CHAPTER 6.

A. TECHNIQUE OF KATHAMRITA.

A circumspection of the technique of the Kathamrita reveals in truth that the method which Sri M. has chosen as a medium of putting forward of the book is very old, although composed in the modern age.

He wrote the book by placing in the eternal custom of 'Preceptor and disciple establishing the preceptor and disciple in their own glory. Needless to say, this method of composing the book through the dialogue is of the old age.

The sages of the old age wanted to make their minds through the conversation.

In the 'Kathamrita', also, we find that he was engaged in talks and discussions on different theories sometimes with household devotees sometimes with Samnyasi devotees and again with those devoted to religion. He used to give vent to secret theories through little moral lessons and similiar and they had resemblance to the sayings and realisations of Muslim Sufi mystics, and Christian Sadhakas also.

In this context, first of all, mention may be made of "Astadhyi", a voluminous grammar written by Panini. This is also explained through the medium of questions and answer.
It is imagined that it is a composition contemporaneous of the 'Upanisad's. About 5th century B.C. it was written. In the Upanisads also the method of imparting instruction through preceptor and disciple is found.

The currents of Plato and Socrates are included in it. But in the old age, when the predecessors imparted instruction to their disciples through 'Sruti' (another name of Veda,) as it was handed down from generation to generation through memory, the disciples remained busy in discovering the real truth or fact from the barrier of these theories. Although the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna were based on morality it was without the great weight of theory. In this context, the opinion of a critic may be mentioned -

"Although the instructions of Sri Ramakrishna is of the path of morals and related to the cultivation of life, it has emerged avoiding the weight of theory and it became gratified in the creation of artistic excellent through the dialogue."¹

"Sri Ramakrishner upades' niti margiya o jibancarya-mulak holeo ta bahusthale tattver gurubhar katiye utha samtaper madhy diye silparasasristite sarthak hocche."²

¹ Ghosh, Pramabhanjan - Sri Ramakrishna Sahitya, P.Y. 1382, P. 194.
² Ibid
This method of instruction may be called oral literature or dialogue process. It was a noble virtue of Sri Ramakrishna to create real impression of the matter through mutual talk and discussion. Sri M. also, exactly put forward before us the picture of that conversation and discussion.

Even, in the modern age, also we see in the work of Ramakrishna, we see the same method immanent in it. In this context, it may be mentioned of the essay entitled —

"Saharan hirayak prabartato 0 alibertak samhād."

There also, it is found that the essay was written through question and answers. Apart from this, the name of Bankim Chandra may be mentioned in this context. Bankim Chandra, also, wanted to make the subject matter or sayings clearly through the dialogue of the 'hero and heroine', although in later years this method had been almost abandoned.

Besides this, another characteristic may be mentioned in this context. It was the division of the chapters of the 'Kathāwrita'. Almost every novel of Bankim Chandra is divided into parts and chapters. Like Bankim Chandra Sri M. also divided his books at first into parts, and then into some chapters. By the bye, it may be mentioned more that Bankim
Chandra has informed about the main theme of the chapter by means of two or three words in the very beginning.

For instance, novel of Rajsingha - "3rd part, "Bibisho bikalpa", 1st chapter, "Bak o bairsir Katha,"1 or Rajsingha - "2nd part - "Nandane marak", 1st chapter, adrsta ganana."2

Such example may be given from the 'Kathamrita' by way of comparison -

"3rd part - 1st Khanda; 4th Chapter "Reconciliation of Non-Dualism, Qualified Non-Dualism and Dualism."3

or

"5th Chapter " The secret of Dualism." 4

or

" 5th Part - 7th Khandes 1st Chapter " Tantric bhakta o senser - airlipeter bhay." 5.

That is, before the description of the subject matter Sri M, made the readers conscious of its gist. At last, another thing deserves mention, but it is not completely related to the 'Kathamrita', only in the first part, it is noticeable, Sri M., at the beginning of the chapter

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2. Ibid. = 562.
4. Ibid/ P.11.
Chapter wanted to establish the teachings, quoting from the 'Gita' and the 'Upanisads', of course he could not keep it till the end. In this context, Kapalkunda of Bankim Chandra may be mentioned. He also at the beginning of the chapter, gave quotations in different places from different famous books, which may be taken as a indication of the chapter.

