

RĀSA-LĪLĀ OF ŚRĪ-KṚṢṆA

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Lakshminath Bezbarua, the Sahityarathi of Assam was the most prominent among those who tried their best to find out the best in the Vaiṣṇavism of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva and preached the creed in the modern Society for its betterment. He wrote two biographies of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva along with his ardent disciple Mahāpuruṣa Mādhavadeva and numerous scholarly articles on different aspects of Vaiṣṇavism. His dedicated study on the Vaiṣṇavism in India made him so famous in those days that he was invited to Baroda by the Mahārājā to deliver a lecture on Vaiṣṇavism. Bezbarua delivered two great lectures there in presence of a galaxy of prominent scholars of India included great philosopher Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, great Scientist Chandrasekhar Venkataraman, Kabiguru Rabindra Nath Tagore etc. and received high admiration from them. Those two great lectures are still very relevant for the Assamese, as well as Indian society and therefore, one of them i.e. History of Vaiṣṇavism in India has already been reprinted in Mahāpuruṣajyoti Volume XIV and the other is reprinted here. The text is adopted from Bezbarua Granthavali Volume III, edited by Jatindra Nath Goswami and published by Sahitya Prakash. The transliteration of the text is, however, done according to the tradition of this journal. Editor

The opening śloka —The first śloka of the chapter out of the five, dealing with the Rāsa-līlā of Śrī-KṚṣṇa, in the *Śrīmadbhāgavata* opens out thus:

भगवानपि ता रात्रीः शारदोत्कुमलिका । बिहरन्तुं मनश्रक्रे योगमायामुपाश्रितः ॥

Even Bhagavān, who possesses the six aiśvaryas, i.e. who is self-sufficient, seeing that autumn night lustrous with mallikā flowers in bloom, desired to play by taking recourse to yoga-māyā.

God gives what a man really prays Him for — In the Gītā Bhagavān says : “O Pārtha! Every man in some form or other worships me and me only. I fulfil his desire in accordance with the way he worships me”. God gives what a man really prays Him for. He knows everybody’s heart. He knows what one really wants from Him with his whole heart and soul. Most people in their heart of hearts long for thinking that they want God. The all-knowing Bhagavān grants him only that what he desires from the bottom of his heart. Earnest and sincere supplication is sure to be responded to by God. God has no necessities of His own, as He is ātmārāma; but His nature is to grant what a devotee, with all the earnestness he could command, prays for at His door. The maidens of Vraja, observing vrata for one full month, worshipped the goddess Kātyāyanī on the bank of the Yamunā; and their prayer was that they might get Śrī-Kṛṣṇa as their husband and protector. Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, the satisfier of the desires of the bhakta, knew this and promised to fulfil their desire.

Summum bonum of a man’s existence — Some śāstras say that the summum bonum of man’s existence is to be merged at last in Brahman. Some say that to attain sārūpya mukti, i.e. to be able to be like Paramātman is the end of one’s life. Some say that to remain as His servant after salvation and to serve Him is the best of all. But what is the natural longing of a man? Is it not to exist always without losing his identity? It is, therefore, natural to think that what a man naturally desires with all his heart and soul, the All-merciful Providence is sure to grant him. The gopīs of Vraja wanted this; and the kind Providence, the Lover of Bhaktas, granted that to them. Bhagavān desired to ॐ, God is supreme bliss, He is the pati of the patis, i.e. the Protector of all protectors. To be united with Him is the supreme bliss of jīvas or Prakṛti. To fulfill the desire of the supplicating soul is the *ramaṇa* or the testing of ānanda for God. God is ātmārāma. He has no want and no desire to be fulfilled. His will is ceaseless. The

desire of the jīva acts on Him and brings out His response. Therefore, the fruit of the consequence naturally follows the course of the desire of jīvas.

Bhagavān took recourse to yoga-māyā — In the śloka quoted above it is said that Bhagavān took recourse to yoga-Māyā. Yoga-māyā is a mysterious power of God, by which the impossible is made possible. Bhagavān, who is the master of Māyā made the action appear something like an ordinary love affair. In the Gītā Bhagavān Himself says, नहं प्रकाशः सर्वस्य योगमायासमावृतः, ‘I am cloud by yoga-māyā; that is why everyone cannot see me’.

Rāsa-līlā is not indecent —Those who think that rāsa-līlā smacks of indecency ought to bear in mind that Kṛṣṇa’s age at the time was between eight and nine. In the Kaṭhopanīṣad it is said that “Brahman is a marvel of marvels; and the knower of Brahman, the hearer of Him and the speaker about Him are also wonderful, i.e. few and far between.’

The Vṛndāvana-līlā is a wonderful līlā of the wonder of wonders; Brahman —That wonder of wonders Brahman in order to fulfill the desire of His bhaktas played the Vṛndāvana-līlā. So, there is no wonder that in the eyes of the common people His līlās would appear as wonderful or impossible. It is for this reason, the foremost amongst the commentators of *Śrīmadbhāgavata*, Śrīdhara Swāmi, just in the beginning of this commentary on Rāsa-līlā, salutes to Bhagavān thus :

ब्रह्मादिजयसंरुढदर्पकन्दर्पदर्पहा । जयति श्रीपतिगोपीरासमण्डलमीण्डितः ॥

‘Kandarpa, the god of love, is proud of getting victory over even gods including Brahmā, Hail unto thee, O Bhagavān Kamalāpati! who conquering such a Kandarpa is shining within the rāsa-mandals.’ Śrīdhara hints broadly by this that in Bhagavān’s Rāsa-līlā there is nothing Kāma.

Difference between Kāma and prema — There is a great difference between Kāma and prema. Kāma is mind's carnal desire; whereas prema is not. Kāma's nature is to roam from one thing to another for the satisfaction of its carvings; prema is undeviating and true to one. Both are seekers of ānanda. But kāma hunts for pleasures, taking the aid of mundane things; whereas prema seeks unalloyed ānanda even without caring for such things. Longing for ānanda is the characteristic of life. The Upaniṣad says,

आनन्दत् हि एव खलु इमानि भूतानि जायन्ते जीवन्ति ॥

Two egos in a man — There are two egos in every one of us. One is real, and the other is an unreal copy of it. Everybody having been blinded by Māyā, is striving to do homage to the copy; because the original remains buried deep underneath. Our efforts to give satisfaction to the copy cannot satisfy the real ego, although we strive hard to do so. The satisfaction of the real ego is the only true happiness and real satisfaction. Kāma goes to serve the unreal ego; whereas Prema is real and eternal. Just as an actor in a drama goes to play the part of a dramatic persona and, after the play is over, goes home and come back to his real self, so also the unreal part of the real ego is at last shaken off the false mantle is cast away, and the real one becomes unveiled. Just as the actor, even during his play, cannot wholly shake of the lingering trace of his latent thought about his real self and home, so also the people while following the will-o'-the-wisp of kāma, cannot wipe off the real hankering of his heart for prema, the immortal. When old age creeps in and blood in the system gets considerably cooled down, the natural longing for returning to his own hearth and home, discarding the false ones of the stage, is bound to follow.

Kāma and prema influence on our bodies — Both kāma and prema are exercising their influence simultaneously on our bodies. The material body with the mind is always longing for similar bodies and minds, to satisfy its carvings. It

roams from one to another; but no real satisfaction worth the name ever comes to it. It cannot come; because the real self wants real ānanda. The carnal mind is anxiously running from place to place, for the superficial something. It cannot have his thirst quenched, because his soul's real pleasure has not been quenched. The ānanda, which is his eternal joy, which gave birth to him, and which he had tasted when he was in his real home from which he has come, still leaves a lingering trace in his consciousness that he has not been able to forget; and the longing for it still continues. Therefore, man, who came from Brahman, the ānanda, is at heart longing for tasting that ānanda again; but the perfidious Satan of a kāma lures him away and leads him to diverse glittering articles not of real gold. Therefore, his real thirst remains unquenched. At the root of man's desire the hankering for ānanda or pleasure is common, although some seek it in this, and some in that of the mundane world. The object of desire changes, but the object of prema or love does not. The desire for changeable objects is kāma; and the desire for the changeless and continuous bliss is prema. As we have mixed up the real ego with the worldly self, so we have mixed up and confused the real prema (love) with kāma (the carnal desire). When the consciousness in a man awakens, he comes to know that he is a particle of ānanda of that great ocean of sat-cit-ānanda, and then he longs to go back to it. In man's heart the incessant but mute and irrepressible longing for returning to that great ocean of perfect bliss is prema. To reveal before the gaze of mankind that divine prema perfectly purged of kāma, Bhagavān Śrī-Kṛṣṇa has enacted this rāsa-līlā. In this world men are generally steeped in worldly matters. They do not practically proceed towards Paramātmā. The merciful God out of His infinite kindness to attract them towards Him and free them from worldly ailments has enacted this play in Vṛndāvana. Mahārṣi Veda-Vyāsa in order to make it more attractive has mingled the description with the sweetest poetical Rāsa. Śrīdhara-Swāmi in his

commentary says, शृंगारस्सोपदेशेन विशेषतो निबृत्तिपरेयं पद्मधायी। ‘Śṛṅgāra-Rasa is a pretence only. In reality it gives mukti.’ It is a medicine for bhava-roga. Śṛṅgāra-rasa is only a sugar-coating.

The Vraja maidens prayer — As alluded to before, the maidens of Vraja by strictly observing vrata had worshipped the goddess Kātyāyanī on the bank of the Yamunā for a month and prayed to the goddess that they might get Kṛṣṇa as their pati, i.e. husband or protector. The all-knowing Kṛṣṇa promised them that he would fulfil their earnest desire after the end of the year from that date with a view to having their hearts more purified during the period intervening and ready to him. At the end of the prescribed period by playing on his flute he called them to come to him. The Upaniṣad says that Paramātman is not available through the help of the preceptor, nor by intelligence, nor by the studying of śāstras and that one gets Him only when Paramātman Himself calls the one. God calls to Him one whose heart becomes purified and fit to receive Him. He invited the Vraja gopīs to Him only when He saw them cleansed of all impurities and fit for receiving Him. Kṛṣṇa wanted the gopīs to come to him leaving everything, their dearest and nearest. They did respond fully to his call. In the Gītā Śrī-Kṛṣṇa tells Arjuna,

सर्बधर्मीन् परित्यज्य मामेकं शरणं ब्रज । अहं त्वां सर्वपापेज्यो मोक्षयिष्यामि मा शुचः ॥

Śrī-Kṛṣṇa’s flute — Śrī-Kṛṣṇa’s flute is calling all and sundry, in sweet but lisping voice, to come to him, leaving everything mundane. Those whose hearts are purged of sins, whose ears have become keen to listen to the call, they and they only hear it, like the gopīs of Vraja, and come to him.

In the *Gītā* Bhagavān says, ‘I am the object of all the Vedas. I am the author of the Vedānta; and I only know the real meaning of the Vedas.’

In the *Śrīmadbhāgavata* Kṛṣṇa says to Uddhava, ‘What the Vedas say and what they prescribe, and saying one thing in one place, what they say quite

different from what they said in another place, it is very difficult to ascertain. No one knows the real meaning of the Vedas but I do.’

Bhagavān, therefore, spoke out the essence of all the Vedas through his *vaṁśī* (flute): ‘Come ye ! Come all ! Leave everything and come over to me ! You will get peace. And by embracing me with all thy heart, sincere and sublime, you will get eternal bliss.’

Meaning of the word, Kṛṣṇa — The meaning of the word, ‘Kṛṣṇa’, is — *kṛṣ* (कृष्) means भू (bhū) i.e. existence; and the cerebral *ṇa* (ण) means ānanda. When both the component parts combine, the word ‘Kṛṣṇa’ is formed. Therefore, Kṛṣṇa means Paramānanda or eternal bliss. Kṛṣṇa is the Parama Brahman of the Vedas. Kṛṣṇa or Parama Brahman in order to draw his bhakta gopīs towards him, called them by playing upon his sweet divine flute. His *vaṁśī* or flute possesses all the powers of attraction towards everlasting ānanda, i.e., Brahman : and Kṛṣṇa is a consolidated image of Parama Brahman. Kṛṣṇa’s flute attracts all as the magnet does the iron. Only iron, that is free from mud and dirt, is attracted. The gopīs by a long and steady process of contemplation and chanting of his name had purged themselves of the resisting dirt and mud of their mind and, therefore, they of all others in Vraja, were easily attracted.

A mind cannot hold two things at the same time — As I have already, said *kāma* is not *prema*. Bhagavān has himself told the gopīs that “those whose mind and soul are devoted to me, their *kāma* is not *kāma*. As fried paddy does not germinate, in the mind or *citta* that has been entirely devoted to me, no *kāmanā* or other desire can germinate.” This is the reason why Uddhava and other *aikāntika* bhaktas of Kṛṣṇa aspired after *kāma* like that of the Vraja gopīs. The minds of the gopīs were entirely taken possession of by Kṛṣṇa. That was why they were free from the ordinary *vidhi* and *niṣedha*, i.e., injunctions and interdictions, prescribed by the *dharma-śāstras*. A mind cannot hold or contain

two things at the same time. The mind, that has been entirely taken possession of by the thought of Kṛṣṇa, cannot think of anything else. All-merciful God is so kind to man that he is ever ready to come and take possession of the heart of man. But when He comes, and finds that the seat in the heart of man is occupied by other worldly things, such as riches, wife, children, etc., He goes away in disgust. God found his seat in the heart of the gopīs ready to receive Him; so he gladly occupied it. As the minds of gopīs has gone beyond the attraction of the law of gravitation to the earth, and left its sphere, and had entered into the sphere of God, Lord Kṛṣṇa drew them to Him.

God incarnates — In passing, and without entering into any philosophical discussion I will speak a word to those who do not believe that God incarnates, and that Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of God. In the 13th śloka of the rāsa-pañcādhyāya it is said that for the good of mankind God, who is attributeless, limitless, unfathomable and dispenser of sattva, rajas and tamas, incarnates. God is Bhagavān because he possesses the six bhagas in full. He is all-power and all-merciful. The thick-headed man, whose mind is under the control of the rajas and tamas guṇas, particularly in this Kali-yuga, cannot have a proper conception of Him. That is why God, who dwells in the heart of everyone and remains clouded with avidyā, incarnated as a man and lived as one of us out of His infinite kindness to lead us into the path of salvation. The *Kaṭhapaniṣad* says: ‘To him whom Paramātmā favours. He reveals Himself in His nija-tanu, i.e. cinmaya vighraha.’ In other śāstras it is said.

चिन्मयस्य ओद्वितीयस्य निष्कलस्य अशरीरिणः । ओपासकानां कायथिं ब्रह्मणो रूपकल्पना ॥

‘For the devotee’s benefit Parama Brahman manifests Himself by assuming form.’ This is also an echo of the saying of the *Kaṭhapaniṣad* given above. The Vedānta and that class of śāstras are for God’s tattva-jijñāsā (तत्त्व

जिज्ञासा), *Śrīmadbhāgavata* and other Bhakti Śāstras are worshippers of God. Faith is the main element in worship.

Severe tests of examination of the gopīs. — At the sweet *vaṁśī* call of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, when the gopīs came to him, he put them to severe tests of examination. After greeting them with the usual complimentary expressions, he asked them first the reason of their coming. The next questions were put to fathom the depth of their love for him. He reminded them that it was night, and that wild animals were roaming all over the forest. They ought not, he added, remain there, as they were of the weaker sex. This was to see if they had got *deha-bandhana*, i.e., fear of life. Bhagavān wanted to find out if the gopīs much estimated their life and set any value on it more than on God to whom they have come, i.e. whom did they consider to be greater— God or their own selves. The meaning, when a person is prepared to sacrifice his life for the sake of God, then and then alone would God accept him.

The second question : Your mother, father, sons, brothers and husbands, not finding you at home, must have been anxiously looking for you. You should not excite their fear and anxiety. So, better return home.

The significance of this question is to see if the gopīs have been able to cut of *sneha-bandhana* i.e. the tie of affection for the nearest and dearest ones. If they have not done so, then they are not acceptable of God. Bhagavān wants to know whether according to them their relations are greater or God is greater.

The next question: Perhaps you all have come to see this beautiful scenery of *Vṛndāvana* with flowers in full blossom and the *Yamunā* flowing by the light of the full moon. If so, you have done so already; so better return home.

The significance of this is to find, whether the vision of the gopīs is *bahir-mukhī* or *antar-mukhī*, i.e. external or introspective.

The next : Go back to Vraja, your home, where your children are crying for your milk. Go and serve your husbands. Go back and milk the cows and give milk to your crying children and the calves.

The signification of this is to see if the gopīs have become free from karma-bandhana. He reminds them of their household duties. Anyone having that sort of tie cannot come to God.

The next : O gopīs, if you have come to see me having been overpowered by affection for me, well and good. Because everyone in this world is so attracted and loves me. You have now seen me, and my business is over. So better go home.

The next: O gopīs, to serve faithfully one's husband and relations and to rear up children is the parama-dharma, i.e. the chief duty of a woman. Those wives, who are not blind to the merits of earning happiness in this world as well as in the next, should not leave their husbands even if he be of a bad character, or ill-lucked, or old, or invalid, or sickly or poor; but, of course, if he is not a sinner.

The significance of this is to point out to the gopīs the fear of adharma, i.e. if the gopīs are prepared to sacrifice their dharma and social śāstric injunctions. The dharma-śāstras say that there is no other dharma for a wife excepting pati-sevā.

The esoteric significance of this śloka is to show how a similar struggle takes place in the heart of a bhakta before he attains the object of his bhakti.

In the next śloka Śrī-Kṛṣṇa says again, "Look here, O gopīs, for a kulānārī to come to a lover is reprehensible. Thereby she loses reputation and earns opprobrium everywhere in this world and also loses heaven hereafter. Living at a distance one can easily worship me with greater devotion and merit than living near me, because 'familiarity breeds contempt.'

The first part of the śloka is to put before them all the phases of fear. The second part is giving a subtle hint of his real self to the gopīs. He says that if you want to resign yourself to me knowing me to be Paramātman, then better go home and think of me there day and night with your whole heart. That will give you more happiness than my companionship with you.

This process is similar to the process of a bhakta in early stages — This is the process similar to the process of a bhakta in early stage of his bhakti. The first stage is śravaṇa, i.e. the hearing of God’s name and all about Him. The second stage is kīrtana, i.e. the reciting of God’s name. The third stage is meditation; and the last stage is everlasting communion with God.

Vyāsa depicts the trial of a devotee making it attractive with poetry — It is remarkable how Maharṣi Veda-Vyāsa, with these ślokas depicted the trial of a true devotee of God, and at the same time made it greatly attractive for all, with does of poetry. In every department of learning (शिक्षा) a beginner has got to begin his sikṣā with the copy of the real, mixed with charming poetical fictions to make it attractive for him. But to take the charming copy as real will lead him to great error. The copy should only serve the temporary purpose as a ladder to reach the goal. Vyāsadeva, to make the abstruse subject easy and accessible, has put a charmingly attractive coating of poetry over the surface of the divine rāsa-līlā.

Dejection of the gopīs — The gopīs became greatly depressed and dejected at hearing Kṛṣṇa’s unpleasant words. Tears trickled down their cheeks, and they remained speechless for some time. After restoring their equanimity they replied with great petulance :

Gopīs’ reply — ‘Accept us as Nārāyaṇa accepts His bhaktas.’ — “O all-powerful (विभो), you should not have given utterance to such cruel words.

