



THE FLUTES OF ŚRĪ KṚṢṆA: FROM VEṆU, MURALĪ AND VAṂŚĪ TO THE DEVOTIONAL TRADITION OF TRŪṆA'S BONE FLUTE

A Textual, Theological and Aesthetic Study of Kṛṣṇa's Flutes, Their Forms, Materials, Measurements and the Idea of the Devotee Becoming the Instrument

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Abstract

Śrī Kṛṣṇa's flute is one of the most recognisable and symbolically powerful objects in the religious imagination of Vṛndāvana. Although commonly represented simply as a bamboo flute held against Kṛṣṇa's lips, Vaiṣṇava literature preserves a considerably richer tradition concerning its different forms, dimensions, materials, apertures, names and devotional meanings. The principal flute forms are traditionally identified as **veṇu**, **muralī** and **vaṁśī**, while the longer forms are associated with names such as **Mahānandā**, **Sammohinī**, **Ākarṣiṇī** and **Ānandinī**, the last also being called **Vaṁśulī**. Traditional accounts give different measurements for these instruments, including approximately six inches for the **veṇu**, eighteen inches for one description of the **muralī** and fifteen inches for one description of the **vaṁśī**, while another technical tradition based on Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* provides different measurements in traditional units and describes the longer flutes in greater detail.[1][2]

The central purpose of this paper, however, is to examine an unusual devotional tradition concerning a gopī named **Trūṇa**, sometimes connected in later retellings with **Candrāvalī**, whose bones are said to have become the material of Kṛṣṇa's flute after her death. The account presents a striking transformation in which the devotee does not merely listen to Kṛṣṇa's flute but becomes the substance through which Kṛṣṇa's breath produces music. The study argues that this tradition can be interpreted through the concept of **embodied flute theology**, in which the hollow flute becomes the supreme metaphor for ego-less surrender and the bone flute represents an even more radical form of devotional transformation. At the same time, the paper distinguishes carefully between material demonstrable from accessible Purāṇic texts and a later devotional attribution, because the precise Trūṇa bone-flute episode has not been located in a

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verifiable Sanskrit passage of the accessible Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa editions consulted. This distinction is essential for presenting the subject as serious research rather than as an unsupported textual claim.

Keywords: Śrī Kṛṣṇa, Trūṇa, Candrāvalī, Rādhā, Vṛndāvana, veṇu, muralī, varṇśī, Mahānandā, Sammohinī, Ākarṣiṇī, Ānandinī, Varṇśulī, bone flute, Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa, Bhāgavata Purāṇa, gopī, bhakti, divine breath, devotional aesthetics.

Introduction

Among the many objects associated with Śrī Kṛṣṇa, the flute occupies an extraordinary position because it joins the visible and invisible dimensions of his personality. His peacock feather, yellow garments, forest garland, jewels and youthful form allow him to be recognised visually, but his flute allows him to be experienced through sound. Kṛṣṇa's image is therefore incomplete without considering the relationship between his body, his breath and the instrument that transforms that breath into music. In the literature of Vraja, the flute is not merely something Kṛṣṇa carries; it is an instrument through which his presence reaches the world.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, especially the celebrated **Venu-gīta** of Book Ten, describes the extraordinary effects of Kṛṣṇa's flute upon the gopīs and the natural world of Vraja. Cows, birds, trees, rivers and other beings are poetically represented as responding to the sound of Kṛṣṇa's music.[3] The flute therefore establishes what may be called a **sonic ecology of Vṛndāvana**, in which human beings, animals, plants and the landscape participate in a common response to divine sound.

The Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa is particularly significant for this study because its Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa presents Kṛṣṇa in an elaborate Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theological setting. Kṛṣṇa is described in his characteristic youthful form, associated with dark or blue-black complexion, yellow garments, ornaments, forest garlands, peacock-feather decoration and the flute.[4] In another important episode, Rādhā takes Kṛṣṇa's flute while Kṛṣṇa takes her jewel mirror, after which the objects are returned.[4] This seemingly playful exchange has considerable symbolic importance because it places the flute within the intimate relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa rather than treating it as a simple pastoral accessory.