Just as, Bankim Chandra, sometimes quoted from Bhramgas, Kumar Sambhunath, sometimes from Keats Byron, Wordsworth. In the same way Sri M also, sometimes quoted from Gita, Upanisads, sometimes from Tantra.

But it was imminent up to the 6th chapter of the 1st part, he did not accept this method any more. But he also did not try to reject, the first portion in the least.

Possibly, Sri M has slowly effaced the consciousness and pedantry of the writer to make it akin to scripture at the beginning of the chapter. Perhaps, that pedantry and ego were expressed as a result of mentioning it consciously. He wanted to make himself free from it.

Apart from this, the restrained and clear cut description have augmented its value. It goes without saying that meaningless verbosity or unnecessary description is almost non-existent in the 'Kathasarita'. Rather thanks to the dexterous power of composition of the writer, it has been written in a restrained and compact manner.
The 'Kathamrita' described by Sri M. is acknowledged incomparable biographical art and religious literature. Aldous Huxley, the illustrious man of genius and literature, has marked the place of the 'Kathamrita' in the world - literature, on the basis of what he said in the preface of the 'Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna'. In the 'Foreword' Aldous commented -

"In the history of the arts genius is a thing of very occurrence Rarer, still, however, are the competent reporters, and recorders of that genius. The world has had many hundreds of admirable poets and Philosophers, but of these hundreds only a very few have had the fortune to attract a Boswell or an Eckerman."2

1. Swami Nikhitenanda (translated and ed.)
   = Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna = 7th ed.
2. Ibid / . = Foreword.
Again he told with firm belief that -

"It", produced a book unique, so far as my knowledge goes in the literature of hagiography. No other saint had so able and indefatigable a Boswell.  

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In this context the similarity and dissimilarity can be understood, if the comparative study is made on the Kathamrita and Boswell's 'Life of Johnson.'

In the context of Indian literature, the book of Boswell, also is a unparalleled creation in the English biographical literature. In the whole of English literature, he has been called an unparalleled biographer. If discussion is made, quoting from the book of Boswell, it will be understood where the similarity and disparity between them lie.

In the Introduction of Boswell book we get that rarest feature of his book in its record of Johnson's talk.

Regarding the "Kathamrita" written by Sri M., this expression is true. In this context, Sri M. himself informed the words, which he heard on that day, were recorded by him at night, of course briefly. Then, he analysed these slowly with a view to making the character of Sri Ramakrishna close to reality.  

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Boswell informed us the cause of note-down the conversation in this way -

"That the conversation of a celebrated man, if his talents have been exerted in conversation will best display his character, is I trust," also

Probably, Sri N's gave weight and importance to the petty activities of his daily life to the words of his mouth, in order to portray his character akin to reality. As a result, the character of Sri Ramakrishna also has been excellently portrayed in the Kathamrita. Though at first, the intention of his writings was separate.

In this regard Sri M. informed that one day Girish Ghosh told him that he heard from somebody that Sri M's writing something about Master. He also said -

"Girish - Will you give it to me? M - No, I won't part with it unless I feel it is right to so. I am writing it for myself, not for others".2

"Girish" - ......amay debe?
Sri M' - na, ami nije na bujhe karruke debe na -
O ami nijer janya likhechi, anyer janya nay.3

Afterwards, of course, at the request of Swami Vivekananda and Sarada Devi, he gave it the form of a book. But Boswell, consciously tried to write the biographical work. It is seen in the book of Boswell, that it is devoid of the description of everyday though the result of the intimacy of long twenty years are available in it. In Kathmunity also, though its history is of four years, the description of a small number of days lie here. In Boswell's book, the dialogue, with Johnson, his letters, diary, and everything have been put forward with sincerity here. And sometimes quotations of different poems are existed in it, the application of idioms and proverbs are also there.

