use of particular narrative devices, or stylistic variations, such as the constraints of the daśaka and Yamaka forms. The study demonstrates how each retelling adapts the narrative to fit distinct poetic structures while retaining key elements of the original story, showcasing the flexibility and innovation within the Sanskrit poetic tradition. In doing so, it underscores the timeless and enduring relevance of the creative innovation employed by poets, who continually reimagine the familiar story within new literary frameworks, maintaining the integrity of the characters and central theme while producing distinct and vibrant works. This paper contributes to broader discussions in Sanskrit poetics, revealing the dynamic interplay between tradition, innovation, and the enduring power of poetic imagination.

**Keywords:** *Bhāgavatam*, *Yādavābhyudāyam*, *Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam*, *Rukmīṇīśavijayam*, *Mukundavilāsam*, *Śrīkṛṣṇavijayah*, *Yādavendramahodayam*, *Śrīkṛṣṇacaritam*, *Nārāyaṇīyam*, *Śaurikathodayah*, *Daśāvatāracaritam*, *Kṛṣṇa*, *Kāṁsa*, *Kāṁsavadha*, *Kubjā*, *Narrative*, *Re-telling*, *Poetic Borrowing*, *Embellishing*, *Interpreting*, *Re-fashioning*.

### Introduction

The Kāṁsavadha episode, a pivotal moment in Kṛṣṇa's journey, has long captured the imagination of poets and scholars alike. Initially detailed in the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* and later referenced by classical commentators such as *Pāṇini*<sup>1,2</sup> and *Patanjali*<sup>3</sup>, Kāṁsa's death at Kṛṣṇa's hands has become a central motif in the Sanskrit literary tradition. Over time, this episode has inspired a multitude of reinterpretations across various texts. This paper explores how the Kāṁsavadha narrative is adapted and reimagined in ten major mahākāvya, each poet employing distinct narrative strategies to retell the story. Unlike the expansive account found in the *Bhāgavatam*, these poets vary in their approach — some condense the narrative, others emphasise Kṛṣṇa's emotional journey, while others focus on dramatic tension or on particular characters. Through this comparative analysis, the paper highlights how each poet reshapes the Kāṁsavadha episode, altering its pacing, structuring of events, and thematic focus, while retaining the integrity of the core narrative.

### Story-line from the Bhāgavatam

Kāṁsa, the tyrant of Mathurā, fears a prophecy foretelling his death at the hands of his nephews, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma. To prevent this, he sends

<sup>1</sup> “To Pāṇini are ascribed the plays Kāṁsavadha and Balibanda”, pg.535, M. Kṛṣṇamachariar (2016).

<sup>2</sup> “Panini's grammar; his proximity to the Vedic language as found in the Upanisads and Vedic sutras suggests the 5<sup>th</sup> or maybe 6<sup>th</sup> c. B.C.”, pg. 88, Otto Harrassowitz Verlag (1977)

<sup>3</sup> ‘The Denotation of Generic Terms in Ancient Indian Philosophy: Grammar, Nyāya, and Mīmāṃsā’, pp. 1 with footnote 2, Peter M. Scharf (1996).

Akrūra to invite them to Mathurā under the guise of a dhanur-yāga festival, planning to kill them. Devoted to Kṛṣṇa, Akrūra joyfully accepts, seeing it as a chance to meet Kṛṣṇa, whom he knows as an avatar of Viṣṇu. In Gokula, Akrūra is welcomed by Nandagopa, Kṛṣṇa's father, and explains Kaṁsa's invitation, which Nandagopa reluctantly accepts. As Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma depart, the Gopīs tearfully bid them farewell.

On the journey, Akrūra stops at the Yamunā River and has a divine vision of Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu, overwhelmed with devotion. Upon arrival in Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma are greeted with awe. Kṛṣṇa, exploring the city, encounters a washerman loyal to Kaṁsa who refuses him fine clothes, prompting Kṛṣṇa to strike him down. A grateful weaver and a florist named Sudāma adorn them with gifts, and Kṛṣṇa blesses them with bhakti. A hunchback named Trivakrā offers them perfume, and Kṛṣṇa's touch miraculously heals her.

At the dhanur-yāga site, Kṛṣṇa snaps the ceremonial bow, alerting Kaṁsa. After defeating the guards, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma return to their camp. That night, Kaṁsa is haunted by ominous dreams.

The next day, in the wrestling arena, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma first face Kaṁsa's war elephant, Kuvalayāpīḍa, which Kṛṣṇa kills effortlessly. They then fight Kaṁsa's wrestlers, Cāṇūra and Mūṣṭika, defeating them in a brutal match, and soon overcome the other wrestlers. Enraged, Kaṁsa orders the execution of Kṛṣṇa's father and grandfather. In response, Kṛṣṇa leaps onto Kaṁsa's platform, overpowers him, and kills him on the spot. Balarāma swiftly dispatches Kaṁsa's brothers. The people of Mathurā rejoice, freed from Kaṁsa's tyranny.

A broad classification of episodes has been made of the instances for ease of discussion, with the approximate number of verses in the *Bhāgavatam* for each instance as follows:

#### Day 1:

- Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma travel from Gokula to Mathurā with Akrūra as their charioteer (1 verse)

- The Gopīs express their sorrow over Kṛṣṇa's departure (4 verses)
- Akrūra stops by the Yamunā River, where he has a divine vision (55 verses)
- Arrival near the outskirts of Mathurā (12 verses)

**Day 2:**

- Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma make their entrance into Mathurā (13 verses)
- Encounter with an arrogant washerman (8 verses)
- Interaction with a generous florist (10 verses)
- Meeting with Trivakrā, the scent maker (also known as Kubjā) (13 verses)
- Visit to the *Dhanuryāga* hall and the breaking of the bow (*Dhanur-bhaṅga*) (8 verses)

**Day 3:**

- Confrontation with Kuvalayāpīḍa, the enraged elephant (15 verses)
- Battle with the wrestlers Cāṇūra and Mūṣṭika (40 verses)
- Kāṁsa's commands regarding the fate of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma (3 verses)
- Kāṁsa is killed by Kṛṣṇa (8 verses)
- Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma defeat Kāṁsa's eight brothers (1 verse)

