Preface

The present thesis is intended to fill an important gap in the critical study of Hindi Literature. An attempt has been made here to trace the history and development of Kūṭa-Kāvya, particularly as it appears in the age of Śūradāsa, with special reference to his Kūṭa lyrics. Kūṭa is a peculiar form of poetic composition representing an oblique mode of expression wherein the intended sense is disguised in intricate and enigmatic words. From the time of the Ṛgvedic hymns till today this form of oblique poetry has been resorted to copiously under different apppellations by poets of varied interests at different times. Thus there exists an appreciable volume of such poetry both in Sanskrit and Hindi Literature. During the early period of Hindi Literature this peculiar form of poetic expression was adopted mainly by the writers of mystic and religious poetry, among whom Śūradāsa occupies a pre-eminent position. In his hands the Kūṭa composition attained its excelsis as he utilised it for expounding the cult of Madhurā Bhakti in the Krṣṇa bhakti school of Hindi Poetry. With him it reaches the final stage of its evolution, for the poets before him had merely paved the way for the fullest development of his genius.

This study has been prompted by two objects. Firstly to trace the influence of contemporary religious beliefs on the Kūṭa kṛitīs of Śūra as otherwise it is difficult of comprehension, for generally mediaeval Hindi poetry is conditioned by the religious and philosophic thought whose elucidation is essential for its proper understanding. This would involve an examination of the peculiar sectarian teachings which determine the style and form of such poetry. Secondly, the legacy of mystic and religious expression has assumed a literary excellences, at many places the content has been subordinated to the mode of literary expression. It has introduced a controversy regarding the
object of poetry. For evidently such literary forms as are characterised by obscure or enigmatic utterances do not conform to the strict canons of Rasa or Dhvani and give the appearance of mere gymnastics or verbal jugglery. It may also be argued that the different figures of speech and other poetic devices employed therein have as their purpose embellishment of poetic thought. But some may hold the view that an attempt to force an alaṅkāra or to use obscure style frustrates the very purpose of Rasa which is vital for the elucidation of emotion. Hence it is necessary to examine the issues involved in this controversy and to determine the correct attitude in this respect.

Although the present study has been directed mainly to the understanding of Śūradāsa’s Kūṭa lyrics, an endeavour has been made to sift and analyse all the relevant material pertaining to the subject. In order to appreciate the merits of Śūradāsa it has been found necessary to analyse Kūṭa compositions in the then prevalent languages and examine the influence of Nāthas, Ṭhāṭhayas and other such exponents of mediaeval Hinduism, on the lyric songs of Śūradāsa. The works of these early writers and poets have been consulted and copiously drawn upon for establishing definite conclusions regarding Kūṭa Kavya. Care has been taken to glean as many relevant facts and symbols as would establish the doctrine of Kūṭa Kavya and explain it in its different phases. The vast material of Kūṭa compositions which has been produced during the long ages of Sanskrit and Hindi poetry, has thus been brought under review for the first time within the compass of this study.

The first chapter traces the meaning and history of Kūṭa and the various forms it assumed at different times. The second chapter deals with the general aesthetics of Kūṭa Kavya - its essential characteristics, function and purposes - while in the third chapter the tradition of Kūṭa
Kāvyā prior to Sūradāsa from the time of the Vedic hymns to the Kūṭa lyrics of Vidyāpati and Kabir has been examined in detail. The last three chapters are devoted to a special study of Sūradāsa's Kūṭa lyrics. It comprises a survey of his Kūṭa songs, their subject matter and the poetic merit.

The material contained in these chapters is the result of my research and studies and I may venture to claim originality in its presentation and interpretation. It may be mentioned here that the subject received little attention from earlier critics who have treated Kūṭa more as a diction or style than a form of poetry. My studies have led me to regard it as a definite form of poetry and not as a mere style. My contribution extends to the critical examination of these lyrics both from the theological and rhetorical point of view and to assess the place of Sūra among the writers of Kūṭa poetry. The study has been made arduous by reason of collecting the Kūṭa poems of Sūradāsa from all his important works and examining them critically from the point of view of poetic merit. The subject has been approached absolutely from a new point of view and the investigations made in a scientific and objective manner.

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