Apart from this, as a result of describing quoting the date and year, the historical value of this book has sufficiently increased. Such as, Boswell narrated a day in the year 1978 in this way: "On Sunday, April, being Easterday after the solemnities of the festival in St. Paul's Church, I visited him but could not stay to dinner."1

Sri M. did not get any other thing except dialogue with Sri Ramakrishna. Of course, he gave place in his book, the proverbs and similies uttered by Sri Ramakrishnadeva with sincerity. Such as -

Sri Ramakrishna used such many proverbs in his sayings.

The conversation of Boswell and Johnson are quoted here:

"Boswell - At present, Sir, I think riches, seem to again most respect."

"Johnson - 'No Sir, riches do not gain hearty respect, they only procure external attention.'"¹

Or

"Boswell - It may be of use, Sir, to have a Dictionary to ascertain the pronunciation.

Johnson - 'Why, Sir, my dictionary shows you the accents of words, if you can but remember them. Boswell - But, Sir, we want marks to ascertain the pronunciation of the vowels.'"²

In Kathamrita also we find that Sri M. presented his book through conversation.

2. Ibid / P. 470.
"About half past in the evening the carriage with Master and the devotees drew up in front of the star theatre on Beadon Street. He was accompanied by 
M. Baburam, Mahendra, and two or three others." 1

Boswell, too, went with Mr. Johnson to several places, such as -

* On Tuesday, April 18, he and I were engaged
to go with Sri Joshua Reynolds to dine with Mr. Cambridge, at his beautiful Villa, on the banks of the Thames, near Twickenham. .......

Our conversation turned on a variety of subjects." 2

Sometimes we find that Boswell mentioned some poem also - sometimes Johnson criticise this, and sometimes he recites.

"Hermit hoar, in solemn cell, wearing out life’s
evening grey; Sense thy bosom, sage and tell
what is bliss ? and which the way ?" 3

Or

"O Solitude, romantic maid, whether by nodding
towers you tread, or haunt the desert’s trackless
gloom, or hover o’er the yawning tomb." 4

4. Ibid / P.873.
Not only that, Johnsons uses many idioms also. For examples -

  "Sands make the mountain, moments make the year" - or
  "Pursues the triumph, and partakes the gale." 1

In Kathamrita we could not find any poem, but Sri 'M.' mentioned a series of song in the lips of Sri Ramakrishna and others.

Sri M. after used to come to Dakshineswar. Even, there was a room reserved for him. Through a perusal of the Kathamrita, it is known that first of all, there was a room at 'Nahabat' for Sri Ma, and after sometimes he resides at 'Pancabati.' Of course, the main object of his living at Dakshineswar, was to undergo yogic practices, avoiding this world for some days. Of course, he noted down the advice of Sri Ramakrishnadeva, secretly at intervals.

Boswell also, spent his night in the house of Johnson, off and on. He also, informed that a house was even reserved for him at the residence of Johnson. Boswell informed also in this matter.

  "On Friday, May 12, as he had been so good as to assign me a room in his house, where I might sleep occasionally when I happened to sit with him to a late hour. I took possession of it this night."

1. Boswell / Life of Johnson / 3rd ed. 1870 / Page-847
2. Ibid. p. 868
3. Ibid. p. 635.
But Johnson's intention was totally material, i.e. a collection of Johnson's conversation, not at all spiritual. A part from this, when Boswell was away for the sake of duty he sometimes took the help of the diary of Johnson for the activities of that time. In this regard he said - " his very accurate observation, and peculiar vigour of thought and illustration, would have produced a valuable work. During his visit to it, which lasted but about two months, he wrote or minutes of what he saw."¹

In this reference Boswell also informs -

" I am confident, will peruse it with pleasure, though his notes are very short and evidently written only to assist his own recollection."²

Even Boswell, sometimes, referring to any incident said that through some incidents the soft and affectionate aspect of the character of Johnson was laid bare. It is helpful to the judgement of character. In the language of Boswell -

" By those who have been taught to look upon Johnson as a man of a harsh and stern character, let this tender and affectionate scene by candidly read; and let them judge, whether more warmth of heart, and grateful kindness is often found in human nature."³

². Ibid - P.645.
It is noticed in the 'Kathamrita' that although dialogue
is its main support, sometimes, Sri N., in his own style,
analysed the character of Sri Ramakrishna through soliloquy.
Such as

"Thakur Sri Ramkrishna is the greatest among men.
I have not seen such a great soul up to now. He, certainly
has seen God."