The following works are compared and analysed against these classifications. This breakdown will be further analysed in the subsequent sections of the paper. Additional details regarding the year of composition, poet, and work-specific episodes are included in the appendix to aid in the comparative analysis of the mahākāvya-s. The mahākāvya-s listed below can generally be categorised into three groups: the first group emphasises both poetic value and narration, the second focuses more on narration with less emphasis on poetry, and the third consists primarily of narration with minimal poetry. The mahākāvya-s include:

- *Yādavābhyudayam* by Vedānta Deśika (13<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam* by Sukumāra Kavi (12<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Rukmiṇīśavijayam* by Vādirāja Tīrtha (15<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Mukundavilāsam* by Bhagavantaraya Suri (17<sup>th</sup> century)

- *Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ* by Śaṅkara Kavi (15<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Yādavendramahodayam* by Nīlakaṇṭha (mid-19<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Śrīkṛṣṇacaritam* by Kunjan Nambiar (18<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Nārāyaṇīyam* by Melpattūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭatiri (16<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Śaurikathodayaḥ* by Vāsudeva (9<sup>th</sup> century)
- *Daśāvatāracaritam* by Kṣemendra (10<sup>th</sup> century)

#### Yādavābhyudayam<sup>4</sup> (YA)

Crafted by the poet and logician Vedānta Deśika from 13<sup>th</sup>-century Tamil Nadu, YA is a masterful work blending beautiful language, vivid imagery, and poignant similes. Spanning twenty-four cantos, the narrative unfolds across the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> cantos in 109 verses. However, the text does not provide a clear timeline, covering events from Akrūra's journey with Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to the eventual demise of Kaṁsa.

The saga begins with the cowherds preparing for and following Akrūra's chariot, which carries Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma toward Mathurā. Notably absent from this entourage is Nandagopa. The emotional climax is the lament of the *gopīs*, which is conveyed in 38 verses filled with *virahānubhāva* (the feeling of separation). Rādhā, who does not appear in the *Bhāgavatam*, is introduced here:

निरपेक्ष इवैष नीलया रसिकः पालिकया सराधया ।

पृथगत्र किमेतदुच्यते कुहकः कश्चिदसौ कुलस्य नः ॥ (9.90)

The *gopīs* curse the women of Mathurā, who will revel in Kṛṣṇa's presence while they remain separated from him.

After a pause at noon beside the Yamunā for Akrūra's *mādhyāhnikam* (afternoon ritual), an ethereal vision of Lord Nārāyaṇa appears in the river, vividly described in 4 verses. Akrūra, invoking the *Aghamarṣaṇa-sūkta* from the *Yajurveda Tattirīya-śākhā*, presses forward:

<sup>4</sup> Pg. 323-352, verses 9.76-10.60, Yādavābhyudayam, K. R. Padmanabhan Iyengar. 2015. Yādavābhyudayam of Vedāntadeśika.

अघमर्षणलीनकिल्बिषः सलिले मग्नतनुर्ददर्श तौ ।

भुजगेन्द्रभुजङ्गशायिनौ पुरुषौ किञ्चिदिवान्यलक्षणौ ॥ (9.118)

Their journey to Mathurā continues without any camping outside the city, unlike in other versions.

Upon reaching the streets of Mathurā, the narrative briefly recounts encounters with the washerman (1 verse), florist (1 verse), and Trivakrā (2 verses). The *Śarāsanotsava* (bow-festival) episode, described in 6 verses, mirrors the portrayal in *Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam*.

The killing of the elephant Kuvalayāpīḍa is recounted in 3 verses, justifying its demise for harassing Airāvata and other divine elephants:

तमासाद्य द्रुतं शौरिः त्रासितत्रिदशद्विपम् ।

पञ्चवक्त्र इवाक्रम्य पातयामास भूतले ॥ (10.23)

The tusks of the fallen elephant are later used in a probable combat against the wrestlers. The brothers indulge in games and join in the festive *dhanur-yāga* celebrations, sharing in the joyous spirit with the cowherds.

The wrestling bout between Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and the mighty wrestlers is narrated in 19 verses. The scene is charged with emotion—damsels cheering, the crowd expressing concern for the young heroes facing formidable foes, and Kāṁsa's dark presence looming. Kṛṣṇa's reactions, from smiling at comments to spotting Kāṁsa and changing his expression, weave a captivating narrative. A clever pun links Rāma and Rāmānuja, symbolizing how Balarāma and Kṛṣṇa defeated Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika, much like Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's triumph over Rāvaṇa and Indrajit:

रामरामानुजाभ्यां तौ रावणेन्द्रजिताविव ।

नमयामासतुः पृथ्वीं नगपातं निपातितौ ॥ (10.52)

The climax reaches a crescendo when Kāṁsa halts the musical drums, and Kṛṣṇa's leap—reminiscent of Garuḍa—seals Kāṁsa's fate:

गरुत्मानिव भूभागाद्गगनाभोगमायतम् ।

कंसमञ्चमपद्वारादुदप्लवत केशवः ॥ (10.55)

Balarāma, following suit, defeats Sudāma, Kāṁsa's younger brother, completing the brothers' victory.

**Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam**<sup>5</sup> (SKVL)

One of the most remarkable mahākāvya in Sanskrit literature, at the forefront of classical works, is the *Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam* (SKVL), composed in 12 *sargas* by the 12th-century Keralite poet Sukumāra Kavi. The episodes under examination span three days and begin from the eighth *sarga*, covering 96 verses.

On **Day 1**, the journey begins from Gokula. The lamentation of the *gopīs* spans 16 verses. Notably, Akrūra does not stop by the Yamunā River in the afternoon, and there is no episode of his divine vision, which is a unique feature of this work as it appears in all other versions of the story. As in the *Bhāgavatam*, Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, and their companions stay outside the city, resting for the night in a park.

