

**UNDERSTANDING THE REALM OF RĀDHĀ  
AN EXPLORATION OF TEXTUAL TRADITIONS  
IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EASTERN INDIA**

Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University  
in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Date: 29 July 2005

**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled, "**UNDERSTANDING THE REALM OF RĀDHĀ : AN EXPLORATION OF TEXTUAL TRADITIONS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL EASTERN INDIA**" submitted by **Ms. Meenakshi Ray** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of **Master of Philosophy** is her own work. The dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other university.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
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(Chairperson)

  
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(Supervisor)

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**Meenakshi Ray**

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## CHAPTER – 1

### RĀDHĀ IN THE CULTURAL IMAGINATION OF EARLY MEDIEVAL EASTERN INDIA

The phenomenon that was to become Rādhā did not emerge in a vacuum, as numerous, but faint glimpses of her can be seen in stray references scattered throughout in the secular and religious traditions<sup>1</sup>. She was embodied differently as demanded by a particular tradition and as a result she assumed multiple identities and her image acquired multiple conceptions.

In the secular tradition of literature, painting and music Rādhā becomes a *nāyikā* or a courtly heroine and the ‘cultural symbol of love’.<sup>2</sup> The poets emphasized on the physical outer beauty of Rādhā and her body was described in detailed hyperbolic terms. She became a sexual entity and this sexual identity became prominent as her physical and emotional states were highlighted all through. As a *nāyikā*, Rādhā embodies the role

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<sup>1</sup> Hala’s *Gāthāsaptasati*, Vākpati’s *Gauḍavāho*, Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa’s *Veṇisamhāra*, Ānandavardhana’s *Dhvanyaloka*, Abhinavagupta’s *Dhvanyalokalocana*, Rājasekhara’s *Kāvyaṃimamsa*, Bhoja’s *Sarasvatikanṭhābharana*, Kṣemendra’s *Daśavatāracarita*, Vidyākara’s *Subhāsitaratnakoṣa*, Sridharadāsa’s *Saduktikarnamṛta*, Bilhaṇa’s *Vikramāṅkadevacarita*, Hemacandra’s *Siddhahemāsabdāmuśāsaṇa*, Śriharsa’s *Naiṣādhīyacarita* and Govardhana’s *Aryasaptasati*.

<sup>2</sup> Karine Schomer, ‘Where Have All the Rādhās Gone? New Images of Women in Modern Indian Poetry’, in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds), *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi. 1984 p. 89

of a woman who is in love with Kṛṣṇa and her relationship with him has none other but an erotic tone to it.

Rādhā in the religious sphere emerges as a Goddess firmly adhering to the abstract theological concepts and is lauded as the divine consort of ultimate Vaiṣṇava godhead Kṛṣṇa. Thus in the brahmanical pantheon, she is primarily seen as a goddess firmly attached to Kṛṣṇa – her identity stems forth from the very virtue of being his consort. She is praised as a Great Goddess, the feminine power or the *hlāḍini śakti* of the male god. She provides the metaphor for the divine -human relationship as she is hailed as the Universal Mother, who mediates between the human devotees and their lord – Kṛṣṇa, facilitating a close bond between them. Further, she is also exemplified as the ideal devotee who is to be emulated so that human beings can attain the ultimate bliss.

Understanding Rādhā's realm in this context seems to be somewhat difficult, as she tends to put on myriad faces in the religious and the secular traditions. It also indicates that her persona cannot be studied in a monolinear fashion as the focus of these literary traditions shifted from one aspect to the other. So this will be an attempt to study the identities and images of Rādhā in these two traditions through various literary sources, which portray her career. The texts that would be looked into are

the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva, *padāvalis* or the love poems of Vidyāpati and the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*.

## PLACING THE TEXTS

Jayadeva flourished in the court of the Sena king Lakṣmanasena who ruled in the region of Bengal during the twelfth-thirteenth centuries.<sup>3</sup>

R.C. Majumdar in his study of the history of Bengal speaks of Jayadeva as ‘one of the ornaments of the ornaments of the court of Lakṣmanasena’.<sup>4</sup>

S.K. De describes the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva as a ‘creative work of art (which) has a form of its own, but defies conventional classification’.<sup>5</sup> So it is seen as ‘creating a new literary genre’ as it does not strictly follow the Sanskrit tradition, but bears close resemblance to the ‘spirit and style of Apabhraṁśa or the vernacular poetry’.<sup>6</sup> Suniti Kumar Chatterji describes the *Gītagovinda* in similar way and says that ‘except in the outward form of the language – in grammar and in the form of words – these *padas* of the *Gītagovinda* appears to be more in the Prākṛit or vernacular spirit than in Sanskrit in their metre, their style and execution,

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<sup>3</sup> R. C Majumdar, *History of Ancient Bengal*, G Bharadwaj and Co., Calcutta, 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 356.

<sup>5</sup> S.K. De, ‘Sanskrit Literature’ in R.C. Majumdar (ed), *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, University of Dacca, Dacca, p. 370.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 371.

and in their general feel, they are vernacular i.e. Eastern Apabhramśa or Old Bengali'.<sup>7</sup>

Kunal Chakrabarti sees the phenomenon as a result of the 'closeness between the two languages (Sanskrit and the vernacular) which both the physical proximity of the brahmanas with the indigenous speakers of local languages and bilingualism rendered inevitable'.<sup>8</sup> He talks about the 'near inseparable linkage of the dialects closer to Sanskrit with emergent Bengali literature in its transitional phase'<sup>9</sup> of which the best example is 'provided by the *Gītāgovinda*....'<sup>10</sup>

Being a court poet, Jayadeva's *Gītāgovinda* was meant to appeal to very few people within the realm of the court itself. By virtue of the form and structure of the poem and on the basis of the descriptions of the *Gītāgovinda* cited above, one can argue that though written in Sanskrit, it could also appeal to people outside the court as well. This is evident in the way the poem has been adopted in the Jagannātha temple in Orissa.

The *padāvālis* or the love songs of Vidyāpati were written in the courts of eight kings of the *Oinivara/Oinavara* or the *Thakkura* dynasty of

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<sup>7</sup> Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 'Rise of Vernacular Literature' in R.C. Majumdar (ed), *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, University of Dacca, Dacca.

<sup>8</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purānas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.299.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.



the Mithila region between the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries. This period in the region was one of political turmoil and social and religious orthodoxy.

Politically, the Oinivara dynasty is said to be 'nothing but the creation of the Sultan of Delhi' who 'gave the kingdom to Kāmeśvara Thakkura (Thakūra), the founder of the family'<sup>11</sup> and thus was the 'dependency of the empire of Delhi'.<sup>12</sup> In the social sphere, Upendra Thakur describes the people of Mithila as being 'extraordinarily devoted to mint, amice, cumin of the Brahmanical law in their everyday life'<sup>13</sup>. The fourteenth century, he says saw the very structure of the society being 'made more rigid and more orthodox'.<sup>14</sup>

Writing in the regional language of Maithili Vidyāpati's *padāvalis* appealed to a very large audience as evident by the fact that even today his poems are sung on various occasions like marriages.

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* is recognized as one of the *Upapurāṇas* and can be regionally identified with Bengal, like most of the other texts. These texts as a genre of religious literature came up as

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<sup>11</sup> Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithila (From the earliest times to 1556 A.D.)*, Mithila Institute of Post Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, Darbhanga, 1988. p. 290.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 292.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 357.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

brahmanas traveled to areas peripheral to their sphere of influence and had to contend with the beliefs and practices of the local people. This gave rise to a process of reorientation in terms of focus, assimilating and accommodating the regional worldview and the creation of a new social order.

Chronologically, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* has been placed between the tenth and the sixteenth centuries by almost all the scholars.<sup>15</sup> That it was compiled over a period of five centuries, gives rise to the need to keep in mind that with such a long period of compilation there might be sections in the text, which correspond to different time frames.

The compilation of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* coincides more or less with the period termed as the early medieval period, which has been characterized by the expansion of state society through local state formation, peasantization of tribes and formation of castes, appropriation and integration of local cults, by scholars like B.D. Chattopadhyaya.<sup>16</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti argues that in the 'process of regionalization, the ritual authority of the brahmanas and the temporal authority of the state worked

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<sup>15</sup> R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> B.D. Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, Oxford university Press, Delhi, 1994.

in tandem, and at times it became difficult to differentiate between the domains of these two interrelated structures of power'.<sup>17</sup>

Although the text was composed in Sanskrit, which Kunal Chakrabarti regards as a tool for exercising greater control 'by excluding the majority from access to one of the most potent symbols of brahmanical authority – literacy',<sup>18</sup> it was 'purveyed in the vernacular for popular consumption'.<sup>19</sup> He thus suggests that its 'exposition would have been consisted of annotated commentary of the Puranic myths and legends by professional narrators, who presented the essential content and rhetoric rather than the exact words of the genre'.<sup>20</sup> Thus its audience became very wide, where people without the knowledge of Sanskrit could listen to the narrations.

