CHAPTER V

MADHAVADEVA AS AN ARTIST, ACTOR AND MUSICIAN.
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Mādhavadeva was a person of highly artistic temperament and sensibility. He was an artist and, at the same time, an ingenious actor also. Like Śāṅkaradeva, he had a sound knowledge of music and dance. His dramas were more musical in style of presentation than the dramas of Śāṅkaradeva. As stated in the old biographies, his plays Govardhana-yatra, Nṛsimha-yatra and Rāma-yatra bear testimony to his fine artistic skill. For the dramatic presentation of his play Govardhana-yatra he had made an artificial mountain, and had made various idols and chariots, too, for his play Rāma-yatra. The drama Nṛsimha-yatra was another example of his mastery over skilful and artistic presentation of a play on the stage.

The saint had a good knowledge of sculpture as well. The Hari-mandir (prayer-hall) he built at Barot was one of the finest examples of his artistic taste. The temple was constructed by the carpenters, Nāravati, Rāma Kārikar, Vibhisana and other devotees at the instance of

1. KGC, p. 549
2. Daityari, v. 1299
and under the supervision of Mādhavadeva. It was a beautiful prayer-hall which served the purpose of the stage and an auditorium also when a drama was produced. It was known as Raṅgiyāl-ghar or Raṅgāvana-ghar (painter's hall), Bar-ghar (large or chief hall) and Natuvāna-ghar (dancer's hall). The hall was constructed with wood and red-dyed bamboos; the pillars were decorated with nicai (bālicanda) and tin foils (raṅgpata) and there were small windows (kundrāksa-jāla) in proper places in the walls. There were floral designs (lata-phul) on the pillars of the main gateway, and wooden images of Jayā and Vijaya were placed there. Many kinds of ordinary materials such as straw, Kāo-dhekiyā (a kind of fern), ripe wood-apple, etc., had been used for the construction of the hall. The hall became so beautiful with its glittering mirrors, tin-foils that it looked like a house of gold and silver, and Mādhavadeva came to be suspected as a very wicked person by King Raghudevanarāyana. In the opening ceremony of this auditorium-cum-prayer-hall his plays Madhī-matara and Bhōjana-behar were staged there.

It is a common belief among the people of Barpeta-sattra that the Raṅgiyāl-ghar was built on the

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3. KGC, pp. 450–451
4. ibid., p. 555
5. Daityārī, v. 290; Bardowa-carita, ch. 37
spot where Śāṅkaradeva had got his vrndāvani-vastra woven by Mathurādāsa and other weavers. In the progress on completion of this work Śāṅkaradeva was greatly helped by Mādhavadeva. The latter showed his ability and skill in the supervision of weaving, for which he was highly praised by Śāṅkaradeva. The vrndāvani-vastra was a big piece of cloth bearing on it the designs of Kṛṣṇa’s life at Vṛndāvana as its subjects, woven into it with tassels of red, white, black, yellow, blue and reddish-white colours. Both Śāṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva had the story of Vṛndāvana woven on that piece of cloth so carefully. The latter had supervised the portion of weaving of the Anoja-behār containing the pictures of every word, act and deed of Kṛṣṇa. Explanatory notes were also given there in clearly woven letters. This piece of cloth was prepared at the request of King Nārānārayaṇa and it was one hundred twenty cubits in length and forty cubits in breadth. The construction of the kīrtana-ghar of Śāṅkaradeva had been calculated to have been contained the immense size of the vrndāvani-vastra, and so the hall became one hundred thirty cubits long and forty-four cubits wide.

6. Barpeta Sattrar Itihās, p. 43
7. KGG, p. 267
8. ibid., p. 267
9. ibid., p. 268
10. Barpeta Sattrar Itihās, p. 43
Madhavadeva inspired dances:

The dramas of Śaṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva gave birth to a distinct type of art which is known to-day the Satīrīya dance. Their dramas being replete with songs and dances and the different characters including the śūtrādhāra having to do their respective parts with dances, three main varieties of dances have been derived from them. They are: Śūtra-bhangi, Kṛṣṇa-bhangi and Gopi-bhangi. A good number of dances are believed to have borne Madhavadeva's influence in them. Here is a brief account of the dances.