On **Day 2**, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter Mathurā, described in 13 verses. The washerman episode is omitted, and the first person they encounter is the florist, whom they visit at his house, a scene depicted in just four verses. The next encounter is with Kubjā, whose episode spans eight verses. Unlike other narratives where Kubjā directly invites Kṛṣṇa to her home, here, her desire is implied through her body language and expressions. Kṛṣṇa, understanding her unspoken longing, soothes her by promising to return after fulfilling his immediate purpose:

स तस्या विकृतिं मत्वा शोकालापविलोकनैः ।

कल्याणि! कृतकार्यस्त्वां द्रक्ष्यामीति मुमोच ताम् ॥ (8.128)

In the *dbanur-bhaṅga* (bow-breaking) episode, recounted in seven verses, the watchmen are so captivated by Kṛṣṇa's charm that they forget to stop him. It seems as if Kṛṣṇa remembers his past incarnation, along with his eagerness to marry Sītā:

<sup>5</sup> Pg. 294-332, verses 8.70-8.175, *Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam* of Sukumāra Kavi, K. P. A. Menon (1996).

राजलोकदुरारोपं चापं गृह्णन् करेण सः ।

अन्यजन्मजमस्मार्षीत् सीतापाणिग्रहादरम् ॥ (8.132)

When the guards realize the bow is shattered, they attack, but Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma fend them off using the bow fragments. The brothers then return to their campsite from the previous night to rest. Kāṁsa, hearing of the events, is now unable to sleep. Kṛṣṇa, too, lies awake but for a different reason—thinking of the sorrow that his separation brings to the *gopīs*.

On **Day 3**, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter the city at sunrise. Near the amphitheater's gate, they encounter the elephant Kuvalayāpīḍa, and the killing of this elephant is narrated in 11 verses. The wrestling match with Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika follows, described in eight verses. Troubled by the brothers' victories, Kāṁsa orders the cowherds to be attacked, enraging Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa steps on Kāṁsa's feet to make him fall, and Kāṁsa's death is recounted in seven verses. Finally, Balarāma deals with Kāṁsa's younger brothers, who rush at them to avenge Kāṁsa's death, dispatching them in just one verse.

#### **Rukmiṇīśavijayam<sup>6</sup> (RV)**

The RV is a Mahākāvya written by Vādirāja Tīrtha, a revered 15th-century monk from Southern Karnataka and a proponent of the Dvaita-siddhānta school. The current narrative spans the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> sargas of this work in 104 verses, which consists of 19 sargas in total. The story unfolds over three days.

**Day 1:** Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accompanied by Akrūra as their charioteer, begin their journey from Gokula to Mathurā. This segment is covered in three verses. As they travel, Kṛṣṇa repeatedly looks back at the *gopīs*, who are deeply distressed by his departure. An arthāntaranyāsa (a concept of substitution in logic) is used to suggest that someone

<sup>6</sup> Pg. 192-222, 10<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> sargas, Sri Rukminisha Vijaya of Sri Vadirajatirtha, A. S. Bheemasenacharya (2022).



determined to achieve victory remains unyielding despite challenges:

स बल्लवीनां प्रणयाख्यदाम्ना  
निबध्यमानोऽपि रिपून् जिघांसुः ।  
जगाम शौरिर्निविजेतुकामो  
निवार्यमाणोऽपि निवर्तते स्म ॥ (10.45)

The *gopīs'* lament for Kṛṣṇa is encapsulated in one verse, where they stand gazing after him, unable to see him any longer.

At the Yamunā, Akrūra experiences a vision described in 24 verses. This vision reveals that bathing in the Yamunā bestows wisdom and reveals Kṛṣṇa to the virtuous:

यमुना सा विजयते यमिनां परमप्रिया ।  
प्रदर्शयति या कृष्णं सुधियः स्नानमात्रतः ॥ (10.72)

Upon reaching the outskirts of Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa instructs Akrūra to enter the city while he and Balarāma stay at a guest house. Akrūra, reluctant to part from Kṛṣṇa, expresses his grief in ten verses, wondering if the *gopīs'* curse is affecting him. He invokes the name Vitthala for Kṛṣṇa, seeking solace:

यस्मिन्विठलनामवर्णयुगलं सत्पर्णचूर्णे परो  
वर्णः पूगफलं गुणौघगणनाकपूरखण्डं महत् ।  
भिक्षुश्लाघ्यमनङ्गवैरि तदिदं संसर्पिरागापहं  
जक्षत्संसृतिरोगमेष्यति कथं ताम्बूलमाकस्मिकम् ॥ (10.81)

Kṛṣṇa consoles Akrūra, encouraging him to proceed into Mathurā.

**Day 2:** Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter Mathurā at sunrise. Nature greets them with fruits, flowers, and scents, and Kṛṣṇa's form is described in a yogic light. The encounter with the haughty washerman is covered in two verses, where Kṛṣṇa requests clothes from him, revealing his *rajoguṇa* (passion) before defeating him. The florist and weaver are not mentioned in this version. The episode with Trivakrā (Kubjā), the scent maker, is

described in six verses. She is portrayed as a bent bow, and a Yādava named Uddhava helps her:

मुष्टिप्रमाणतनुमध्यवतीं स्वकर्ण  
विश्रान्तनिर्मलगुणां रुचिरां त्रिवक्राम् ।  
विष्वक् प्रयुक्तनयनान्तशरां निरीक्ष्य  
कोदण्डमुद्धवकथाविषयं स मेने ॥ (11.6)

Kubjā applies sandal paste to Kṛṣṇa, leading to her spiritual liberation.

At the *Dhanuryāga-maṇṭapa*, the breaking of the bow (Dhanurbhanga) is depicted in five verses. The bamboo bow breaks due to the improper act of worshiping it in the presence of the supreme being, Kṛṣṇa. The bow's insentient nature is emphasized in contrast to Kṛṣṇa's divinity:

सदृशजातोऽपि गुणान्वितोऽपि  
शिक्षानुरूपोऽपि स तेन चापः ।  
भग्नः शनैर्वक्रहृदो हि पुंसः  
को वा गुणः कोविदमानयोग्यः ॥ (11.12)

The brothers then return to where Nanda and the *gopas* are staying. An eleven-verse section personifies Bhaya (fear) and describes Kāṁsa's troubled sleep, filled with ominous dreams and questions about his fate.