These texts belonged to two different genres, i.e., the secular and the religious, so the focus would be on how they portray Rādhā, whether or not there are differences as well as similarities, and the extent to which cultural context might have moulded Rādhā's personality and the level of changes or otherwise accommodated in the process. The relationship

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<sup>17</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001 p. 292.

<sup>18</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, p. 26.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa can also provide an avenue to understand and gauge the identities and images. There is also a need to conceptualize their relationship in terms of perception and representation in these two traditions. The difference in the languages has also to be kept in mind in this exercise.

Understanding Rādhā's realm in the context seems to be somewhat difficult because she tends to put myriad faces in the religious and the secular traditions. Rādhā was embodied differently in these traditions and as a result she assumed multiple identities and her image acquired multiple conceptions.

This is an attempt to study the images and identities of Rādhā in various literary sources, which portray her career, and these are the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva, *padāvalis* or the love poems of Vidyāpati and the *Brahmavaivarta Purāna*.

Thus, keeping Rādhā's career in mind, I am interested in looking into her various aspects as perceived in the early medieval Eastern Indian cultural imagination. In this essay, an attempt has been made to enumerate and analyse those secondary works that deal with Rādhā persona.

Divided into two broad categories, this is a thematic rather than a chronological survey. The first section examines those works, which see

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of devotion and the divine-human relationships', indicate 'Hindu thinking about sexual roles and relationships and project tensions that characterize the Hindu tradition'.<sup>22</sup> He also points out the varied nature of the goddesses which make them diametrically opposite to each other.<sup>23</sup>

Kinsley has devoted one chapter to each goddess, and Rādhā being one of them. Although not an exhaustive study, he has tried to take into account almost all the relevant aspects of Rādhā's being. She is seen primarily as a goddess firmly attached to a male consort Kṛṣṇa in almost all contexts and as indulging in an adulterous relationship.<sup>24</sup> Kinsley sees this liaison as idyllic devoid of the 'pragmatic world of social duty' but which is nevertheless counter balanced by the theme of love in separation.<sup>25</sup>

Kinsley briefly touches upon the early history of Rādhā, wherein he enumerates her presence in various literary sources, bringing forth certain characteristics. She appears as a love sick girl overcome by emotions where the theme of *viraha* comes forth as a dominant one.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkeley, p. 81.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 82.

He points out the tradition of the mythology of *gopis*, dating it to the period of the *Harivaṁśa*<sup>27</sup> and highlights their role in the context of devotion serving as an ‘appropriate metaphor for divine-human relationship’.<sup>28</sup> He tries to differentiate between the *gopī* tradition and Rādhā’s status as Kṛṣṇa’s favourite and as a central figure primarily in the *Gītagovinda*.<sup>29</sup> The former concentrates, Kinsley informs us, on the exterior experiences and the latter on the interior landscape of love and the surroundings wherein Rādhā becomes the specific woman,<sup>30</sup> a point that Karine Schomer makes in her essay as we shall see later.

The *parakīyā* and the *svakīyā* theories are also discussed, placing Rādhā in both the contexts. Kinsley starts with the *Gītagovinda*, wherein Rādhā’s marital status is not specified, but hints of her belonging to another man are there. From there on he takes up Vidyāpati and Caṇḍidāsa’s poetry, which clearly portray Rādhā as married to another man, risking social ostracism and abandoning social duties in order to love Kṛṣṇa.<sup>31</sup> It was in the Caitanya movement under which the Vaiṣṇava

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 83.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 83-84

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

<sup>30</sup> Karine Schomer, ‘Where Have All the Rādhās Gone? New Images of Women in Hindi Poetry’ in Hawley and Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

<sup>31</sup> David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkeley p. 86-88.

theologians propounded the theory of *parakīyavād* and explained the adulterous relationship as well as nature of Rādhā's love in terms of *prema* and as against *kāma*.<sup>32</sup> In the Bengal Vaiṣṇavism, Rādhā's status became that of an object of devotion who herself became worthy of worship and devotion as well as a model *par excellence* to be imitated.<sup>33</sup> Thus, according to this theological idea, Rādhā assumed the position of Kṛṣṇa's eternal essence- *his hlāḍini śakti* emphasizing her divine status.<sup>34</sup>

Kinsley then goes on to explain the position of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* which projects Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa's legal divine consort- a *svakīyā* and as a goddess and elevates her to such an extent that she become superior to Kṛṣṇa himself.<sup>35</sup> Giving her a central role in the cosmogony, calling her *Mahāviṣṇomātr*, *Mahāviṣṇudhātri*, etc, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* suggests motherly role. Kinsley points out the changes in their relationship as they are now related to each other as husband and wife wherein Rādhā takes on a possessive quality.<sup>36</sup> To this Kinsley comments that in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* 'she is a selfish vindictive and insecure wife who makes life miserable for Kṛṣṇa, herself and the other

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 89.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp. 90-91

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p. 91.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp. 92-93.

<sup>36</sup> David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p. 93.



women of heavenly Vraja and loses 'her innocence her intensity and a considerable part of her charm'.<sup>37</sup>

Though Kinsley's study of Rādhā is but a part of a larger project, it helps in understanding the position that she occupies. Kinsley here is concerned with (a) the origin of Rādhā, (b) nature of relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in terms of *parakīyā* and *svakīyā* theories; (c) the differences between the *gopī* and the Rādhā tradition; (d) Rādhā as a model of devotion to be emulated; (e) Rādhā as a mother in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* and (f) the corresponding changes in her character.

#### A. Rādhā as a Goddess

In this context, A.K. Majumdar in his article *A Note in the Development of the Rādhā Cult*, as the name suggests, is concerned with tracing the origin of the practices of worshipping Rādhā through various sources.<sup>38</sup> His study brings forth the difference between Rādhā as a heroine in the conventional literary works and a goddess in the *purāṇas*. Majumdar, like Kinsley, takes up the question of the *gopīs* and Rādhā as well.

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>38</sup> A.K. Majumdar, 'A Note on the Development of the Rādhā Cult', *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 36, Parts III-IV, 1955.

Majumdar, unlike Kinsley, tries to reject the position of Rādhā as a goddess within the *Gītagovinda* by pointing out the absence of any divine co-relation in the text. He also says that the nature of the work could not have been erotic if Rādhā was worshipped as a goddess at that point of time. But within the *Gītagovinda* itself Rādhā has been compared to Lakṣmī, as B.S. Miller suggests that ‘names of Kṛṣṇa’s divine consorts.... occur to place Rādhā in the appropriate cosmic context’.<sup>39</sup>

Majumdar argues that Rādhā was placed inside a temple only about a century after the *Gītagovinda* was written. On the basis of an inscription of the reign of Sāraṅgadeva of Gujarat, he says that Rādhā was worshipped along with Dāmodara in Gujarat as the family deities of a ruling chieftain only before the end of the fifteenth century.

It is finally in the *purāṇas* with the exception of some, that he finds the depiction of Rādhā as a divinity and lists the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* as being ‘meant for the propagation of the Rādhā cult’.<sup>40</sup> But he makes the error of predating it to the Caitanya movement, yet saying that ‘it was inspired by the form of Vaiṣṇavism preached by Caitanya and his

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<sup>39</sup> Barbara Stoller Miller, ‘Rādhā: Consort of Kṛṣṇa’s Springtime Passion’ in *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1977.

<sup>40</sup> A.K. Majumdar, A Note on the Development of the Rādhā Cult’, *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute*, Vol. 36, Parts III-IV p. 248.

disciples....'<sup>41</sup> He further argues that it was the literature produced in Bengal and Mithila that exalted the position of Radha and also differentiates between the *gopī* and the Rādhā cults.

Majumdar's study brings forth the difference between Rādhā as a heroine in the conventional literary works and as a goddess in the purāṇas. He rightly points out to the exalted position of Rādhā in Gauḍiya Vaiṣṇavism but fails to take into account the very fact that it was in the works of the six goswāmis of Vrindavana (the disciples of Caitanya) that Rādhā was ultimately transformed into a devotee submissive to Kṛṣṇa. And it was here that we find the *dāsa bhāva* of *bhakti* being favoured to that of *mādhurya bhāva* where Rādhā became the model of the ideal devotee to be emulated by humans in order to propitiate the ultimate godhead Kṛṣṇa.

The next work that deals with Rādhā, as a goddess is the edited volume *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*,<sup>42</sup> in which there are two sets of essays - those dealing with Rādhā exclusively and the others studying various other goddesses. The importance of the volume lies in the fact that it represents the two different traditions the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds), *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

Sanskrit and the vernacular and tries to bring out Rādhā's position accordingly.