Jhumurā nāc:

The jhumurā nāc of the Kamalabari-sattriya is a variety of dances performed by batches of ten-year monks. The name of this variety of dance is believed to have been derived from the jhumurās of Madhavadeva. The songs of Āśā-jhumurā, attributed to Madhavadeva, were found to be used in this dance; but sometimes some other writers expressing the sentiment of the god were also found. The dancers wear loose skirts (ghūris), embroidered jackets of net cloth and white turbans. They look neither like male figures nor like female. The suggestive idea is that they represent the Vrndāvana.
when Krsna suddenly disappeared from their midst in the rāsa circle and again, by way of consolation for themselves, they play the part of the boy-god at the same time.

The dance is divided into two parts - preliminary (rāmdānī) performed before the son; and the main dance (gā-nāc) performed along with the son. There is no abhinaya; only some nṛtta hands are used. yati tāla alone is played on.¹²

Behār nāc:

This dance seems to have been derived from Mādhavadeva's jhumur, Bhojana-behār. This dance has two parts, namely, rāmdānī and gītar nāc. The rāmdānī part is performed in the tāla cuta, while the main rhythm of the gītar nāc part is either rakta-tāla or paritāla; but some other tālas are also employed, and these give the dance its variety.¹³ The dancing boys numbering between twenty-to thirty, dress like Kṛṣṇa. The dance is accompanied with songs representing the stories of Kṛṣṇa's tenderness in the Vṛndāvana. One biographer of the saints¹⁴ states in the Bhojana-behār drama, in which the actors play the parts of Kṛṣṇa, Balarama and the cowherd boys; Kṛṣṇa-

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¹³. ibid.
¹⁴. Pāmacarana, v. 301
with flute in hand and putting on a crest of peacock feathers on his head. He puts on a yellow cloth and Balarāma a blue one.

In the Bhajana-behār jhumurā, which is enacted in the day of guru-kīrtana, the same dance is utilised with songs. Generally the behār nāc is staged on special occasions.

Cālī nāc:

The symbolic significance of this type of dance seems to have been drawn from the stunt of the peacock. Cālī (strut) means spreading out the long feathery tail of the peacock or any other such bird. When monsoon clouds come, the peacock dances up in joy. Likewise, this dance is symbolic as a comparison of the emotional relationship between the devotee and his Lord with that between the excited peacock and the monsoon cloud. A second interpretation of the Cālī nṛtya is found in the Harivamśa when Nārada had gone to Vaikuntha and exhibited the nṛtya. Again, it is believed that Kṛṣṇa himself had performed this dance in Vṛndāvana. A description of the Cālī nṛtya:  

15. Dr Neog, (intro. Sattriya Nṛtya aru Sattriya Nṛtya Tāl) suggests that the word Cālī nṛtya echoes a Nāṭya term for a kind of footwork (pada) known as pada-charikā or similar, or chārī, which is defined by Charatāra: "the movement of the feet, legs (from the ankles to the knees), thighs and hips."
found also in the Sangītā-dāmodara by Saranga and in the Govinda-sangītā-līlā-vilāsa by King Bhagya Chandramouli of Manipur. Boys of fourteen or fifteen years of age partake in this dance. They put on female dress. A tuft of long hair is tied together as a lock on the head and it resembles the crest of the peacock, and the rest of the hair is covered with a veil drawn from head to neck and tied under the chin, keeping the face open. They wear white ghūris, black jackets with glamorous workmanship of gunā (gold filigree) and wrap 'tāngālis' (waist-belts) of red embroidery) round their waists. Wreaths of flowers hang on their necks, 'nūpurs' cling to their feet, and sometimes, artificial breasts of wood are also used. The dance is accompanied with songs composed by Sankar, and Madhavadeva. Madhavadeva's disciple Padma Īṭa narrates the dance from Barpeta sattra to Upper Assam.