**Day 3:** The encounter with Kuvalayāpīḍa, the tusker, is covered in eight verses. The mahout, Ambaṣṭa, praises the city and disparages the village brothers. Kṛṣṇa, by holding the elephant's tail and forcing it to run backward, removes its tusks and kills the mahout and his followers. The symbol of the goad appears on Kṛṣṇa's feet as he defeats the elephant:

पादप्रहारविवशः किल वारणोऽसौ  
कुर्वन्पपात भुवि नाम गुणानुकूलम् ।  
तस्याङ्घ्रिसङ्घिसहजाङ्कुशरम्यरेखाशङ्कीव  
कम्पितमहीधरभूप्रदेशः ॥ (11.37)

Kṛṣṇa is then likened to Narasimha, his form glowing as he slays the elephant:

अंसस्थदन्तपरिशोभितरक्तबिन्दुसंसक्तनिर्मलतनुर्हरिराबभासे ।

रक्षोविदारणविलासधृतात्रमालावक्षस्थलाद्भुतनृसिंह इव द्विपारिः ॥ (11.38)

The defeat of the wrestlers Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika is covered in ten verses. Their wrestling matches are portrayed as acts of worship, but the wicked ultimately meet destruction. Cāṇūra's defeat is compared to a coconut being broken:

बालमल्लकरचूर्णितभास्वन्नारिकेलतुलनां स जगाम ।

अन्यलोकगमनोद्यतभीतोत्तंसकंसपरिपन्थिसुशान्त्यै ॥ (11.46)

Kṛṣṇa recalls how Kāṁsa killed his brothers and strikes Cāṇūra repeatedly until he is defeated. His head turns away from Muṣṭika in shame. Kāṁsa's injunctions to kill Kṛṣṇa, the *gopālakas*, Nandagopa, and Ugrasena are summarized in one verse. Kṛṣṇa approaches Kāṁsa amidst his chaturanga army. Indra, witnessing the divine power, sends a chariot to Kṛṣṇa with the charioteer Mātali:

चिरं पुरा वैष्णवसेवनेन मुकुन्दसामीप्यफलं प्रपन्नः ।

स मातलिस्तस्य विचित्रवीर्यमभून्नरीक्ष्योभयथापि सूतः ॥ (11.57)

Kṛṣṇa defeats Kāṁsa's army, and Mātali praises him for vanquishing the rakṣasas sent by Kāṁsa.

Kṛṣṇa's killing of Kāṁsa is described in two verses. He throws the terrified Kāṁsa to the ground, fulfilling Kāṁsa's own injunction:

कृष्णोऽथो बहिराजगाम नगरात्कंसस्य देहाभिधा

च्छक्षुः श्रोत्रमुखाक्षिपालनपरैः स्वीयैः समेतः सुरैः ।

नष्टानिष्टजनान्निरीक्ष्य विमतं दृष्ट्वातिपुष्टं भटा

नन्दोऽपि क्षयमेयिवान्स च खलो हीनोग्रसेनो हतः ॥ (11.61)

The episode of Kāṁsa's brothers is not included in this narrative.

**Mukundavilāsam**<sup>7</sup> (MV)

The MV is a Mahākāvya in 10 sarga-s composed by Bhagavantaraya Suri of the 17<sup>th</sup> CE from Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu, whose forefathers hailed from Maharashtra. The current narrative spans the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> sarga-s covering 97 verses.

The journey of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma to Mathurā from Gokula begins with Akrūra as their charioteer. The narrative does not track specific days but unfolds across key events.

The *gopīs* lament Kṛṣṇa's departure in 30 verses, expressing their grief using various poetic devices. They curse the moon in 8 verses, speaking of their sorrow:

तत्तां मामतिसुखयिष्यतीति बुद्ध्या  
शीतांशुः सुतनु मया निषेव्यमाणः ।  
हा हन्त ! प्रतपति भानुवन्मयूखै-  
विस्त्रब्धे किमुचितमस्य पातकित्वम् ॥ (5.46)

They also address Manmatha (the god of love) in 5 verses, accusing him of causing harm:

कुर्वाणस्त्वमचिराय कर्म घोरं  
निर्दग्धस्सकलहितैषिणा शिवेन ।  
शर्वाण्या पुनरपि जीवितोऽसि यत्तत्  
किं तस्याः समुचितमीदृशेऽपि पापे ॥ (5.55)

In 5 verses, they speak to the wind, lamenting its role in carrying away their beloved:

सम्भूता ननु भवतस्तनूनपादि-  
त्यश्रौषं यदनिशमागमप्रपञ्चे ।

<sup>7</sup> Pg. 68-91, 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> sargas, Mukunda Vilasa by Bhagavantaraya Suri, ed. by N. Venkataramanan (1996).

हा हन्त त्वयि दहति प्रकाममङ्गं  
प्रत्यक्षं तदनिल ! सांप्रतं व्यलोकि ॥ (5.63)

A humorous verse describes how the gods Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva keep their wives close, fearing Manmatha's influence:

यद्भीतः स्मर ! भवतो भवो भवानी -  
मधङ्गि हृदि च दधौ रमां रमेशः ।  
वाग्देवीमपि वदने बिभर्ति वेधा-  
स्तच्चित्रं भृशमबलां विमर्द्य किं ते ? ॥ (5.58)

On the way to the Yamunā, Kṛṣṇa describes the surroundings to Balarāma in 17 verses, mentioning that it is the Hemanta season (the cold season):

चलितो मधुरामसौ रथी  
पथि हेमन्तविकस्वरां धराम् ।  
अवलोक्य मुरारिरग्रजं  
कथयामास कथां तदाश्रयाम् ॥ (6.1)

There is a beautiful verse portraying Manmatha's despondency, as his influence wanes in the cold:

मधुना मलयाचलानिलैः  
वियुतः प्रागधुनाब्जसायकैः ।  
असहायतयेव मन्मथः  
परिजागर्ति मुहुर्मुहुस्स्वयम् ॥ (6.10)

The description of the Yamunā and its banks spans 10 verses, followed by Akrūra's vision in 11 verses. Akrūra praises Kṛṣṇa with a Dashavatāra stuti, listing all ten incarnations up to Kalki, including Buddha:

अतिशेषमहीशनं परं  
प्रथयन् धर्ममुदञ्चयन्दयाम् ।

परिमोहयति स्म यो जगत्  
ननु तस्मै नतिमादधामि ते ॥ (6.38)

The entry into Mathurā and its description takes up 20 verses, with a particularly beautiful verse describing the city:

गगनं तरतो विवस्वतः  
श्रमनुत्थै पुरि सौधसञ्चयः ।  
पवनात्मभुवः पयोनिधौ  
धुरि मैनाक इवाऽयमुत्थितः ॥ (6.45)

The encounter with the haughty washerman is briefly mentioned in 1 verse, with no mention of the weaver or the florist. The episodes involving Trivakrā (Kubjā) and the Dhanuryāga-maṇṭapa with the Dhanurbhanga are also absent.