We have taken shelter at your feet, after leaving aside all desires for enjoyment in worldly relationships. Take us unto you, like Nārāyaṇa taking His bhaktas under His aegis.” The gopīs’ addressing Kṛṣṇa as ‘vibho’ and saying ‘We have taken shelter at your feet’ is not the expression of an ordinary lover to her beloved. This indicates that the gopīs supplicated for shelter thinking Kṛṣṇa as Bhagavān. That is why they remained firm in their attitude and did not care to pay any heed to Kṛṣṇa’s frightening words. They expressly said, ‘Accept us, as Nārāyaṇa accepts His bhaktas.’ This is not the language of a fallen woman soliciting love at the hands of her lover.

You are Isvara and, therefore, you are the object of your advice — Then they said, “You are learned in the lore of dharmāśāstras. We do not deny that to serve husbands, sons, friends and relations is the dharma of womenfolk in this world. But we do know that you are Isvara and, therefore, you are the object of your advice; because you are the Ātman of all lives in creation; and in your service let our required services to our husband and relations be fructified.”

God is master, husband, protector and friend — What higher level of Sādhanā or devotion or prema could be uttered than this ? ‘God is my master, husband, protector, friend and an intimate relation. I have none else except God; if this idea takes possession of a person, what more remains for him to be done?’ When this ideal mood takes firm root in a fountain head of all the ānanda in the world; nothing else remains for him to be attained. The Upaniṣad says, आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो विद्वान्’ God is ānanda.’

Except God everyone else is upapati — Gopīs’ expressions lead us to the final conclusion that God is the real husband, and everyone else is only upapati. Gopīs were not thinking of the popular worldly dharma-śāstras’

injunctions, but of the चरमतत्त्व, i.e. the final truth. Who does not see daily the futility of worldly relationships? They are wiped off at the twinkling of an eye, when the great God so wills. The gopīs fully realized this truth, and their vision was not clouded like ours.

Derivation and meaning of pati, putra and suhṛt — From the root pā the word *pati* is derived. Pā means to protect. One who can give protection is *pati*. But if a person cannot protect himself, how could he be a protector of another ? The word *putra* means one who can save his father from the *puna-nāma Naraka*. But how could he, who cannot rescue himself from sin, give deliverance to another ? Who is *suhṛt* or real friend ? One who unselfishly does good to another is a *suhṛt*. How can he, who is blinded by his own selfishness day and night, be another's *suhṛt* or real friend ? So, God is the only real *pati*, *putra* and *suhṛt*, and none else. Therefore, the gopīs have come to Him, their Kṛṣṇa, and have taken his śaraṇa or shelter. The gopīs address Kṛṣṇa as *priyatama*, i.e. the most beloved. Who can be the most beloved than Bhagavān ? One's life becomes dear to one, because a part and parcel of Paramātman is there.

Husband, wife, sons, etc, become dear only for Paramātman — The Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad says.

न वा अरे पत्युः कामाय पतिः प्रियो भवति, आत्मनस्तु कामाय पतिः प्रियो भवति । न वा अरे जायायै कामाय जाया प्रिया भवति, आत्मनस्तु कामाय जाया प्रिया भवति । न वा अरे पुत्राणां कामाय पुत्राः प्रिया भवन्ति आत्मनस्तु कामाय पुत्राः प्रिया भवन्ति ।

One's husband, wife, sons, etc., become dear to one only for Paramātman. Ātman's ātman Paramātman is Kṛṣṇa, तस्मिन् तुष्टे जगत तुष्टम् । So

the gopīs have rightly said to Kṛṣṇa. “By serving you, our services to husband, children and friends become complete.”

Śāstra’ injunction are not for those whose minds are illuminated with the light of God — The dharma-śāstras’ injunctions and interdictions (vidhi niṣedha) are only for those whose minds are clouded by avidyā and who, therefore, consider worldly relations as real relations, worldly happiness as true happiness. These injunctions and interdictions are nor for those whose minds are illuminated with the light of paramānanda of God. Those who understand the great protector of this universe as their only Protector, and believe in Him, sincerely with heart and soul, are beyond the pale of the secular injunctions and interdictions of the dharma-śāstras. Those who in all sincerity can say and feel the significance of śloka in the Gītā: ईश्वरस्सर्वभूतानां हृदि तिष्ठति अर्जुन । भ्रामयन् सर्वभूतानि यन्त्रारूढानि मायया ॥ have got nothing to do with the customary duties enjoined by the śāstras. No sin touches them if they do not follow them. The gopīs have come to ānanda Brahman, Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, leaving aside everything else, as of no consequence; therefore, they have got no obligations and duties to tie them down with the injunctions of the secular dharma-śāstras. Therefore, when they heard Śrī-Kṛṣṇa giving them advice to serve their husbands, sons, etc., they give him the reply with a tinge of sneer in the very form of address: O dharmavir !

The pith of teachings of the Upaniṣads — This śloka, embodying the reply of the gopīs, contains the pith of all the Upaniṣads, and the final conclusion of the Vedānta.

God is ātman of everyone — In the next śloka the gopīs say ? “You are ātman of everyone, so you are always dear to all. We have got no need for husband, son and relations, etc. They are sources of anxiety and

trouble. So be propitiated on our account. Do not disappoint us. We have been anxiously waiting to get you for a long time.”

Ātman is dear to everyone. So is Śrī-Kṛṣṇa — The significance of this śloka is : O Kṛṣṇa, we are women; you, therefore, think that we are deviating from the path of dharma and going astray. But think of the fact that those who understand the real meaning of the śāstras, be they women or men, cannot but be devoted to you; because they know you to be ātman and you are, therefore, always dear. Ātman is the object of love for everyone from his very birth; and the image of ātman is you. In the *Gītā* Kṛṣṇa himself says, अहमात्मा गुडाकेश सर्वच्चदानंदरुप ‘O Arjuna. I am living in the heart of everyone as ātman’ Śrutis say, Brahman is सच्चिदानंदरुप, In *MaitrīUpaniṣad*, Brahman is styled as ब्रह्मा-विष्णु-मंडिसं सव्वस्विदं धाम। Viṣṇu means all-pervading; विविष्टि इति विष्णुः। The Bhāgavata says, ईश्वरः पस्मःकृष्णः सच्चिदानन्दबिग्रहः So, when Paramātman is सच्चिदानन्दबिग्रहः Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, he is bound to be loved by, and be the dearest to all. Nothing of this world can always remain the dearest. Ānanda is always dearest to everyone. Man is in searcher after ānanda. He does not want to die, because he does not want to lose Ātman. What does it mean ? It means Paramātman is joy and happiness. Why do other things become dear to us ? Because Paramātman or Brahman is there. Paramātman pervades everything in this world. Bhagavān Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is an incarnation of ānanda, i.e. the great Paramātman; therefore, he is always dearest to everyone.

The gopīs are prepared to die if they cannot get Kṛṣṇa in this life — In the next śloka the gopīs say that if they cannot get Kṛṣṇa in this life, they would die meditating on him, for then they are sure to come to Him. This is the nature of real prema or love.

Since the gopīs have touched Kṛṣṇa’s feet, it is impossible for them to leave him — In the next śloka the gopīs say, among other things, “Since the day we have touched your feet, it is impossible for us to go elsewhere and get ourselves engaged in anything of this world. The Upaniṣad also says भिद्यते हृदयग्रन्थि छिद्यते सर्वसंशयः ‘If one comes to paramapuruṣa Paramātman, his heart becomes clear and all doubts disappear.’

The gopīs soliciting Kṛṣṇa for dāsyā-bhakti— In the next two ślokas the gopīs are soliciting Kṛṣṇa for dāsyā-bhakti mixed with sānta or madhura. Dāsyā bhakti, strictly speaking, is not what we understand by the relation between a mercenary servant and his master. This dāsyā is mixed with sānta and madhura aspect. That is why Kapila, the incarnation of Viṣṇu, says (in the third Skandha of the *Bhāgavata*), ‘My bhaktas do not accept the five kinds of mukti or salvation even if given; they only want my dāsyā, i.e. sevā or service.’

The gopīs are charmed with Kṛṣṇa's unparalleled beauty. — “O Kṛṣṇa, you are finding fault with us for coming to you; and taunting us as coming to a upapati. But we ask you, ‘Will you tell us who is there in the world who would not do the same thing having been charmed with your exquisite beauty, unparalleled in the three worlds; and having heard your songs like the flow of nectar emanating from your heavenly flute ? Even the cows, deer, birds and trees are charmed.” There is an esoteric significance mixed with poetry in this. By the attraction of ānanda or supreme joy even the animal and vegetable worlds are thrilled with joy; — what to speak of man ?

All the forces are modifications of one force — Modern science has said that ‘all the forces we know are modifications of One Force and are identical in their essential nature; that the heat and light and all the various forces around us — electricity, magnetism and the rest — that all these are but vibrations of

varying lengths and activities in a subtle medium, and that they may be transmuted, the one into the other. They are not fundamentally different, but are one and the same in their root.’

The western philosophers have now come to admit that śakti, i.e. force, or more properly speaking, power that plays in what is called $\dot{A}C$, i.e. matter, is transmutation of power that is in the animal life. The *BhagavadGītā* clearly speaks:

यदादित्यगतं तेजो जगद् भासयतेऽखिलं ॥ यच्चन्द्रमसि यच्चाङ्गौ तत्तेजो विद्धि मामकम् ॥

Herbert Spencer in his book, *Ecclesiastical Institutions*, says, “The power which manifests throughout the Universe distinguished as material is the same power which in ourselves wells up under the form of consciousness.” The *Gītā* says —

यावत् संजायते किञ्चित् सत्त्वं स्थावरजंगमम् ॥ क्षेत्रक्षेत्रज्ञसंयोगात् तद् विद्धि भरतर्षभ ॥

In mineral, animal, vegetable and human, the same power pervades. Mineral is A.C.U (inert), but, in fact, the all-pervading Power exists in it; or else the power of attraction, repulsion, etc., would never have been visible there. Our great scientist, Sir Jagadis Chandra Bose, has proved scientifically that minerals also feel the fatigue and get tired when hit in the same way as the animal does. He has demonstrated the similarity that exists between the response to electrical and mechanical stimulus on the part of living nerve and muscle, and the response of metals. The reason is nothing else, but that even in mineral God exists, as in the vegetable and animal kingdoms.

Kṛṣṇa grants the prayer of the gopīs. — At last Kṛṣṇa hearing these piteous lamentations of the Gopīs became kind and granted their prayer, although he is ātmārāma, i.e. nijānandapūrṇa. God is the ocean of kindness. But who really prays for having His kindness? Those who apparently do, their prayers are not from the depth of their heart. God is all-knowing. He knows what is working in

the mind of him who prays. God does not become kind to him who is conscious in the heart of hearts that he has got earthly ties. God will give Himself only to him who has discarded every tie of this world, like the gopīs of Vraja. The gopīs with tears rolling down their eyes told Kṛṣṇa that they had nothing in this world and the all-knowing Bhagavān saw through it. Therefore, he gave them shelter under his lotus-like feet. A sincere little drop of tear in a man is more valuable than all the riches of the world he could possess. God gives Himself to the possessor of that tiny drop of tears. The Upaniṣad says of God: He is quite near, and at the same time far away. He is as easily available as it is extremely difficult to get Him. A particle of deceit is enough to drive Him far away from you. But if you can with a heart like the Vraja gopīs shed a drop of tear, He is easily within your reach.

Kṛṣṇa commences Rāsa-līlā. — After this Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa, although he is ātmārāma, i.e. having no desire of his own to fulfil, in order to fulfil the earnest desire of his bhakta gopīs, and knowing fully well that their mind has become purged of all worldly desires, commenced rāsa-līlā with them. He knew that in the mind of the gopīs the jñāna or the thought for anything else has been destroyed.

Pride of the gopīs and disappearance of Kṛṣṇa — But after some time it appeared that yet a slight and subtle trace of ego that was lurking dormant in the mind of the gopīs grew into pride; and they thought that none in this world was so fortunate as they, because they have captivated even the Madana-mohana, i.e. the charmer of Cupid or Kāma. Bhagavān knowing this growing sense of pride in their mind, immediately disappeared from their midst. He did it with the purpose of cleansing their mind of the last vestige of thought of that nature that proves a barrier between the bhakta and Bhagavān.

Mind cannot hold two things simultaneously. God disappears when the gopīs' mind slips into their own self. — The esoteric significance of this is: A mind cannot hold two things simultaneously. The mind cannot remain floating even for a second without catching hold of something when the mind is deeply buried in the thought of God, it cannot think of anything else. When the gopīs' mind slipped into the thought of their ego or self, Bhagavān disappeared. In fact Bhagavān did not leave them and go away. As soon as their thought went to the second thing i.e. their own selves, their vision of God naturally become eluded. Such a thing happens in the first stage of a sādḥaka or devotee. I am quoting a passage here from that remarkable book, *Imitation*, in order to make my statement clear:

My son, when the fire of devotion is kindled in thy heart, let not the favour exalt thee into pride; boast not of it to others as a distinction due to thy superior merit, nor ponder it in thy own mind with self approbation and complaisance.

Neither exalt thyself in thy own esteem as the peculiar favourite of Heaven because thy heart felt the raptures of devotion and tasted the ineffable sweetness of the spiritual fervour; for by those marks the lover of perfection is not known.

There is another reason for Kṛṣṇa's disappearance. He wanted to see that the love of the gopīs for him becomes perfectly matured. A good doctor or kavirāja prescribes medicine for the patient even after he is cured of the disease, so that there may not be any relapse. Likewise a follower of jñāna-mārga as well as a follower of the bhakti-mārga are enjoined to follow their course strictly for some time, so that there may not be any relapse.

The gopīs' premonmāda.— Thus, the separation made the gopīs think, think and think of Kṛṣṇa and nothing else; and the result was that they came to a

state of unmāda (उन्माद), i.e. madness and tanmayatā (तन्मयता), i.e. a heart quite lost in the thought of Kṛṣṇa. They took to considering themselves as Kṛṣṇa and imitating his acts. There is nothing unusual in this. When a man's mind is completely absorbed in one object, and the concentration becomes deeper and deeper, he becomes a part and parcel of the object of concentration. This is called samādhi of the jñānīns and bhaktas. When the thought on the subject becomes long-standing or stationary, it is called samādhi. This happened to Śrī-Caitanyadeva, when his thought on Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa became stationary. He at last came to take himself as Rādhā in its very perfection and he lost all the separate identity of his own self. This state is called also āveśa or tadākāratā in the śāstras. In the first chapter of the *Brahma-sutra* it is written शाखहृष्या तूपदेशः वामदेववत् ॥ In the Śāṅkara-Bhāṣya it has been thus explained:

Once upon a time Indra after seeing Paramātmā thought and said, "I am the Paramātmā", as Vāmadeva Ṛṣi after having the knowledge of Paramātmā said, 'I am the sun.' When the bhedajñāna (भेदज्ञान), i.e. the knowledge of difference between God and self is obliterated, the votary comes to think, there is no difference between him and God; because he thinks he has merged entirely in God. In the state of samādhi of a yogī he becomes completely merged in Paramātmā, and no difference exists.

The gopīs also became like Kṛṣṇa in their thought and they commenced acting like him. They became tadātmika; therefore, they भीकृष्णबिचेष्टा जगृहु, i.e. took to acting like Kṛṣṇa. I will not tire your patience by going into detail as to their acting.

A gopīs pride and Kṛṣṇa disappearance from her — An incident happened in the meantime. Kṛṣṇa had taken a gopī with him at the time of his

disappearance from the group. That Gopī after some time felt very much elated and became proud of herself; because she thought that Kṛṣṇa, of all gopīs, had chosen her to show special favour by taking her with him, leaving the rest. So being very much puffed up, she asked Kṛṣṇa to carry her on his shoulders, as she was tired of walking. Kṛṣṇa sat and bent down to let her ride on his shoulders. As soon as she became ready to do so, lo and behold! Kṛṣṇa vanished into thin air. Then she realised her folly and commenced weeping.

God does not condone pride in His devotees.—The significance of this is : God does not condone *darpa* or pride even in His devotees. His bhaktas should be entirely free from any sort of pride, even the pride of exaltation as His bhakta. The lines quoted above from the book *Imitation* clearly indicate this viz., “Neither exalt thyself in thy own esteem as the particular favourite of Heaven.” The Upaniṣad says :

यस्यामतं तस्य मतं मतं यस्य न वेद सः । अविकृतः विजानीतां विकृतमविजानताम् ॥

‘One who thinks that he does not know Brahman, he knows Him. One who thinks he knows Him does not know Him.’

The gopīs thought they completely knew Bhagavān Śrī-Kṛṣṇa and brought him under control. The result was that they completely failed.

The gopīs search for Kṛṣṇa.—The group of the deserted gopīs commenced a search for Kṛṣṇa. They asked trees and creepers, and grass and deer, if they could give them information of Kṛṣṇa, who has gone away leaving them. The Upaniṣad says :

यो देवोऽग्नौ यो अप्यु यो विश्वं भुवनमाविवेश । यः औपधिषु यो बनस्पतिषु तस्मै देवाय नमो नमः ॥

‘I bow down to that god who is in the fire, water, plants and trees, and who remains pervading throughout the Universe.’

The gopīs like jñānīns saw Brahman in everything and realised His presence there. But they could not be satisfied as they were premika bhaktas. They wanted to get Brahman to their heart in the shape of Madana-mohana Śrī- Kṛṣṇa, and embrace him; or else they would ever remain disconsolate.

In their search for Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, following his foot-steps, they met the particular gopī on the way, weeping bitterly. They heard the story from her desertion and then pursued the search all together taking her also along with them.

The gopīs see pitch dark ahead in their search and return to the bank of Yamunā. — After a trying search they sighted deep darkness ahead, and could not proceed further. At last they returned to the sandy banks of the Yamunā and commenced waiting and crying for Kṛṣṇa reciting his name, and made an abject surrender to Him. Sometime after this, Kṛṣṇa suddenly appeared before them with a smiling face.

Why the gopīs saw pitch darkness before them in the search at Vṛndāvana?— Because darkness had already crept into the Vṛndāvana of their mind. The tamoguṇa, i.e. darkness of the mind, had promoted their ego to think that they would find out Kṛṣṇa in the outside Vṛndāvana. That pride was humbled. They, therefore, returned to the bank of the Yamunā, i.e. the place wherefrom they had started, and took to chanting his name and uttering fervent prayers. One thing must be noted here that the idea of their returning to their own home did not occur in their minds, because they had come to Kṛṣṇa leaving altogether their hearth and home and had become Kṛṣṇa-Maya and tadātmikā, i.e. completely absorbed in Kṛṣṇa.

The relationship between God and the jīvas.— The eternal relationship between God and the jīvas is that of sevya and sevaka. When jīva

seperates from God, he roams far and wide, contracting various relationships in his worldly life. When at last he comes to recognize his own self, then discarding completely the false and illusory relationships, with which he has so long been entangled, he returns to his old relationship with God. This is called svarupāvasthāna of the jīva. So long as the gopīs' thoughts were on their own selves and had relied on their own strength for seeking and finding out Bhagavān Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, they were unsuccessful. When realizing their mistake, they returned to their svasthāna, i.e. own place, and commenced crying and praying, Kṛṣṇa appeared before them again. I give below a parallel passage of prayer from that remarkable book Imitation.

Dearest Lord, most beloved and spouse of my soul, supreme source of light and love and sovereign lord of Universal Nature! When will it be granted me to taste and see how good thou art! O Lord my God, when shall I lie wholly absorbed in thy fullness! When shall I lose in the love of thee all perception of myself, and have no sense of any being but thine?

How long will my Lord delay His coming! Oh, may he come to me and turn my sorrow into joy! Come O Lord, come quickly! In thy absence no day nor hour is joyful, for thou art my joy.