The sattra Cālī nāces are said to be of a definite number; but actually, one differs from another mainly in the rāmdānī, which employs eight different tālas. Ektālī and paritalā are used in the ga-nāc. Songs words during the ga-nāc are those barāits and āṅkīya ārās that represent the actions, thoughts and sentiments of love. The rāmdānī are divided into four groups: sāne (minor).

bar (major), Kalakatiya and Haitowaliya. This dance is sometimes known as Natuwa nac also.

Var-pravešar nac:

This dance is supposed to represent Lord Krishna's dance as he returns in glee from Vrndavana to Golubari, the evening. Twenty-five to thirty natwás in Krishna's costume take part in this dance. It is generally performed during Madhavadeva’s death anniversary.

Nādu-bhangi:

Nādu-bhangi is a dance generally of three pairs of gopas and gopās. The songs of Pasa-jhumārī and some bargīts (like 'sakhī he chale Kāhu Vrndāvane', and 'sakhī pekhu madanagopāla') are sung. There is no abhinaya; nrittahastas only are there. The dance is divided into rāmdāni and gā-nāc. One difference from jhumura is that various tālas may be employed in the dance.

17. Sattrīya Nṛtya āru Sattrīya Nṛtyar Tāla, Intro.
18. Materials about the Cāli nāc have been collected mainly from a note by Sri Narayan Chandra Goswami, Adhikār, Natun Kamalabari sattra.
20. ibid.
Madhavadeva as a musician:

Madhavadeva was not only a great poet, lyricist and scholar, but a great singer also. For his musical accomplishments and sweet voice he has been described a Gandharva incarnate.\(^2^1\) His songs are very popular for their sweetness and softness of their language. The bardits were powerful instruments for the religious saints in preaching and spreading their cult of bhakti. The songs of both Śankaradeva and Madhavadeva attracted people towards their faith, and the preachers could easily introduce it into the far-reaching corners of the country and even beyond. Says Madhavadeva in his guru-bhatima: "The glory of Śankaradeva's lyrics and poems spread far and wide". It is certainly due to Madhavadeva's influence that the bardits became so popular and so famous. With his sweet, pleasing voice Madhavadeva was able to have due appreciation from his guru both for his composition as well as for the musical presentation of the songs.\(^2^2\) The subject-matter adopted by Madhavadeva for his lyrics was suitable for both the literates as well as the illiterates. There was an extraordinary combination of Vedāntic philosophy and filial sentiments (vātsalya) in


\(^{2^2}\) KGC, op. 123, 126
his lyrics; and these easily found their way into the hearts of the masses and became popular. The songs of saints, with their thoughtful and serene nature of composition and their application of the rāgas and tālas, befitting their thought and composition, won a special position in the cultural life of the people of Assam. There is a popular saying: "nom negur barjit, singāl barīt" (the most wretched person, sings barīt). The popularity of Madhavadeva's songs is also evidenced by the fact that a good number of songs which are certainly his compositions bear in the colophon his name as their composer. They conclude with such lines as: "kanyā Madhava dāsa", "Kṛṣṇara carana hṛdaye dhariṇī dīna śāri " gay", etc. Such a conclusion in a song is evidently the desire on the part of the unknown lyricist of those times for enhancing the popularity of his lyric although the standard of his compositions might be poor, or even too poor to stand any comparison with the saint's.

The biographies of the saints written in Assamese give us wonderful accounts of Madhavadeva's genius as a musician and as a lyricist. It has been stated that at times for enhancing the popularity of his lyric although the standard of his compositions might be poor, or even too poor to stand any comparison with the saint's.