The encounter with the tusker Kuvalayāpīḍa is described in 1 verse, and the wrestlers Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika are mentioned in 1 verse. Kāṁsa's injunction to kill Kṛṣṇa is summarized in 1 verse, and Kṛṣṇa's killing of Kāṁsa is described in another single verse. The episode of Kāṁsa's brothers is not present in this narrative.

**Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ**<sup>8</sup> (SKVJ)

Another notable mahākāvya from the state of Kerala, composed by Śaṅkara Kavi in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, is the *Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ* (SKVJ), which spans twelve cantos. The work predominantly follows the Vaidarbhi style, with occasional deviations into Pāñcālī and Gauḍī meters. It narrates the remarkable exploits of Kṛṣṇa.

The story under consideration unfolds across two days, specifically in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> cantos, comprising 67 verses. On **Day 1**, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accompanied by Nandagopa and the cowherds from Gokula, set off towards Mathurā. The lamentation of the *gopīs* is covered in 2 verses.

<sup>8</sup> Pg. 283-307, verses 7.108-8.26, *Śrīkṛṣṇavijaya* of Śaṅkara Kavi. Dr. K. P. A. Menon. 1999.

The party halts at the Yamunā River at noon, where Akrūra's divine vision is described in 15 verses. While the specific location in Mathurā where they camp is not mentioned, it is clear from the text that they settle in their carts:

चरमशिखरिभाजि पद्मबन्धौ  
 मुरमथिता सह बन्धुभिः समस्तैः ।  
 प्रकटितनिजदोर्बलातिरेकः  
 शकटगतः कृतभोजनोऽथ शिश्ये ॥ (7.148)

The city of Mathurā is described in 5 verses. The episode with the washerman is recounted in 2 verses. The florist episode, which takes place at his house, is described in 2 verses. Kubjā's encounter with Kṛṣṇa is covered in 7 verses. The bow-breaking episode is summarized in 2 verses. After these events, they return and spend the night sleeping in their carts.

On **Day 2**, the killing of the elephant Kuvalayāpīḍa is described in 10 verses, with a vivid depiction of the elephant's cheeks smeared with sindūra:

अथ बृंहितघोषकम्पिताश-  
 स्ततसिन्दूरतटित्प्रभापिशङ्गः ।  
 हरिणा तरुणाम्बुदानुकारी  
 ददृशे रङ्गमुखे मतङ्गजेन्द्रः ॥ (8.5)

The killing of Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika is detailed in 4 verses. Interestingly, no order is given by Kāṁsa to retaliate at this point. The death of Kāṁsa himself is spread across 4 verses. As in most versions of the story, Balarāma dispatches Kāṁsa's brothers, who come to avenge their fallen kin.

**Yādavendramahodayam**<sup>9</sup> (YM)

The YV, a mahākāvya by Nīlakaṇṭha of Pune (Maharashtra), written

<sup>9</sup> Pg. 190-206, verses 8.80-9.59, Yādavendramahodaya of Nīlakaṇṭha with commentary of V. S. Ranade, critically edited by Dr. Siddharth Yeshwant Wakankar (2000).

around 1850 CE, spans ten sarga-s and narrates key events over two days in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> sarga-s in 90 verses.

On the first day, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accompanied by Akrūra, arrive at the Yamunā, which is described in two verses. Akrūra's vision at the river is elaborated upon in several verses. In six verses, the river is praised by the dvijas (Brahmins) who chant mantras in her honor:

उपासितां द्विजवरैर्मन्त्रानिव कलध्वनीन् ।

आवर्तयद्भिरश्रान्तं परमां देवतामिव ॥ 8.86

Akrūra's experience at the river unfolds over five verses. He first notices the reflection of the chariot in the water. After confirming its presence on the bank, he returns to the river and witnesses a divine vision of Ananta (the serpent god) being praised by the devatas. In this vision, Kṛṣṇa is seen as a young child seated on Ananta's lap, with Ananta serving as a white umbrella over him. This vision is described in eight verses, followed by Akrūra's stuti (praise) of the divine vision, which spans nine verses.

Upon reaching Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma stay in a garden near Nanda's residence. Their entry into the city is depicted in nine verses, where people eagerly crowd at their windows to get a glimpse of the divine brothers:

अवधीरितसुन्दरोत्तमं तं

भगवन्तं समुपागतं निशम्य ।

अवलोकनवाञ्छया पुरस्था

गृहवातायनमासदन्नताङ्ग्यः ॥ 9.10

The narrative then details several encounters in Mathurā. The haughty washerman is briefly mentioned in two verses, where his servants flee, abandoning their clothes. Kṛṣṇa and his companions also meet a weaver and a florist, each described in one verse, and Trivakrā, the scent maker, is mentioned in one verse.



The Dhanuryāga-manṭapa and the related events are summarized in three verses. The Yajña-shālā (sacrificial hall) and the breaking of the bow are covered in one verse each, followed by the description of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma defeating the guards who attempt to stop them. The brothers then return to their garden to rest in the evening.

On the second day, the encounter with Kuvalayāpīḍa, the rutting tusker, is depicted in four verses. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma defeat the tusker, extract its tusks, and carry them as trophies.

The wrestling match with Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika is detailed in twelve verses. Kṛṣṇa kills Cāṇūra and grants him a heavenly abode, while Balarāma defeats Muṣṭika. The wrestlers Śāla, Kūṭa, and Tośāla, who are considered invincible and are loyal to Kaṁsa, are also killed:

अभजन् शलकूटतोसलाख्या  
अपि मल्लास्तदवस्थतां नियुध्य ।  
नृपतेरसुताभिमानमात्रात्  
कथमेतेषु यथार्थपञ्चताऽभूत् ॥ 9.53

Kaṁsa is astonished by the ease with which his wrestlers are defeated.