The gopīs chant Kṛṣṇa-nāma together — They chanted Kṛṣṇa-nāma together.' The mode of bhaktas' prayer is different from the mode of jñānīs and yogīs. The jñānīs and yogīs meditate on God sitting along in seclusion, whereas bhaktas pray chanting God's name in company with other bhaktas. Bhagavān says in the Gītā,

मच्चिता मद्रतप्राणा बोधयंतः परस्परं। कथयन्तश्च मां नित्यं तुष्यन्ति च स्मन्ति च ॥

The tears and earnest prayers of the gopīs and their humiliation and contrition brought back Kṛṣṇa and he appeared before them. I will again quote a parallel passage from the Imitation : —

Behold I am here! Behold I come to help thee, because thou has called upon me in sincerity and truth. Thy tears and the desire of thy soul, thy humiliation and contrition have inclined me and brought me to thee.

Kṛṣṇa reappears before the gopīs — AS soon as Kṛṣṇa appeared before them, they stood up together and left as if life had returned to a dead body — उत्तस्थुर्युगपत् सर्वास्तन्यः प्राणम् इवागतम् । The Upaniṣad says, Brahman is प्राणस्य प्राणश्रक्षुपांश्रक्षुः Śukadeva, following this saying of Śruti, brings in this simile. He compared the gopīs with dead bodies and Kṛṣṇa with prāṇa, i.e. life –breath. तदेजति तन्नैजति तहूरे तदन्तिके तदन्तरस्य सर्वस्य तहू सर्वस्यास्थ बाहातः । — So says the Upaniṣad: ‘Brahman moves about, and at the same time does not move at all. He is far away, and at the same time quite near. He is in the heart of everyone, and at the same time outside everyone.

When the gopīs’ belief in their own power to find out Kṛṣṇa is gone, Kṛṣṇa reappears. — This saying of the Upaniṣad was practically demonstrated by Kṛṣṇa in his līlā. As long as there was a lingering trace of āsakti or attraction for the gopīs for outside things, Kṛṣṇa was far away from them. They could not find him, ferreting out the whole Vṛndāvana. As long as the gopīs depending upon their own ability, thought that they would find out Kṛṣṇa, they failed in their attempt. When their belief in their own power was gone, and with all their heart and soul they resigned to Kṛṣṇa, and offered heart-felt prayers to him, Kṛṣṇa of his own accord appeared before them. Life returned to the body, and the body became enlivened with all the faculties.

Meaning of Vedas' injunction of karma-kāṇḍa first, then jñāna-kāṇḍa, and then Brahma-jijñāsā — Now all the worldly desires of the gopīs became fully extinct and they got Paramātmān, their hearts' sole desire. The Vedas at the beginning enjoined karma-kāṇḍa as the means of attaining God. They could not halt there and had to enjoin yāga, yajña, etc., to propitiate the gods, Indra, Candra, Vāyu and Varuṇa, and upheld the happiness of Svarga. But the honest Śruti could not stop there. It saw that the aim and object of all karma-kāṇḍa is permanent happiness. But karma-kāṇḍa could not promise that. That is why jñāna-kāṇḍa followed karma-kāṇḍa. After that the Upaniṣad's Brahma-jijñāsā came to discussions and conclusions. The gopīs after undergoing an elaborate puṣṭi of the goddess, Kātyāyanī to begin with and roaming over the length and breadth of Vṛndāvana, could not get Parama-Brahman, the giver of the real and unalloyed bliss (परम सुख), So at last coming to realize the futility of their own efforts, when they came back to the bank of the Yamunā, the place from where they began their search, and commenced crying for Kṛṣṇa, chanting his name with their whole heart and soul, and also completely resigned themselves to him, then and then only could they attain Kṛṣṇa. There is no other way. This is the final teaching of the Upaniṣads; and this teaching is amplified in the Rāsa-līlā of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa.

सर्वास्ताः केशवालोके परमोत्सवनिर्वृत्ताः जहुरिहजं तापं प्रज्ञा प्रप्या यथा जनाः ॥

‘Just as the mumukṣu getting prajñā i.e. God leaves the world, so also the gopīs getting Kṛṣṇa shook off the pangs of separation and became quite happy.’

तदशंनान्नाह्वदविपुतहृद्रजो मनोरथान्तं भुतयो यथ ययुः ।

The gopīs are purged of hṛd-roga. — “The gopīs seeing Bhagavān became purged of worldly desires of the heart, they became totally purged of

Kāma; just like the Śrutis not being able to find the great God in karma-kāṇḍa came to jñāna-kāṇḍa that gave the vision of God the Everlasting Bliss.”

Even after getting salvation a bhakta finds pleasure in the service of God.

— There may be a question as to why the gopīs even after attaining Parama Brahman, devoted themselves to His service. The answer is this: The bhaktas of Bhagavān even after attaining the much-coveted salvation, find pleasure in the service of God. Generally this is not the case with the yogīs and jñānīs who have attained salvation.

The gopīs' questions to Kṛṣṇa.— When Kṛṣṇa took his seat in the midst of the gopīs, the gopīs asked him certain questions in praṇaya-kopa, i.e. in anger mixed with love: “O Kṛṣṇa, in this world there is a class of men who love only when they are loved. There is another class who love even if they are not loved. There is a third class who do not love even if they are loved or if they are not loved. Will you kindly tell us how this is” (meaning, to which of these classes do you belong) ? The gopīs cleverly put these questions in order to bring Kṛṣṇa to task for his past conduct in treating them like that. Kṛṣṇa’s reply to the first question is : “Those who love when they are loved is like a barterer. He is guided by selfishness. There is no real friendship nor merit in that. It is like a sale-purchase business.”

Ahaitukī bhakti is the only way to realize God Kṛṣṇa — The significance of this reply is that Ahaitukī bhakti is the only way to get Kṛṣṇa. The religion that is tinged with phalākāṅśā, i.e. the desire for result, is a hypocritical religion. It is not a dharma at all. Upāsanā with phalākāṅśā is a deceitful upāsanā (कपत उपासना) It cannot be called an upāsanā proper. If the worship or prayer is based on the desire for gain, such as riches, issues, etc., *Kṛṣṇa* remains far away from it. We see in the worship of the current deities that the worshipper prays; धनं देहि यशो

देहि मानं देहि etc. ‘Give me riches; give me name and fame; give me assurance of safety, and destroy my enemies,’ etc. We find nothing of the sort in the worship of *Kṛṣṇa*’s image. *Kṛṣṇa*’s image stands in a graceful pose with smiling face, playing on the flute. *Kṛṣṇa* is available only when he is worshipped with sincere love, without कामना. There is no lasting ānanda in the things of this transitory world. It is only in the everlasting Brahman, whose image is Śrī- *Kṛṣṇa*, the concentrated essence of ānanda or bliss. If the worshipper forsakes the relationship with the things of this mundane world entirely with all the sincerity he could command, paramānanda *Kṛṣṇa* will be within his reach. Of course, Bhagavān says in the *Gītā* that ये यथा मां प्रपद्यन्ते तांस्तथैव भजाञ्जहं, ‘I grant the prayer of my worshipper according to his heart’s desire.’ Those, whose aim is just to get worldly gains, their prayer may be fulfilled. The aim of the gopīs is to attain God. The real worshippers of Bhagavān Śrī- *Kṛṣṇa* do not desire for anything except his services. Bhagavān reflects Himself on bhaktas’ heart like the reflection of the image of a China-rose on a clean mirror. The mind, that is not free from dirt and dust, i.e. desires for worldly gains, no image of sat-cit-ānanda can be reflected there.

The love of one who does not care for a return is pure love and is of real friendship. — Here is *Kṛṣṇa*’s reply to the second question : “The love of one who does not care for any return is pure love, and is of merit, as well of real friendship. It is just like the love of parents for their children. Even if the son does not love his parents, they cannot but love their son. There are people also who out of great kindness in their heart love others without caring for response.

Kṛṣṇa is not among this class of people. — “But I am not within this class also. My affection and kindness is different from, this class of people. The kindness of a kind person is a kind of transmutation of sattva-guṇa of his heart.

When he sees the sufferings of certain people, his heart melts, and he cannot help it. But I am above all the three guṇas; I am perfect ceaseless bliss. I, therefore, do not become affected with others' sorrow; but my kindness flows towards the sufferers all the same. Father's and mother's affection flows in a particular channel towards their children; but my affection pervades the whole Universe. It is not dependant on any particular cause or reason. I am full of kindness and affection. They are for every one in the Universe. That is why I call myself समोऽहं सर्वभूतेषु न मे द्वेषोऽस्ति न प्रियः । “O gopīs, I am, therefore, not within the category of your second question.”

Kṛṣṇa's answer of the third question of the gopīs is : Kṛṣṇa is not within the category of the indifferent. — The gopīs wanted to know if Kṛṣṇa is within the category of those who are quite indifferent, and do not love even when loved or when not loved at all. The gopīs thought they would find Kṛṣṇa in this class. Kṛṣṇa understood this and said, No. He said that there are four sub-classes of people within this category: (1) The minds of those, who are brahma-jñānī or ātmārāma are concentrated on the joy of their own self, they are antarmukhī, i.e. introspective, and devoid of bahirdṛṣṭi, i.e. outward vision. I am also ātmārāma, but notwithstanding that. I have got to look to the welfare of the whole Universe. I see through the outside and inside of the endless lives habitating in this endless brahmānda. So I cannot be compared with this class of men. (2) Although those, who are āptakāma, have their eyes directed outside, they have got no desire of their own to be fulfilled. Therefore, they do not love any one. I am also āptakāma, but my bhaktas' wish forcibly leads me to volition. So I have got no similarity also with this class of people. (3) I am not to be counted amongst the ungrateful wretches, because I am Jagannātha; I dispense the fruits, i.e. consequences to the people in accordance with their karma and to bhaktas in

accordance with their devotion. (4) I cannot, of course, have a place amongst the gurudrohī, i.e. those who do not return good for good but do injury to the benefactor in return. I am rather their Chastiser..

Kṛṣṇa reveals his true nature. — Kṛṣṇa now explains his conduct and reveals his true nature and real self before the gopīs: “Listen O friends, listen! When a poor man after getting some money loses it, he does not think of anything else except the lost money day and night. In order to place my bhaktas in a similar situation so that they can think of nothing else but me, I disappear from their sight after being visible to them for once.”

Any one wanting God must think of Him and Him alone. — If anyone wants God at all times, one must think of Him and Him alone, leaving aside all one’s worldly thoughts. God, therefore, says. “Ye worldly people, you are so fond of wealth; you will have to love me likewise, and then will you get me. When you lose your wealth you have got, you think of it day and night, you will have to think of me likewise and then you will get me for ever, and otherwise not. I, therefore, out of kindness place my bhaktas in such a situation.”

No obscenity in rāsa-līlā. — I would, in passing draw the attention of those superficial critics who scent obscenity in rāsa-līlā to the above śloka where God reveals Himself.

Kṛṣṇa had disappeared only to strengthen the love for Him in the gopīs’ hearts. — In the following śloka Kṛṣṇa says, “O gopīs, I know you have left lokācāra and vedācāra and your dearest and nearest for me. I too did not go away anywhere having left you. In order to strengthen your love for me I was remaining invisible; but I had seen you and heard you all along. You are dearest to me; and I am also your great well-wisher. So you ought not to blame me.”

I quote another passage from the book *Imitation here* :

And he that loves with purity considers not the gift of the lover but the love of the giver; he values the affection more than the tokens of it; esteems his beloved infinitely beyond the benefits he confers; and with a noble generosity divesting his mind of all desire of personal advantage reposes himself not upon my gifts but upon me.

Kṛṣṇa even remaining invisible heard all what the gopīs said.—

Bhagavān told the gopīs, “Remaining invisible I have seen you and heard all that you have said.” This is a saying for everybody in this world. God is all-knowing and all-pervading. He sees and hears everything done and said by everyone in this world everyday. None can do anything or even think of anything without His knowledge. He saw the gopīs and heard their sincere prayer and understood their deepest longing for Him. So He appeared before them. He does not appear before us because He sees through our insincere behaviour and hears our insincere talk and understands the existence of impure thoughts in our hearts that are engrossed in matters worldly. In the bhakti-mārga the bhakta sees Bhagavān. But in jñāna-mārga and yoga-mārga this does not happen, because there the upāsaka merges in the upāsya, and loses his separate identity. That is why jñānī’s ānanda is called jñānānanda and the yogī’s ānanda is called ātmānanda. The bhakta’s ānanda likewise is called premānanda or Bhagavadānanda. In jñāna-mārga as well as in yoga-mārga the process is similar. The jñānī in his earlier stage feels Brahman as a flash of lightning that disappears immediately. That whets his desire to feel like that again and again. The yogī also in his state of samādhi, in course of tasting ātmānanda, finds his sight at times drawn towards outside world. That makes him more eager to return to his former state of samādhi. This process leads the mind gradually to the stable state of mukti. In bhakti-mārga also in the earlier stages the bhakta loses sight of Bhagavān after catching a glimpse of him. In course of his sādhanā when his eagerness becomes deeper and deeper to see Bhagavān

again and again, he comes to attain Bhagavān at last and for ever. This was the reason why Kṛṣṇa told the gopīs, “Do not be offended with me. I gave you the temporary pain, with a view to give myself to you for eternity.”

The gopīs’ love for Kṛṣṇa is niṣkāma; it cannot therefore, be repaid. — In the next śloka Kṛṣṇa says, “You have come to me leaving behind everything and discarding all the ties, and your love for me is niravadya, i.e. niṣkāma. I shall not be able to repay your debt even if I get the long life of the devas. So you, by your own liberality, get it repaid.”

The bhakta does not want to destroy his separate existence even after mukti and wants to serve God eternally. So God cannot get rid of him and repay his services.— The esoteric significance of this is that Kṛṣṇa is the image of the concentrated essence of ānanda. The gopīs are devotees of prema-bhakti. Ananda can give satisfaction to a jñānī and a yogī in full; but not to a premika bhakta. Jñānī seeks merging in God as the ripples or particles of water do in the limitless ocean; the yogī seeks to be identified with the Paramātman. When they attain these states, they are satisfied. But the premika bhakta does not want to destroy his separate existence. He wants to serve God for ever and enjoy the bliss of his services eternally. Therefore, Bhagavān is unable to repay the debt of his premika bhakta. His bhakta has nobody else except his Bhagavān. Kṛṣṇa cannot throw him off, and cannot get rid of him, because he is tied up with the tie of prema-bhakti, because his name is Dāmodara. He ran away as far as he could from mother Yaśodā, but at last he was caught and he had to accept the tie at her hands.

Kṛṣṇa commences rāsa-līlā, a circular dance, with the gopīs. The conquering of Kāma i.e. carnal desires, is the object of rāsā-līlā.— After this Kṛṣṇa commenced his rāsa-līlā with the gopīs. Rāsa means a kind of dance where several dancers, both male and female, dance in a circle. The male dancers put

their hands on the necks of the female dancers and females catch hold of the hands of the male dancers, and all of them dance in a circle. Śrīdhara-Svāmī, the chief commentator of the *Bhāgavata*, says. — रसो नाम बहुनर्तकीयुक्तो नृत्यविशेषः, ‘it is a dance of many dancers dancing together.’ At the beginning of the *rāsa-pañcādhyāya* Śrīdhara-Svāmī says, तस्माद्रासक्रीडाविडम्बनं कामविजया-रुबपनायेत्मेव तत्त्वम्। ‘Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa with a view to show Kāma-jaya, i.e. the conquering of Kāma or Cupid or carnal desires, played this *rāsa-līlā*.’

By copying the ordinary rāsa dance, Kṛṣṇa played the rāsa-līlā. — Śrīdhara means here to say that the copying of the ordinary *rāsa* dance Kṛṣṇa played the *rāsa-līlā* in order to show the victory over Kāma. Following the worldly dance of worldly dancers, Kṛṣṇa played this divine *līlā*. To make the divine truth easily comprehensible to the people of this earth, it is necessary to express it in the terms of the world. By taking recourse to the inscrutable Yogīc power *Kṛṣṇa* commenced the dance, becoming as many *Kṛṣṇas* as there were gopīs. This is quite in keeping with the appearance of Paramātmān in the heart of a group of sādhakas or devotees who, sitting together, pray to God. It is just like the shadow of the sun reflecting separately on the waters of many pitchers kept together. God appears in the heart of everyone simultaneously, and each devotee thinks that God is only with him, as each and every one of the gopīs in the *rāsa-mandala* thought that *Kṛṣṇa* was only with her.

The Upaniṣadas says : रसं ह्येवायं लबध्वानन्दीभवति । आनन्दं ब्रह्मणो बिद्धान् । आनन्दादेव स्यल्लियामानि भूतानि जायन्ते । आनन्देन जातानि जीवन्ति ।

‘Paramātmān is rasa; and the root of satisfaction of the creatures. All the creatures emanate from Paramātmān, the fountain-head of ānanda, and live by ānanda.

Kṛṣṇa's dance and play with the jīvas is rāsa-līlā in imitation of the rāsa dance.— The basis of the Brahmānanda is Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, the image of concentrated ānanda. His dance and play with the jīvas, who are prema-prakritis is called rāsa-līlā in imitation of the rāsa dance. In the pure heart — Vṛndāvana of his bhaktas the union of Paramātman and jivātman takes place. In this mundane world the pleasure of the union of male and female is considered to be the highest. Kṛṣṇa, taking recourse to Yoga-Māyā, acted like that in order to attract people to the real divine communion, the only way to taste the divine ānanda that leads men to God. The Upaniṣad says, तद् यथा प्रियया स्त्रिया सञ्जरिष्वको न बाह्यं किञ्चन वेद नान्तरमेवमेवायं पुरुषः, etc., likewise the jīva in communion with Paramātman finds himself in a similar state. In that state of holy communion the devotee forgets the existence of father and mother, Candāla and non-Candāla, tapasvī and non-tapasvī. He goes beyond the pale of pāpa and puṇya, i.e. sin or merit. His heart becomes purged of all sorrows. This is the reason why the gopīs had forgotten everything including their hearth and home, husband and children.

Paramātman's dance with jivātmā is ananta.— In rāsa-līlā Kṛṣṇa danced in a circle. A circle has neither beginning nor end. This is to show that Paramātman's dance with the jīvas is ananta, i.e. endless and continuous.

The meaning of Śukadeva's coupling Kṛṣṇa's name with adjectives such as ātmārāma, etc., in rāsa-līlā. — One thing must be taken note of, that in the rāsa-pañcādhyāya, where there is a mention of vihāra, Śukadeva has coupled Kṛṣṇa with such adjectives as ātmārāma, ātmarata and Bhagavān, to guard against the conclusions as to his acting like ordinary human beings. These adjectives indicate clearly that Kṛṣṇa is self-sufficient and has got no desire of his own to be fulfilled. He acted that way taking recourse to yoga-Māyā. His intention was to lead men through transient happiness, that results from worldly

endeavours, to nityānanda, i.e. the everlasting joy, and thus create distaste for the transitory so-called joy. Mahāmuni Śukadeva has later on, in reply to Parīkṣita's question, cleared all the doubts that might linger in the minds of people as to Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa's propriety of acting rāsa-līlā.