The present study moves beyond the familiar image of a single bamboo flute and investigates the wider traditional classification of Kṛṣṇa's instruments before turning to the unusual account of **Trūṇa and the bone flute**. The fundamental research question is not merely what Kṛṣṇa's flute was made of, but what it means for a devotee to become the material through which Kṛṣṇa's breath is expressed.

Methodology

This research employs a **textual-comparative and theological methodology**. The primary conceptual sources are the *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, the *Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa*, and the Vaiṣṇava theological literature associated with Rūpa Gosvāmin, particularly the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. The traditional descriptions of Kṛṣṇa's flutes are compared with later devotional presentations in order to distinguish the historical textual layer from subsequent theological interpretation.

The research also uses a source-critical approach. Statements concerning flute names, dimensions, materials and apertures are presented as traditional literary specifications rather than archaeological measurements



of surviving instruments. This distinction is particularly important because different devotional sources give different dimensions and sometimes count the blowing aperture differently from the finger holes.[1][2]

The Trūṇa bone-flute account is treated as a **devotional tradition requiring textual qualification**. The available Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa material establishes the importance of Kṛṣṇa's flute and includes significant flute-related episodes, but the specific statement that Trūṇa or Candrāvalī died and that her bones were fashioned into Kṛṣṇa's flute has not been located in a sufficiently verifiable passage in the accessible editions consulted. Accordingly, this paper does not invent a chapter or verse reference. Instead, it studies the theological significance of the tradition while identifying its precise textual provenance as a subject for future manuscript research.

Kṛṣṇa's Flute in the Vraja Imagination

The flute's importance derives first from its relationship to Kṛṣṇa's identity as the cowherd of Vraja. Kṛṣṇa is not represented merely as a divine king or cosmic deity but as a youthful cowherd moving through forests, tending cows and interacting intimately with the inhabitants of Vṛndāvana. The flute belongs naturally to this pastoral environment, yet its significance transcends pastoral life because its music affects beings far beyond the ordinary range of a cowherd's instrument.

The *Venu-gīta* provides perhaps the most famous classical literary expression of this phenomenon. The gopīs hear the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute and describe its extraordinary effect upon themselves and upon the environment. Cows stop their movement, birds become absorbed, rivers respond, trees appear to exhibit devotional emotion and the entire forest becomes transformed by the sound.[3] The flute therefore becomes an instrument through which Kṛṣṇa's personal presence is communicated without direct physical contact.

The significance of this distance is central to Kṛṣṇa-bhakti. Kṛṣṇa does not have to appear physically before every listener. His flute can travel where his body is not immediately present. Sound therefore becomes a form of divine presence.

The Three Principal Flutes: Veṇu, Muralī and Vamśī

The traditional Vaiṣṇava literature does not always treat Kṛṣṇa's flute as a single standardized instrument. Three principal forms are commonly distinguished as **veṇu, muralī and vamśī**. The *Nectar of Devotion*, drawing upon the devotional tradition of Rūpa Gosvāmin, describes the veṇu as a very small flute, no more than approximately six inches in one transmitted account, with six holes used for playing. The muralī is described as approximately eighteen inches long, with an opening at the end and four holes along its body, while the vamśī is described as approximately fifteen inches long and possessing nine holes on its body.[1]

These measurements should not be interpreted as modern engineering specifications. They belong to a traditional literary system in which dimensions and apertures carry aesthetic and symbolic significance. A separate technical discussion based on Rūpa Gosvāmin's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* presents somewhat different measurements using traditional units, demonstrating that different textual traditions may calculate length and openings differently.[2]

The **veṇu** represents the small flute and is traditionally described as having six playing holes. The **muralī** is longer and is especially associated with enchanting sound, while the **vamśī** belongs to the longer flute



family and is traditionally described with nine body apertures. The differences between these forms are therefore not merely technical; the literature transforms the flute into a vocabulary of different modes of attraction.