Kaṁsa's orders are summarized in one verse, where he commands that the brothers be driven away, Nanda be deprived of his wealth, and Vasudeva and Devaki be killed.

The killing of Kaṁsa is described in three verses. Armed with a sword and shield, Kaṁsa attempts to defend himself but is overwhelmed by Kṛṣṇa, who knocks off his crown, drags him by his hair, and strikes him with his feet, ultimately leading to Kaṁsa's death. Filled with intense anger over his parents' suffering, Kṛṣṇa strikes Kaṁsa down before life completely leaves him.

Kaṁsa's brothers are killed by Balarāma, as noted in one verse, though the specific number of brothers is not mentioned.

**Śrīkrṣṇacaritam<sup>10</sup>** (SKC)

The SKC is an 18<sup>th</sup> CE work by Kunjan Nambiar from Kerala, spans twelve cantos, with the current narrative focusing on the 7<sup>th</sup> canto in 29 verses.

The story unfolds over three days. On Day 1, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accompanied by Akrūra and the cowherds, set off on their journey to Mathurā from Gokula. Unlike in other versions, there is no mention of the *gopīs* lamenting Kṛṣṇa's departure. The group halts at the Yamunā, where Akrūra experiences a vision of Kṛṣṇa reclining on Ananta, the serpent, as a couch. Akrūra describes the vision in one and a half verses and reports seeing Kṛṣṇa as Viṣṇu inside the water. As they continue toward Mathurā, Akrūra sings praises of Kṛṣṇa:

व्यक्तवर्णमधुरस्तुतिकर्त्रा तेन भक्ततिलकेन समेतः

प्राप्तलोकशरणः करुणावान् प्राप्त एष मधुरां मधुवैरी । (7.43)

On Day 2, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter Mathurā. The encounter with the haughty washerman is covered in four verses, and the brief encounter with the florist is described in half a verse. The episode with Trivakrā (Kubjā), the scent-maker, is depicted in four verses. Kṛṣṇa advises her to be patient, assuring her that he will return in four to five days:

कीरवाणि! सकलस्तव खेदो

दूरमेष्यति सहस्व मनाक् त्वम् ।

पञ्चषैस्तु दिवसैरभिपत्स्ये

चञ्चलाक्षि ! भवती मिति तूचे ॥ (7.53)

At the *Dhanuryāga-manṭapa*, the breaking of the bow (Dhanur-bhanga) is described in three verses. Kṛṣṇa uses the broken bow-shaft to defeat the guards. When the bow snaps with a loud sound, Kāṁsa trembles and falls. Kṛṣṇa, roaming the city, reflects on his birth there:

<sup>10</sup> Pg. 179-191, Canto 7, Kunjan Nambiar's Śrīkrṣṇacaritam, K.P.A. Menon (1998).

वीक्ष्य वीक्ष्य मधुरापुरभागान्  
 मोक्षदः स विचचार मुहूर्तम् ।  
 स्वावतारभवपूर्वविशेषं  
 भावयन् किमपि कौतुकशाली ॥ (7.58)

Kṛṣṇa secretly visits his parents' cell, bows to them, reveals his plans, and reassures them before departing:

कैतवेन च सदा मधुवैरी  
 तातमातृभवनं प्रतिपेदे ।  
 सादरं नतिकृदीहितमुत्तवा  
 खेदजातमपहाय जगाम ॥ (7.60)

The brothers and the cowherds rest for the night.

On Day 3, the encounter with the tusker Kuvalayāpīḍa and his mahout is described in one verse, detailing their deaths. The wrestlers Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika are defeated in two verses. Following their defeat, their relatives mourn, the wicked flee, and Kṛṣṇa plays his flute, smiling as he does:

चाणूरोऽगात्तदानीं सपदि यमपुरं कृष्णमुष्टिप्रहाराम्लानो  
 भोजेन्द्रदर्पो मुसलभृदकरोन्युष्टिकं चापि नष्टम् ।  
 दूनस्तद्वन्धुवर्गः खलबलपतयः साध्वसादभ्यधावन्  
 वेणूद्वोषं व्यतानीन्मृदुहसितसुधाभासुरो वासुदेवः ॥ (7.65)

There is no mention of Kāṁsa's injunctions in this canto. Kṛṣṇa's killing of Kāṁsa is described in one verse, where Kṛṣṇa grabs Kāṁsa by the neck, throws him to the ground, and beheads him with a sword:

अद्राक्षीदभ्रवर्णः पुनरुपरिपरिभ्राजितं  
 भोजराजं विप्लुत्याध्यारुरोह

द्रुतमतिबहुलक्रोधभाक् सौधदेशम् ।  
 कण्ठे गाढं गृहीत्वा लघु कुटिलनृपं  
 भूतले पातयित्वा कण्ठं प्रोत्खण्ड्य  
 खड्गेन च चिरमुरसि स्वैरवासी व्यळासीत् ॥ (7.66)

Finally, Kṛṣṇa kills Kāṁsa's eight brothers in one verse.

**Nārāyaṇīyam**<sup>11</sup> (N)

The N in 100 daśakam-s (1 daśakam = 10 verses) was composed by Melpattūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭatīri of Kerala in the 16<sup>th</sup> CE. Our current narrative is spread across 73<sup>rd</sup> to 75<sup>th</sup> daśakam-s in 25 verses.

The events unfold over two days. On the first day, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, accompanied by Akrūra and the gopas, depart from Gokula on their journey to Mathurā. The sorrow of their departure is so intense that even the animals and trees are described as grief-stricken:

अनसा बहुलेन वल्लवानां  
 मनसा चनुगतोऽथ वल्लभानाम् ।  
 वनमार्तमृगं विषण्णवृक्षं  
 समतीतो यमुनातटीमयासीः ॥ 73.6

However, the lamentations of the gopīs are not highlighted in this section. During the journey, they stop at the Yamunā, where Akrūra experiences a vision. Kṛṣṇa humorously questions Akrūra's reaction to the cold water, asking if the chill is causing his discomfort:

किमु शीतलिमा महान् जले  
 यत्पुलकोऽसाविति चोदितेन तेन ।  
 अतिहर्षनिरुत्तरेण सार्धं रथवासी  
 पवनेश पाहि मां त्वम् ॥ 73.10

<sup>11</sup> Pg. 524-543, 73<sup>rd</sup> - 75<sup>th</sup> dashakas, Narayaneeyam, S. N. Sastri (2023).