In this edited volume, C.M. Brown's essay<sup>43</sup> looks for the origins of Rādhā as a goddess, with a systematic theology in the BVP, which he calls a 'Krishnaite work of the fifteenth or sixteenth century'.<sup>44</sup> He seeks out the 'evolution of Rādhā image or symbol (which) was a complete process involving mythological, literary, devotional and theological developments'.<sup>45</sup> From being one of the several unnamed gopis, Rādhā assumes a status of feminine 'cosmic and redemptive power'.<sup>46</sup>

This transformation, Brown elucidates, corresponds to three levels through which she was theologized. At the first level everything human about Rādhā in earlier accounts was re-interpreted on the divine level. Even the reason of Kṛṣṇa's coming onto this earth is given as allowing him to 'accompany Rādhā to earth during her sojourn as the cowherd woman in Vrindavana'.<sup>47</sup>

On the second level, Rādhā is identified as *prakṛti*, *śakti* and *māyā* through which she assimilated a great variety of cosmologic and

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<sup>43</sup> C.M. Brown, 'Theology of Rādhā in the Purāṇas' in Hawley and Wulff (eds), *Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 58

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 61

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 64

cosmogonic functions. In the last level, Brown analyses that Radha became a bridge between the human and divine by extending her grace and compassion. Rādhā is to be worshipped by the *dāsyā bhava* and she becomes the mother with greater compassion and accessibility than Kṛṣṇa. Brown finds out that through her cosmogonic and redemptive roles she attains preeminence and thus rises above Kṛṣṇa for once. Thus, the purāna successfully associates the *śākta* and the Krishnaite ideas providing Rādhā a position peculiar to it and above all as Brown points out that *Brahmavaivarta Purāna* aligns Rādhā with the Great Goddess.

Brown's article is primarily concerned with the process through which Rādhā became a great goddess and ascertains her position within the theology wherein she becomes the divine consort, universal mother and a model of devotion to be emulated.

### **B. Rādhā as a Consort**

Charlotte Vaudeville through her essay, 'Krishna-Gopala, Radha and the Great Goddess', traces the presence of the relation between the cowherd god Krishna Gopala and the great goddess<sup>9</sup> and believes that its in the interpretation and interaction of these two great divinities of popular Hinduism that a solution to the problem of the emergence of

Rādhā as lord Krishna's *śakti* and divine consort must be sought'.<sup>48</sup> She is concerned with the origin of the pair of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa and status of Rādhā as a goddess and looks into the Hindu calendar and textual evidence from *Vaiṣṇava* and non-*Vaiṣṇava* literature that deals with the mythology of Kṛṣṇa.

She points out the constant presence/association of a goddess directly or indirectly in the Hindu calendar with Kṛṣṇa's origin and legends. But it is through the textual traditions of the *Harivaṁśa* and *Vishnu* and *Bhāgavata* Purāṇas that she makes her point clearer as she indicates towards the goddess's presence in the form of Kṛṣṇa's mother and sister.

Regarding Rādhā's appearance in the legend of Kṛṣṇa, she sees the *Jagannātha-Ekanamśa* pair as the prototype of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa pair. Vaudeville further considers the tradition deeply imbued with tantric thought and practice as another source for conceptualization of the pair.

B.S. Miller in 'Rādhā: Consort of Krishna's Springtime Passion', which forms a part of a larger study of the *Gītagovinda*, tries to bring out

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<sup>48</sup> Charlotte Vaudeville, 'Krishna Gopala, Radha and the Great Goddess' in J.S Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds), *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, p. 2.

‘when and in what circumstances the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa pair originated’.<sup>49</sup>

Through her study of literary and epigraphic sources she tries to locate Rādhā and also attempts to associate to her with Kṛṣṇa.

Miller is concerned essentially with the ‘character of Rādhā and her unique association with Krishna that Jayadeva brought to his *Gītagovinda*’.<sup>50</sup> She finds the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa pair ‘not apparent from any single source, but rather in details which emerge from the collection of stray verses that refer to her’.<sup>51</sup>

Miller’s Rādhā is the ‘dramatic heroine’ or the *nāyikā* who complements ‘Krishna’s role as the dramatic hero or the *nāyaka*’. She points out to the seven of the eight stylized psychological states or the *nayikāvasthā* that Jayadeva identifies Rādhā to be in the text. At the same time, Miller sees in *Gītagovinda*, the combination of the ‘lyrical techniques of Jayadeva’s songs’ with the conventional language of Sanskrit erotic poetry to ‘express intimate power of divine lovers’.<sup>52</sup>

In her study, Miller brings out a Rādhā who is at once ‘an intense, solitary proud female’ complementing and reflecting the mood of Kṛṣṇa’s

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<sup>49</sup> Barbara Stoller Miller, ‘Rādhā: Consort of Kṛṣṇa’s Springtime Passion’, Barbara Stoller Miller (ed. and trans.), *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1977, p. 27.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

passion and at the same time is the divine consort of Kṛṣṇa whom Jayadeva places 'in the appropriate cosmic context'.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Miller projects a Rādhā who is both a *nāyikā* as well as a goddess. Through a context specific study she provides an image of Rādhā which has shades of both a heroine as well as a goddess.

### C. Rādhā as a Devotee

Apart from being a divinity a goddess and a consort Rādhā occupies another major position in Vaiṣṇava theology. She is the ideal devotee who is to be emulated and considered as the bridge to the ultimate deity Kṛṣṇa.

It is in this context that Donna M. Wulff examines Rādhā and her relationship with Kṛṣṇa in the plays of Rūpa Goswāmi, one of the six disciples of Caitanya.<sup>54</sup> She finds out that Rādhā in his plays serves invariably and without any dispute as a model of ideal devotee.<sup>55</sup> Rūpa

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<sup>53</sup> Barbara Stoller Miller, 'Rādhā: Consort of Kṛṣṇa's Springtime Passion', Barbara Stoller Miller (ed. and trans.), *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, Columbia University Press. New York, 1977, p. 26.

<sup>54</sup> Donna Marie Wulff, 'A Sanskrit Portrait: Rādhā in the plays of Rūpa Goswāmi', in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds), *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p.28.



makes the 'intensity and devotional quality of Rādhā's love' apparent throughout the play.<sup>56</sup>

Rādhā's role as a model devotee is not the only aspect of her relationship with Kṛṣṇa, but she herself becomes the object of devotion when Kṛṣṇa too exalts her. And it's not only Kṛṣṇa who treats Rādhā as his object of devotion; the secondary characters in the play also adore Rādhā in similar ways.<sup>57</sup>

Rādhā through Rūpa's plays appears as one who is metaphysically equal to Kṛṣṇa, both depending on each other intimately wherein the worship of Rādhā is as 'important as that of Krishna himself'.<sup>58</sup> Thus through Rūpa's plays, Wulff finds that Rādhā 'as love embodied is thus the supreme avenue of religious realization'.<sup>59</sup> With the highest praise accorded to her love she tries to determine Rādhā's status per se (in general) and vis-à-vis Kṛṣṇa's (in particular) providing the avenue to understand the divine-human relationship as personified in Rādhā's person.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, pp. 33-36.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Donna Marie Wulff, 'A Sanskrit Portrait: Rādhā in the plays of Rūpa Goswāmi', in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds), *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984. p. 41.



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Shrivatsa Goswami belongs to the Caitanya *sampradāya* and his article in the Hawley and Wulff edited volume brings forward the voice of an insider, as it were.<sup>60</sup> Reflecting a totally spiritual and philosophical experience, Goswami points out the relationship between Kṛṣṇa as the ‘Bhagavān’ who ‘manifests himself in aesthetic experience-*rasa*’ and Rādhā as his highest ‘*śakti* as *love potency*’.<sup>61</sup> Through their union Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa bring out a ‘common meeting ground’ for the human seeker’.<sup>62</sup>

Goswami informs us about the ‘levels and varieties’ of the ‘love relationship’ of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Thus in order to obtain the ‘transcendent, absolute *rasa*’ the devotee opts for a personally suitable mode to relate to Kṛṣṇa and among which *mādhurya* is the culmination of all as ‘it adds the quality of intense devotion (*sevā*) to the beloved and entails a total surrender on the part of the one who loves’.<sup>63</sup> Thus, Rādhā comes into the picture as the bridge between the devotee and Kṛṣṇa as she becomes the source and personification of love.

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<sup>60</sup> Shrivatsa Goswami, ‘Rādhā: The Play and Perfection of Rasa’, in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, p.75.

<sup>63</sup> Shrivatsa Goswami, ‘Radha: The Play and Perfection of Rasa’, in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

Thus, Rādhā in her union with Kṛṣṇa provides to the devotees a platform through which they can realize their goal of getting closer to the ultimate godhead, Kṛṣṇa.