23. KGp, p. 549
the listeners. In a different sequence his songs would become a source of consolation for persons in distress or agony. His songs could encourage the heart of the unenlightened devotees enkindling their minds with the knowledge of the Supreme. Madhavadeva had the instant capacity to compose as well as sing lyrics whenever he was asked to or whenever a situation demanded it. Just during the pilgrimage with Sankaradeva he had to please his guru by composing different songs and composing in music and singing them then and there. Many of his songs had specific incidents behind their origin. For example, one of his solemn songs, Kemane bāibo Hari garana ter, was composed at the house of Ghagari Mājhi when some Vaisnavas had refused to take food at the Mājhi's home because he had been suspected to be a huntsman. Madhavadeva, in his lyric says that the world itself is nothing but a dense forest in which the individuals are nothing but many deer, falling prey to the hunter of Time. The song had the desired effect in removing all hesitation from the minds of the Vaisnava so that they readily agreed to accept the reception of the Mājhi. Another and very extemporaneous situation was the occasion of composing ex-tempore and:

24. KGC, p. 523
25. ibid., p. 539
26. ibid., p. 409
27. ibid., p. 405
singing instantly the famous song, bhayo bhai savf, when Lari, the son-in-law of Sankaradeva, was being beheaded under a royal decree. Incidentally, it may be mentioned, that as a popular belief goes, Madhavadeva, while waiting along with his co-prisoner, Lari, for his impending death escaped the execution only because of the soft appealing tone of his voice. As he was singing a barīt in the early hours of the Sunday, the executioner suddenly happened to hear him singing and enquired where the voice had come from. On learning that it was the voice of the condemned prisoner who was nothing but a saintly nature, the officer, being moved by the beauty of his song, ordered his release on the plea of his being an unmarried man and without anybody to weep for him if he would be killed. Thus he escaped the capital punishment to the credit of his voice as well as his expediency as a musician.

Rāgas used in the barīts of Madhavadeva:

We get more or less thirty rāgas in the barīts of Madhavadeva, and they are: Ahira, Aśavāri, Bhaṇī, Belwār, Bhaṭīālī, Dhanaśrī, Gaurī, Kalvān, Kang, Lālī, Kau, Kau kalyān sindhura, Kedār, Lalit, Māhun, Māhun dhanaśrī, Mallār, Nat, Nat-mallār, Pānasīrī, Śinghārī, Ātri gāndhār, Ātri Gaurī, Suhāī, Śyām, Śyām eṇḍā, Ban
bhāṭiāli, Tur vasanta, and Vasanta.

Rāgas and the number of songs used in Ādāhavadevī:

(i) Arjuna-bhaṇjana: It contains eight songs, one each of Sindhura, Barācī, Saurī, Kāmōja, Sī, Turā, and Kalyāṇ rāgas.

(ii) Cōr-dhāra: It includes six songs, one in each of the Vasanta, Belowār, Śṛi, Barācī rāgas and one in Āsāvarī rāga.

(iii) Bhūmi-latowā: This play has five songs, one each of Āsāvarī, Bhāṭiāli and Śṛi rāgas and two in other rāgas.

(iv) Pimnara-gucowā: It contains three songs, one in each of Śṛi ghandhāra, Śṛi and Bhāṭiāli rāgas.

(v) Bhojana-behār: It contains three songs, one in each of Sindhura, Vasanta and Śṛi rāgas.

We may mention here the names of the rāgas by Śankaradeva in his songs, and they are:

Āhira, Āsāvarī, Bhāṭiāli, Mahura, Mahura-dhanaśri, Sat, Ārī, Suhāi, Śṛi, Bhubāli, Dhanasrī, Samrī, Kāmōja, Śīśā, Kēdār, Sat-mallār, Purvī, Sārāṇa, Sindhura, Śṛi śārī, Tur, Tur bhāṭiāli, Tur vasanta and Vasanta.