Śukadeva's first reply to clear King Parīkṣita's doubt — Śukadeva's first to clear Parīkṣita's doubt is :

“Persons with divine power are seen to break the rules of dharma and exhibit courage. In such a person it is not considered to be a sin. The fire consumes everything. Those who are tejiyān, i.e. Ísvara or masters, having full control over the organs of senses, are not liable to breaking the injunctions of the dharma-śāstras. They are free from ego; so they are not responsible for such things. But those who are not Ísvaras not only should not do such things, but should not even think of it. Ordinary people should not take the example of Rudra who swallowed poison easily. A man ought to follow the advice given by mahāpuruṣas, but not to act like them, except those actions of theirs that conform to their advice. Mahāpuruṣas are free from ego : so they do not earn merit by good works, nor sin by acting badly. That which is detrimental to body and soul and is blameable in the context of society is sin. Those mahāpuruṣas who have got no connection with their bodies and society have no good and civil to account for; so they are not considered to have committed any sin. The great God who is the master of these Ísvaras or mahāpuruṣas, and of the whole world, and also of all pāpa and puṇya (merit and sin), it is needless to say that He is beyond the pale of pāpa and puṇya as prescribed by the dharma-śāstras.” In the Gītā Bhagavān says :

न मे पार्थास्ति कर्तव्यं त्रिषु लोकेषु किञ्चन । न मां कर्माणि लिङ्गन्ति न मे कर्मफले स्पृहा ॥

‘O Pārtha, I have got no duty to perform in the three worlds; nor have I got any desire for the fruit of Karma; nor do I get entangled in karma; therefore, I have no karma-bandhana.’

Śukadeva's proper reply.— Śukadeva first according to kaumutika nyāya, replied this way to the question of Parīkṣita. Now he comes to the proper reply : ‘O Mahārāja, now hear the real thing. Nārāyaṇa Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is all-pervading. He is inside and outside of everything in this world including the gopīs. Then who could be His paradāra (परदार) ? In the *Gītā* Kṛṣṇa says सर्वस्य चाहं हृदि सन्निविष्टो ‘I am in the heart of everyone.’ Again he repeats, मत्तः परतरं नान्यत् किञ्चिदस्ति धनञ्जय । ‘O Dhanañjaya, there exists nothing but me.’ The Vedānta says, Parama Brahman created the Universe with his Māyā and then entered into it. Therefore, it is evident that Bhagavān Kṛṣṇa played with his own self. He had no paradārā. Śukadeva says, रेमे रमेशो ब्रजसुन्दरीमिभः यथार्भकः स्वप्रतिबिम्बविभ्रमः ‘Kṛṣṇa was playing with the Vraja gopīs just as a boy plays with his own shadow upon a mirror.’ Śukadeva again says,

नासूयन् खलु कृष्णाय मोहिताः तस्य मायया । मन्यमानाः स्वपार्श्वस्थान् स्वान् स्वान् दारान् ब्रजौकसः ॥

‘The wives, who were playing with Kṛṣṇa in the rāsa-mandala at Vṛndāvana, were all along seen by their husbands lying by their sides at home having been overpowered by the māyā of Kṛṣṇa; so they did not become jealous of Kṛṣṇa.’ Śukadeva says :

अनुग्रहाय भूतानां मानुषं मानुषं देहमास्थितः । भजते ताहशीः क्रीडा याः क्षुत्वा तत्परो भवेत् ॥

‘God incarnates as man to favour His bhaktas; so that by hearing His līlā, they may be attracted towards Him.’

Evolution of the world out of kāmamaya and guṇamaya ādirasa — This world has evolved out of kāmamaya and guṇamaya ādirasa. The ananta ādirasa that is free from Kāma and guṇa is the eternal rest for jīva. This worldly ādirasa

is the evolution of that sweet and pure ādirasa. When jīva frees itself from this impure worldly ādirasa, with the help of prema-bhakti and taste that Divine Adirasa, then it becomes fit for communion with Paramātman. The name of that soul-exalting nitya-līlā is rāsa-līlā. In that līlā there is result without action, there is satisfaction without the hankerings of desire. There is only pure bliss. It is not possible to give an inkling of that pure rāsa-līlā between jivātmā and Paramātman without taking recourse to, to a certain extent, the model of ordinary rāsa dance of worldly ādirasa. The Upaniṣad has also, therefore, taken this course and given the example, such as तद् यथा प्रियया रिस्त्रया सञ्जस्त्रिष्वल्को न बाकिश्चन वेद न आन्तरं तथा एवायं पुरुषः । That is why Bhagavān played this rāsa-līlā in Vṛndāvana, taking umbrage under Śṛṅgāra-rasa, which is only a calanā i.e. pretence. Śrīdhara-Svāmi, therefore, says this in the beginning of his commentary on the rāsa-pañcādhyāya. The Tattvajñānī bhaktas, who are able to discriminate between the water and the milk will take the portion that is milk, i.e. the divine premānanda. The lovers of worldly pleasure, even if they fail to take real substance, will be gradually drawn to it, being tempted by the attraction of worldly Śṛṅgāra rasa. Such is God's kindness for everyone. God wishes that everyone should come to Him. Anyone who thinks of Him incessantly in any form such as through sakhya, dāsya, madhura, vātsalya and even enmity, the all-merciful Bhagavān will draw him towards Him and will give him shelter under His wing. He gave a salvation even to Śiśupāla, his great enemy. Kāṁsa attained sārūpya salvation by constantly thinking of Him out of great fear for his life. Śukadeva in reply to Rājā Parīkṣita says in the first chapter of the rāsa-pañcādhyāyā:

कामं क्रोधं भयं स्नेहमैर्ज्यं सौहृदमेव च । नित्यं हरौ बिदधतो यान्ति तन्मयतां हि ते ॥

Let any person think of Him in any way, day and night; he is sure to be absorbed in Him. Because the properties or qualities of a thing do not await anybody's desire to produce their effect. If a man takes nectar thinking it to be poison he would not die. If a man takes Kṛṣṇanāma even carelessly, the kind God gives him salvation. So says the *Skandapurāṇa*:

मधुरं मधुस्मेतन्मङ्गलं मङ्गलानाम् । सकलनिगमवह्नौत्फलं चित्स्वरूपं ॥
सकृदपि परिगीतं श्रद्धया हेलया वा । भृगुवर नरमात्रं तारयेत् कृष्णनाम ॥

Two kinds of error mentioned in the Vedānta — In the Vedānta mention is made of two kinds of error : one samvādī and the other visamvādī. The author of *Pañcadaśī* says :

दीपप्रभा मणिभ्रान्तिर्बिसंबादिभ्रमः स्मृतः । मणिप्रभामणिभ्रान्तिः संवादिभ्रम उच्यते ॥

'By seeing the glow or light of a maṇi or jewel from a distance if any person thinks that glow or light to be jewel, he makes a samvādī mistake. If likewise seeing the light of a lamp he thinks that light to be a jewel he commits a visamvādī mistake.' Both these are mistakes no doubt. But the result is different. If he goes to take the light of the lamp as jewel he would not get any jewel. But if he stretches his hand towards the light of the jewel, he will ultimately catch at the jewel. Therefore, if anyone goes towards Bhagavān being led by samvādī bhrama he is sure to get Him after some time. A person who, being attracted by the outside glow of Śṛṅgāra rasa, peruses rāsa-līlā and hears it, in course of time will be led to Bhagavān; because his bhrama or error is samvādī. Being attracted by the outward glow of the jewel, he is sure to place his hand on the jewel at last. The Vedas, the Vedānta and the purāṇas all admit clearly God's power of attraction. If a man utters the name of God only just before his death or even in his delirium, he is promised salvation or mukti. Who does not

know the story of the sinner Ajāmila ? Even the advaitavādī *Pañcadaśī* says.

ज्वरेनाप्तः सन्निपातं भ्रान्त्यां नारायणं वदन्। मृतः स्वर्गमवाप्नोति तं संवादी भ्रमो मतः ॥

The *Vedānta-sūtra* says, लोकवत्तु लीलाकेवल्यं, ‘The creation of the Universe by the Parama Brahman is His līlā; that is play only.’

Ānanda is support of jīvas. Jīvas gets a minute particle of this eternal ānanda and that is enough for him. — Ānanda is the peace, rest and support of jīvas. The Upaniṣad says, सच्चिदानन्दमयं परं ब्रह्म। The jīva is a part of Brahma according to the Upaniṣad. Therefore jīva is also a lover of ānanda, but at heart, not the transient worldly ānanda. The worldly pleasures that go by the name of ānanda is not the real ānanda, which is eternal. The eternal ānandam is आनन्दं आनन्दनातीतं Brahma, who is Brahmānanda. The jīva gets only a minute particle of that ānanda, and that is quite enough for him. Without sat there cannot be chit. Without chit there cannot be ānanda. Brahma is sat-chit-ānanda. Paramātman, which is other name for Brahma, is also sat-chit-ānanda. Bhagavān, which is another name for Brahma, is also sat-chit-ānanda. Brahma, Paramātman and Bhagavān are one, and the one is three. The name Brahma gives prominence to sat, Paramātman to chit and Bhagavān to ānanda. Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is the saccidānanda incarnate. That is why the *Śrīmad-Bhāgavata* says, कृष्णः सच्चिदानन्दविग्रहः ईश्वरः। Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is the support of jīvas and particularly of bhaktas. The *Vedānta* says, आनन्दमयोऽज्यसात्। This is Śrī-Kṛṣṇa, no doubt.

The effect of hearing rāsa-līlā. — The concluding śloka of rāsa-līlā has it : बिक्रीडितं ब्रज-बधूभिरिदं विष्णोः etc. I will give below the अन्वय (analysis) of it, i.e. अन्वय in easy Sanskrit, instead of quoting the whole śloka : यः भद्रान्तितः ब्रजबधूमिः सह

बिष्णोः इदं बिक्रीडितं श्रुणुयात् अथ पणयित् अचिरेण धोरः जितेन्द्रियः भवति परां भक्तिं प्रतिलज्ज्य आशु कामं नाम हृद्रोगं परित्यजति ।

‘One who with respectful regards hears this rāsa-līlā of Bhagavān Viṣṇu with the Vraja gopīs or recites it, within a very short time attains prema-bhakti for Bhagavān and becomes able to discard Kāma the disease of the heart.’

The author, the narrator and the hearer of rāsa-līlā. — At the first place, we shall have to see who is the author of the description of rāsa-līlā, who is the narrator and to whom it is narrated. Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana Vyāsa, the author of the 18 purāṇas and of the *Vedānta-sūtra*, and the apportioner of the Vedas, is the author. Vyāsa’s son, Śukadeva, the confirmed Brahmachārī and bhakta yogī is the narrator. Rājā Parīkṣita who is in prāyo-paveśana under the curse of a Brahman and, therefore, a most penitent, and is eagerly seeking mukti, awaiting his doom is the listener.

The conclusion is unavoidable that rāsa-līlā is nor something indecent.— If these things are taken seriously into consideration, the conclusion is unavoidable that Parīkṣita could not be a victim of deception by Vyāsa and Śukadeva with something indecent like the putrid worldly Śṛṅgāra rasa, the delight of pleasure-hunting worldly people. It is, therefore, clear that in Kṛṣṇa’s rāsa-līlā there is something divine under the cloak of worldly Śṛṅgāra rasa. Let us not throw away the substantial grain seeing the outward skin of husk, with which it is covered. Those, who are steady-minded and have got regard for the saying of the ṛṣis, are sure to ponder over the matter, and find the desired substance underneath — I mean the essential path of mukti. In Kṛṣṇa’s rāsa-līlā Kāma or Cupid, casting off his carnal coil of fickle nature, has transformed himself into divine prema. Kāma has got no separate existence of his own. Man’s body is his sole habitation. When man will be attracted towards Kṛṣṇa, the Paramātman,

Kāma will be nowhere. Jīva's union with Śrī-Kṛṣṇa is his lasting peace and bliss. Śukadeva truly says that when a person with steady regard listens to the description of Vishnu's rāsa-līlā, he will soon get rid of Kāma and attain salvation. The bhaktas of Bhagavān aspire for that kind of mukti that makes them taste eternally the bliss of Brahma. Our earthly language is not powerful enough to express that bliss. We have got to take recourse to it all the same so as to indicate something like that bliss.

Rāsa-līlā is the play of the embrace of jīva and Brahman. — The gopīs forgot the whole world by embracing the image of ānanda. So Kṛṣṇa's rāsa-līlā is the play of the embrace of jīva and Brahma and nothing else. To forget the world is to drive away kāma and kāmanā, i.e. desires. The way for the divine embrace is prema that makes the lover extremely disconsolate at the separation from the beloved. This is the teaching of rāsa-līlā.

Śukadeva used the expression ब्रजवधूभिः बिष्णोः इदं विक्रीडिसं । Vishnu's play, and not Kṛṣṇa's. Why? The expressive word 'Vishnu' is used here to show that Vishnu who is all-pervading, and is playing day and night inside and outside the Universe with his own śakti, is Kṛṣṇa and none else. He is saccidānanda Kṛṣṇa.

Summary of the five chapters of rāsa-līlā — In the first chapter of the Rāsa-pañcādhyāya Kṛṣṇa, calling the gopīs to his side, with a view to testing the sincerity of their love for him, at first wanted to frighten them away showing dharma-bhaya, loka-bhaya and prāṇa-bhaya. But the gopīs were not frightened, and they persisted. Is it usual for women, who are in a company or group, to go together to their single lover ? Certainly not. It is, therefore, nothing else than a congregation of bhaktas of the same mind and thought, seeking shelter under God's feet.

It has already been seen how sometime after rāsa-līlā had commenced, the gopīs felt proud of their position due to their thoughts having been diverted to their own selves and Bhagavān disappeared immediately. Is it not similar to what the Upaniṣads say about the vanishing God from the mind of a devotee as soon as it is diverted to a second thought ?

In the second chapter, the gopīs are found roaming over Vṛndāvana in search of Kṛṣṇa, and being tanmaya, i.e. quite absorbed in Kṛṣṇa's thought, asked the trees, plants, bushes and beasts about the whereabouts of Kṛṣṇa. Is it not like the samādhi of a sādḥaka in early stage ? Has it been noticed anywhere in this world that hundreds of women join in a group to search for a single lover of theirs, who has left them ?

In the third chapter, the gopīs sitting on the bank of the Yamunā were loudly crying for Kṛṣṇa, addressing him in words expressive of God's names and attributes. Was it a cry and lamentation of the fallen women uttered at the separation from their treacherous lover who had left and gone away ? Certainly not.

In the fourth chapter, Kṛṣṇa appear in their midst. The talk of the gopīs with Kṛṣṇa was simply ennobling. Could such talk take place between ordinary lovers ?

In the fifth and last chapter the gopīs are in the final embrace of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa. That was an exhibition of the jīvas' only aim, i.e. coming to the lap of God, and tasting the coveted eternal joy and bliss.

This is the rāsa-līlā of Śrī-Kṛṣṇa.

Kṛṣṇa played nitya-līlā in Vṛndāvana and saṁsāra-līlā in Dvārakā.—
Kṛṣṇa played his nitya-līlā in Vṛndāvana and saṁsāra-līlā in Dvārakā. By playing these two kinds of līlās he showed the difference between them vividly. In the union of Kṛṣṇa and gopīs in Vṛndāvana there was no intermediary. The gopīs

sincere prema was the only intermediary. The chanting of Kṛṣṇa-nāma was the mantra. Their own pure citta was the maker of sampradāna. Their entire self-resignation was the marriage. Whereas in Dvārakā in Kṛṣṇa's marriage with Rukmiṇī and others, there was ghataka or intermediary such as the Brāhmin, Vedanidhi. There was the full play of niṣkāma prema in Vṛndāvana, unlike at Dvārakā. The result was no sorrow, no pain (here; and even not a small bird was destroyed at Vṛndāvana. In Dvārakā, Rukmiṇī's sorrow when her son Pradyumna was stolen, and Satyabhāma's sorrow when her father Satrājita was killed, etc., were many. Kṛṣṇa destroyed his vast and powerful Yadu-vaṁśa before his ascension. But he did not cause the destruction of even a small bird at Vṛndāvana when he left it.

'Purāṇas constitute the pañcama Veda and the Bhāgavata is the chiefest and the — best. This is why the *Bhāgavata* is called अखिलभुतिसारे. A purāṇa is called the pañcama Veda. Of all the purāṇas the *Bhāgavata* is the chiefest and the best.

Kṛṣṇa is the last word. — Kṛṣṇa is the last word in yajña, yoga, vrata, jñāna-yoga, karma-yoga and bhakti-yoga. There is no difference between Kṛṣṇa and Kṛṣṇa-nāma. Nāma-dharma is the dharma of the Kali-yuga. Śāstras, therefore, say,

हेरेनीम हरेनीम हरेनीमैव केबलं । कलौ नास्त्यैव नास्त्यैव नास्त्यैव गतिरन्यथा ॥

So, let us sing God's name with all our heart and soul, and devote ourselves unselfishly to the service of God and of humanity, which is His greatest manifestation in this earth of ours.

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THE QUESTION OF THE COMPATIBILITY OF ADVAITISM WITH BHAKTIVĀDA

Dr. Girish Baruah

The thesis of the present essay is: Advaitism is not compatible with bhaktivāda. Let me argue in favour of this statement and prove its validity.

Advaitism or advaitavāda or non-dualism is compatible with one ultimate reality. Ultimate reality, in Vedāntic parlance, is known as Brahman and this concept is accepted by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva also. Brahman, in Advaita Vedānta, is the supreme reality over which no other reality can be conceived. It is said that when the ātman of a man is identified with Brahman then he is liberated, because the ātman or the self and Brahman are the same thing. This is possible through the path of knowledge, not through bhakti or devotion.

In metaphysics i.e. parāvidyā we have three types of philosophy: pluralism i.e. bahutvavāda, dualism i.e. dvaitavāda and monism or non-dualism i.e. advaitavāda. Pluralism admits of many ultimate realities, dualism admits two ultimate realities and monism admits only one ultimate reality. Corresponding to these metaphysical theories we have three theological theories viz. polytheism i.e. bahudevavāda, duotheism i.e. dvidevavāda and monotheism i.e. ekeśvaravāda. While the Veda believes in bahudevavāda and Śaktivāda in dvidevavāda in the persons of Śiva and Śakti, Vaiṣṇavism believes in monotheism. Metaphysically Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika philosophy believes in pluralism, the Sāṃkhya in dualism and the advaita Vedānta in monism.

A religion cannot survive without a God excepting however old Buddhism and Jainism. Our Vaiṣṇavism also admits God, and Vaiṣṇavism is a

religion which believes in bhaktivāda. Bhaktivāda cannot be there without there being a bhakta or devotee. If we do not admit the existence or reality of a devotee then devotion would be a far cry. So when we admit the reality of a devotee we must face some kind of dualism. God and devotee are two parallel existences or realities.

In the context of God Vaiṣṇavism or bhaktivāda admits one God only in the form of either Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. So bhaktivāda is not a dualistic theory in the context of the number of God. It is dualistic because it admits two realities: God and his devotee. So not duotheism but monotheism as a theory can be ascribed to bhaktivāda. While bhaktivāda is monotheistic, jñānavāda is monistic or non-dualistic.

A problem arises here. Śaṅkaradeva is out and out a monotheist, as he believes in one God i.e. Kṛṣṇa. So the theistic dualistic concept goes away when he opts for monotheism. We want to ask ourselves another question. Is Śaṅkaradeva a monist? To be a monist one should be an advaitic Vedāntin. That Śaṅkaradeva believes in advaitism there is no doubt about it. But one cannot be a monist if one remains within the level of God. To be so one has to go to another plane i.e. the plane of Brahman, the Indian Absolute. Śaṅkaradeva also will have to go to that plane or level if he is an advaitin.