## II. RĀDHĀ AS A NĀYIKĀ

Rādhā in the secular tradition is projected as the dramatic courtly heroine or the *nāyikā* involved in an illicit liaison with explicit erotic overtones and emotional attributes, which brings forward her sexual identity. Rādhā, as the courtly heroine, highlights the outer beauty she possesses and here her anatomy is described in a stereotypical way. Invested completely with a secular image, Rādhā becomes a symbol rather than an individual. She is projected as an ideal beauty that personifies beauty itself.

Sumanta Banerjee in essay traces Rādhā's origin and attempts to examine the 'relations between popular and elite cultural traditions and mythologies and social or historical situations'.<sup>64</sup> In this study he takes into account various sources - oral, written, folklore and scriptures.

He attempts to trace the emergence of Rādhā by equating the *halliṣa* of *Harivaṁśa*, the dance of the tenth chapter of *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*

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<sup>64</sup> Sumant Bannerjee, *Appropriation of a Folk-Heroine: Rādhā in the Medieval Bengali Vaisnavite Culture*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1993, p. 3.

to the folk festivals of Abhiras, a pastoral cowherd community.<sup>65</sup> He considers these folk festivals as a possible source of Rādhā's emergence as a heroine. Here, he seems to echo D.P. Chattopadhyaya and N. N. Bhattacharyya's argument of an evolution, from the nomadic pre Aryan community to the agricultural Aryan society of the goddess in the Hindu pantheon.<sup>66</sup> This transition, Banerjee argues led to the difference of behavior in social terms that became apparent in their religious ideals as well<sup>67</sup>.

As he discusses the specific context of medieval Bengal, Banerjee points out to the distinct indigenous traits of Rādhā along with the common characteristics of ancient texts that completed her persona.<sup>68</sup> Her distinct indigenous traits were a result of the specific socio-cultural, politico economic context of Bengal, he argues. He gives the example of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* and associates it with the eroticism of Abhira folk tradition and the contemporary courtly culture of Lakṣmaṇasena.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>66</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, 'Recent Approches to the History of Religion in Ancient India' in Romila Thapar (ed) *Recent Perspective of Early Indian History*, Popular Prakashan, Delhi, 1995

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, pp 8-9

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, p. 10

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 13

Bengal's Vaisnavaite poets introduced an adulterous relationship with an incestuous overtone, making Radha a social being conversant with norms of *jāti, kul and shil*. In this context, Banerjee discusses Bodu Candidāsa's *Śri Kīrtana*, Vidyāpati's *padavalis* and Candidasa's lyrics.

Banerjee explains that though Caitanya chose the theme of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa's love, he invested it with the concept of *bhakti* in order to accommodate it into the ambit of Vaiṣṇavism. And it was in this process that Rādhā became a 'submissive devotee' and her personality got 'increasingly sanitised'.<sup>70</sup> This was reflected at the societal level when the role of lower caste people became secondary as they had to submit to the newly institutionalized Vaiṣṇavism and give up their once assertive participation.

Banerjee in his essay has tried to trace the source of Rādhā's origin in a folk tradition that gradually developed with the elite tradition shaping her image. But Kunal Chakrabarti in his book criticises this attempt saying that 'it is futile to look for a pristine origin of Rādhā in any particular tradition or to mould her in a particular mould'.<sup>71</sup> Chakrabarti further points out that Banerjee fails to appreciate the 'complexity in the

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid, p. 33

<sup>71</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001 p. 330

relationship between folk and elite in medieval Bengal, symbolized by multiformity of Rādhā'. The Abhira theory, Chakrabarti says is based on 'unstated assumptions and rather suggests that multiple elements derived from diverse even mutually exclusive sources' might have contributed towards the making of Rādhā's image.<sup>72</sup>

Rādhā's image of a *nāyikā* as Karine Schomer, in the Hawley and Wulff edited volume, puts it becomes both depersonalized and universalized-a symbol rather than an individual.<sup>73</sup> She talks about Rādhā, the 'cultural symbol of woman in love rather than a religious symbol for the soul seeking union with God'.<sup>74</sup> She examines the bifurcation between the devotional and the secular treatment of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa theme and the development of her image in the princely courts and aristocratic houses.

Schomer explores the *rīti* tradition of poetry where Rādhā was perceived as the ideal courtly lover or the *nāyikā*.<sup>75</sup> It dealt in theory with all the aspects of *rasas* but the primary focus remained on the *śṛṅgāra*

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp. 330-331

<sup>73</sup> Karine Schomer, 'Where Have All the Rādhās Gone? New Images of Women in Hindi Poetry' in Hawley and Wulff (eds), p. 93

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p. 89

<sup>75</sup> Karine Schomer, 'Where Have All the Rādhās Gone? New Images of Women in Hindi Poetry' in Hawley and Wulff (eds), *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1984 p. 90

*rasa*, the erotic mood.<sup>76</sup> And Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa here became the subject and object of this erotic mood, Rādhā especially was presented as the ‘supreme model of women in love the *nayika par excellence*’.<sup>77</sup>

Rādhā’s divine status was shed and she began to be hyperbolically described as her image was confined in one given pattern of physical, psychological or behavioural traits, that of an archetypal beauty.<sup>78</sup> Completely divested of her devotional image, Schomer, shows, Rādhā became exclusively a sexual being and was described in the third person.<sup>79</sup> She goes beyond the *parakiyā* and *svakiyā* distinction and acquires a polygamous position being one of the many co-wives of prince Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā never has to suffer separation for a long period of time and ‘the separation she endures and the union she enjoys are both simply means of creating *śṛṅgāra rasa*’.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, Schomer shows that Rādhā as a *nāyikā* neither stands for the values she once stood for nor does she betray any particularities. Rādhā becomes a symbol here, portraying the theatrical dimensions of physical and mental attributes.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, p. 91

<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p. 92

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 93

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp 93-94

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p. 95

The concern in these studies has been to bring forward the various aspects of Rādhā's personality. Thus as a *nāyikā*, her sexuality is highlighted all the more – she enjoys the sexual union and also becomes the dominant partner. Here her physical characteristics become and are described in the stereotypical ways of the poetical tradition.

Portrayed as a goddess, Rādhā has all the characteristics required to be praised as one. Within this perspective, she emerges as one who embodies her sexual aspects and some one who goes beyond structure.

Rādhā seems to be embodied differently in the secular and religious traditions but patterns of linear continuities and discontinuities are also evident. Her portrayal as an archetypal beauty, hyperbolic descriptions of her anatomy, enumeration of her psychological and physical states and the concept of separation are some of the features common to both the Rādhās.

One's concern here is to bring out the contextual aspect behind each of these Rādhās whether the need of the composers of the various texts to be studied here or Rādhā's personality itself provided the means to project her in so many diverse and even mutually exclusive ways one of main concern.



In the following chapters, the focus would be on the way Rādhā has been portrayed in the literary sources both in the secular as well as the religious traditions. The next chapter would examine the way in which Rādhā's personality in the secular traditions of the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva and the *padāvalis* or the love poems of Vidyāpati has been perceived. Both of them wrote in the courts of various kings and provided Rādhā with a new face and a concrete character.

Jayadeva's Rādhā speaks a language of intense passion in the environment of union and separation. She has been painted in a dual tone by Jayadeva and his uniqueness is spelt out in the way Rādhā as an individual acts and Rādhā as a beloved experiences the passion of love. Vidyāpati created a Rādhā who is a complete individual and steps out of the path of social propriety to fall in love with Kṛṣṇa and also continue an illicit relationship. For him Rādhā as a heroine matters more than Kṛṣṇa as a hero. Her ecstasy and anguish find more space in these poems than his experiences.

That Vidyāpati wrote almost three hundred years after Jayadeva and his protagonists remained the same, facilitates a comparison between the *Gītagovinda* and his *padāvalis* would bring out the facets of Rādhā's

personality. The similarities and the differences in the portrayal would illuminate the contextual aspects involved in their production.

In the third chapter, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* would be studied to elaborate upon the ways in which Rādhā has been described in the religious sphere. As she is transformed into a divine entity in the brahmanical worldview, the ways and means adopted to create a completely different personality of Rādhā will be studied and an effort will be made to make sense of the changes brought in. That the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* involved a process which attempted to integrate two different worldviews –the Sanskritic and the indigenous – provides an entirely fascinating turn to the study.

The last chapter, by way of a conclusion would try and make sense of the various Rādhās in the secular and religious traditions of the literay world. The attempt would be to locate Rādhā's images and identities in the cultural sphere.

