CHAPTER X

THE ŚRĪ KRŚNA KIRTANA

The exact dating of Krśna-kirtana is still a matter of surmise. But so far as the philological character of the text is concerned, it belongs to the late fourteenth century and early fifteenth century. The work presents many problems. But as regards its form, it gives us certain clues also. Despite the indecent set-up of the work its vitality amazes us.

The poet Badu Chandīdāsa has drawn largely upon Jayadeva’s Gita-govinda. But the chief difference between the two works should not be lost sight of. The Gita-govinda is a gītinatyā (lyrical drama) while the Krśna-kirtana is a nāṭa-gīta (dramatic lyric). Jayadeva has of course a palpable thread of plot to follow. But his preoccupation is with the fine embroidery of lyrics which reveal brilliant snatches of human emotion. Badu Chandīdāsa, on the other hand, presents a series of intensely interesting events. He does not maintain the same high level of lyric totality which is everywhere present and equibalanced in the Gita-govinda. Sometimes he is strident and sometimes he sings in a sweet voice. Not that he is incapable of maintaining a uniform dimension in the lyrics — indeed, he has given us some perfect lyrics — but that he has disturbed the flow, with the intuition of a typical playwright, only to
hasten the speed. The whole work falls into two clear-cut divisions. The first division is extended from Jammakhaṇḍa (section dealing with the birth of Kṛṣṇa) to Vānakaḥanda (section dealing with the five arrows of Kandarpa, i.e., the god Eros). The second one includes Vamsīkhaṇḍa (section dealing with the flute) and Rādhāviraha (section dealing with the affliction of Rādhā in separation) and then, as the manuscript is incomplete, the reader remains dazed and puzzled. But as the obvious possibility of tragedy suggests itself, the reader somehow enjoys his sense of bewilderment as a karuna-rasa (the artistic sentiment of pathos) and is rewarded by that. The leap from the first part of the story to the next is remarkable as it satisfies all the requisite aspects of a poetic drama. Poetic drama, "except only for preserving the necessary credibility, neglects the outer shells of reality, and directly seeks to imitate the core. This kind of drama uses for its texture a verbal process which, with its numerous provocative and evocative devices, such as imagery, and deliberate metaphor and consistent metre, is inescapably recognised as symbolic of the emotional reality of life." Up to the Vānakaḥanda Bādu Chandīdāsa is intent upon giving a strong impression of mundane realities, all erotic and episodical. But as soon as the Vamsīkhaṇḍa begins, he directly seeks to imitate the core and his object becomes less sensual, more emotional. Not that physical cravings are
then totally absent. But the singleness of a spirit glows through fleshly desires and makes them vital. The poet also generally shifts from dialogue to monologue, from spectacular splendour to heart-rending monodies of the heroine. And also the psychological development of her soul becomes complete in the sense that her complete psyche begins to work. This psyche reacts to all the visible and invisible changes in time and nature and expresses itself through some superb lyrics. One or two portions are as follows:

1. ke nā bāṅśī bāe badāi kālinī nai kule/
   ke nā bāṅśī bāe badāi e gotha gokule//

* * *

bana pode āg badāi jagajane jāni /
mor man pode yeha kumbhārer poni//
— Vāmāikhaṇḍa

(O Badāi! who is it that plays the flute along the bank of the river Kālinī? O Badāi! who is it that plays the flute in this pasture land of Gokula? When a forest is set on fire, the whole world knows it. But my mind burns inwardly like a potter's kiln).

2. ye kāṁha lāgian mo āna nā chāhiloṁ
   nā māniloṁ laghu guru jane/
   hena mane padhase āmmā upokhiṁ roṣe
   āna lainā baṅche vrndāvane//
— Rādhā-viraha
( 0 Baqai ! Kaha, for whose sake I have thrown everything else and have neglected my superiors and inferiors, has left me. See the fun of fate, he has deserted me in a passion of rage and is enjoying himself in Vrindavan with another).

The poet weaves more lyrics into the last two sections, namely, Vamsikhanda and Radha-viraha, than in the preceding sections. That indicates the deliberate scheme of the poet who has endeavoured and succeeded in taking us with a sudden jump from action to reaction and from outer accidents to an emotional catastrophe. Therein lies the inner charm of the work. The word 'nata' has been used by the poet himself and its use in the very beginning of Vamsikhanda throws light on the hidden intention of the poet:

badai laiyan rahi geli sei thane/
sakhi sabe buila radha lajiu sinane//
sola sata gopi gela yamunar ghate/
ta dekhiya nahnain patila nate//
khane karatal khane baijae mdamburga/
ta dekhi radhikar sakhigane ranga//
ar yata vadyagana achhe kahnain/
patidine nana echande vae sei thai/
dekhiya na bhulilaihaner dasi/
srji kahnain taken mohana baasi//
(Radha went there with Badai, her company, and told all the cowherdesses to accompany her to the bathing place. So the sixteen hundred gopis went to the ghat of Jamuna. Kåññ̄̄n̄did also did not miss the opportunity of adopting a dramatic device accordingly. Now he began to beat on the cymbal and now he began beating on the drum. It gave pleasure to the friends of Rādhā everyday. Kåññ̄̄n̄did thus used to play on all the other instruments he had. But those made no appeal to Rādhā, the wife of Āikan. So, at last, Kåññ̄̄n̄did had to create a fascinating flute, perforated with seven holes that convey notes, and plated with a ferrule of gold).