Upon reaching the outskirts of Mathurā, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma enter the city with their companions. The episode of the haughty washerman is briefly mentioned in half a verse, noting that the weaver attained a place in Vaikuntha, while the encounter with the florist is similarly summarized in the remaining half of the verse. The narrative then transitions to Trivakrā, the scent maker, with a two-verse description of her interaction with Kṛṣṇa. The Dhanuryāga-maṇṭapa and the Dhanur-bhanga episode are covered in two verses. Here, Kṛṣṇa effortlessly strings and breaks the bow, defeating the guards who are either mesmerized or awed by his presence. After breaking the bow, Kṛṣṇa uses the splintered pieces to beat the guards. Following these events, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma return to their resting place on the outskirts of the city. There, Kṛṣṇa shares his sorrow of separation from Rādhā with Śrīdāmā before falling asleep:

शिष्टैर्दुष्टजनैश्च दृष्टमहिमा प्रीत्या च भीत्या ततः

सम्पश्यन्पुरसम्पदं प्रविचरन्सायं गतो वाटिकाम् ।

श्रीदाम्ना सह राधिकाविरहजं खेदं वदन्प्रस्वप-

न्नानन्दन्नवतारकार्यघटनाद्वातेश संरक्ष माम् ॥ 74.10

The second day begins with the encounter with Kuvalayāpīḍa, the tusker in rut, described in three verses. Kṛṣṇa, demonstrating his power, plucks pearls from the tusker's root and instructs Śrīdāmā to string them into a necklace for Rādhā:

हस्तप्राप्योऽप्यगम्यो झटिति मुनिजनस्येव धावन्नाजेन्द्रं

क्रीडन्नापत्य भूमौ पुनरभिपततस्तस्य दन्तं सजीवम् ।

मूलादुन्मूल्य तन्मूलगमहितमहामौक्तिकान्यात्ममित्रे

प्रादास्त्वं हारमेभिर्लीलितविरचितं राधिकायै दिशेति ॥ 75.3

Next, the narrative moves to the wrestling arena, where Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma face the wrestlers Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika. Kṛṣṇa enters the arena carrying a tusk on his shoulder, accompanied by Balarāma. The spectators, seeing the unequal match, decide to leave, which is depicted in two verses.

Balarāma defeats Muṣṭika, and the remaining wrestlers flee in fear.

Kāṁsa's injunction to eliminate Kṛṣṇa is summarized in one verse. In the ensuing battle, Kṛṣṇa leaps onto Kāṁsa's throne, likened to Garuda soaring from the earth to the mountain peak. The killing of Kāṁsa is described in another verse, noting that Kāṁsa was Kālanemi in his previous birth:

सद्यो निष्पिष्टसन्धिं भुवि नरपतिमापात्य तस्योपरिष्ठात्  
 त्वय्यापात्ये तदैव त्वदुपरि पतिता नाकिनां पुष्पवृष्टिः ।  
 किं किं ब्रूमस्तदानीं सततमपि भिया त्वद्गतात्मा स भेजे  
 सायुज्यं त्वद्वधोत्था परम परमियं वासना कालनेमेः ॥ 75.9

Finally, Kṛṣṇa kills Kāṁsa's eight brothers, which is described in a single verse, bringing the episode to a close.

Śaurikathodayaḥ<sup>12</sup> (SK)

The SK is a Yamaka kāvyam written by the renowned Yamaka-kavi Vāsudeva of Kerala in the 9<sup>th</sup> century CE. This work spans 6 āśvāsa-s, with the episode in question appearing in the 3rd āśvāsa and covering 20 verses.

The narrative does not explicitly track a specific timeline but begins with the departure of Akrūra, Kṛṣṇa, and Balarāma as they set out for Mathurā. The lament of the gopis is not included in this version.

Upon reaching the Yamunā river, Akrūra's vision is described in four verses. Following this, Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's arrival in Mathurā triggers a series of events. Upon hearing of their arrival, Kāṁsa begins making several attempts to kill Kṛṣṇa, which continue until his own death.

A brief episode mentions a haughty washerman in half a verse and a florist in another half-verse. The Kujā episode is summarized in one verse. The description of the Dhanuryāga-maṇṭapa and the breaking of the bow (Dhanur-bhaṅga) is covered in a single verse, where Kṛṣṇa's playful mood is highlighted as he begins to dance:

<sup>12</sup> Pg. 285-295, Vāsudeva's Tripuradahanam and Śaurikathodayaḥ, Dr. KPA Menon (1999).

अथ संरम्भं गमयन् द्विषतो नीत्वा धनुर्वरं भङ्गमयम् ।

अरिलोके लीलाभी रुचिरः कृष्णो ववल्ग केलीलाभी ॥ 3.58

The narrative continues with the encounter with Kuvalayāpīḍa, the rutting tusker, described in one verse. The wrestling match with Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika is summarized in another verse.

While Kāṁsa's injunctions are not detailed, the killing of Kāṁsa is recounted in three verses. The text does not mention Kāṁsa's brothers.

**Daśāvatāracaritam**<sup>13</sup> (DC)

The DC, composed by Kṣemendra of Kashmir in the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE, is notable for its detailed depiction of the ten incarnations of Vishnu. The narrative referred to in 22 verses is contained within the 8<sup>th</sup> sarga, which focuses on the Kṛṣṇāvatāra and is the most extensive sarga of all the sarga-s.

The journey from Gokula to Mathurā is briefly mentioned in a single verse, noting the departure of Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Akrūra, Nanda, and the cowherds. Unlike other versions, the gopis' lament over Kṛṣṇa's departure is not highlighted. Instead, the text shifts focus to Kṛṣṇa's own feelings of sadness and melancholy:

कथं राधामनामञ्चागतोऽहमिति माधवः ।

अरतिं म्लानतां चिन्तां व्रजन् भेजे विनिःश्वसन् ॥ 8.170

As Kṛṣṇa travels through the groves and secluded places of Gokula, he is absorbed in thoughts of Radha. His heart is weighed down by memories of their time together, and his mind is consumed by the pain of separation.