## CHAPTER – 2

### BETWEEN THE GODDESS AND THE NAYIKĀ A COMPARISON OF JAYADEVA'S *GĪTAGOVINDA* AND VIDYĀPATI'S *PADĀVALI*

Friedhelm Hardy, in his book *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa devotion in South India*<sup>1</sup> describes Kṛṣṇa as a phenomenon<sup>1</sup>. Rādhā too can be understood in a similar way, given the enormity and diversity of her realm. She seems to exude various shades in her personality and as a result, her ambit consists of terrains that appear to be mutually fulfilling and at the same time gives out strains of tensions within her overall personality.

In the textual tradition, Rādhā became the protagonist of Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* and Vidyāpati's *padāvalis* or love poems. Written in the courts of kings, the love between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa became the concern for these two poets. Both the *Gītagovinda* and the *padāvalis* of Vidyāpati fall into the category of *kāvya*, broadly understood as ornate or courtly poetry, which takes up erotic themes, uses manipulative language and

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<sup>1</sup> Freidhelm Hardy, *Viraha Bhakti: The Early History of Kṛṣṇa Devotion in South India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1983. Hardy talks about the inability to grasp the structural principles that determined the overall coherence (p.6). He also finds this phenomenon as an 'amazing one and full of contradictions and ambiguities (p.8). Same can be said of Rādhā.

conveys different moods.<sup>2</sup> It is said to have originated from two different forms of literary production – single stanza lyrical poem and the epic ornate poetry.<sup>3</sup>

Our concern here would be with Rādhā as portrayed by Jayadeva and Vidyāpati. In Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*, there are twelve cantos depicting different moods and situations of the story of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's union, separation and reunion. Vidyāpati's *padāvalis* on the other hand portray different stages of their relationship that are independent of each other.

The study of these texts would necessarily bring in the contextual questions regarding the worlds which produced them<sup>4</sup> and the corresponding similarities or differences which the writers have brought into the figure of Rādhā. In the same breath we need keep in mind the difference in the language – Sanskrit and the vernacular Maithili and the extent to which it might have affected Rādhā's portrayal by these poets.

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<sup>2</sup> It was a new concept of aesthetic enjoyment that relied on the notions of artificiality and ornamentation.

<sup>3</sup> Lienhard, Siegfried, 'A History of Classical Poetry: Sanskrit-Pali-Prakrit' in Jan Gonda (ed) *A History of Indian Literature*, Otto Harassowitz, Wiesbaden 1984. pp. 55-64

<sup>4</sup> The social, political, cultural and religious conditions of the period that might have shaped Rādhā's image.

## Rādhā in Transition

Written in the twelfth century by Jayadeva, the *Gītagovinda* was composed in the court of the Sena King Lakṣmaṇasena. Hailed as a patron of Sanskrit and a Vaiṣṇava, his court provided an atmosphere that was eclectic and syncretic, allowing the popularization of the *Gītagovinda*.<sup>5</sup>

The *Gītagovinda* has the pair of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as its protagonists and describes the cycle of their union, separation and reunion. The portrayal of their relationship is in the most intense language of passion, bringing the ecstasy and the anguish of union and separation alive in the poem.

The *Gītagovinda*, because of its language, structure and style has lent itself to various interpretations. Scholars have found in it a lyric drama (Lassen), a pastoral poem (Jones), an opera (Levi) a rural drama (Pischel) and a refined *yātrā* (von Schroeder).<sup>6</sup> S.K. De sees it as going much beyond the stereotypical *kāvya* prescribed by rhetoricians.<sup>7</sup> Though, De says, Jayadeva cast the divine love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, it was

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<sup>5</sup> Known as a *Parama Vaiṣṇava*, Lakṣmasena's title differed from his ancestors who were other wise known as devotees of Śiva and in his court Jayadeva could write and include the Buddha as one of the incarnations of Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted from S.K. De 'Sanskrit Literature' in R.C. Majumdar's (ed) *The History of Bengal*, Vol.1, University of Dacca, Dacca, 1963, p.370.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 370.

‘considerably humanized in an atmosphere of passionate poetic appeal.’<sup>8</sup>  
B. S. Miller characterizes it as a ‘dramatic lyrical poem’<sup>9</sup>, which  
expresses the ‘intimate power of divine love’<sup>10</sup> with a ‘relation between  
esthetic experience and a religious experience’<sup>11</sup>

Lee Siegel has taken the most balanced position in his study of the  
*Gītagovinda*.<sup>12</sup> He argues that ‘the *Gītagovinda* is not so much an  
allegorical work as an allegorically interpreted work’.<sup>13</sup> In his  
introduction, Siegel points out the ‘ambiguous relationship between the  
sacred and the profane dimensions of love’<sup>14</sup> as Jayadeva counter balances  
the ‘conventional descriptions of carnal love play’<sup>15</sup> by juxtaposing  
‘traditional expressions of devotion’<sup>16</sup>. Thus eschewing an either or  
position, Siegel reads the *Gītagovinda* as both a sacred and a profane  
work.

And it is through this approach that Rādhā’s character can be best  
traced in the *Gītagovinda*. Jayadeva composed his work in a period when

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 370.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara S. Miller in ‘Rādhā: Consort of Krishna’s Springtime Passion’ in *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva’s Gītagovinda*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1977

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 94

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Lee Siegel, *Sacred and Profane Dimension of Love in Indian tradition as Exemplified in the Gītagovinda of Jayadeva*, Oxford University, Delhi, 1978.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p 178

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. pxi

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

classical Sanskrit was losing its hold and the vernacular tradition was on the rise.<sup>17</sup> Most scholars have expressed the view that the *Gītagovinda*'s literary structure comprises a new genre and at the same time takes up the vernacular style as well.<sup>18</sup> So, B.S. Miller argues that a careful study of Jayadeva's style, in terms of meter, ornamentation and structure would bring out both the classical Sanskrit and Prakrit elements and that the Apabhraṁśa form occupy equal position.<sup>19</sup>

Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* brought in the concept of erotic, sensuous relationship between the divine pair of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. In the cultural milieu of Bengal, Rādhā is considered as 'largely an innovation of Bengal',<sup>20</sup> who appeared as a fully developed deity in the Bengal Purāṇas<sup>21</sup>. Rādhā as well as the *Gītagovinda* developed as a result of the amalgamation of various traditions. And many dimensions of Rādhā- as an individual per se and as a beloved – are apparent through it.

The image of Rādhā as projected in the *Gītagovinda* manifests its contextual peculiarity- she acquires the embellishments of a heroine of

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Almost all scholars dealing with the *Gītagovinda* hold this view.

<sup>19</sup> S.K. De, 'Sanskrit Literature' in R.C. Majumdar (ed) *The History of Bengal*, Vol. I, university of Dacca, Dacca, p.371

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Stoller Miller, 'Rādhā: Consort of Krishna's Springtime Passion', in B.S. Miller, *Love song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, Columbia University, New York, 1977, p.11.

<sup>21</sup> R.C. Majumdar, '*History of Ancient Bengal*', G. Bhardwaj and Company, Calcutta, 1977, p.514.

courtly poetry, becomes the ideal beauty of the erotic genre, gets a position as a goddess and is recognized as the feminine power of Kṛṣṇa as well as embodies the feminine principles and lastly she is pictured as a devotee. Thus Rādhā's character was conciliation between the religious and the secular courtly ideals. Such a characterization of Rādhā can be understood on the basis of the very fact that Jayadeva did not keep himself confined to the strict convention of the classical genre of *kāvya* but explored the techniques of the Apabhraṁśa poetry.

In the *Gītagovinda*, the very first verse brings in the character of Rādhā. She appears to be older than Kṛṣṇa as she is entrusted to escort him to his house at Nanda's order.<sup>22</sup> It also indicates the nature of the relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as the 'secret passions of Rādhā and Mādhava Triumph on the Jamuna river bank'.<sup>23</sup>

In the social context of Bengal, Rādhā's affair with Kṛṣṇa is illicit with incestuous overtones, though Jayadeva though does not speak about this in his poem. The later Vaiṣṇavites indulged in intense debates about Rādhā's status in this relationship. Within the conventions of classical Sanskrit rhetoric Rādhā becomes a *parakīyā* - a woman belonging to

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<sup>22</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Purāṇas and the Making of Religious Process*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, p.303.

<sup>23</sup> I.1 of *Gītagovinda* translated by Barbara Stoller Miller in her, *Love song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, Columbia University, New York, 1977



another man. For the Sahajiyas, Rādhā's *parakīyā* status signifies the intensity of the love between them.