If we assess Śaṅkaradeva's philosophy we see that he believes in Brahman also apart from believing in God. He needs a God for his devotional purposes; and he needs a Brahman for his advaitic position. How is it so? In the philosophy of Śaṅkarācārya also we have these two concepts. But in Śaṅkarācārya God is unreal, as he is created by māyā. But in Śaṅkaradeva God is not unreal. Now how can he reconcile between these two realities: God and Brahman. If he admits these two realities he would be a dualist, which he outright denies.

Śaṅkaradeva cannot solve this dilemma if he remains within the domain of God. He has to surpass this domain. Another problem arises here: If he surpasses the domain of God he will have to surpass the domain of bhakti. How can he deny bhakti which is so dear to him? To believe in Brahman or to accept jñānavāda one has not to deny bhaktivāda and thereby God; simply he has to surpass the latter. To surpass does not mean to deny. So without denying bhaktivāda or God Śaṅkaradeva can be an advaitin. How it is so let us explain.

We know that Kṛṣṇa is the main God in Vaiṣṇava religion. Śaṅkaradeva has accepted Kṛṣṇa to be an ārādhya devatā of the Vaiṣṇava devotees. Why has he accepted Kṛṣṇa in place of Viṣṇu? Because he knows that Viṣṇu is not God, but a god, one of the three gods, the other two being Śiva and Brahmā. He has posited Kṛṣṇa in place of Viṣṇu by infusing the Brahman content in the former. So Kṛṣṇa has been elevated to the standard of Brahman by bringing in the content of the latter. Therefore Kṛṣṇa is not only God, he is Brahman-God.

It is said in the advaita Vedānta that Brahman can be achieved not through devotion but through jñāna as we have earlier mentioned. Śaṅkaradeva has not denied jñāna. He has accepted jñāna even by accepting bhakti. He has not ruled out the necessity of jñāna in knowing Brahman, although jñāna is not a common means for the mass people. They find it difficult to go to the level of jñāna as it is a very arduous task not possible to be practiced by common people. Śaṅkaradeva has no objection if one selects jñāna to go to the domain of Brahman. He perhaps therefore did not baptize the Brahmins, because he thought that for them bhakti is not necessary as because they can directly go to Brahman through knowledge. Brahmins are so because they know Brahman ('Brahmaṁ jñāti iti brāhmaṇa').

We have seen above that Śaṅkaradeva has been able to keep his advaitism intact even pursuing the path of devotion. The dualistic attitude in him goes away

as and when he refers to Brahman. But there is a tacit belief in him that the devotional field is not ultimate, as God is also not ultimate. God is not ultimate because Kṛṣṇa is born and dies. Now Kṛṣṇa in person is not there. Where is he? Certainly he is there in the bosom of Brahman in his implicit form. As and when necessity arises he might come out from this form and take an incarnation in any of the shapes he likes. Kṛṣṇa

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LYRICO-DEVOTIONAL NUMBERS OF ŚAṄKARADEVA – BARGĪTS

Dr. Dayananda Pathak

The creativity of Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva found adequate expression in his lyrico-devotional numbers – Bargīts - having their roots in the classical music tradition. This tradition has manifested itself in two major forms – Hindustānī and Carnatic. Then there are different local variants. A group of scholars trace the origin of the Bargīt to a local or regional variant described as the Kāmṛpī variant of the Hindustānī music tradition. The Hindustānī form is prevalent in northern, western and eastern India, while the Karṇāṭic music is prevalent in the whole of south India. The Kāmṛpī variant had its own manifestation depending upon its independent political status and geo-cultural identity. One can see elements in Kāmṛpī variant which are quite alien to either Hindustānī or Karṇāṭkī.

The Hindustānī form is often described as '*barā-gānā*' i.e. great songs or noble numbers. Bargīts may have its roots to that idea of '*barā-gānā*' or '*bar-gīt*'. Nevertheless, 'Bargīt' has an identity of its own. It is essentially a devotional number sung by a devotee describing the meaninglessness of worldly life and mundane existence vis-à-vis man's quest for liberation of human soul from the shackles of material life.

These numbers got nourished and fostered in the yards of the satra institutions all across the north-eastern part of India. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva developed 'Bargīt' with his creative touch and poetic exuberance of high order. This class of devotional numbers embedded itself in the hearts of people, and they are being sung by them in all auspicious occasions from the time of their composition till today.

The great Master composed as many as 240 Bargīts as recorded in his 'caritpūthis' (hagiographies). One Kamalā Bāyan, a disciple of the saint from Pātbausī, wanted to peruse the numbers at home. Śaṅkaradeva gave him the manuscript of the Bargīts. The Master advised him to peruse them and return at the earliest. But, as ill luck

would have it, the house of Kamalā Bāyan caught fire. His house along with all the household properties was reduced to ashes within moments by the ravenous fire. He could not save the manuscript of the Bargīts from the devastating fire. Like the other household goods, the Bargīts were also reduced to ashes.

The Master was mortified to learn about the incident. He lost his manuscript. It was an unbearable shock for him. He lost his inclination for Bargīts, and promised not to compose any more Bargīt in future. Instead, he advised Mādhabadeva to compose Bargīts.

It was indeed a difficult task to reconstruct the Bargīts as composed by the Master. But his disciples refused to submit or yield to such a catastrophic situation. They reconstructed only about 37 numbers, retrieved from their memories. But the rest could not be retrieved.

The Master composed devotional numbers for his plays too. Scholars club some of those numbers under Bargīt because of their devotional contents and lyrical excellence.

Now, it was the turn of Mādhabadeva. He had to oblige his Master. He followed the footprints of his Master, and managed to compose Bargīts. The pundits also treat some of his songs as Bargīts. Thus, the total number of such lyrical compositions by both the saints would be well around 342. Interestingly enough, subsequent lyrical numbers by their disciples are not considered to be Bargīts either by the pundits or by the posterity. May be, the subsequent poets did not have the creativity and inspiration of their Masters. A section of pundits has a tendency to describe such lyrical compositions as '*satrīyā saṅgīt*' just like '*satrīyā nṛtya*' for obvious reasons. But Bargīts, as such, cannot be called or designated as *satrīyā saṅgīt*.

Bargīts are distinguished from other lyrics. They are marked by the following themes and motifs –

1. Bargīts are lyrics on the theme of transitory character of human life. Man's physical existence and his quest for material pleasure take away the best period

of his life. At the fag end, man is subjected to a feeling of moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

2. They delineate the juvenile and adolescent *līlās* or pranks and pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa.
3. A feeling of total servility or '*dāsya bhāvanā*' on the part of the devotee pervades all through.
4. They are also equally marked by deep philosophical overtone.
5. They are lyrically sound and morally inspiring.
6. They are short and intimate.
7. They are composed in Brajāvālī, an artificial language, shaped up by the neo-vaiṣṇavite saints and poets of the 15-16th century.
8. They are essentially devotional number, both in letter and spirit.
9. They are reminders of man's futile physical existence. A man cannot have the peace of mind unless supported by his singular devotion to the Lord.

Regarding the composition of Bargīts Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhadeva had apparent differences. Śaṅkaradeva's numbers are precisely devoted to the philosophical and spiritual interpretation of human life, while those of Mādhadeva relate to the portrayal of the juvenility or '*bālyalīlās*' of Lord Krishna. However, both the approaches take our mind and heart to the same direction. Both the approaches lead us to a state of spiritual height.

Śaṅkaradeva composed his maiden Bargīt during his first pilgrimage when he was at Badarikāśrama. *Mana meri Rāma caraṇahi lāgu...* is considered to be the first Bargīt of the Master, composed some time in the year 1488 AD. The theme and motif of the number is the projection of the transitoriness of human life. Time is stated to be like a python. The mighty python is coiling us up. So, instead of wasting time on worldly pleasures one should keep himself devoted to Lord Krishna. The Lord can save us from perdition. The Lord can lead us to the right direction, and salvage us from the grip of the python, i.e. our obsession with the material pleasures of life.

Dr Maheswar Neog, the great Vaiṣṇavite scholar, holds a different opinion regarding the first Bargīt of the Master. '*Meri hṛdaya paṅkaje boicu...*composed at a place named Roumāri somewhere between Barpetā and Cooch Behar, during the first lag of the Master's first pilgrimage, is considered to be the first Bargīt of the saint by Prof. Neog. Such differences have arisen because of the different hagiographical accounts put forward by the *caritputhis*. We believe- such discussions can be left to the scholars. For us such issues are avoidable.

We have already mentioned about the Indian classical music and also about its two distinct schools – Hindustānī and Karṇāṭakī. We have also tried to trace out a third school, i.e. the Kāmṛūpī School to explain our position in the map of Indian classical music.

Songs and music go hand in hand. Śaṅkaradeva was aware of this symbiotic relationship between the two. Every devotional number was sung with appropriate *rāgas* and *tālas*. *Rāgas* include- *ahira*, *āśoārī*, *kedāra*, *kānārā*, *gaurī*, *kau*, *tur*, *basanta*, *tur-bhāṭiyālī*, *nāt-mallār*, *beloāra*, *bhupālī*, *dhanāśrī*, *mallāra*, *māhur-dhanshri*, *lolita*, *Śrī*, *Śrī-gāndhāra*, *sindhurā*, *suhāi*, *sāreṅ*, and *imana*. Except 'kaura' the other *rāgas* are parts of the Indian classical music tradition. However, it is also seen that some of the well-known *rāgas* of the Indian classical music tradition were not incorporated by Śaṅkaradeva in his Bargīts for obvious reasons. His purpose was devotional with a mind to surrender before the Lord. Every *rāga* may not be appropriate for his purpose. He, therefore, had to proceed with his own orientations to carry forward his devotional spirit through his own lyrics.

The Master was never unmindful of the local music tradition, embodied and sustained through folk music, as he had drawn from the quasi-dramatic institutions for his plays. The local folk music tradition must have had some impact over his lyrico-devotional numbers.

Tāla or percussion rhythm is an integral part of every musical performance- vocal or instrumental. We find a specific *tāla* for every Bargīt. Such *tālas* are named as *ekatāla*, *kharmāna*, *rūpaka*, *sutkalā*, *domānī* and others. By and large, the musical instruments included *Khola*, *Tāla* (cymbal) and *Flute*.

A single Bargīt is sung differently in different places. The impacts of the individual satras are also quite important in this regard. Most of the satras maintain the tradition of singing of the Bargīts. So, the local impact in this regard cannot be ruled out. As an innovative practice, some of the exponents of Śaṅkarī tradition of music have undertaken choreographic exercises against each Bargīt, and such exercises, especially designed by popular danseuses, have become popular and eye-catching. More importantly, such choreographic exercises have given a modernized and innovative dimension to the lyrico-devotional numbers of Śaṅkaradeva. Innovations are inspiring, but deviation from or distortion of the original will create an environment of chaos. We are free to add new dimensions to the ‘noble numbers’ since we are living in the digital era, but we cannot uproot it from its original soil.

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ROLE OF WOMAN IN SOCIAL REFORM (SPECIAL
REFERANCE FROM VAIṢṆAVA DEVOTEE OF
MEDIEVAL ASSAM)

Dr. Arcchana Puzari, Dr. Gitanjali Hazarika

In Mediaeval period woman played a significant role in the development of the society. This had happened only because of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva. His strong conviction of spreading the light of true knowledge among the ignorant, illiterate masses, he used different art forms as communication of medium. Śaṅkaradeva's liberal attitude inspired women disciples and he even advised his disciples to spread knowledge amongst woman who were really eager to follow Vaiṣṇava faith. Śaṅkaradeva knew that a society is incomplete without the contribution of woman. Living life in mediaeval period was much different than the life we live today for many reasons. The general attitude towards women in mediaeval time was that they were inferior to man. But they had a lot of responsibility. However, sometimes it so happens that in the society a soul appears and the social life of the people is guided according to his direction. Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva was such a person. He not only guided the contemporary society but also played the role of a guiding star of the society.

With a strong conviction of spreading the light of true knowledge among the ignorant illiterate masses, Śaṅkaradeva, the great saint analyzed various religious scripture and used drama, a strong mass communication medium for the purpose.

The rituals of the religion were earlier designed so as to safeguard the interest of privileged class. Common man had no chance of becoming an integral part of the religion in those days. But by opening path of religion for the poor,

downtrodden and the exploited and overcoming the wall of discrimination among people on the basis of caste, Śaṅkaradeva established a new identity for all. Vaiṣṇavite

Ancient society was gender neutral society, where both man and woman were equally independent in their day to day life. From Vedic period onward, woman played a vital role as scholar and women like Khanāvātī, Gārgī, and Maitreyī had occupied a very prominent and scholarly place and contributed to the upliftment of the society. Women were enlightening themselves in the Prākṛt stage or Caryāpada period also. The Gurucarit told us, that influence of Neo-Vaiṣṇavite movement, developed a new society, where woman had equal right to exercise religion with man. Śaṅkaradeva's liberal attitude inspired woman disciples and he even advised his disciples to spare knowledge amongst woman who were really eager to follow Vaiṣṇava faith. Śaṅkaradeva knew that a society is incomplete without the contribution of women folk.

Āi Padmāpriyā, daughter of Bhabānīpurīa Gopāl Ātā, who emerged as a powerful poet and is considered to be the first poetess in Assamese language. Āi Padmāpriyā drew her inspiration to compose her songs from Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva and father Gopāl Ātā. The lyrics she composed reflected her love for Śaṅkaradeva's teachings. From her numerous songs and lyrics it can be ascertained that her merit could easily match with those of great scholars and saints like Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva. Āi Padmāpriyā was quite eligible to be a scholar but it was not considered in that time. But she was widely accepted and recognized as one of the pioneering woman poet in Assamese language.

In the Gurucarit, we have seen another woman poet who succeeded Āi Padmāpriyā, she was known as Āi Kanaklatā. According to Dr. Birinchi kumar Baruah, "One interesting feature of the Vaiṣṇavite Renaissance is its democratic spirit, for it encouraged learning not only among men, but also among woman.

Kanaklatā Āi, granddaughter-in-law of Śaṅkaradeva, wrote several hymns of dedication. She was not only the first poetess of Assam, but also the first woman to be appointed Head of a Satra or religious order'.¹

Śaṅkaradeva's grand mother Khersūtī was another woman of medieval Assam, whose dedication and inspiration created a great Vaiṣṇava saint and scholar Śaṅkaradeva for us. Though she was illiterate but she was respectful woman towards knowledge. Eventually, Śaṅkaradeva's father Kusumbara and mother Satyasandhyā died immediately after his birth. So, Khersūtī carried all responsibility of Śaṅkaradeva. She taught him discipline, punctuality and sent him to school where he learnt under the guidance of Sanskrit scholar Mahendra Kandali and completed his studies at the age of 22 and became a scholar.

Another woman Rādhikā was one of the most courageous women, in the medieval conservative society. Belonging from a lower caste of the society Rādhikā had done a great technical work as like an engineer. There was a tributary named Tembuāni, which prone to flash flood. Along with flood, erosion also threatened the lives of people in the Bardoā area, as it leads to permanent loss of land. Rādhikā, only the woman, confidently told Mahāpuruṣa, that she can do the work easily. Śaṅkaradeva had equal respect for all the people, so he gave the total responsibility to Rādhikā for reconstruction of the embankment of Tembuāni river. Though Rādhikā was illiterate, she had done a great work and in order to protect people from flood and erosion and taken main measure 90 degree angle vertically flown the river. In this way Rādhikā established that, woman can do anything.

¹ .B.K.Baruah ---HISTORY OF ASSAMESE LITERATURE ,pg.47.

Now we see kamalāpriyā alias Bhubaneswarī. She was the daughter of Rāmrāy from Bhuyān community. She was so broad minded that she herself done inter caste marriage in that medieval society, where cast system was very strict. She was married to chilārai Dewān who belongs to Rajbongshi community. The political conflict between two political powers the Koc & the Bhuyāns have finished by this marriage. This marriage has an historical importance. After this incident, the union of Aryan and non Aryan in Assam become easier & faster. She was also very beautiful and a marvellous singer.

Candarī Āi, the personal helper of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva, was really educated according to the concept of that period. Without the institutional education she could understand the main object of religion. Some Brāhman scholars who came to debate with Śaṅkaradeva went back after hearing the analysis of Candarī Āi on Bhāgavata. It shows how well a woman understands the critical verses. She indicated the right place for the kalpataru tree of vaikunṭha in Śaṅkaradeva's drawing. It shows the knowledge & artistic view of Candarī. She played an important role in Śaṅkaradeva's life. Candarī Āi developed her personality and overcome all the inferiority complex.

Brajāngī Āi, mother of Gopāl Ātā was an expert weaver. She was so laborious that she went to market by taking four heavy loads carried on a pole placed on her shoulders. She proved that Assamese woman earned (outside home) for her family from the very earlier. Padmāpriyā, first Assamese poetess was the granddaughter of Brajāngī Āi.

Another important character is Dhelī Barpoharī. When Śaṅkaradeva reached at the Native place of Dhelī, then Mādhavadeva went to collect food for the disciples. As a customer, Mādhavadeva paid a coin with the symbol of Śrī Kṛṣṇa to Dhelī Barpoharī. After observing the coins Dhelī gave the goods free to Mādhavadeva and offered one rupee to him as the price for next day food item.

Śaṅkaradeva praised her too much for her donation made to the needy devotee. From the example of Dhelī, Śaṅkaradeva's disciples got the spirit of donation. As drop – drop of water makes the sea such as minimum donation can make a huge amount. Dhelī is a path finder of collecting of public money.

Kanaklatā re-invented Baradoā, Ākāśīgaṅgā, Tembuanījān and śilikhā bṛkṣa etc. These are the places related with Śaṅkaradeva. So it has a historical importance. She knew the importance of conservation of such historic site. She was differently able with a short leg and a big hump in her back. She has done all the household work alone & helped in the weaving work. She was a very good singer also. She was known as Cākulī. Thus she inspired both culture and work culture.

Kālindī Āi (2nd wife of Śaṅkaradeva)'s contribution towards society, is praiseworthy. In that male dominating society, women had to given up all of her religious faith learned at home after marriage. But Kālindī Āi worshiped her own god “Śālagrāma” inside the house and paved the path of religious independence of woman. We notice the social responsibility of Kālindī Āi after the death of Śaṅkaradeva. Kālindī Āi was the advisor of Mādhavadeva, who worked as a spiritual and institutional head of Neo-vaiṣṇavite movement of Assam after Śaṅkaradeva. Her management skill was unrivalled.

At the first pilgrimage, Śaṅkaradeva meet a woman retail shop keeper who treated Śaṅkaradeva as the Lord Kṛṣṇa and herself as Sumālinī Dhāi. She gifted all her deposited money to Śaṅkaradeva and died. Capacity of donate make her immortal. She kept a good example for next generation. Importance of donation is all times needs.

Besides these women, the wife of Jayantīr Madhāi, Rūp Gosvāmī, and Barabāhī Thākūr were the woman who fought for the equality among male and female. They were the example of empowered woman.

Thus some courageous women worked for the change of society. They worked positively under a negative situation. We should congratulate them that they have done a hard task in that medieval conservative society.

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INFLUENCE OF THE PURĀṆAS IN TRADITIONAL ASSAMESE MANUSCRIPT PAINTING

Dr Indira Saikia Bora

Manuscript as a means of conserving and transmitting culture and learning representing the artistic sensibilities of the people are the offshoots of this cultural upsurge. The manuscript called ‘puthi’ in Assamese ensures for it a most venerable position in the minds of the people who worship it in place of any idol in the altar at the community prayer hall or Nāmghar and also in domestic chapel.