Again in the preface of the 'Kathamrita' he informed about
Sri Ramakrishna -

"Thakur Sri Ramakrishna was born on the 2nd day of the
bright fortnight of the Falgun in an honest Brahmin family,
in the village of Kamrupur, under the jurisdiction of
the district of Hoogli."

Boswell also narrated in the same way -

"Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffashire,
on the 18th of September, M.S.1709....."

At the start of the biography Boswell informed that
he got very easily the facts and figures of the composition
of biography from Johnson.

In the portrayal of the character of Sri Ramakrishna,
Sri N., also, in the same way, collected all the materials.

It is stated in the first part of the 'Kathamrita' in this context —

"Sri M. noted down in his diary the daily account, remembering them on that very night what he heard that day and what he heard in the holy lips. Such types of materials are gathered through direct observation and hearing, with day, date and year."¹

Although Sri M., was not much conscious regarding collection of such materials, Sri Ramakrishna is sometimes found to test the power of memory of Sri Ramakrishna. He was as if examining his beloved disciple in this way and was preparing Sri M. for his future life.

Just as, there are some similarity between the two, there is no dearth of disparity. Though Boswell and Sri M. wrote books of the same type, Johnson and Sri Ramakrishna Deve were not the same. Because, Johnson was a religious minded man. Regarding his religious feelings Boswell informed —

"How seriously Johnson was impressed with a sense of religion even in the vigour of his youth appears from the following passage in his minutes kept by way of diary:— Sept. 7, 1736. —

I have this day entered upon my twenty-eighth year, 
'Mayest' thou, O God, enable me, for Jesus Christ's
sake, to spend this in such a manner that I may receive
comfort from it at the hour of death, and in the day of
judgement. Amen." 1

But we know Sri Ramakrishnadeva, was himself a man
of religion. Life and religion were inseparable to him.
In this context, the quotation of a famous critics will
make the saying clear -

"Dr. Johnson, inspite of his eagerness for religion,
was a worldly man and Sri Ramakrishna without rejecting
man and the world - was a super human." 2

There was another difference between the writings
of both of them. In the work of Boswell, Boswell is
present everywhere, but in the Kathamrita, Sri M. is
always absent. Eliminating himself, he devoted his
attention to the composition of the Kathamrita. Another
thing may be referred to in the judgement of the dif-
ference of the works of both of them. Although the elo-
quence of Dr. Johnson or his fame as a man of literature,
gave him enough reputation, yet, it cannot be established
in any way, at the same value, with the life of

2. Basu, Sankari Prasad - Vivekananda
Shri Ramakrishna who was a spiritual figure. Consequently, it will not be out of place to say that there cannot be any comparison between the two works.

There are another disparity between the two books. Boswell, at first, collected materials and then wrote the biography systematically from his birth.

Sri M. also collected materials first, but 'Kathamrita' started in a different manner; the way or style he adopted is completely different from Boswell. Kathamrita started when Sri M. came to Dakshineswar and with the first meeting of both of them. Of course, Sri M. simultaneously referred what and when Sri Ramakrishna narrated his previous life regarding 'fore-words', in the Kathamrita.

Besides this, Boswell described the death of Johnson; but Sri M. narrated the incidents till 3 and half a months, before the expiring of Sri Ramakrishna-deva. The description of the last day, which Sri M. gave his book was the 23rd April, 1886. The description of the following days was no more to be found in the 'Kathamrita'. The writer was completely silent as to
why he did not write any longer.

Probably, Sri M. did not want to recall those painful days of his preceptor. So he remained completely silent about his last days. This respect and devotion was not present in Boswell.

If it is analysed in this way, it is found that that although the style of writing of the 'Kathamrita' reminds us of the 'Life of Johnson' of Boswell, as the main characters are different, so there is much dissimilarity of both the books.