The *parakīyā* woman who is in an adulterous relationship can actually bring out the concept of *prema*- the true love. In *prema*, Edward Dimock says, 'there can be no trace of *kāma*, of carnal desire, of desire for the satisfaction of self'<sup>24</sup> *Prema* is *kāma* transformed so the presence of *kāma* nevertheless comes in. Rādhā's *parakīyā* nature further brings forward her status as a devotee par excellence. This illicit status of Rādhā's relationship with Kṛṣṇa 'intensifies the bond of emotions that connects the two poles'.<sup>25</sup> She has to defy the societal rule because for her the relationship she has with Kṛṣṇa is her priority. In similar ways a devotee 'must adore Kṛṣṇa not out of duty but because he is overwhelmed and enraptured'.<sup>26</sup>

The motif of love-in-separation or *viraha* forms the dominant theme of the poem from the third song of the *Gītagovinda*. Rādhā becomes a *virahotkanthita*, a *nāyikā* who is 'distressed when her lover

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<sup>24</sup> Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1991 (Indian ed), p.16.

<sup>25</sup> S. Goswami 'Radha: The Play and Perfection of Rasa' in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1984, p.82.

<sup>26</sup> Edward C. Dimock, *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1991 (Indian ed), p. 118.

does not come through a fault of her own'<sup>27</sup>. Before this, the first verse gives the glimpse of their union in the initial rendezvous. This becomes the first stage of the poem as the cycle of union, separation and reunion ensues in the rest of the poem.

Thus, Rādhā suffers in separation and becomes a *virahiṇi* and the concept of *viraha* is as important as union in the vaiṣṇava theology. It brings out the best in a devotee because 'it draws the mind away from the satisfaction of the self, because it increases the desire for the beloved one and because intense self desire for god is to the vaiṣṇavas a saving grace.'<sup>28</sup>

Rādhā in spite of her suffering enumerates the qualities of Kṛṣṇa (II. 2-8). This position of Rādhā in *viraha*, praising Kṛṣṇa, is to be emulated by the devotees. She becomes their model and as Shrivatsa Goswami puts it 'Śrī Rādhā is the ultimate answer to the human quest for philosophical, theological, existential'<sup>29</sup> On the level of practice the enumeration of Kṛṣṇa qualities can be done through *kīrtana*, which is exactly what the vaiṣṇavas indulge in, in order to attain the state of total absorption in Kṛṣṇa.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p.150.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp. 11-12.

<sup>29</sup> S. Goswami 'Rādhā: The Play and Perfection of Rasa' in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Radha and Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarasiidass, p. 72

Rādhā also remembers Kṛṣṇa and his ways and Jayadeva uses the word *smaraṇa* or memory (11.2.8) to evoke this meaning. It is through this particular motif of memory, Barbara Stoller Miller in her essay, illuminates the relationship of the pair in the *Gītāgovinda*.<sup>30</sup> She elaborates upon the aesthetic theory of memory and stresses the links between memory and love. She tells us ‘an act of remembering is a conventional technique for relating the antithetical modes of frustrated and fulfilled love – *vipralambha* and *sambhoga śṛṅgāra*’.<sup>31</sup>

In the *Gītāgovinda*, Miller sees memory as ‘a complex set of mental processes that integrates religious, erotic and aesthetic meaning, forming a whole...’<sup>32</sup> The mutual memory of their initial rendezvous in the opening verse of the *Gītāgovinda* is played throughout in the poem and it is this memory that binds them into a dual divine relationship. Miller brings out the uniqueness of memory by pointing out that Kṛṣṇa ‘participates in the world of memory as a subject as well as an object’. As Rādhā remembers him, he too is as ‘vulnerable to her possessive, overwhelming power as

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<sup>30</sup> Barbara Stoller, ‘The Divine Duality of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa’ in Hawley and Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1984.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 14.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

she is to his....<sup>33</sup> but the strength of Rādhā's memory is beyond Kṛṣṇa's power of resistance.

Charles Malamoud in his essay elaborates upon the wordplay of *smara*, of which *smaraṇa* is one of the derivatives, and brings out the connection between memory and love, which Miller talks about.<sup>34</sup> He points out to the twofold meaning of the word *smara* and argues that 'throughout the history of the Sanskrit language, a lively tradition maintains that *smara* - love, desire is inseparable from *smara* - memory'<sup>35</sup>. He further points out that 'love and memory come to be traced as mutually evocative themes which combine in such a way as to be variations on each other'.<sup>36</sup> He also shows that *smara* is 'only applied to amorous desire'<sup>37</sup> by bringing forward the ways in which the word has been used in literature.

Malamoud points out that '*smara* is that which awakens in us the remembrance of things...desired'<sup>38</sup>. Rādhā through the memory of her initial meeting with Kṛṣṇa thinks about him and as she recollects the

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Charles Malamoud, *Cooking the World: Ritual and Thought in Ancient India*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p. 248

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 247

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 249

moments spent with him she longs to be with once again. Malamoud explains this desire of Rādhā for reunion and her remembrance of past experiences here as love being ‘a particular application of memory’ and ‘memory itself implies, at all time, a desire for that which is remembered’.<sup>39</sup>

In this context, Siegel says that the lines ‘*my mind remembers Hari, he joked and played love games with her during the rasa*’ (dance)<sup>40</sup> have erotic connotation and also ‘is a conventional motif in Sanskrit erotic *kāvya* enabling the poet to combine the moods of separation and union.’<sup>41</sup>

During the period of their separation, Kṛṣṇa repents his ‘wanton ways’ (III.3-10) and with the help of one of Rādhā’s friends a meeting is arranged between them. But Kṛṣṇa fails to keep his promise and the poet has described Rādhā’s state in the words that bring out the position of a *vāsakasajjā*<sup>42</sup> (VI.8Q1). She becomes a *vipralabdha* as well, ‘*while the moon rose. And Mādhava idled; Lonely Rādhā cried her pain aloud. In Pitiful sobbing*’ (VII.2), because Kṛṣṇa failed to keep his words.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 250

<sup>40</sup> Siegel’s translation of the verse in *Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions as Exemplified in the Gitagovinda of Jayadeva*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1978

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 158

<sup>42</sup> A *nāyika* who waits for her lover’s arrival, prepares for their meeting and adorns herself for love making.

Jayadeva continues to elaborate upon the condition of Rādhā in separation. And finally, when Rādhā manages to see Kṛṣṇa ‘*After struggling through the night*’ (VIII.1), she is only enraged by the signs on Kṛṣṇa’s body indicating his infidelity (VIII.2-10) As the marks of the other woman is ‘*lovingly left*’ which Rādhā sees as ‘*fiery passion Exposing itself on your (Kṛṣṇa’s) Skin*’ leaves her as a ‘*khaṇḍita yuvati*’ (VIII.9). After denouncing Kṛṣṇa, Rādhā’s condition becomes that of a *kalahantarita* as she starts repenting her anger (IX.1) Her friend addresses Rādhā as a *mānini* and asks her not to ‘*turn wounded pride on Mādhava*’ (IX. 2-9).

The reading of the text shows that Jayadeva’s imaging of Rādhā follows the conventions of the classical erotic poetry. Rādhā becomes the ideal courtly heroine and betrays the moods and emotions suited to such a woman.<sup>43</sup> Jayadeva also depicts Rādhā as the ideal beauty of the erotic genre, which makes a direct appeal to the female body and puts special emphasis on female anatomy. The descriptions of Rādhā ‘thus are in extremely stereotypical ways the body is highly ornamented<sup>44</sup> and the

<sup>43</sup> Miller calls this the psychological state suited to a heroine or a *nayika* known as *nayikavastha*

<sup>44</sup> Rādhā wears jeweled anklets (11.16), exquisite garland (IV.II), string of pearls (XI.15).

<sup>45</sup> She has breasts in perfect circles (III.13), luscious red berry lips (III.13), full hips (v.8), etc.

stress is on its voluptuousness.<sup>45</sup> The hyperbolic descriptions of her anatomy bring her out as a sexual being. Apart from this her hands, feet, eyes, etc are botanised and compared with lotus, creepers, fruits etc.<sup>46</sup>

Jayadeva's projection of Rādhā's images in the poem have symbolic dimension as well. Siegel analyses this and says that they 'suggest simultaneously religious and erotic motifs and as such they may be read as symbolic transactions between realms of experience, inter connections between contexts'.<sup>47</sup>

Throughout her career, Rādhā has been talked about in association with her male consort Kṛṣṇa and the references show an inseparable existence taking Rādhā's position on a higher plane. Such a compounding binds Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as a 'dual divinity'<sup>48</sup>, which becomes 'central to Jayadeva's conception of Krishna'<sup>49</sup>. In the *Gītagovinda* thus, Rādhā has

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<sup>46</sup> Rādhā herself becomes a flowering creeper (I.26). Her 'hair is a tangle of wilted flowers (II.15). She has red lotus face (III.5), lotus mouth (III.14), lotus feet (XI.22), hibiscus blossom feet (X.7), etc.