28. This is according to SHT, pp. 281-282.
It is to be noted that the names of the rāgas found in the songs of the two saints as mentioned are to be found in the Sanskrit sāṅgīta śāstras except one, i.e., Kau. The name Kau is not found among the names of the śāstrīya rāgas. Has it anything to do with Kukubha or Kauṣika rāga? On a scrutiny we did find three more rāgas in the songs of Madhavadeva, viz., Evam-yaś, Barādī, Kāmod and Lalit, while, on the other hand, the rāgas Tur, Bhūpālī, Pūrvi and Sāreng used in Śāṅkara’s songs find no place in the songs of Madhavadeva.

Tāla (rhythm) plays a very important role in Vaisnava music. The following names of musical rhythms are to be found in the dramas of Śāṅkara deva and Madhavadeva: Ektāli, Kharamān, Cūṭi-kalā, Cuta, Vati-mān, Dvaramī, Visama, Paritāla, Lūpaka and Cok (Māthyati, Dālvēga and Dharamvyati, according to another view). Māthyati was used by Madhavadeva. The rhythms Pachak and Thakālī (una-tāla), which were found in the songs of Madhavadeva, were not used by Śāṅkara deva in his songs.

An account of the performance of the Rāma-bhāona:

The Rāma-bhāona was a colourful performance and is found described in the biographies of the saint.

29. Sit, p. 283
also been called a yātra.\textsuperscript{30} The biography written by Daityārī Thākur\textsuperscript{31} and the Bardowa-carit\textsuperscript{32} mention that the dramatic function was arranged at the request of the people of Tatikuci, who had collected money and made necessary arrangements for it. The images of Rāma, Śīlā, Hanumāna, Vibhīṣana etc., as was necessary, had been made by Sundarā, a dancer (natuwa), under the directions of Madhavadeva. Masks and a chariot also had been made and the idols had been put on that chariot. Daityārī calls it \textit{viśaya-yātra} or Rāma-yātra, but the Kathā-guru-carit\textsuperscript{33} calls it Rāma-bhāona and makes no mention about the idols of Śīlā and others. The Rāma-bhāona was a full-fledged dramatic performance which covered the whole story of Rāma from birth to the end of his career. The saint himself had written the drama including the dialogues of the Sūtra, \textit{Ayurveda}, and songs as well, and prepared masks\textsuperscript{33} for its presentation. Among the main actors there were Thākur as Daśaratha, Paramānanda as Rāma, Rāmaī as Lakṣmana, Rāmacaran as Bharata, Balāi as Śatrughna, Harivaśa as Sītā and Buḍha Ātā, Gopāla Ātā, Śrī Rāma, Harihara, and Guru and Payonidhi in other minor roles.\textsuperscript{34} It was a very

\textsuperscript{30} Daityārī, v. 1297
\textsuperscript{31} ibid., v. 1299
\textsuperscript{32} ch. 37
\textsuperscript{33} KGC, p. 519
\textsuperscript{34} ibid., p. 519
successful performance which took full five or seven nights to cover the whole story of the play. People from various distant places came to enjoy the play and to see the idols of Rāma, Sītā, Hanumanta and Vibhīṣaṇa. For the function was over, Madhavadeva himself destroyed the drama realising that nobody after him would be able to stage that high-standard drama in its proper and suitable form. Although he destroyed the script of it, two old songs survived in the memory of the monks, which we can begin with the lines:

(1) Jaya jaya Rāma Pasukuthalīkha
(2) Dekho re nayana bhari loī / parame puruse pāne ṇa

Nṛśimha-yātra:

Visnu, one of the chief disciples of Mañjūsāra, was living at Malaca, where he had established a centre for his organised work of preaching. But the local people who had been initiated by him into the faith had accepted him to be their only guru and refused to obey anybody else to hear or know anything about Śaṅkaradeva and Madhavadeva. Being unhappy at this, Visnu complained to Mañjūsāra the guruship, which he had been compelled to bear.