The gopis, left behind, wander in distress, overwhelmed by their secret longing for Kṛṣṇa. Their hearts are filled with emotional turmoil, as

<sup>13</sup> Pg.90-92, verses 169-190, The Daśāvatāracarita of Kṣhemendra, ed. Pandit Durgaprasad and Kashinath Panduranga Parab, 1891.

they fall into a state of delusion and lament over their lost dreams. Radha, in particular, suffers immensely from the separation, enduring unrelenting emotional agony.

The sarga does not describe Akrūra's vision at the Yamunā or the stop at the outskirts of Mathurā. Instead, it moves directly to Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma's entry into Mathurā. Upon learning of their arrival, Kaṁsa begins to prepare Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika for his sinister plan. Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma, adorned in royal garments, ornaments, and sandalwood paste, enter Mathurā, bringing joy to the city's people. Upon seeing Kṛṣṇa from her palace, Devaki is overcome with emotion:

हर्म्यस्था देवकी दृष्ट्वा कृष्णं कमललोचनम् ।

बाष्पसंरुद्धनयना मुमोह प्रसूतस्तनी ॥ 8.180

The narrative does not cover the encounter with the haughty washerman, the florist, or Trivakrā (Kubjā). Additionally, the description of the Dhanuryāga-maṇṭapa and the breaking of the bow (Dhanur-bhaṅga) is omitted.

Regarding the tusker Kuvalayāpīḍa, it is noted in two verses that Kṛṣṇa used the tusks of the elephant itself to defeat and kill it. The wrestling match with Cāṇūra and Muṣṭika is described in three verses. Kaṁsa's orders are summarized in one verse (verse 186), and the killing of Kaṁsa is depicted in four verses. However, the text does not mention Kaṁsa's brothers.

### Conclusion

This comparative study of the Kaṁsa episode across the Mahākāvyas— Yādavābhyudāyam, Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam, Rukmiṇīśavijayam, Mukundavilāsam, Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ, Yādavendramahodayam, Śrīkṛṣṇacaritam, Nārāyaṇīyam, Śaurikathodayaḥ, and Daśāvatāracaritam — reveals a spectrum of unique poetic interpretations of Kṛṣṇa's journey, his divine deeds, and his climactic confrontation with Kaṁsa. Each poet reshapes the core narrative to highlight particular philosophical, emotional, and stylistic aspects, demonstrating the flexibility and richness of Sanskrit's retelling



tradition. This creative liberty in portraying Kṛṣṇa and other divine figures underscores the robustness of the tradition, where poets are able to bring their own interpretations to familiar stories while preserving their reverence for the divine.

In Yādavābhyudāyam, Vedānta Deśika explores the emotional depth of divine love through the longing of the gopīs, introducing Rādhā and highlighting the intensity of their yearning. Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam by Sukumāra Kavi focuses on interpersonal relationships and emotional dynamics, omitting episodes like Akrūra's vision in favor of character development. Conversely, Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ by Śaṁkara Kavi streamlines the narrative by incorporating Akrūra's vision while excluding the episode of Kaṁsa's order to capture or kill Kṛṣṇa, offering a distinct poetic rhythm and structure.

Rukmiṇīśavijayam by Vādirāja Tīrtha portrays Kaṁsa's inner turmoil, personifying his fears and adding psychological complexity to the narrative. In Mukundavilāsam, Bhagavanta Rāya Sūri brings to life the sorrow of the gopīs with rich poetic detail, using traditional conventions to express the emotional intensity of their experiences. Yādavendra-mahodayam by Nīlakaṇṭha provides elaborate descriptions, particularly of Akrūra's vision and the reverence shown to Kṛṣṇa by the people of Mathurā, emphasizing his divine grandeur and the devotion of his followers.

In Śrīkṛṣṇacaritam, Kunjan Nambiar presents a more straightforward retelling with fewer poetic embellishments, keeping the narrative clear and direct. Nārāyaṇīyam by Melpattūr Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭatiri imposes the constraint of the daśaka style, creating a complex interplay of brevity and precision, while conveying Kṛṣṇa's divinity in succinct, devotional tones. Similarly, in Śaurikathodayaḥ, Vāsudeva uses the Yamaka form — a challenging poetic structure that limits expansive narrative descriptions — yet effectively emphasizes Kṛṣṇa's valor, particularly in his final confrontation with Kaṁsa, producing a high-stakes dramatic effect.

Kṣemendra's Daśāvatāracaritam, part of a larger work on Vishnu's ten incarnations, dedicates only a portion of the text to Kṛṣṇa's journey,

reducing the space available for detailed exploration of Kaṁsa's slaying. As a result, Kṣemendra highlights what he deems most significant, focusing on Kṛṣṇa's introspection and emotional journey within the broader context of Vishnu's incarnations.

Each poet's treatment of the Kaṁsa episode is distinctive: Yādavendramahodayam provides the most detailed account, particularly of Akrūra's vision and Mathurā's reverence, while Daśavatāracaritam focuses on Kṛṣṇa's inner reflections and emotional growth. Works like Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam, Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ, and Yādavābhyudayam showcase diverse aspects of the narrative: Śrīkṛṣṇavilāsam explores relational depth, Śrīkṛṣṇavijayaḥ emphasizes rhythmic and structural flexibility, and Yādavābhyudayam delves into the metaphysical and emotional dimensions of divine love.

This study highlights how Sanskrit poetics retains its adaptability across centuries, allowing for both the preservation and reinvention of divine narratives. By offering fresh perspectives on Kṛṣṇa's journey, each poet contributes to the enduring resonance of his story, showcasing the narrative's capacity to evolve while maintaining its central reverence and significance. Through the varied approaches seen in these texts, we gain insight into the diverse ways in which poets engage with sacred themes and universal emotions, reinforcing the continued relevance of this rich literary tradition.

Two appendix charts accompany this study: the first outlines the poets, their time periods, and their works, while the second maps the key episodes and corresponding verses. These charts provide structural insight and further clarify the unique approaches taken in each text.

Overall, this comparative analysis emphasizes the creative richness of the Mahākāvyas and their continued capacity for innovation within a traditional framework. By exploring the poetic techniques and thematic choices of each work, this study offers valuable contributions to the understanding of Sanskrit poetics and the dynamic reinterpretation narratives.

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