The Longer Flutes: Mahānandā, Sammohinī, Ākarṣiṇī and Ānandinī

The most fascinating development in the flute tradition occurs when the longer forms of the *vaṁśī* are considered. The literature describes progressively longer forms with names carrying particular devotional meanings. A longer *vaṁśī* is called **Mahānandā**, also associated with **Sammohinī**. A still longer instrument is called **Ākarṣiṇī**, while the longest form is known as **Ānandinī**. The **Ānandinī** is also called **Vaṁśulī** and is described as especially pleasing to Kṛṣṇa's cowherd companions.[1][2]

The names themselves are extraordinarily significant. **Sammohinī** derives from the idea of enchanting or bewildering; **Ākarṣiṇī** is connected with attraction; and **Ānandinī** conveys joy or delight. The flute is therefore named according to its effect upon consciousness. Kṛṣṇa's instrument does not merely make sound; it **enchants, attracts and gives joy**.

A technical presentation of these traditions gives further measurements for the longer forms. It describes the **Sammohinī** as approximately **19½ inches** and associates it with jewels, the **Ākarṣiṇī** as approximately **20½ inches** and associates it with gold, and the **Ānandinī** as approximately **22½ inches**, associating it with bamboo and the alternative name **Vaṁśulī**. [2] These measurements belong to a particular textual tradition and should therefore be presented as traditional specifications rather than as universally standardized dimensions.

The association of the longer flutes with precious materials adds another dimension to the study. The **Sammohinī** is associated with jewels, while the **Ākarṣiṇī** is associated with gold. This creates an extraordinary contrast with the ordinary bamboo flute. Kṛṣṇa's musical world can therefore include the simplest natural material and the most precious substances imaginable.

Traditional Flute Classification

Flute	Traditional character	Traditional dimension	Holes / apertures	Material or association
Veṇu	Small principal flute	About 6 inches in one account	6 playing holes	Bamboo tradition
Muralī	Longer, enchanting flute	About 18 inches in one account	4 body holes plus blowing opening	Enchanting sound
Vaṁśī	Principal longer flute	About 15 inches in one account	9 body holes in one description	Bamboo tradition
Mahānandā	Longer <i>vaṁśī</i>	Traditionally variable	Traditionally variable	Associated with longer forms
Sammohinī	Enchanting form	About 19½ inches in one technical account	Traditionally variable	Jewels



Ākarṣiṇī	Attracting form	About 20 ⁵ / ₈ inches in one technical account	Traditionally variable	Gold
Ānandinī	Longest form	About 22 ¹ / ₈ inches in one technical account	Traditionally variable	Bamboo
Vaṁśulī	Alternative name for Ānandinī	Same traditional form	Traditionally variable	Bamboo

The variations between these figures reflect different textual and counting conventions and should not be treated as evidence that one source is necessarily “wrong.” In particular, the number of holes may vary according to whether the blowing aperture is counted separately from the finger holes.[1][2]

The Materials of Kṛṣṇa's Flutes

The material tradition surrounding Kṛṣṇa's flutes is itself worthy of detailed study. Bamboo is the most familiar material because the flute is inseparable from Kṛṣṇa's pastoral identity, yet the devotional tradition also describes instruments associated with **jewels and gold**. The jewel flute, **Sammohinī**, represents extraordinary beauty and splendour, whereas the golden **Ākarṣiṇī** transforms the flute into a precious object whose material itself evokes attraction.[1][2]

The **Ānandinī**, by contrast, returns to bamboo. Its association with the name **Vaṁśulī** is particularly interesting because the bamboo material is not treated as inferior to gold or jewels. Instead, bamboo becomes the material of the longest flute, associated with joy and the cowherd companions. The hierarchy therefore does not simply move from ordinary to precious material. It moves between **simplicity, splendour, attraction and joy**.

This becomes crucial when the Trūṇa bone-flute tradition is brought into the discussion. Bamboo, jewel and gold are materials traditionally associated with Kṛṣṇa's instruments, but the bone-flute account introduces a fourth category: **devotional materiality**. The question becomes not which material is most valuable economically, but which material carries the greatest history of surrender.

The Flute and Kṛṣṇa's Breath

The central physical characteristic of every flute is its dependence upon the breath of the player. A flute has no independent voice. It cannot decide its melody. It becomes musical only when breath enters its hollow body and is controlled through the apertures.

This simple physical principle became one of the most powerful devotional metaphors in Vaiṣṇava theology. The flute is hollow, and therefore it represents the devotee who has emptied the ego. Its holes allow the breath to pass, just as the surrendered devotee allows divine will to pass through the self. The instrument does not claim authorship of the music. Kṛṣṇa plays; the flute receives.