According to a local belief, the origin of the traditional Assamese paintings can be pushed back to the time of purāṇic legend of Citralekhā where she was depicted as an accomplished portrait painter². The history of Assamese painting, however, can trace back to the time of the 7th century king of ancient Assam, Kumār Bhāskaravarman. In the Harṣacarita, a 7th century chronicle by Bāṇabhaṭṭa, it has been recorded that the royal presents which had been sent by Bhāskaravarman to Harṣavardhana, a contemporary king of Northern India, included, inter alia. ‘Volumes of fine writing with leaves made from aloe bark and of the hue of ripe cucumber’ and carved boxes of panels for painting, with brushes and gourds attached: In the *Nidhanpur- copper- plate inscription* of the early part of 7th century it has also been recorded that ‘Bhāskaravarman’s mark (i.e. picture) was seen in the houses of kings, untarnished on account of great luster. From the *Uttarbarbil* inscription Balvarman-III of the *Śālastambha* dynasty, belonging to the last quarter of 9th century, it is known that the royal palace was decorated with picture.

However, the concrete evidence about the nature of the earliest Assamese paintings can only be indirectly derived from the line drawings engraved in the Copper Plate inscription belonging to 1071 AD of Indrapāla of the Pāla dynasty of Assam, where picture of a bird, a lotus, a conch and a wheel had been rendered in line drawings. In the verse *Babrubāhanar Yuddha*, which was composed by Harivara Vipra, a court poet of the king of Kamatā, Durlabhnārāyaṇa of 13th century, and reference has also been made about the pictures of the human and celestial beings also of flora and fauna.

Very little about the classical cultural tradition of Assam had been the subject of discussion among scholars outside the geographical boundaries of the province. Mahāpuruṣa Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva founded the edifice in the 15th- 16th centuries A.D. Dr. S. K. Chatterjee ascribes him as one of the first rank saints and sages of medieval India. Śaṅkaradeva combined in himself many qualities. He was unparalleled in the field of Assamese language and literature. He was a great poet and composer, dramatist, painter, actor-dancer, social reformer, administrator (*as a Śiromaṇi Bhūyan*) besides being the founder and propagator of Assam Vaiṣṇavism. The bhakti movement inaugurated by him, stimulated an unprecedented intellectual awakening and a unique cultural efflorescence, which encompassed literature, art, architecture, sculpture, dance, drama, music and painting. It has been described that Śaṅkaradeva painted Sātvaikuṅṭha (seven celestial world) tulāpāt (pressed cotton paper) in connection with the theatrical performance of *Cihnayātrā*. It may be noted here that, in Assamese the word 'Cihna' means 'sign' and the 'Yātrā' means performance³.

From the references as mentioned above, it can be inferred that the tradition of painting had been in existence in Assam since 7th century A.D. From the references of the *Harṣacarita*, it has become well- established that in 7th

century, the tradition of manuscript writing on aloe bark, which was coated with colour, had been prevalent in the 7th century Assam. Of course, there was no specific mention whether such manuscripts were decorated with picture or not.

In India, the earliest evidence of manuscript writing was confined among the Buddhist, which goes back to 5th century A.D. Among the Jainas, their earliest manuscripts belonging to 6th century A.D. have so far been reported. The earliest of these manuscripts were of palm leaves and of birch bark which did not require much effort and any complex and time consuming in comparison to palm leaves and birch bark.

The production of aloe bark leaves in Assam for writing as early as 7th century is undoubtedly an important phenomenon in the history of writings of India. It might also indicate that the manuscript tradition in Ancient Assam was an independent development and had not any kind of inspiration from the Buddhist manuscript tradition. It may also point to the existence of a Hindu tradition of writings which might have prevailed in India prior to the Buddhist tradition and which might have come to Assam with the earliest Aryan migration. It is worth mentioning here that of all the Indian vernacular translation of “*Vālmīki’s Rāmāyaṇa*”. Mādhava Kandali’s Assamese translation is the earliest. Even Hindi, Bengali and Oriya version had appeared about a century and a half later.

In India, the first concrete evidence of manuscript having picture on it belongs to 10th century and is restricted among the Buddhist manuscripts. During the region of the *Pālas* of Bengal, such manuscripts were painted in Buddhist monasteries of Bengal, Bihar and Nepal, Assam was contiguous with Bengal there was every possibility that such manuscripts were prepared in Assam too. Discovery of a few terra-cotta depicting Buddha and Buddhist *Stupa* in Assam belonging to that period also strengthen that belief.

When the Turk had invaded and occupied North India in 12th century and destroyed the Buddhist monasteries, the tradition of painted manuscript had also been lost along with it in North India, however, in Nepal, it survived a little longer. During the Turk invasion, many Buddhists from Bengal and Bihar had migrated to Nepal. There was very possibility that to Assam also such migration took place, as Assam too was a Hindu kingdom like Nepal and along with it the *Pāla* tradition of painted manuscript might have also entered Assam.

The origin of Assamese school of paintings in Bengal, we should look for it in the tradition of the Western Indian with whom Assamese school of painting seems to have a very close affinity. The very near structural similarities of the composition of a few picture of the 10th Book of *Bhāgavata* with the paintings of *Laurcanda* of 1450-75 A.D. definitely indicate that they belong to the same tradition such structural similarities of composition of the 10th of *Bhāgavata* can also be observed in the paintings of the manuscript of *Mṛgāvatī* of the early *Rājasthānī* school 1560 A.D. From such evidences, it can be safely said that the painters of early Assamese school had a definite knowledge about the painting style of the earliest period of the Western school. So, it is reasonable to believe that there might have existed a painting style prior to the Jaina school, from which both the Hindus and the Jaina's have derived their inspiration. It is not impossible that early Assamese painters were acquainted with such an early style. Perhaps, it was due to an existing powerful tradition of painting style in Assam, the *Pāla* School was unable to influence the Assamese school.

In the manuscript paintings of the *Pāla* School, the pictures were never meant to represent the text of manuscript. But in the Assamese school of paintings were invariably the illustration of the text of the manuscript. Even in the early Jaina school too, the picture never represented the text. It was only in

the later part of the 14th century that in the *Jaina Kalpa Sūtra* manuscript, the pictures were depicted to illustrate the text of the manuscripts.

The Assamese manuscripts painting can be broadly classified into two categories based on the style of its composition and the representations of man, Nature and architecture. The 10th Book of *Bhāgavata* and all other manuscripts with similar characteristics belongs to the category which represents the early phase of the Assamese manuscript paintings. The compositions of all painting are very simple. There is no effort on the part of the artist to represent perspective in the composition of these paintings. Almost always the objects, whether man, animal or inanimate objects, painted in flat colours, are placed on the same horizontal plane of the foreground superimposed also on a flat coloured background. Relations among the different objects depicted in the paintings are always arbitrary and not proportionate to the reality. Colours used are also very often arbitrary and are limited to only a few shades. Red, blue, black and yellow are the dominating colours. Generally, red background is used to depict day and blue to depict night and indoor scene and as most of the scenes depicted in the pictures are events of the day, so majority of the picture are on red background.⁴

Another distinguishing feature of this category of painting is that the space of the picture is divided into main portion- One the active lower and the other passive upper. Lower portion which occupies the greater area of the painting is the site where all the events of the painting are depicted. Upper portion forms the lobed arches above the lower. Upper portion does not contain any other elements of the picture. Almost always it is painted in blue colour. It is obvious that this portion is meant to represent the sky. In the later development of this category, the lobed arches gradually become reduced.

All the manuscripts of this category are religious in their themes. Exploits of Kṛṣṇa and Rāma are the subjects which are generally depicted in these paintings. As the paintings are simple depiction of the concrete events of their lives, there is very little room for the individual artist to utilize his own creative impulses.

However, in the illustration of the manuscript of the *Anā dipātana* which deals with the ideas about the creation of the universe. Where the artist is confronted with abstract concept rather than concrete reality, he has taken the opportunity to exploit his own imagination instead. In the paintings of this manuscript obstruction reaches in extreme limits. The finest example of this type of abstraction is found in the manuscript of *Anā dipātana* of *Kujī Satra*. This manuscript is on hand-made paper instead of aloe bark, it offers greater space for the artist to make experimentation with the pictorial space too.

The other category of paintings is the development of the later period. The composition of all the paintings of this category is relatively more complex. There is also effort to depict perspective in this group of paintings. However, instead of using the scientific technique of geometry and tonal variations, the problem of perspective have been stored here mainly by the placement of the objects in different groups in different levels of the picture. The architecture of the buildings depicted in these paintings is more complex. Influence of the late *Rājasthānī* and *Mughal* paintings has played here a dominating role. But the geometric perspective of the buildings which are often encountered in some of the *Rājasthānī* and *Mughal* painting are very rare in the Assamese paintings. Colours used in this category of paintings are wider. Besides the common red, green, yellow, black and blue, their different shades and combinations are noticed here. White is also very wisely used. Lobed arches are totally absent in this category of paintings. Almost all the paintings of this category are also

religious in Nature. However, in two of the manuscripts secular themes are also depicted.

Paintings of this category are sometimes endowed with an expressive quality. Human figures are portrayed here in conformity with its Naturalness. However, this effort is almost absent in the portrayal of the Nature including the animals. Generally, plants are depicted in stylized conventional forms. In the paintings of the *Hastīvidyārṇava*, which is preserved in the Historical and the Antiquarian Department, Guwahati, animals are portrayed in more realistic manners.

However, in most of the picture of this manuscript, landscapes are painted in realistic manner that reflect some resemblance with the *Mughal* paintings. In the manuscript of *Saṅkhacūḍa-vadhakāvya*, almost a similar treatment of landscape is observed.

In another group of manuscripts of this category, the portrayal of Nature is always done in highly stylized manner that reveals its close proximity with the Rājasthānī paintings. In the paintings of the manuscript of *Hātī-puthi* of *Āuniāṭī Satra*, *Mājulī* and *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa*, now preserved in the British Library, London, we observe the finest example of such stylized depiction of Nature, particularly the landscapes. However, in the paintings of *Hātī-puthi* too, the animals are depicted in realistic manner. In the paintings of *Hātī-puthi*, another interesting feature is noticed relating to the designs of the architecture. Not only the buildings are highly stylized here, in some of the paintings they even from the basic structures of the paintings occupying their entire space. Though such stylized buildings often help in enriching the compositions yet they lack the tactile quality of solidity which we find in the paintings of the manuscripts of *Kumāraharaṇa* of Dīciāl Satra of Nowgong. There is also close similarities between the architecture of *Hātī-puthi* and *Brahmavaivartapurāṇa* belongs to

1836 A.D. Depiction of musket bearing soldiers and men with western coat and hat in *Hātī-puthi* also indicate that it belongs to a very late period as it is quite clear that the painter was well acquainted with British customs. Both these manuscripts represent the final phase of the Assamese painting tradition.

The main purposes of the traditional painting of Assam were to supplement the text of the manuscripts. In other words, they were the illustrations of the texts. There was a special class of people in Assam known as *Khanikar*. They were both artist and the craftsman. Besides paintings they also made idols in wood. It may be pointed out here that the word 'Pratimā' to mean illustrations⁵, *Khanikar* also made masks to be used for theatrical performance.

The scribe of the manuscript was usually a different person called *Lekhak*. Generally, he did the writing first and left blank spaces to be filled with illustration later by the *Khanikar*. *Lekhaks* were invariably literate persons. But some *Khanikars* were illiterate as well. But he could copy all the same paintings as well as writings. So it is obvious that sometimes *Khanikars* did the works without fully understanding the essence of the text. But as all the themes of the manuscripts were part of the general folklore tradition of Assam, the *Khanikars* were not totally unfamiliar with them. However, to some extent, such factors were also responsible in determining the nature and characteristics of the traditional Assamese paintings.

It is quite obvious from the above that for the full appreciation of the Assamese manuscript painting, it is essential to know the accompanying text of painting. Nevertheless, there is always a kind of beauty in the Assamese manuscript paintings. It derives its beauty basically from its uniqueness and the provincial flavour of simplicity. When we contrast the Assamese paintings with those of the school of late Rājasthānī, Kāñgrā, Mughal etc. which are basically

the product of urban cultures, we may see the uniqueness of the Assamese manuscript paintings which are primarily, a product of the village culture. Though some kings and queens of the late Medieval Assam used to commission scribes and painters to prepare manuscripts, yet there is no evidence to think that they had their own royal ateliers. Manuscripts were generally prepared by the traditional scribes and painters who lived in the villages.

It may be pointed out here that the materials for the Assamese manuscripts were mainly prepared from the bark of the *Āgor* tree, which is found only in the countryside. As the painters and scribes had to prepare the base materials for the manuscripts themselves, which is involved a very long process, it was advantageous for them to do the work there itself. Besides painting has never been available profession in Assam. The traditional painters known as *Khanikar* had to depend for his livelihood basically on farming. So it was not possible for him to settle in urban centre near his clients to do the paintings exclusively. The Vaiṣṇava monasteries, another site for the production of manuscripts, were also situated away from the urban centres was a determining factor in shaping the style of the Assamese paintings. It also helped to retain the characteristics, perhaps, of a very old tradition which had been abandoned elsewhere in India long before.

The Neo-Vaiṣṇavism as preached by Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva (1449-1568AD) was link in the chain of similar movements and protest against the degenerate religious practices and glorification.

The art book of illustration by means of miniature was scrupulously cultivated by unknown painters living within the religious atmosphere of certain satras. The epics and purāṇas were generally illustrated and pictures are available in all combination of colours.

Rudra Simha is generally regarded as the greatest of Ahom monarchs for his profound spirit of toleration, his attempt to break the seclusion of Assam by creating a new order of people in society the Bairāgī and Khāunds, whose duty was to visit important centres of cultures in India and import to Assam beneficent customs and manners. The reign period of *Śivasimha* (1714-1744 AD), the son and successor of *Rudra Simha* is far more important from the point of view of cultural development in Assam.

The important work of art of this time is the Bhāgavata's Book VI, painted by *Vadhaligirā* in 1736 AD by the orders of the king, queen and the prince of *Tipām*, the son on *Śivasimha* and *Ambikā Devi*. The *Dharma-purāṇas*⁶ was composed in material Assamese by Kavicandra Dvija and was also illustrated by *vadha-ligirā*. It is one of the finest examples of the Assamese court painting and is at present in the British Museum.

Another royal house that was the patron of literature and painting was that of Darang, one of the eastern branches of the *Koch* king of Kāmarūpa. They like their related state of *Beltolā*, *Rāṇī* and *Lukī* had been feudatories of the Ahom kings. The seat of Darang Rājās had been Mohanpur, near Mongaldoi in the district of Darrang. The most important result of their contribution had been the *Vamśāvalī* of the Rājās of Darrang by *Sūryakharī Daivajña* into 1791 AD. It is illustrated but in a degenerate style of *Gargāo*⁷. This book gives a full and vivid account of the Koch period in Assam. Its writer Sūrya Hari Ganak is reported to have been the greatest Sanskrit Scholar of his time in Assam. The next kingdom where Assam painting flourished in the late 18th century and early 19th century is known as Coochbehar.

Footnotes:

1. Essays on Śāṅkaradeva and Neo-Vaiṣṇava movement of Assam, published by Śrīmanta Śāṅkara Kristi Bikāsh Samiti, 2004
2. Ibid, p. 131
3. Ibid, p. 131
4. Bhāgavata, Book 17, a single folio available at the Department of History and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Guwahati.
5. Dharma-Purāṇa Mss with the British Museum, London and a Photostat reproduction with the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Guwahati.
6. The art book of Illustrations in Assam, p. 175, Manuscript paintings of Assam State Museum, 1998.

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GUṆAMĀLĀ, AN EXCLUSIVE MASTERPIECE OF ŚAṆKARADEVA: AN INSIGHT

RASHMI REKHA GOSWAMI

In the religious and cultural history of Assam as well as in India, Śrīmanta Śaṅkaradeva is an iconic figure. Śaṅkaradeva, the saint-scholar, playwright, social-religious reformer, can also be designated as the colossal figure in the cultural and religious renaissance of Assam because he is credited with providing a thread of unity to Assam straddling two major kingdoms (Ahom and Koch kingdoms), building on past literary activities to provide the bedrock of Assamese culture, and creating a religion which gave shape to a set of new values and social synthesis. When the Assamese society was totally enveloped by the cloud of superstition, when it has been shaken by the social disturbance arising out of the discontent of Assamese people, at that very moment Śaṅkaradeva, with his high intellectual calibre saved the life of the Assamese society and created a new era in the history of Assam. It was the new era of knowledge, religion, culture, spirituality, peace, harmony and tranquillity. He has started a socio-cultural renaissance in Assam which was at once unique in Nature and revolutionary in terms of its impact. His Neo-Vaiṣṇavism stands out among the different *bhakti* cults in India in terms of its unique and innovative character, which found expression in the move to create an egalitarian civil society based on the shared values of fraternity, equity, humanism and democracy. The *ekaśaraṇa-nāmadharma*, preceded by Śaṅkaradeva always emphasises on the glorification of Lord Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. According to him Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa is the supreme power, the sole creator, governor, sustainer and destroyer of the

universe. The *Guṇamālā* of Śaṅkaradeva also depicts the same account. Actually it is nothing but the deification of Lord Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa.

***Guṇamālā*, a study:**

Guṇamālā is a unique masterpiece which shines like a star in the literary heritage of Assam. It is unique because it was composed within a single night at the request of Koch king Nara Nārāyaṇa in 1552. It is an abridged version of the *Bhāgavata* capturing in racy, rhyming and sonorous verses. The eccentric story behind the creation of *Guṇamālā* runs thus- one day Koch king Nara Nārāyaṇa in order to taste the intelligence of his court poets asked them to give him, in one night, a condensed version of the *Bhāgavata*. Although all other poets hesitated to accomplish such a huge work in one night, it was only Śaṅkaradeva who freely accepted the challenge and accordingly he had condensed the substance of the ten chapters of the *Bhāgavata* into a small booklet viz. *Guṇamālā*, and then he put it into a small wooden box. He also painted the box with *hengul-hāitāl* (yellow and red) an elephant squeezed inside a circle. He called it *Bhurukāt Hātī*-meaning an elephant squeezed in the Lime-pot. It is also said that one day Koch king Nara Nārāyaṇa in order to taste the intelligence of his court poets asked them to squeeze an elephant in a lime-pot. Having heard such an impossible work, when other poets clearly declared their inability, it was Śaṅkaradeva who has tactfully finished the act with his incomparable talent. Having seen the skilful act of Śaṅkaradeva, the king was highly pleased and appreciated his intelligence. *Guṇamālā* is also known as *Guṇacintāmaṇi*. In the *Guṇamālā*, there are six chapters and 377 *padas*. In the first chapter of *Guṇamālā*, Śaṅkaradeva mainly portrays the ten *avatāras* of Lord Viṣṇu in a very poetic form. Here there are 44 *padas*. It is an excellent piece of work because here Śaṅkaradeva depicts the knowledge of the entire world in just few serene, magnificent and fascinating poetic lines. In the second chapter there are

66 *padas*. In this chapter the entire story of the birth of Kṛṣṇa and His *Lila* of childhood is depicted very poetically. The third chapter with 64 *padas* beautifully describes His *Bṛndābana līlā* and *Mathurā līlā*. The fourth chapter comprising 70 *padas* begins with *kaṁśa-vadha* (the killing of *kaṁśa*) and very articulately describes the peaceful situation after *kaṁśa-vadha* and the marriage ceremony of Kṛṣṇa with Rukmiṇī, Satyabhāmā, Kāḷindī, and Mitrabindā and so on. The fifth chapter which consists of 55 *padas* mainly describes the *līlā* of Balarāma, the story of “*dāridya bhañjan*” along with Kṛṣṇa’s journey to Mithilā, His return journey to Dvārakā and so on and so forth. In the sixth chapter there are 78 *padas* and it describes the eleventh chapter (*skandha*) of the Bhāgavata. Here the picture of the planning of vanishing the *Jadu-vamśa* (the clan of *Jadu*) and tragic death of Kṛṣṇa is portrayed very beautifully. This is the main theme of *Guṇamālā* in nut-shell. In this paper only the first chapter is delineated very elaborately as the vivid description of the whole *Guṇamālā* can’t be presented in such a short paper.