The description is significant and revealing. Kṛṣṇa, the clever hero, does not stage a complete drama (nāṭaka), but adopts a special kind of dramatic device (nāṭa). This nata, as is vivid from the given description, is a kind of orchestral performance, designed to break the monotony of a long composition. It does not cling to any classical standard, but moves freely to achieve its composite effect. Badu Chandidas's nāṭa-gīta is a triple form of narration, conversation and the lyric. It is not the same as gīta-nāṭa (songs and dance) mentioned by Mukundarama on several occasions. Badu Chandidas has united the indigenous currents, with the help of Jayadeva,
into a plastic art form which has given it a unique place in the old and mediaeval Bengali literature.

The word 'dhamali' has been used to designate the Srikrsna-kirtana. The poet himself has used the word in more than one context:

1  varek jia to goäli rādhā lo
   ār na bulobon dhamāli/ — Vaṇakhandā

(Rādhā, please come back to life and consciousness. I shall never crack any more jokes at you).

2  samuchit nahe rādhā tomā sans keli/
   mor pāne āla rādhā bejaha dhamāli// — Rādhā-viraha

(Rādhā, it does not behove me to make dalliance with you. So please abstain from making fun of me).

This dhamāli is a type of burlesque where satire gets the upper hand. So it becomes in Bādu Chaṇḍidāsa's composition. It is at times jocular and harsh, pungent and vulgar. But as Vamsikhandā sets in, the air of frolic dissolves in the premonition of the approaching dénouement. The setting then becomes more and more tense and tragic.

This sudden reversal of situation points to the extreme freedom on the part of the poet who was alert in his
purpose and adept in his movement. Any one of his lyrics, taken apart, conveys a tension which, regarding the direct expression of human element, compares to a pada of Īnānādāsa.

Badu Chandīdāsa's work marks the culmination of payār, along with one of its intimate associates, i.e., tripādi. But the main feature of this work is its pronounced adherence to the agrarian and rural aspect of a particular social phase. An eminent historicist philosopher of our time observes, 'the real miracle is the birth of the soul of a town... What distinguishes a town from the village is not size, but the presence of a soul.' Badu Chandīdāsa not only clung to the rural patterns of life, but was driven to certain departures from the urban point of view. He evidently felt disdain for the urban set-up which permeated the court-poetry. Hence, in this sense 'the soul of a town' is conspicuously absent in his art. He too felt the impossibility of sharply dissociating his work of art from Jayadeva's, for the latter was his thematic source, but he consciously employed parochial devices as opposed to the latter's delocalised, sophisticated attitude. Thus once again, it is relevant to compare Badu Chandīdāsa's technique with that of Jayadeva. True, in the entire field of mediaeval Indian literature there are no other poets more intimately associated than these two. But Badu Chandīdāsa offered a wide difference in technique and training
with the other, whose style was to an extent moulded
by rhetorical considerations. Their antitheses have been
emphatically defined and opposed to each other in their
respective attitude to music. A specialist has discussed
the nature of some of the ragas enumerated in Jayadeva's
Gīta-govinda. These ragas are Gurjārī, Vasanța, Rāmakīrī,
Mālavagouda, Karṇāṭa, Deśākha, Gōṇḍakīrī, Malava, Bhaiṛavī
and Vībhaṣa. Another voice on the subject observes that
the current rāgas and gālas were incorporated in his
(Jayadeva's) padagītis. The tālas were Maṇṭha, Yati,
Rūpaka and Ekaṭāla, and their forms or rhythmic patterns
can easily be deciphered. The arrangement of the micro-
tones, in relation to seven notes, was made according to
the system, adopted by the Nāṭyaśāstra of Bhaṭṭa. Then
again, he accepted "the systematized prabandha-type of
music", along with its "music-parts or dhātus, emotional
sentiments or moods ( rasa and bhāva). It is possible to
determine or discover the real form of rāgas, current in
Jayadeva's time (twelfth century A.D.), by comparing them
with melody-types (rāgas), as depicted by Kavi-Lochana's
Rāgatarāṅgini and Hṛdayanārāyaṇa's Hṛdayakoutuka. The
reconstruction of these ragas is also possible by data
collected from Hṛdayanārāyaṇa's Hṛdayaprakāśa. These prove
that the romanticism of Jayadeva had a classical background,
adherent as he was to the pure melody-types of the Indian Classical Music. One of course would be erroneous in suggesting that Badu Chandidas did away with Classical ragas and rāginīs. But at the same time one can hardly fail to notice that he did not wish to retain them in their original purity. This is substantiated by the fact that in most of the cases he emphasised the corrupt forms of them loosely, rather in an appellative way, e.g., Kāku, Kāhu (< Kakubha), Āhēr (< Ābhīr, Ābhīrī, or Āhīr), Rāmagiri (< Rāmakrī or Rāmakeli), Dhānuṣī (< Dhāneśrī) etc., despite the fact that he was well-versed in Sanskrit. The ślokas he attached in way of argument at the beginnings of the cantos were in flawless Sanskrit. But he was essentially a non-Sanskritic at heart. For Badu Chandidas advocated the cause of a localised form of music, which might or might not have any efficacious result on the kirtana form of music. Jayadeva was not only a cosmopolitan in matters of artistic taste, but somewhat fond of 'measure, purity and temperance'. For most of his ragas belong to the Bhairavaṭhāt (frame-work or system of basic scale) and that alone signifies their being sung in the earlier part of the day, i.e., morning. This gave the singer and the listener a sublime support. Two more facts point to the sublimating effect of these songs. First, it is said that the songs of Jayadeva were presented everyday in the temple of Jagannatha at Puri by temple-dancing girls or devadāsis and Brāhmanas.
And again, "they are still there in some of the South Indian temples in the form of classical Kārtanas".10