A modern scholarly study of Bengal Vaiṣṇava devotional aesthetics has examined this symbolism in relation to Rūpa Gosvāmin's flute descriptions, including interpretations connecting the apertures of the different



flutes with aspects of the human body and senses.[2] The interpretation should not be confused with the original mechanical purpose of the holes, but it demonstrates how flute anatomy became a field for theological reflection.

The result is a powerful spiritual equation:

hollowness becomes surrender, breath becomes divine grace, and sound becomes devotional expression.

Trūṇa and the Bone Flute

The most unusual element of this research is the devotional account of **Trūṇa**, a gopī whose bones are said to have become associated with the making of Kṛṣṇa's flute after her death. In some retellings the figure is associated with **Candrāvalī**, although the identity should not be treated as universally established without a source explicitly making the connection.

The narrative is remarkable because it transforms the usual symbolism of the flute. In the ordinary metaphor, the devotee is asked to become like bamboo: hollow, receptive and free from ego. In the Trūṇa tradition, this metaphor becomes corporeal. The devotee's remains themselves become the instrument.

The theological movement can therefore be represented as:

gopī → devotion → death → transformed remains → flute → Kṛṣṇa's breath → divine music.

This is not simply a story about the material composition of an instrument. It is a story about the possibility of **permanent devotional participation**.

The devotee's physical life ends, but the devotee's material remains continue to participate in Kṛṣṇa's līlā.

The Scholarly Problem of the Trūṇa Attribution

A responsible research paper must distinguish between what can be directly demonstrated from a primary text and what belongs to later devotional memory.

The accessible Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa material clearly establishes Kṛṣṇa's flute as an important feature of his divine form. It also contains the significant episode in which Rādhā takes Kṛṣṇa's flute while Kṛṣṇa takes her jewel mirror.[4] However, the precise passage stating that **Trūṇa or Candrāvalī died and that her bones were made into Kṛṣṇa's flute has not been located in a sufficiently verifiable Sanskrit passage in the accessible editions consulted.**

The formulation is that **a devotional tradition attributes or associates the Trūṇa bone-flute account with the Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa tradition.**

This distinction actually creates an important avenue for original research. The story may belong to a regional textual tradition, oral Vraja tradition, later Vaiṣṇava commentary or another devotional source that subsequently became associated with the Purāṇic narrative.



Trūṇa, Candrāvalī and the Gopī Ideal

The possible connection between Trūṇa and Candrāvalī requires particular care. Candrāvalī occupies an important place in later Vaiṣṇava literature and devotional aesthetics as a principal figure within Kṛṣṇa's gopī circle. The gopīs collectively represent a form of devotion in which ordinary social identity is subordinated to complete absorption in Kṛṣṇa.

The Trūṇa story intensifies this ideal. The gopī does not merely desire Kṛṣṇa, hear his flute or participate in his līlā. Her material remains are imagined as becoming the very instrument that touches Kṛṣṇa's lips.

Thus the movement is not simply:

hearing Kṛṣṇa → loving Kṛṣṇa.

It becomes:

hearing Kṛṣṇa → surrendering to Kṛṣṇa → becoming an instrument of Kṛṣṇa.

This is why the bone-flute tradition deserves theological study even before its precise textual origin is established.

Bone as a Symbol of Devotional Continuity

Bone has a particular symbolic power because it represents what remains after the external body has disappeared. In the Trūṇa tradition, however, the remains do not signify absence. They become the material through which Kṛṣṇa's presence is expressed.

Death is therefore transformed from **separation into continuation**.

The devotee dies, yet the devotee's material remains become part of Kṛṣṇa's music.

The flute therefore becomes a meeting point between mortality and immortality.

The body is temporary.

The music continues.

The devotee disappears as an ordinary individual but is imagined to remain present through the instrument.

This makes the bone-flute story an unusually sophisticated meditation on the relationship between **body, death and bhakti**.

Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's Flute

The Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa's episode involving Rādhā's mirror and Kṛṣṇa's flute provides an important textual foundation for considering the flute within the intimate world of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.[4]

The mirror and flute can be interpreted as complementary objects. The mirror reflects appearance; the flute transmits sound. The mirror allows the beloved to contemplate the visible form, while the flute carries the beloved's breath beyond the body.



Rādhā taking Kṛṣṇa's flute therefore possesses symbolic force. She temporarily takes possession of the object through which Kṛṣṇa communicates himself to Vṛndāvana.

The flute is consequently not merely Kṛṣṇa's possession. It participates in the emotional world of **Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa intimacy**.

The Flute and the Cows of Vṛndāvana

The flute also has a special relationship with Kṛṣṇa's cows. Kṛṣṇa is **Gopāla**, the protector and companion of cows, and **Govinda**, the one associated with the cows and the senses. His flute belongs naturally to this pastoral world.

In the *Venu-gīta*, the cows become absorbed in the sound of Kṛṣṇa's flute, while the gopīs contemplate the extraordinary fortune of the creatures that can hear him directly.[3] The flute thus becomes an instrument of pastoral communication as well as spiritual attraction.

This allows a broader interpretation of Vṛndāvana as a **musical ecosystem**. The cows are not merely background animals, and the trees and birds are not merely scenery. Kṛṣṇa's flute creates relationships among all of them.

The Flute and the Natural World

The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* gives the flute an ecological dimension rarely found in ordinary musical literature. Its sound causes the natural world to respond. Birds become silent or absorbed, deer listen, rivers respond, trees appear to exhibit devotional emotion, and the atmosphere of the forest itself changes.[3]

The flute therefore creates a bridge between human devotion and non-human existence.

This is especially significant for a study of Kṛṣṇa because his Vṛndāvana identity is inseparable from nature. The peacock feather, forest garland, cows, Yamunā, trees, flowers and flute belong to a single pastoral-aesthetic universe.

Kṛṣṇa does not merely live **in** Vṛndāvana.

Through the flute, he causes Vṛndāvana itself to **respond**.

The Flute as a Rival of the Gopīs

One of the most fascinating emotional ideas in Kṛṣṇa literature is the jealousy or astonishment directed toward the flute. The gopīs hear the sound of the instrument and are fascinated by its extraordinary intimacy with Kṛṣṇa. The flute is permitted to remain at his lips, receiving what the gopīs themselves long to receive.

The flute therefore becomes simultaneously an object of admiration and a symbolic rival.

This paradox becomes even more striking in the Trūṇa narrative. If Trūṇa's remains become the flute, the gopī does not merely become Kṛṣṇa's listener or admirer. She becomes the object physically closest to his lips.



The traditional flute metaphor of **proximity** therefore becomes, in the bone-flute story, a metaphor of **complete union through service**.

The Longer Flutes and the Trūṇa Bone Flute

The traditional classification of Kṛṣṇa's flutes makes the Trūṇa account even more interesting because it raises a question of categorisation.

The **Sammohinī** is associated with jewels.

The **Ākarṣiṇī** is associated with gold.

The **Ānandinī** is associated with bamboo.

But what would a flute made from a devotee's bones represent?

It would not fit neatly into a hierarchy based upon economic value.

Instead, its value would be **relational and devotional**.

Gold is precious because of its material value.

Jewels are precious because of their beauty.

Bamboo is precious because it becomes the traditional pastoral instrument.

But the devotee's bone would be precious because it represents **surrendered love**.

This creates an entirely different category of sacred materiality.

Comparative Table of Material Symbolism

Flute	Material	Traditional association	Possible theological emphasis
Veṇu	Bamboo	Small flute	Simplicity and pastoral intimacy
Muralī	Traditional flute material	Enchantment	Divine attraction
Vaṁśī	Bamboo tradition	Extended flute	Communication and attraction
Sammohinī	Jewels	Enchantment	Splendour and bewildering beauty
Ākarṣiṇī	Gold	Attraction	Preciousness and irresistible attraction
Ānandinī / Vaṁśulī	Bamboo	Joy, cowherd association	Pastoral happiness



Trūṇa bone flute	Devotee's remains in devotional tradition	Embodied surrender	Complete self-offering
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A Separate Pastoral Instrument: The Buffalo-Horn Bugle

Kṛṣṇa's musical world was not limited to the flute. Devotional literature also describes his **buffalo-horn bugle**, which was polished and decorated, including with gold ornamentation.[1] This instrument should not be confused with the *veṇu*, *muralī* or *vaṁśī*.

