CHAPTER VI
CHARYĀ AND DOHĀ

One way of appreciating the lyrical merit of Charyā-songs is to compare them with Dohās composed by the same group of poets. The comparatist's purpose, however, will be defeated if he attempts to draw a broad line of division between the didactic and the non-didactic poetry in this case. M Winternitz, the eminent Indologist, who is rather harsh on the use of pseudo-mystic language of Charyā-songs, finds himself in difficulty in making such a distinction. "Closely connected with lyrics", he says, "is gnomic poetry. In many works lyric stanzas and didactic passages are blended into a single whole in such a way that one may be in doubt in the matter of grouping them."¹ Our proto-Bengali poets also were confronted with the same difficulty while trying their hands both at Charyā and Dohā.

The beautiful stray lines — some of which are shortest possible units of expression — included in the appendices to Dr. Sukumār Sen's edition of Charyā-padas, pose this problem. Some of these esoteric lines are as follows:

1. uiau re bhusuku-tārā/
   santi bhanai pohānta pahārā/
(The star that rises is named after Bhusuku, the fellow-poet. Santi says, "the hours of night have passed by".)
The cited pieces, though fragmentary, combine poetry with philosophy. Some of the basic empirical concepts of the Saha-
jiyā Buddhistic cult (such as the suspension of duality through a sexual union between the male and the female and the idea of Void) are there but that does not spoil the lyrical totality.

What strikes one most is that often the same poets are seen toying with the same idea or thought both in a dohā and
a charya.

For instance the doha by Saraha

ghare āchchhai bāhre puchchhai
pai dekkhai padivesī puchchhai /
saraha bhanai bada jānau appā
ṇau so dhea na dhāraṇa jappā //

(She seeks her outside, while he is well in. She sees her husband but asks neighbours his whereabouts. Saraha says, "You, O fool, must know thy self. Meditation or mantra does not count.")

has a thematic similarity with his following charya-song:

apaṇe rachi rachi bhavamirvāṇā /
mīchhe loa bandhābæ apañā //
ambhē na jānau achinta joi /
jam maraṇa bhava kaisaṇa hoi//
jaiso jāma maraṇa bi taiṣo /
jibante maaleṇ pāhi viṣeṣo//
ja ethu jāma maraṇa bi sankā /
so karau rasa rasānere kankhā //
je sācharāchāra tidaśa bhāmanti /
te ajarāmara kimpi no honti//
jāme kaṇe ki kāme jāna /
saraha bhanati achinta so dhūma //
(People always make wild guesses about the causality of existence and cessation. But we, the yogis, do not claim to have cleft the mystery of the birth-death life-stream. Life and death, it appears, are the two names of the same thing. There is hardly any difference between a living being and a dead man. If there is anybody afraid of this chain of life and death, let him go on in the pursuit of alchemy to thwart the current. Those who go on rambling around the abodes of gods never turn immortal. Whether it is birth that leads to Karmana or vice versa — is, Saraha says, an unsolved riddle).

The charyā-song is designed to explain the conceptual denunciation of the institutional monasticism, but it cannot be said that the song is less quizzical than the preceding doha. The song, as a matter of fact, is far more esoteric. But its artistic value rests in its variation of discursive and non-discursive statements.

Kāhna is more 'simple, sensuous and passionate' than Saraha. He is almost primitively direct in his doha. The following doha bears the stamp of his amoral attitude to life:

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ekku na kijjai manta na tanta
nia gharini lai keli karanta/
nia ghare gharini jaba na majjai
taba ki pañchabanna vāhrijjai //
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(He does not meditate. Nor does he observe the rites of the scriptures. He whiles away with his bride. How can one expect to enjoy the gorgeous sport of five colours unless the wife is leal and comfortable at home?).

The charyā-song that follows is more lyrical:

bhava nirvāne padaha-mādalā /
mana pavana beni karandakaśālā //
jaya jaya dundubhi-sada uchhaliyāñ /
kāhna dombī- vivāhe chaliyāñ//
dombī-vivāhiya ahārau jāma /
jautuke kia ānutu dhāma //
ahanisi suraa pasange jāa /
joinijāle raeni pohāa //
dombēer samge jo joi ratto/
khānaha na chādaha sahaja-ummatto //

(Involvement and salvation, a kettle-drum and a tambour, the empirical self and the wind, a pair of drum and metallic bells — all seem to be in unison. The tempo mounts when the jubilant beating of the drums are heard and Kāhṇa goes to marry Dombī, the outcast girl who does basket-work. By marrying Dombī Kāhṇa's existence becomes worthwhile. The highest virtue is taken as a dowry in this marriage. Day and night they make love to each other. He is surrounded from all sides by spiritual enchantresses. The crazy yogī who is involved with Dombī does
not leave her for a moment).

The crisp little madrigal is more engaging than the doha but the poet strives his best to muddle the logic of his statements in the latter. Lest the common reader attempts to secure a clue of a chain-syllogism of this cover-language, the poet spreads a beautiful haze over his eyes and ears.

The visual images of the bridal party, the auditory images in the beating of drums and pealing of ceremony bells and the coesthèssia that emerges at the end of the poem with the rising tide of excitement, are all brilliantly co-ordinated to the effect. Otherwise it could be nothing more than a series of pithy statements as epitomized in the dohā. There lies the charm of a Chāryā-verse. It is not devoid of meaning but the poet hides its conceptual aspect with tuneful, tactile or picturesque imagery. A dohā could hardly serve the purpose of this 'intellectual-emotional complex'. Didacticism, in this way, goes hand in hand with Chāryā-lyricism, giving the latter the cue to weave elaborate patterns.
NOTES


2 CharyāgitiPādāvālī, Ed. Dr. Sukumār Sen, pp. 119-121.

3 The poem is in rāga guṇjāri.

4 Ibid. p. 15. Dr. Sukumār Sen suggests that there are two Kāṇhas, the one who is intimate, esoteric and in deep love with Dombi while the other is more of a maxim-maker. We are discussing the former poet in this connection.

5 This verse is set in rāga Bhairavi.