<sup>47</sup> Lee Siegel, *Sacred and Profane Dimension of Love in Indian tradition as Exemplified in the Gītagovinda of Jayadeva*, Oxford University, Delhi, 1978. p. 195.

<sup>48</sup> Miller's article is titled as 'The Divine Duality of Rādhā and Krishna' in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds.), *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarasiidass, Delhi, 1984

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p. 18.

been placed in an ‘appropriate cosmic context’<sup>50</sup> as the poet uses the same of Kṛṣṇa’s divine consorts Śrī, Padma, Padmāvati, Lakṣmī, Kamalā.

Kṛṣṇa speaks of Rādhā as ‘Love’s living goddess of triumph’ in the fifth verse of the third part of the *Gītāgovinda*. Scattered through out, there is a vocabulary of reverence and adoration for Rādhā. As Rādhā remembers and meditates upon Kṛṣṇa, he too behaves in a similar fashion. Rādhā appears and disappears and he asks for ‘beautiful Rādhā’s vision’ (III.8). Kṛṣṇa meditates upon without sleeping, holds on Rādhā to his mind in a trance and he mutters magical prayers (V.1.) He even bows before her ‘pleading forgiveness’ for his conduct (VIII.I). There is a use of same words of trust as Rādhā too is capable of disputing ‘the dread darkness of fear’ (X.2), he becomes compliant as he asks Rādhā to inflict wounds on him in order to pacify her (x.3) and goes to the extent of asking her to let him dye her feet (x.7). Using the ultimate language of subservience, Kṛṣṇa requests Rādhā to place her feet on his head- ‘A sublime flower destroying poison of love’ (x.8)). Jayadeva praises Rādhā in the conventional way of exalting the Devī, Rādhā is compared to Candi, the goddess in her fierce aspect as her ‘eyes glower like gleaming

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<sup>50</sup> Miller, ‘Rādhā: Consort of Krishna’s Springtime Passion’, in Miller (ed and trans) *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva’s Gītāgovinda*, Motilal Banarasi Dass, Delhi, 1977



dark lotuses' whose 'arms conquer worlds' (X.13). Even Kṛṣṇa- the ultimate godhead- worships 'Rādhā's lotus feet' (XI.22).

Taking Rādhā's identity as a goddess further, the *Gītagovinda* brings in the concept of inseparability of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as Rādhā imagines 'I am Kṛṣṇa Madhu's foe' (VI.2) Kṛṣṇa too evokes Rādhā as 'my ornament, my life, my jewel in the sea of existence' (X.4). B.S. Miller explains this inseparability by taking Kṛṣṇa's role to be that of the 'embodiment of erotic mood *sṛṅgāramurtimanā* and Rādhā as the 'passion rati' and the 'emotion-hood through which the mood develops.'<sup>51</sup> Here the theory of Rādhā as the *hlādinī śakti* of the ultimate godhead Kṛṣṇa can be read in.

Keeping in mind the milieu of Bengal at the time of Jayadeva, the influence of the period might have worked into such a characterization of Rādhā. Siegel suggests the influence of the *śakti* cult or broadly that of Hindu Tantrism and alludes towards a similarity between the *cāryapadas* composed by Tantric Buddhists Sidhāchāryas and Jayadeva's poem.<sup>52</sup> The prominence of the Devī in the religious tradition of Bengal seems to be reflected in submission and subordination of Kṛṣṇa to Rādhā.

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<sup>51</sup> B.S. Miller, 'Rādhā: Consort of Krishna's Springtime Passion', in Miller (ed and trans) *Love Song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1977, p. 36.

<sup>52</sup> Lee Siegel, *Sacred and Profane Dimension of Love in Indian tradition as Exemplified in the Gītagovinda of Jayadeva*, Oxford University, Delhi, 1978. p. 18.

At the end of the poem Jayadeva's Rādhā reunites with Kṛṣṇa and makes him serve her by adorning her (XII.12-18). She becomes a *svādhīnabhartrakā* and has Kṛṣṇa under her power. Rādhā takes Kṛṣṇa's place in the 'battle of love' (XII-12) and obtains what she asks for. Thus the cycle of union- separation and reunion is completed in the *Gītagovinda*. Rādhā in the *Gītagovinda* comes to occupy a broad canvas wherein her divine as well as a secular image co-exist bringing in an ambiguity – a position between the sacred and the profane.

Though Vidyāpati flourished in the fourteenth/fifteenth centuries and wrote almost three hundred years after Jayadeva - Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa remained the protagonists of his love songs. He depicted the same passion of their relationship and portrayed their joys and sorrow.

Vidyāpati began his career in the court of the kings of the Oinavara/ Oinivara or the Thakkura dynasty. These kings are hailed as patrons of cultural progress and are said to have brought in a 'period of comparative peace.'<sup>53</sup> Though the dynasty was an independent one, scholars like Upendra Thakur are of the opinion that its 'independence was only in the

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<sup>53</sup> R. R. Diwakar (General editor), *Bihar Through The Ages*, Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1959, pp. 443-444

matters of internal affairs and it was largely a dependency of the Delhi Sultans who are also credited with creating this house'.<sup>54</sup>

That Vidyāpati served under eight kings indicates toward the political turmoil within the dynasty itself. R.N. Jha sees the result of this in Vidyāpati's works, which were 'shaped by the course of events in the Oinivara dynasty.'<sup>55</sup> The most productive and creative period of his life was in the court of Śiva Siṃha who was not only the ruler and patron of Vidyāpati but the latter acted as a 'friend, philosopher and guide' to his patron. Many of Vidyāpati's songs featured Śiva Siṃha and his queens and the tenor indicated a close relationship between them.<sup>56</sup>

Most of his love songs were written under the patronage of Śiva Siṃha and illustrate the composite nature of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. R.S.McGregor argues that they were being used as 'a complimentary way of reference to the patron'.<sup>57</sup>

Vidyāpati's love songs are concerned with the relationship between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in which various forms and phases, moods and situation

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<sup>54</sup> Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithila (From the earliest times to 1556 A.D.)*, Mithila Institute of Post Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, Darbhanga, p. 233

<sup>55</sup> R.N. Jha, *Vidyāpati: Makers of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1972, p.5

<sup>56</sup> Diwakar (General editor), *Bihar Through The Ages*, Orient Longman, Calcutta, 1959, p.444.

<sup>57</sup> R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature From Its Beginning to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Vol.VIII, Fase.6 in Jan Gonda (ed), *A History of Indian Literature*, Otto Harassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1984, p.31.

of their sexual love are depicted. Having Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa as the protagonists, these have been seen as a 'strange combination of holy and unholy of earthly and heavenly.'<sup>58</sup> 'His earlier poems are 'full of sexuality, his latter of mystic ideas.'<sup>59</sup> They have therefore lent themselves to various interpretations and all the more because they were adopted by the vaisnavas. He is thus seen as a Vaiṣṇava, who paid a tribute to vaisnava ideology through his love songs. Here the argument seems to be a little inflated because among Vidyāpati's songs there are devotional ones composed in reverence to, apart from Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Śiva, Viṣṇu, the Devī, Gangā and others. In this context, R.N. Jha points toward one of Vidyāpati's poem's where he 'held the more common sense view' and enumerates that 'there is but one Almighty and naught is there in the worlds that has not been created by him which dismisses 'idea of distinctness between Hari and Hara'.<sup>60</sup> R.S. Mc Gregor emphasizes the dominance of the secular aspect in Vidyāpati's songs which were 'used

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<sup>58</sup> Upendra Thakur, *History of Mithila (From the earliest times to 1556 A.D.)*, Mithila Institute of Post Graduate Studies and Research in Sanskrit Learning, Darbhanga, p. 572.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> R.N. Jha, *Vidyapati: Makers of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1972, p.19 .

conventionally to provide a vehicle for presentation of a topic which is secular.’<sup>61</sup>

Maithili was the medium of expression for Vidyāpati, but his songs betray the conventional form of the genre of classical Sanskrit poetry. Called the ‘*Abhinava Jayadeva*’, he is said to have taken a cue from Jayadeva and have attempted a fusion of the two streams--folk and classical Sanskrit poetry.<sup>62</sup>

Keeping in mind the immense popularity of the *Gītagovinda* and the geographical proximity of Bengal, this argument of inspiration can be held as feasible. Moreover, the Mithilā region is also considered the cultural extension of Bengal and Vidyāpati’s presence in a regional kings’ court and the centre of his attention –Rādhā- can be seen as an aspect of vernacularisation of the Sanskrit tradition. But this does not in any way undermine the immense popularity of Vidyāpati’s love song as R.N. Jha rightly says that ‘the songs belonging to the social life of the land, they can be relished only in that social background’.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> R.S. McGregor, *Hindi Literature From Its Beginning to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, Vol.VIII, Fase.6 in Jan Gonda (ed), *A History of Indian Literature*, Otto Harassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1984, p.31

<sup>62</sup> R.N. Jha, *Vidyapati: Makers of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1972, p.31.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45

Comparing the Rādhās of Jayadeva and Vidyāpati, in this context, becomes an exercise of looking into the structure of the personalities of their respective Rādhās. Both follow the rules of the classical Sanskrit rhetoric in order to describe Rādhā's physical and emotional states-she is a *nayika* with all her attributes. But the questions of the cultural context--court of a local king, language, social background, etc. comes in and Vidyāpati's Rādhā acquires certain new traits, experiences new situations and enjoys a new status altogether.