The distinction is useful because it demonstrates that Kṛṣṇa's pastoral identity involved several kinds of sound. The horn belongs strongly to the world of the cowherd boys and pastoral play, whereas the flute occupies a more intimate position in relation to the gopīs, cows and the emotional atmosphere of Vṛndāvana.

The horn can therefore be understood as a sound of **pastoral play and announcement**, while the flute becomes the sound of **attraction and intimacy**.

Embodied Flute Theology

The central theoretical contribution of this paper is the proposal of the term **Embodied Flute Theology**.

The ordinary devotional interpretation of the flute teaches that the devotee should become hollow like the instrument. The devotee must empty the ego, surrender independent will and allow divine intention to operate through the self.

The Trūṇa tradition extends this metaphor into the body itself.

The devotee becomes material.

The material becomes an instrument.

The instrument receives Kṛṣṇa's breath.

The breath becomes music.

The music becomes the experience of Vṛndāvana.

This sequence transforms the flute from an object into a theology of surrender.

The flute does not produce itself.

The flute does not play itself.

The flute does not claim the music as its own.

It simply allows Kṛṣṇa to play.

This is perhaps the most concentrated image of **śaraṇāgati**, or complete surrender, that the flute tradition can provide.



Discussion

The study demonstrates that Kṛṣṇa's flute should not be reduced to the generic modern image of a bamboo *bānsurī*. The textual and devotional traditions preserve an elaborate classification involving **veṇu**, **muralī** and **vaṁśī**, followed by longer forms such as **Mahānandā**, **Sammohinī**, **Ākarṣiṇī** and **Ānandinī/Vaṁśulī**. [1][2] The dimensions vary among textual presentations, but one commonly transmitted account gives approximately six inches for the *veṇu*, eighteen inches for the *muralī* and fifteen inches for the *vaṁśī*, while a more technical tradition gives different measurements and describes the jewel **Sammohinī**, golden **Ākarṣiṇī** and bamboo **Ānandinī/Vaṁśulī** in greater detail. [1][2]

These differences themselves are valuable research data because they demonstrate that Kṛṣṇa's flute developed through a living devotional tradition rather than a single rigid technical specification.

More importantly, the material variety of the flutes prepares the conceptual ground for the Trūṇa story. Bamboo, gold and jewels can all become instruments of Kṛṣṇa's breath. The bone flute adds another possibility: the devotee's own body can become the sacred medium.

The story consequently shifts attention from **the value of the material to the value of surrender**.

Limitations

The principal limitation of this research concerns the exact textual status of the Trūṇa/Candrāvalī bone-flute account. The accessible Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa material verifies Kṛṣṇa's flute and its importance, including the intimate Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa episode involving the flute and mirror, but the specific statement that Trūṇa's bones became Kṛṣṇa's flute has not been located in a sufficiently secure Sanskrit passage in the editions consulted. [4]

The paper therefore deliberately avoids presenting an invented chapter and verse as evidence. The Trūṇa account should presently be described as a **devotional tradition associated with the Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa tradition**, pending identification of the precise primary or secondary source.

A second limitation concerns the identification of Trūṇa and Candrāvalī. Although Candrāvalī is an important figure in later Kṛṣṇa devotional literature, a scholarly paper should not automatically equate the two names without a textual source explicitly doing so.

A third limitation concerns flute measurements. Different sources employ different units and counting conventions, especially regarding whether the blowing aperture is included among the holes. The measurements presented here should therefore be treated as **traditional literary specifications**, not measurements of an extant archaeological object. [1][2]

Conclusion

The flute of Śrī Kṛṣṇa is simultaneously an instrument, a symbol, a theological metaphor and a participant in the emotional universe of Vṛndāvana. Its traditional forms—**veṇu**, **muralī** and **vaṁśī**—develop into a larger hierarchy that includes **Mahānandā**, **Sammohinī**, **Ākarṣiṇī** and **Ānandinī**, with the latter also known as **Vaṁśulī**. [1][2] Some traditions describe a small six-inch *veṇu* with six holes, an eighteen-inch *muralī* with four body holes and a blowing opening, and a fifteen-inch *vaṁśī* with nine body holes, while



another technical tradition provides different measurements and gives particularly detailed dimensions for the longer jewel, gold and bamboo flutes.[1][2]

The differences in measurement do not diminish the tradition. They demonstrate the richness of its textual development. The flute became an object upon which Vaiṣṇava authors could inscribe ideas concerning beauty, sound, attraction, embodiment and surrender.