The Sanskrit school of poetry had its spiritually sublime moments as well as extravagantly erotic ones. These two combined in Jayadeva to bring Sanskrit poetry down to a feasible equilibrium. Badu Chāṇḍīdāsa, on the other hand, never embarked metaphysically. He extricated the empirical residue out of Jayadeva's poetry. His work did not want to celebrate the divinity of life, nor it followed the societally done ars amatoria of the Sanskrit poetry. Badu Chāṇḍīdāsa, indeed, dispensed with all the preoccupations of the Sanskrit Mind. Many of the details of the Śrīkṛṣṇa-kīrtana are largely culled from Sanskrit sources but undergo a metamorphosis. Hence it is not religious in its impact like that of the Assamese version of the Gītā-govinda rendered by Rāma Sarasvatī. The latter, despite his independent spirit, was deeply influenced by Sanskritic leanings. True, he infused into his version the local spirit of Assam. But he retained the character of the original and succeeded in putting his religious faith, along with secular drift, into it. This was not possible for a pugnacious poet like Badu Chāṇḍīdāsa who possibly composed his work at a time when Bengal for the time being became uncertain of its foothold and sought to satirize even the romantic and religious values of its own. It was
written out of disgust and reaction. His over-motivation makes his art full of melodramatic excess. He exploited all the possibilities of his form without leaving a talented successor. But as this work has a recognizable charm of its own, it attracted singers (gāyens). Plenty of refrains have been added by them to the main body of the book and this addition is perceptible particularly in Dānakhaṇḍa (the section on toll-collection), Noukākhanda (the section on the boat), Vamākhaṇḍa (the section on the flute) and Rādhā-viraha (the deserted Rādhā). The abundance of such interpolations shows that Kṛṣṇa-kīrtana provided the singers with many moments of relief. These moments of relief delighted the mediaeval listeners and may relight a modern reader too in the same way.
NOTES


4 Suresh Chandra Chakravarti in his article 'Śrīgītā-govindagīti' in Harakrishna Mukhopādhyāya's edition of Gītā-govinda, 1362 B. S., pp. 88-90.

5 Swāmi Prajnānanda, The Historical Development of Indian Music, Calcutta, 1960, p. 194. That Jayadeva's work, in spite of its romanticism, bears the stamp of classical design, is clear even from the Western point of view as given below:

"In a poem of such delicate texture as the Gītā-govinda, the musical scheme could hardly fail to be a thoughtful one. The names of rāga and tāla which would be full of
association to a Bengali may connote little to us; but we may see from the mere titles how they have been used as an element in the design. The song of 'One of Rādhā's maidens' in praise of love with which the Gīta begins is echoed by the 'Hymen of Hymenaee' at the close; both are in rāga Vasanta and tāla Yati. The voice of 'one fair but not so fair as Rādhā' consoles and breathes hope which finds its fulfilment in Rādhā's triumphant song of reconciliation (Rāmagiri; Yati). The slighted Rādhā and the flouted Kṛṣṇa utter their sorrows in the same accents, and these accents they afterwards forget them (Gurjjari; Yati). Kṛṣṇa's assuring message is met by Rādhā's jealousy; and the messenger, who is persuading her to relent, draws forth only a pitiful plaint over his neglect, to which the 'chorus' gives a new turn after Kṛṣṇa's home coming (Desivarādi; Rūpaka). Again, Rādhā rebukes Kṛṣṇa in the moving tones of Bhairavi, and his answer, when she has yielded, is in the ecstasy of Vibhāsa". A. H. Fox Strangways, The Music of Hindostan, Oxford, 1914, p. 83.


7 Khagendranāth Mitra's article 'Kṛṣṇakirtaner Sur O Tāla' (Sāhitya Parisat Patrika, 45th year, 1st issue, pp.18-19).


10 The Historical Development of Indian Music, p. 195.

11 Dr. Kshudiram Das in his article 'Krṣṇa-kīrtana Kāvyo Gāyorer Prakṣep' (Anukta, Śrāvana-Āsvin, 1880 S).