In *Guṇamālā*, Śaṅkaradeva glorifies Nārāyaṇa with the very majestic language. The simple implication of *Guṇamālā* is the garland of praises of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa. Here Śaṅkaradeva says that Śrī Kṛṣṇa did take incarnation again and again in order to destroy the sins and thus He makes light the heavy burden of the world.¹ Śrī Kṛṣṇa, who is the storehouse of immense qualities is described as august, stately and fair.² He is the substratum of the world as He is the sole cause of creation³ who also maintains the whole creation.⁴ Śrī Kṛṣṇa or Gopāl or Murāri kills numerous demons⁵ for the welfare his devotee. He is very merciful and so He fulfils all the wishes of the devotee. Moreover, He is the bestower of *mokṣa*, *artha* and *kāma* (salvation, wealth and desire).⁶ So Śaṅkaradeva says that Mādhava who is the friend of his devotee⁷ should be worshiped properly within this *samsāra*⁸ because it is the only way to get his blessings. This lotus eyed

dazzling deity takes incarnation ten times to reduce the saddle of the world (*dhari bārebāra daśa-avatāralpṛthivīra bhāra khaṇḍilā apāra*). In His incarnation of *matsya* or fish he has rescued the four Vedas⁹ and He has killed *kaṁsa* after taking birth as *jaduvaṁsī*.¹⁰ Further He has taken incarnation also as *Kurma*, *Barāha*, *Narasimha*, *Bāmana*, *Paraśurāma*, *Rāma*, *Buddha* and *Kalkī* and at every time He protects the world from disaster. He has given resort to Mandara mountain on His back to churn the vast ocean in His *kurma* incarnation¹¹ and He has saved the world by killing *Hiranākṣya* in His *Barāha* incarnation¹². In His manifestation of *Bāmana* as the son of *Aditi*, He has confuted the haughtiness of *Bali*¹³ and as *Paraśurāma* He has slayed the *kṣatriyas*¹⁴. Then as *Narasimha* He has killed *hiranyakaśipu*.¹⁵ Moreover, as *Rāma*¹⁶ He has killed *Rāvaṇa*, the king of *Lankā* for abducting *Sītā* and taking the incarnation of *Buddha*¹⁷ He has nullified the authority of the Vedas and He spread the message of peace throughout the world. Lastly in his embodiment of *Kalkī*¹⁸ He has eliminated all the sinners. According to Śaṅkaradeva, one can taste the sweet taste of supreme happiness just only by the utterance of the name of *Kṛṣṇa*. Śrī *Kṛṣṇa*, the embodiment of purity is also very beautiful, resplendent and wonderful because He is not only the friend of His devotees but also of the vile. He gives salvation to all the evil souls who are in bondage because of their evil act. All the demons (*asuras*) or the sinners like *Rāvaṇa*, *Hiranākṣya*, *hiranyakaśipu*, *Vatsa*, *Vaka* etc are actually in bondage and they have got salvation when they are killed by Śrī *Kṛṣṇa*.

As previously stated, the main purport of *Guṇamālā* is to depict the greatness of Lord *Viṣṇu* or *Kṛṣṇa* and to reflect His *līlā*. Śaṅkaradeva's effort of spreading the *ekaśaraṇa-nāmadharma* or *mahāpuruṣīyā dharma* reveals throughout the *Guṇamālā*. Thus he always has an appeal to the mass to enhance the mental peace with the repeated citing of the name of *Kṛṣṇa* (*Hari*).

Śaṅkaradeva has not prescribed any rigorous way of getting the blessings of Hari, he only says that if one utters or listen the name of Kṛṣṇa with great devotion then he will certainly get the blessings of Kṛṣṇa and will also attain emancipation.

Śaṅkaradeva's main aim was to spread *jñāna-yoga* through *bhakti-yoga*. His concept was great but simple because it was for the mass people. His only intention was to make enrich the common people with the *bhakti* of Kṛṣṇa and *Guṇamālā* was also one of his small but strong gadget through which he has tried to get the goal. *Guṇamālā*, the precise form of *Bhāgavata*, is a milestone not only for Assamese culture, history and literature but also for the whole humanity because it was composed in one night which reflects the great spirit, knowledge and intelligence of Śaṅkaradeva. Apart from that he has also painted the box with *hengul-hāitāl* within that night which reveals his expertise in art. Thus it can be said that Śaṅkaradeva was a multi-dimensional figure not only in the heritage of Assam or India but also in the world-heritage. Lastly it can be concluded that *Guṇamālā* is only small in size but great in its spiritual approach.

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MAHĀPURUṢA ŚAṅKARADEVA'S RUKMIṆĪ
HARAṆA NĀTA: AN UNPRECEDENTED WORK OF
BHĀGAVATA-PURĀṆA

Dr Manju Goswami

The Aṅkīyā Nātas are magnificent literary works of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva. Śaṅkaradeva wrote these Aṅkīyā Nātas with an aim to showcase the glorious feats and Divine powers of Lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa through audio-visual verses among the common masses. Although he composed six Aṅkīyā Nātas among them Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta was the most voluminous. Before he penned his last Nāta Rama Bijaya (1490 A.D) he composed Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta. Much earlier to Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta, Śaṅkaradeva composed the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Kāvya (1438 A.D) based on the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and Harivaṃsa Purāṇa. According to Maheswar Neog Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Kāvya was the creation of Śaṅkaradeva as a young man¹. It was after about fifty years of composing the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Kāvya that Śaṅkaradeva wrote down the drama version of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa. It was during his stay in Koch kingdom that Śaṅkaradeva penned down the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta at the request of Rāma Rāya². He praised Rāma Rāya in the Mukti Maṅgala Bhatimā in this way -----

Śrī Rāma Rāya bhakati sujāna |

karāwata Kṛṣṇa Nāta Niramāna ||

Rukuṇī Haraṇa nāma paradhāna |

Kṛṣṇa kiṅkara ohi Śaṅkara bhāna. ||

(atha bhaṭimā maṅgalaṃ byāktabyoṃ : muktimaṅgalaṃ Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta)

According to Guru Carita and Kathā Guru Carita Śaṅkaradeva composed this Nāta at Pātbausī after returning from his second pilgrimage³. Prior to this he was present at the court of the Koc King Naranārāyaṇa. There is difference of opinion among critics regarding the date of composition of this particular drama. Noted critic Maheswar Neog opines that the period of composition of this drama is 1560 A.D and this has been accepted by many. The story of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta is an adaptation of chapter 52-54 of the Daśama-Skanda from the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. As far as the subject matter of Śaṅkaradeva's Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta is concerned he has followed the text as well as action of this particular chapter of the Daśama Skanda from Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

The dramatis maintained some liberty in depicting and portraying the character without distorting the original story of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa.

With a view to propagate the Bhakti Dharma, the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta has been composed with the inclusion of Vīra, Śṛṅgāra and Hāsya rasa, through the union of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī. Śaṅkaradeva has fulfilled the wishes of both God and devotee and contributed towards the spread of Bhakti Dharma.

According to the story of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta, Kṛṣṇa learns about the beauty and virtues of Rukmiṇī from Surabhi Bhāta who comes from Kuṇḍila and thus Kṛṣṇa got attracted towards Rukmiṇī. On the other hand, Rukmiṇī too, comes to hear about the virtues and manly personality of Kṛṣṇa from Haridāsa Bhāta who came from Dvārakā and desired him as her husband. In this way they got attracted to each other. Thus the dramatist has skilfully displayed the first stage of love between Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī in the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta.

Bhīṣmaka the father of Rukmiṇī and the reigning king of kuṇḍila discussed with his consort queen Śaśīprabhā and his council of ministers and decided upon Kṛṣṇa as the most suitable groom for his daughter Rukmiṇī. When Rukmiṇī came to know this from her friend Līlāvātī she was overwhelmed.

parama puruṣa piu bheli Murāru |
 janama saphala sakhī abahu hāmāru ||
 (Rukmiṇī Haraṇaa Nāta – (verse-6)

Conflict is cardinal part of drama. All drama ultimately arises out of conflict.⁴ As the saying goes that society, parents as well as relatives create hurdles on the path of love, so also the case of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī was no exception. Rukmavīra, the eldest brother of Rukmiṇī stood as a formidable barrier. He wanted to marry off his sister to his friend Śīsupāla, the king of Chedi. His (Rukmavīra) opinion about Kṛṣṇa was as such.

“Se Yādava anācāra, go badha, strī badha; mātula badha, kata pāpa kaya ṭhika, se hāmāra sambandhaka jogya hoyā nuhi”.⁵

This is why he was of the opinion that Śīsupāla was the ideal groom for Rukmiṇī ---

“Je mahāraja siṅha Śīsupāla se Rukmiṇī ka jogya bara haya, niste tāheka bibāha dewaba”.⁶

The elderly king Bhīṣmaka felt helpless when he heard about the pledge made by his eldest son Rukmavīra. He had no option but to give his consent. At the turn of events Śīsupāla promptly arrived at Kuṇḍila on the invitation of Rukmavīra to marry Rukmiṇī.

Due to the arrival of the unexpected invitee Rukmiṇī lost her composure, but not for long. In spite of the impending doom she maintained her cool and instructed her friend Līlāvātī to call Vedanidhi. On Vedanidhi’s arrival Rukmiṇī briefed him about the unexpected marriage alliance with Śīsupāla. She requested Vedanidhi to go to Dwārakā and to meet Lord Kṛṣṇa on her behalf. She personally wrote a letter to Kṛṣṇa briefing him about the latest happenings regarding their marriage at Kuṇḍila. Vedanidhi assured her and went to meet

Kṛṣṇa at Dwārakā. He tried to make light of the situation by making an exaggerated remark regarding his meditating skills and said that through his mediation he could even bring down the moon to the earth. It was a trifle matter for him. In good time he hands over Rukmiṇī's letter to Kṛṣṇa at Dwārakā. Soon after receiving that letter Kṛṣṇa leaves for Kuṇḍila along with Uddhaba and Vedanidhi. Vedanidhi had never been on a chariot before. He became unconscious due to the speed of the chariot on which he was ridding. It was Kṛṣṇa who nursed him back to normal state. Soon after reaching Kuṇḍila he informs Rukmiṇī about Kṛṣṇa's arrival to Kuṇḍila. Rukmiṇī offers her gratitude to Vedanidhi in this way -

“he pita, Bāpe upajāilā mātra, tuhu prāṇadāna dewala. tohāka ṛṇa sujaye nāhi, pāro.”⁷

On the preceding day of her marriage Rukmiṇī was instructed by Rukmavīra to go to the temple of Goddess Bhavānī along with her friends. In the meantime Kṛṣṇa also appeared in King Bhīṣmaka's court along with Uddhaba. On seeing Śrī Kṛṣṇa the other kings present at the court started running away in fear of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. But it was Jarāsandha who persuaded them not to run away but to sit calmly in the court. Meanwhile Rukmiṇī took Goddess Bhavānī's blessings and reached the court. It was from the court that Kṛṣṇa gallantly took her away -

“jaisana mṛgayutha madhyahaste simhe nija bhāga laiṇā jāy”.⁸

This act of Kṛṣṇa angered the other kings and Śiśupāla as well. All of them chased Kṛṣṇa and thereafter a fierce battle took place. Śaṅkaradeva has described this fierce battle thus -

“kope nṛpasava kāmora bāhu | Cāndaka jaca khedi jāi Rāhu ||”⁹

(Rukmiṇī Haraṇa)

On the other hand seeing all these Rukmavīra confronted Kṛṣṇa. A fierce battle was fought between the two. Rukmavīra was defeated in the hands of

Kṛṣṇa. Kṛṣṇa was about to behead him when Rukmiṇī begged for clemency for her elder brother. Kṛṣṇa showed compassion and spared her brother's life. After this the marriage of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī took place at Dwāarakā with great pomp and show. The inhabitants of the three worlds- namely the Devatās, Asuras and Nāgarāja assembled at their wedding ceremony. King Bhīṣmaka performed the customary rites of "Sampradāna" of his daughter's hand to his son-in-law Kṛṣṇa. Lord Brahmā officially acted as the priest and blessed the couple. The dramatist Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva has concluded the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta with the description of the above mentioned ceremony.

Through Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta Śaṅkaradeva has beautifully depicted the traditional marriage ceremony that takes place in an Assamese society.

In spite of the fact that the story of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta is an adaptation of the Bhāgavata purāṇa, yet Śaṅkaradeva has been able to exhibit his creativity through this particular Nāta. He has applied his creative genius in projection of the characters in a more realistic manner.

Character is an integral element as far as drama or play is concerned. An important aspect of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta is characterisation. In the Middle Ages characterisation was given least importance, whereas far more importance was given to the projection of Rasa and the like. The artistic talent of Śaṅkaradeva was such that he gave stress on characterisation keeping in view the main objective of the Bhakti Dharma.

Among all the characters of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta the heroine's character was most prominent. The ideal manifestation of love has been projected through Rukmiṇī's character that surrendered her mental as well as physical being to her beloved Kṛṣṇa after hearing about his virtues and unparalleled personality from Haridāsa Bhāta. Moreover, utmost submission towards Kṛṣṇa indicates that she

was his (Kṛṣṇa's) devotee too. The exceptional beauty of Rukmiṇī has been projected well than its original version -

ki kahāba ramaṇīka rūpa paracura | bayanaka pekhi Cānda bheli dūra ||
nayanaka pekhi pāya bara lāja | kayala jhampa kamala jala māja ||

(Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta – verse –4)

The remarkable qualities that enhanced Rukmiṇī's character are patience, quick wittedness and ardent love towards her beloved. Soon after she heard that she had to be the bride of Śiśupāla, she took the decisive step and wrote a letter to Kṛṣṇa mentioning how he could release her from the clutches of Śiśupāla. She described to him the plan as to how elope her. Again, it was the forgiving human within her, who requested that Kṛṣṇa may spare her elder brother Rukmavīra. Rukmiṇī's activities, her mental get up, dialogues, etc have gained more appeal through the gītas (Songs).¹⁰ The characteristic features of "Mugdha Nayika" of Sanskrit drama is being projected through the character of Rukmiṇī. For example-

“prathamābatirṇa jauvana madanabikāra ratau bāma
kathita mṛducha mane samadhikalajjāvātī mugdha.”¹¹

(Sāhitya Darpana)

As like the two friends of Śakuntalā Anasūyā and Priyamvadā as mentioned in the great poet Kālidāsa's monumental drama Abhijñāna Śakuntalam so also Rukmiṇī has Madana Manjarī and Līlāvatī as her close companions, faithful and sincere friends. These two characters are not being mentioned in the original text. They are but the creative creations of Śaṅkaradeva. Rukmiṇī's mother Śaśīprabhā also does not have a key role to play in the drama. But her presence can be well felt due to her responsibility towards her daughter. The character of Daivakī too, has been sketched out as a loving mother as well as an ideal homemaker.

Śrī Kṛṣṇa is the cardinal character of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta. On one hand He is the Lord of the universe and on the other hand, he is a young man with all the emotions and hesitations of youth. He was a noble hearted king who looked to the comfort of guests coming to see him. For example, we can cite the name of Vedanidhi who went as Rukmiṇī's messenger to meet Him at Dwārakā . The excellent hospitality that Vedanidhi received from Kṛṣṇa reveals his greatness as a king. Even though Kṛṣṇa displayed human attributes in the drama, yet, not for a single moment did Śaṅkaradeva forget the Divine identity of Kṛṣṇa. In the last Bhatimā of the drama, the dramatist sings the divine glory of Kṛṣṇa and reminds the audience of his divinity.¹² At the end we find in the following Bhatimā in the drama -

abahu nāhi buji Śāstraka marma | nāmata śaraṇa lehu saba dharma ||

kalimala mathana parama Hari Nāma | jāni sabahi nara bola Rāma Rāma ||

(Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta, Bhatimā-10)

Rukmavīra has been portrayed as the typical arrogant, loud mouthed and tyrannical Bar Bopā (eldest son) in a typical Assamese household. Possessed by young blood, he is the living example of pride and haughtiness. In Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta it was Rukmavīra who created conflicting situation in the development of the story line. Instead of Kṛṣṇa, he wanted his friend Śiśupāla as the husband for his younger sister. Rukmavīra faced utmost humiliation at the hands of Kṛṣṇa.

The dramatist has projected king Bhīṣmaka as a weak character who could not stand against his arrogant son's decision to give his daughter's hand to Śiśupāla and hence conceded.

“Oye putā, bibāhaka nimitte Śiśupālaka sattare ānaha”¹³

In this way he agreed the marriage of Rukmiṇī to Śiśupāla.

Surabhi Bhāta and Haridāsa Bhāta are the two minor characters in Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta who are responsible for creating Pūrva Rāga towards each other in the hearts of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī. Both these characters are instrumental in making the ‘love marriage’ of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī successful. At the same time the dramatist Śaṅkaradeva has taken care to exhibit the divinity of Kṛṣṇa and the unparallel divine relationship between God and devotee.

Vedanidhi is an exceptional character of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta. This is an exclusive creation of the dramatist Śaṅkaradeva. Vedanidhi was instrumental for playing the role of cupid in bringing the hero and the heroin closer to each other in the drama. About Vedanidhi the Bhāgavata says ‘Vichistyaptog Dvijam Kaccit’. He was a liberal minded Brāhmin who was always ready to help anyone in trouble without expecting anything in return. He covered six months long journey in a short time and hands over Rukmiṇī’s love letter to Kṛṣṇa at Dwāarakā. Moreover he described Rukmiṇī’s mental condition to Kṛṣṇa. He returns to Kuṇḍila with Kṛṣṇa in his chariot and creates a hilarious situation when he faints in the chariot. Furthermore, soon after his arrival at Kuṇḍila he informs Rukmiṇī about the arrival of Kṛṣṇa too. But here, Śaṅkaradeva’s creation of Vedanidhi stands out as a novel character.

Not much has been discussed about characters such as Śiśupāla, Brahmā, Nārada, Jarāsandha etc in the drama. In spite of this the dramatist has taken care to project all these minor character in such a way that all of them have contributed their bit towards the spontaneous flow of the story line of the drama. In fact each and every character of the drama has contributed towards the glorification of the character of Kṛṣṇa or the Supreme Lord.

The Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta is a grand creative art form of Śaṅkaradeva. Together with a good story, different situations and illustrious projection of the different scenes have added popularity to the drama. The dramatist has also been

able to maintain the dramatic sequences throughout the entire drama. Some dramatic elements have added more flavour to Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta where the Bhātas Surabhi and Haridāsa arrive and sing the glory beauty of both Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī. The situation when Vedanidhi fainted on the speeding chariot, the unconscious like state of Brahmā the priest when he sets eyes on the beautiful face of Rukmiṇī and Bhīṣmaka's arrival at Dwārakā with profuse amount of dowry to be presented to his daughter Rukmiṇī after her marriage to Kṛṣṇa. Through the union of Kṛṣṇa and Rukmiṇī both the Divine and worldly union has been depicted. At the same time the dramatist has also not forgotten to illustrate the conflicts and constraints of social life in this drama of his.