35. KGC, p. 519
36. Daityārī, v. 1299
37. KGC, p. 520
38. ibid., p. 520
Mādhavadeva then felt the necessity of paying a visit to Malacā. At the same time he contemplated a dramatic presentation of the play Nṛśimha-yātṛē and advised Viṣṇu accordingly for making all necessary arrangements for the purpose. Viṣṇu with Hārāyana Dāsa made the masks and effigies and created a rabhā (pandal) also with the help of other monks. When the arrangements were completed, they offered Mādhavadeva a warm reception at Malacā. The play was duly staged before a vast gathering of thousands of spectators. The pandal glittered with one thousand lamp mata and agnigad (row of torches). Mādhavadeva himself played the role of Nṛśimha (the man-lion), for his preparation he dyed a pāguri (turban) with violet-coloured ur dos (Indian spinach) and hid it under the coat of Hīrā Doloi who played Hīranyakaśipū. As the play was going on reaching its climax Nṛśimha (role played by Mādhavadeva) took Hīranyakaśipū on his knees, tore off his belly (i.e., the coat worn by Hīrā Doloi), wrenched out his entails (i.e., the piece of dyed turban) and wrapped them around his body. The spectators began to run away at this horrible sight thinking that they had seen a real murder before their eyes. The incident presents Mādhavadeva as an immensely versatile and skilful actor and shows how seriously he had taken

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39. KGC, p. 498
40. ibid., p. 498; SFT, p. 273
the art of the drama and stagecraft.

Govardhana-yatra:

It is a matter of controversy whether the Govardhana-yatra was a drama or simply a utsava (festival). For the use of the word yatra Medhi had counted it among the genuine plays of Madhavadeva.\(^1\) The Katha-carita mentions the arrangements for Govardhana-yatra in a descriptive way\(^2\) but does not mention the name of the actors except the name of Krsna Pandit, a brāhmaṇ, who offered the role of the Lord (Gosāi). It is said in the carita that an artificial mountain was made for the purpose of the yatra and a ladder was used to climb on that mountain. This Govardhana-yatra was performed under the direction of Madhavadeva to save the people from severe drought. Probably there was a popular belief that the worship of a mountain Govardhana brings immediate rainfall. Madhavadeva made all the necessary arrangements to worship the mountain and placed the brāhmaṇ on the top of the artificial mountain. When the saint started to sing Meghamandali rag, clouds began to assemble in the sky. As soon as he sang the four lines of the rag, heavy rain with thunder and a hail-storm covered the place. All the people gathered.

\(^1\) C.V.L.C., p. 96
\(^2\) p. 549
ran in panic and took shelter in safe places. But the brahman remained helpless in the top of the mountain. When the storm was over, Madhavadeva sent his men to bring the brahman. They brought him down with the help of the ladder and nursed.

Dadhimathana:

Bezbaroa writes that Madhavadeva played the role of Upananda and Sankaradeva played the role of Nanada in a play Dadhimathana at Sundari.43 This is found in the Bardowa-carita also.

Madhavadeva, with his great mastery over fine arts and dramaturgy, gave a new dimension to the new Vaisnava tradition of dance and music besides popularising them on a far larger scale than what his great guru could achieve. Needless to say, Sankaradeva set the tone of a new tradition of Vaisnava music and dance, propagated through his dramas. Madhavadeva's jhumurās constitute a class by themselves, which combined in them certain finer points of classical songs and dances, to trail behind the works of his great guru. The mellifluity of liquid music as reflected in the lyrics incorporated into his jhumurās not only further enriched their poetic quality, but also helped the

43. Intro. Śrī Śrī Madhavadevar Vakyaartha
44. ch. 37
to be the 'pillows' of finer shades and nuances of the Vaisnava music. And, the kind of classical dances, which were to accompany such songs, also imbibed in them intricate gestures and pastures of the high excellence of classical dance tradition of Assam.