The *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa* establishes the flute as a force capable of transforming the entire environment of Vraja, while the Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa places the flute within the intimate world of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa.[3][4] The flute reaches the gopīs, attracts the cows, fascinates the natural world and becomes so closely associated with Kṛṣṇa that Rādhā's playful taking of it becomes an intimate exchange between the divine couple.

The **Trūṇa bone-flute tradition** carries this symbolism to its most extraordinary conclusion. If the tradition is accepted as devotional theology, the gopī does not simply listen to Kṛṣṇa's flute; she becomes it. Her body, after death, becomes transformed into the instrument through which Kṛṣṇa's breath becomes sound.

This creates the deepest metaphor of the entire flute tradition.

The perfect devotee is like the flute: empty of ego, open to divine breath and incapable of claiming the music as personal achievement.

The Trūṇa story goes further.

The devotee does not merely become like the flute. The devotee becomes the material of the flute.

The gold of Ākarṣiṇī represents material splendour, the jewels of Sammohinī represent extraordinary beauty, and the bamboo of Ānandinī/Vaṁśulī represents pastoral simplicity and joy. The imagined bone flute of Trūṇa represents something different altogether: **the value of a life completely offered in devotion.**

For this reason, the bone-flute tradition deserves further investigation through Sanskrit manuscripts, regional Vraja traditions, Bengali and Braj Vaiṣṇava literature, oral histories and sectarian commentaries. Its precise textual origin remains a question for future research, but its theological message is unmistakable: in Kṛṣṇa-bhakti, the highest transformation is not merely to hear the Divine voice but to become so completely surrendered that **the Divine can breathe through one's very existence.**

References

- [1] Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupāda. *The Nectar of Devotion: The Complete Science of Bhakti-Yoga*. Chapter 26, "Kṛṣṇa's Flute." The chapter discusses *veṇu*, *muralī*, *vaṁśī*, *Mahānandā/Sammohinī*, *Ākarṣiṇī*, and *Ānandinī/Vaṁśulī*, including traditional dimensions, holes and materials.
- [2] Chakravarti, S. "The Breathing Body, Whistling Flute, and Sonic Divine: Oneness and Distinction in Bengal Vaishnavism's Devotional Aesthetics." *Religions* 12, no. 9 (2021): 743. This study discusses Rūpa Gosvāmin's flute classifications, traditional measurements, apertures and their later bodily symbolism.
- [3] *Śrīmad Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, Book 10, Chapter 21, **Venu-gīta**. This chapter describes the effects of Kṛṣṇa's flute upon the gopīs, cows, birds, trees, rivers and the wider natural environment of Vraja.



- [4] *Brahma Vaivarta Purāṇa*, Kṛṣṇa-janma-khaṇḍa. The text presents Kṛṣṇa with his flute and includes the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa episode in which Rādhā takes Kṛṣṇa's flute and Kṛṣṇa takes her jewel mirror.
- [5] Gosvāmin, Rūpa. *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*. The foundational Vaiṣṇava work on devotional aesthetics and bhakti-rasa, including descriptions relevant to Kṛṣṇa's attributes and flute traditions.
- [6] Rocher, Ludo. *The Purāṇas*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1986. A major scholarly reference concerning the textual history and development of Purāṇic literature.
- [7] Kinsley, David. *The Divine Player: A Study of Kṛṣṇa Līlā*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979. A major study of Kṛṣṇa's līlā and the theological development of his Vraja identity.
- [8] Haberman, David L. *Acting as a Way of Salvation: A Study of Rāgānugā Bhakti Sādhana*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988. Relevant to devotional identification and participation in the Vraja-bhakti tradition.