Śaṅkaradeva has made use of the Brajāwali language in his Aṅkīyā Nātas. He adopted this artificial language in his Aṅkīyā Nātas with a view to propagate the Bhakti Dharma among the masses and make them aware of the divine glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Similarly in Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta too, there is the use of Brajāwali language, role of the sūtradhāra in the development of the story line, appliance of songs, verses, Bhatimās and ślokas in accordance with situation and mood of the characters etc. The verses have played an important role in the development of the story. Appropriate dialogues songs and verses have erased differences of time, space and persons. Songs relate to various Rāgas such as Suhāi, Dhanaśrī, Āśoārī, Gāndhāra, Kannada, Gaurī, Ahira, Rāgaśrī, Māhura, Belowāra, Bhātiāli, Nāta Mallāra, Śāraṅga, Kalyāṇa etc are being included in the songs of the Nāta. Use of various Tālas such as Ekatāli, Paritāla, Rūpaka tāla, Domānī, Yatitāla, cutkalā, Kharmāna are used in the songs and this elevates the meaning as well as music of the songs. Śaṅkaradeva has made use of Indian traditional Rāgas and Tālas in his songs. He has also taken help of Bhatimā while depicting the inner feelings of the hero and heroin at the moment of the creation

of “Pūrva raṅga” in their hearts. Surabhi Bhāta describes the qualities of Rukmiṇī before Kṛṣṇa as such---

katano jatane bidhi kaye niramāna | se kanyā howe prabhu tohāri samāna ||
kahalo swarūpa ava bacana bicāri | howaya ḡṛhiṇī java Rukmiṇī nārī ||

(Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta)

Again, Haridāsa Bhāta goes to Kuṇḍila and sings the glorious virtues of Kṛṣṇa before Rukmiṇī -

tuhu nava taruṇī pradhāna | so Hari navīna joāna ||
duhu eka bayasa samāna | kayali bidhi niramāna ||

(Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta)

In this way the dramatist initiates the drama and makes the audience aware of the storyline of the drama. There are 43 ślokaś in the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta and these contain the theme of the story. The various features of modern Assamese drama comprising of dramatic plot, characters and dialogues are exquisitely embeded in the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta.¹⁴

The sole purpose of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva was to engross the masses into the Bhakti Rasa and the Aṅkīyā Nātas were written with this intension in view. There can be seen the confluence of Nava Rasa in his Aṅkīyā Nātas. These Nava Rasa are namely Śṛṅgāra, Vīra, Karuṇa, Hāsyā, Bibhatsa, Adbhūta, Raudra, bhayānaka and Śānta rasa. At the end all these merge into Bhakti Rasa. The Sanskrit luminaries are of the view that “Kāvyeṣu Nātakam Ramyam”. But in case of Aṅkīyā Nātas, creation of Kāvya Rasa is not the sole aim of the dramatist.

Kṛṣṇa Rati plays a prominent role in Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta. However this may be viewed as Śṛṅgāra Rasa in general. Rukmiṇī Haraṇa illustrates the sentiment of love as the principal motive of the play.¹⁵ (Aṅkīyā Nāta – Introduction, p. ix). It is to be noted that when God is the subject, then there is no question of Rati Rasa being created or its existence. The Vaiṣṇavas have termed

it as “Kṛṣṇarati”. Though Rukmiṇī wishes Kṛṣṇa for her husband, yet, even she realises that he is the supreme Lord of the Universe. Her letter written to Kṛṣṇa reveals this fact. Rukmiṇī thought of Kṛṣṇa as -

Śrī parameśvara sakala surāsura bandita pādapadma prapannajana
tāraṇa Nārāyaṇa Śrī Kṛṣṇa”

We can see the depiction of Vīra Rasa (i.e. heroic and terror) in the subjugation of Rukmavīra by Kṛṣṇa, humbling of Śiśupāla and Jarāsandha, taking away Rukmiṇī from the court of Bhīṣmaka by Kṛṣṇa, defeat of Rukmavīra and others in the battle etc. In fact, all these brave feats of God can be termed as His Līlā. The sūtradhāra expresses thus -

Jo Harika droha karaya, Hari guṇa nāma laite nindā karaya, sohi
pāpīka, ehi avasthā dekhaha! Jāni Hari bhakatika Nindā Cāra”¹⁶

The audience are much touched by the sorrow of Rukmiṇī, her fears and agony when she heard that she would be married off to Śiśupāla, her earnest prayer to Kṛṣṇa to grant her elder brother Rukmavīra’s life etc. All these are clear depiction of the pathetic sentiment of Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta.

It is necessary to implement Hāsya Rasa (i.e. comic elements) appropriately in a dramatic story without destroying its solemn subject matter. Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva was a creative genius and he was quite talented at the implementation of Hāsya Rasa in his Aṅkīyā Nātas. In Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta Vedanidhi, who was over confident of “tapaka mahimāye ākāsaka Cānda āni dite paro, fainted on the speeding chariot and murmured nonsense as such -

“he bāpu tuhu ke? hāmu kona? ki nimitta ethā āwala thika?”¹⁷

The audience find pleasure in these words of Vedanidhi. Hāsya Rasa lightens up their hearts. In the same way, during the Mukha candrikā ritual, the Brahmā fainted on seeing the beauty of Rukmiṇī’s face is described thus -

“Rukmiṇīka bhūvana mohana rūpa nirekhiye Brahmā māṭi luṭi parala”¹⁸

In spite of such depiction of Hāsya Rasa (i.e. comic elements) there is a subterranean stream of Bhakti Māhātmya flowing on and on. This is so because Vedanidhi realises the divinity of Kṛṣṇa and Brahmā too, regains consciousness remembering the divine name of Kṛṣṇa.

There is the depiction of Bibhatca Rasa in the drama. This was when the numerous suitors present at the court were turned on by the beauty of Rukmiṇī. The behaviour of the kings expressed at that time indicates this fact.

The main objective of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva was to propagate the divinity of Lord Kṛṣṇa and make the common masses realize the glory and virtues of Kṛṣṇa. The glorious personality of Lord Kṛṣṇa is being revealed in the particular drama. The first śloka of the drama sings the glory of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Likewise the Nāndi Gīta that followed was nothing but another way of showing respect to the divine self of Kṛṣṇa -

jaya jaga jeevana murāru | pāwe paraṇāma hamāru ||

After this the Bhatimā too, bears the appraisal to Kṛṣṇa thus -

jaya jaya yādava deva | ādi anta napāwata kewa ||

After these the Sūtradhāra begins the drama with a prayer to Kṛṣṇa thus -

“bho bho sabhāsada sādhujana, ye jagataka parama guru nārāyaṇa,
yāheri aṅśa avatāra, bārambāra bhumika bhāra haraya sehi
bhagavanta Śrī kṛṣṇa sākṣāte āpun awatari ohi sabha madhye
rukmiṇī haraṇa bihāra nritya parama koutuke karaba”¹⁸

There is a spontaneous flow of the Supreme power of Lord Kṛṣṇa from the beginning up to the end of the drama. Keeping in view “Kṛṣṇastu Bhagavān Svayam” the dramatist has made necessary changes and added creative elements to the original story of the Bhāgavata Purāṇa and penned down the Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta. The dramatist has displayed the divinity of the Lord who crushes the unholy and wicked and gives safeguard to truth and just and fulfil the wishes

of his sincere devotees. In this way he preserves peace in this Universe. The dramatist has taken utmost care to reflect the Assamese culture through his drama. So we can see the Assamese life in its Natural form.

Indeed the dramatist par excellence Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva has written down an excellent drama with equally good co-ordination of ślokas, songs, Bhatimā, dialogues, rasa's etc, without distorting the original text found in the Bhāgavata Purāṇa. That is why Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta is considered to be a master-piece work of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva.

Foot Notes :

1. Maheswar Neog : Asamiya Sahittar Ruprekha, PP. 84.
2. Birinchi Kumar Baruah (Edit.) : Aṅkīyā Nātam (Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta), PP. 100.
3. Kailash Das and Rajita Kalita Maral (Edit.) Asamiya Bhakti Sahitya, PP. 245.
4. A. Nicoll : The Theory of Drama, P. 92.
5. Birinchi Kumar Barua (Edit.) : Aṅkīyā Nāta (Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta). PP. 68.
6. Birinchi Kumar Barua (Edit.) : Aṅkīyā Nāta (Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta). PP. 68.
7. Birinchi Kumar Barua (Edit.) : Aṅkīyā Nāta (Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta). PP. 82.
8. Birinchi Kumar Barua (Edit.) : Aṅkīyā Nāta (Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta). PP. 85.
9. Satyendra Nath Sarma : Asamiya Nātya Sahitya, PP. 66.
10. Satyendra Nātah Sarma : Asamiya Nātya Sahitya, PP. 66.
11. Acharya Kṛṣṇamohan Sastri : Sahitya Darpan, PP.
12. Kailash Das, Rajita Kalita Maral (Edit.) : Asamiya Bhakti Sahitya, PP. 254.
13. Birinci Kumar Barua : Aṅkīyā Nāta (Rukmiṇī Haraṇa Nāta) PP. 68.
14. Ajit Saikia (Edit.) : Chasa Basarar Asamiya Nātaak : Parampara Aru Paribartan, P. 34.

15. Birinchi Kumar Barua : Añkīyā Nāta, Introduction, P. ix.
16. Birinchi Kumar Barua : Añkīyā Nāta, Introduction, PP. 95.
17. Birinchi Kumar Barua : Añkīyā Nāta, Introduction, PP. 78.
18. Birinchi Kumar Barua : Añkīyā Nāta, Introduction, PP. 97.

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5. Maheswar Neog : Asamiya Sahittar Ruprekha, Bani Mandir, 1986.
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BHAKTI-CULT: A HERITAGE OF HINDU MUSLIM UNITY IN ASSAMESE CULTURE

Dr. Ali Akbar Hussain

Assam Situated in North Eastern Part of India, is a wonderland with mighty river Brahmaputra flowing through it, sheltering various indigenous ethnic group immigrants and invaders merging in course of time in our Assamese identity. It is a 'land of magic,' holy-land of unity named after Śaṅkaradeva and Ājān Pīr.

With the rise of ethnic conflicts and identity crisis, and demands for own states, Assam is growing smaller, threatening greater Assamese Nation, when Assamese identity is in it peril, when National integration is at stake, we must think of the tradition of Hindu-Muslim unity and the factors for the formation of greater Assamese society. In this article, my thrust will be on the heritage of Hindu-Muslim unity, Specially the Bhakti-cult that binds the Assamese society under one roof. The strength of India lies in its heritage of unity - unity in diversity. And it is the golden thread of Bhakti cult and Sufism that binds the people each other. The great personality behind the Bhakti movement in Assam was Śaṅkaradeva who brought about a tremendous change in the Hindu society. He was a philosopher, a poet, an artist, a reformer and above all a great humanist. He preached tolerance and advised his followers not to hurt the religious sentiments of others. He tried to eliminate casteism sheltering Koch, Sandal, Muslim, Hindus and other untouchables under his liberal roof. It would be appropriate to mention the words of reputed scholar Dr Moheswar Neog here. He says, " among the disciples of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were Cāndsāi,

Jayahari, both Musalmans: Govinda, a Garo: Jayānanda a Bhutiya: Mādhava of jayanti of Hirā or potter's profession"

On my part it would be a futile attempt to write on a great personality like Śaṅkaradeva, still I feel it essential and relevant at present day of social crisis and communal disturbance to study his philosophy that inculcate social integration and communal harmony. An important phenomenon that needs serious discussion here is the identical likeness between Sufi movement and Vedāntic philosophy. Most of the Sufis in India conceived of and preached unity in forms of idealistic monism. The Hindus found their ideas very similar to those of Vedāntic philosophy. But the greatest attraction for the lower castes of Hindus was Islam that preached equality and fraternity. Quite large number of Hindus embraced Islam. The Hindu converts to Islam were at first ostracized by their own people but gradually came to be tolerated and served as a connecting link between their brothers in blood and brethren in faith. Ramānanda, Kabīra, Guru Nānaka, Mīrā Bāī, Caitanya were the other personalities who created a general atmosphere of religious harmony between Hindus and the Muslim. Before going to discuss on we should say a few lines on Bhakti tradition.

Bhakti cult occupies a very high place in Hinduism as Sufism in Islam. It is a priceless possession of Hindu religion. It has played a very vital role in the history of India for the uplift of human beings. The Bhakti movement originates in love, continues in love and ends in love. Its basis is love, its means is love its aim is love. This love, which is devotion to God, knows no bargaining, knows no fear, and knows no return. It is not tainted, not stained by desires, not touched by worldliness. This is a spontaneous out pouring of intense devotion to God. And Sufism signifies mysticism in Islam. It is Mohammadan pantheistic mysticism. Its three most outstanding features are the complete renunciation of worldliness,

the total surrender of oneself to God who is the essence of love, and the unshakable faith in the immanence of God in this world.

Co-existence of Hindus and Muslims, socio religious condition of medial India, and identical philosophies of Vaiṣṇavites and Sufi- saints helped each other to grow side by side. Buddhism, a veritable revolt against the degenerating trends of the so called votaries of Sanātana Dharma also started to disintegrate in the land of its birth. Islam with its populist appeal of universal brotherhood came to attract the have-nots, particularly after the establishment of the Mughal empire. It was to stem the tide of the religious decadence that Śaṅkarācāryya first expounded the vedantic philosophy of oneness of God with the human spirit (ekamebādvitīyam). The Alowārs of south heralded the truly liberal concept of Upaniṣada and the Purāṇas by singing song adhering to Bhakti-cult.

Śaṅkaradeva's precepts of Bhakti are termed as Eka Śaraṇa Nāma Dharma- surrender to one and only God! Ek Deo, Ek Seo, Ek Bine Nāhi Keo- only one God, only one to be revered, none else to be revered none else but one! Śaṅkaradeva's greatness lay in destroying the age-old caste barriers, which ruined country's social structure. Many scholars are of the opinion than new vaiṣṇavism was greatly influenced by the liberal tenets of Islam. The pictures in the Hastīvidyārṇava by Dilvar and Dosāi are not without the influence of the Mughal pictorial art. Making a reference Nazar Ali's "Some facts about My Life" Medini Choudhury states that even among the Muslims there were drummers, Kalias, and Deuris who were invited to Hindu ceremonies. Many of the utensils used by the Hindus in their religious are mostly made by a particular Muslim sect. Cānd Khā prepared cloth for Śaṅkaradeva. The pot used for fetching water by Śaṅkaradeva was made by Muslim. The existence of mosques side by side with Nāmghar and Temples in many of Assamese villages is scarcely seen else where.

While the great Sufi saints Mainuddin Cisti and Nizāmuddīn Āwliā during 13th century preached the teaching of Islam at Āzmir and then to other places of India, Āzān Faqir came to Assam in middle of the 17th century. He married a woman, learned Assamese and composed Zikirs to preached teaching of Islam. The reason of his composing zikirs was only that before his arrival in Assam the people had already been influenced by the literary works of Śāṅkaradeva (1449 AD - 1568 AD). Āzān Faqir, the Sufi saint preached the teaching of Islam namely Kalima, Nāmāz, Rozā, Haj, Zākāt, and the principles of shariāh and tariqat through his zikirs written in the form of bargīt and deh bicār gīt. The acceptance of Śāṅkaradeva as apostle by the Assamese Muslim like Cānd Khā and Jayahari and of Mādhavadeva by Yavan Hari Dās shows to what an extent Vaiṣṇavism exerted its influence on the Muslim settlers of Assam. The Darbesh dance of some Muslim countries in certain aspect has a close resemblance to the Assamese ' Bar Sabhāh'. It is recounted in the Kathā-Guru-Carita that the use of straw mats as seats for Vaiṣṇavas in course of religious services was introduced for the first time during the life time of Śāṅkaradeva. The use of mats called masalla or jainamaj during prayers is regarded as indispensable by the Muslims. Assamese Hindus like Muslims believe in paris Huris which may be likened to the Apsaras and zins. Offering 'mah- prasad' by the Hindus and 'chirini' by Muslims after prayer is similar practice. Dress code of the followers of Śāṅkaradeva is almost similar to that of the Muslims. The institution of nāmghar and satra has similities with mosque of the Muslims.

It is a known fact that the liberal outlook of the Ahom rulers and vaishnavite ideals helped in the growth of Muslim population in Assam. Dr Hiren Gohain in his Asamiya Jatiya Jivanat Mahāpuruṣaiya parampara says that simple, liberal, and philanthropic ideals of Islam attract people to embrace it. E.A, Gait, the historian, writes that the great majority of persons professing Islamic faith in

Assam are, as in Bengal, local converts from the lower caste and aboriginal tribes. Both Vaiṣṇavism and Islam proceed side by side in Assam during the time of Śaṅkaradeva. This joint venture of sufism and Vaiṣṇavism may be ascertained from the following verses of zikir and bargīt

hindu, musalman, ek allar foman.....

gorasthane kabar sari sari.....

hinduk puriba musalmanak goriba.....

(Hindus and Muslims are bounded by the same self of the devine rules of Allah..... The act of cremating a Hindu and the entombing of a Mumin only signify one end death of all)

santa mahanta awlia sakale / ekati namate khate...

(The saints mahanta's that the Hindu holyman, and the Awlias also suplicate to one man, the name of God)

Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva's sermon 'ek dev ek seva ek bine nāi keva' is identical with Islamic kalima- la illaha illallah.

The close relation which developed between sufism and vaiṣṇavism helped not only in the growth of a deeper sense of mutual respect and tolerance in the mind of their adherents, but also mutually exchanged and adopted the religious rituals of each others. Thus alike sufism many rituals are found in Vaiṣṇavism, which have their origin in Islam. Perhaps imbibed with this influence, Vaiṣṇavism laid stress on honest earning and plain living; both ends and means must be justified. Those who do not abide by the rules of morality or religion in earning for the maintenance of his family, must suffer from deficiency. It also stressed upon purity of men, both inward and outward. A Vaiṣṇava should not be addicted to intoxicating drugs and should keep honest company. It also advised women not to mix with other male person freely and

they should cover their body from head to foot with cloth, so that no body can see any part of their body.

This world, as Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva said is futile, life in this world with near and dear one's is simply and endearing attachment (māyā). Śaṅkaradeva sang in bargīt;

athira dhana jana jīvana youvana
 athira ehu saṁsāra |
 putra paribāra sabahi asāra
 karaba kāheri sāra ||

(This life and world is not permanent. The children and wife all will leave you)

With the same concept Āzān pīr sang;

dhanjana putra bhāryā sabe akāraṇ / māyā mohe berhi āce māyār kāraṇ.

(There is no meaning of property of family only love and affection remains with us)

Śaṅkaradeva explained the inner sprit of harināma in kīrttana as;

nānese karibe parama siddhi / harira nāma jagatara nidhi.

(Nāma will solved super spirit; because nāma of God is the discipline of the universe)

Like wise Āzān pīr also utters the same spirit jīvara sārathi nāma oh āllāh

jīvara sārathi nāma / sat guruk bhetibā ātmāk cinibā / sijiba dinare kām.

(The accompany of human being is nama, oh Allah. If you honour a real guru then you will be able to find out the soul and your spiritual desire will be fulfilled.

The above discussion shows no where else in India is the relationship, in the social and cultural plane, between the Hindus and Muslims so cordial and complementary as in Assam-- particularly in the Brahmaputra valley. If we are to

live to peacefully in our society, we must follow the ideals of Mahāpuruṣa Śaṅkaradeva and Sufi saint Āzān Faqir.

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