Vidyāpati's main concern is Rādhā – she is his 'true heroine'<sup>64</sup> as he describes her career as a young girl, her slowly awaking youth, her physical charm, her shyness, doubts and hesitations, her innocence, her surrender to rapture, her utter anguish when neglected, Kṛṣṇa's presence is almost, if one can argue, secondary.

In the verses of Vidyāpati, Rādhā is a girl who is growing up. 'Childhood and girlhood meet in one. And new and old are both forgotten. Says Vidyāpati: O Lord of life Do you not know songs of youth' (1) Her growing up is described in a verse when 'Each day the breasts of Rādhā swelled. Her hips grew shapely, her waist more slender' (2). Jayadeva's Rādhā, on the other hand right since the beginning is a grown up heroine

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<sup>64</sup> W.G. Archer and Deben Bhattacharya (ed and trans), *Love Songs of Vidyāpati*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1963, p. 30

who is old enough to escort Kṛṣṇa home (I.1) and its only her youth which has been described.

For Vidyāpati, Rādhā's ecstasy and anguish matter more and Kṛṣṇa almost becomes a rogue-callous, cruel, selfish- who is 'a country boy. He did not know the art of love' and Rādhā says that Mādhava tortured her' (8). In another poem, Kṛṣṇa is 'so violent a lover' that 'he crushes my frail body' (7). Sumanta Bannerjee points that Rādhā in Vidyāpati's *padāvali* 'appeals as an urban heroine shaped in all likelihood from the image of a rich and wily courtesan who used to throng the fifteenth century court of the Mithila kings where Vidyāpati was the poet laureate'<sup>65</sup>

Here Rādhā becomes the refined aristocratic lady and Kṛṣṇa a rogue against Jayadeva's '*Nagara Nārāyaṇa*' who had 'mastered the procedures of science of love'.<sup>66</sup> According to erotic textbooks lovemaking is a battle of love, where violence is but a necessary part. And in *Gītagovinda*, Jayadeva uses the imagery of violent love making which Kṛṣṇa pursued with ruthless vigour. On the other hand, for Vidyāpati, 'women were for love but they were gentle and sensitive and only by

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<sup>65</sup> W.G. Archer and Deben Bhattacharya (ed and trans), *Love Songs of Vidyāpati*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1963, p. 31.

<sup>66</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, *Appropriation of a Folk Heroine: Radha in the Medieval Bengal Vaiṣṇavite Culture*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1993, p. 23

respecting their soft refinement would they be truly loved'.<sup>67</sup> He has been hailed as a poet who understood the female world and temperament and who 'almost invariably looks at love from the woman's point of view'.<sup>68</sup>

Jayadeva has not given explicit indication about Rādhā's marriage with another man, but keeps the relationship ambiguous. The *parakiyā* aspect nevertheless has been talked about in the Vaiṣṇava theology, keeping the Rādhā of the *Gītagovinda* in mind. But in Vidyāpati's songs, Rādhā no doubt is a *parakiyā*, as a go between addresses Kṛṣṇa: '*I can't guess your heart O Mādhava. The treasures of another man I offered to you. I was wrong.... Relinquish then the wife of another.*' (17).

Rādhā's anxiety of losing her home if she goes to meet Kṛṣṇa and of losing him if she stays home is made apparent by Vidyāpati (26). She becomes an *abhisārikā* and extremely cautious while venturing out to meet Kṛṣṇa as advised by her friend (29). She goes for the tryst '*while darkness is thick*' to avoid the '*demon moon*'.

Thus Rādhā becomes a 'woman 'passionately involved in a socially illicit relationship'<sup>69</sup> in the verses of Vidyāpati. She restrains her self 'I

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<sup>67</sup> Seventh part of the *Gītagovinda* is titled as this.

<sup>68</sup> VI.4, II.5 of *Gītagovinda*

<sup>69</sup> W.G. Archer and Deben Bhattacharya (ed and trans), *Love Songs of Vidyapati*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1963, p. 31.



*dare not gaze at him In such an older throng*’ and is aware of the dangers involved ‘*with blaming eyes around*’ (81). Yet the passions of love prevail and Vidyāpati’s Rādhā ‘*shall not fear the elders at homes, words will not trouble*’ her. She ‘*will not flinch. Nor shall I hide*’ (88).

Rādhā here has become a social being who is anxious about the ostracism she might face if her liaison is discovered. In spite of all this, she carries on her relationship with Kṛṣṇa and thus Rādhā’s ‘subjective world’ is transformed into a ‘battlefield of conflicting emotions and responsibilities and social restraints.’<sup>70</sup>

In Vidyāpati’s songs, Rādhā is completely divested of her divine status and there is not a single verse praises her as a divine entity. Everywhere her image has been secularized and she appears as a human lover, the ideal courtly *nāyikā*. Archer suggests that it was ‘the fancied resemblance of Śiva Simha’s court to Kṛṣṇa’s life in Vrindābana which may have prompted Vidyāpati to place his love songs in Rādhā – Kṛṣṇa setting.’<sup>71</sup> R.N. Jha has explained this secularization in terms of the presence of ‘the hero and heroine, the lover and the beloved (as being) essential for the evocation of the sentiment of love because then only

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<sup>70</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, *Appropriation of a Folk Heroine: Rādhā in the Medieval Bengal Vaiṣṇavite Culture*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1993, p. 24.

<sup>71</sup> W.G. Archer and Deben Bhattacharya (ed and trans), *Love Songs of Vidyāpati*, George Allen and Unwin, London, 1963, pp. 35-36.

*sadharanikarana* or universalisation of the principal sentiment to possible

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Vidyāpati captures the mythological story of Kṛṣṇa departure to Mathura, from where he never returns and Rādhā suffers his separation. Rādhā laments, 'In a far land, my darling... I don't think he will return now.' Complaining about her long wait Rādhā says. 'He left me young. Now I am ripe for words of love. He dwells with me no more. My sweet promised to return...' (91) Jayadeva's Rādhā does not have to suffer this pain as she reunites with Kṛṣṇa at the end of the poem and Kṛṣṇa's *mathur* is not Jayadeva's concern. The separation ensuing from Kṛṣṇa's departure to Mathura, Rādhā is left behind as a proṣitapreyā or a proṣitabhartṛkā, one whose lover is away in a distant place, in Vidyāpati's songs.

The image of Rādhā as created by Vidyāpati brings out the stereotypical heroine of the rhetorics where she sheds her divine identity and emerges as a sexual being. Her concern is self-satisfaction in love for which she is ready to take chances and continuing her relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā becomes almost selfish when matters of her longings arise she does not remain the everlasting compliant Rādhā of the *Gītāgovinda*. But the ultimate fate, which awaits her, is Kṛṣṇa's departure.

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<sup>72</sup> R.N. Jha, *Vidyāpati: Makers of Indian Literature*, Sahitya Kala Akademi, New Delhi, 1972, p 56.

## CHAPTER 3

### EMBELLISHING THE GODDESS: RADHA IN THE *BRAHMAVAIVARTA PURANA*

In this chapter, Rādhā's persona would be traced in the brahmanical tradition of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* wherein she emerged as a fully divinised entity. The BVP negotiated a spectacular change in her career and provided her a place in the pantheon by equating and embellishing her with all the required elements that could portray her as a goddess.

Rādhā acquires the status of the divine consort of a male deity and was attached to abstract theological and philosophical concepts. She was provided with roles which were entirely new in her career. By virtue of being firmly associated with the ultimate godhead Kṛṣṇa, she gains a new status of his *hlāḍini śakti* or the feminine power. She is also to act as the bridge between the lord and his votary by donning the role of the universal mother and by being idealized as a devotee *par excellence* of the lord and who is to be emulated by the human devotees.

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* changed Rādhā's status and provided roles unknown to her and she seems to have traveled a long way from the secular tradition of the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva and the *padāvalis* of

Vidyāpati as studied in the last chapter. Rādhā's character in the *Gītagovinda*, as sketched by Jayadeva was reconciliation between the religious symbolic dimensions and the secular courtly ideals. Thus according to the tradition, she is described in a mixture of extremely stereotypical ways of the classical genre of *kāvya* and the techniques of Apabhraṃśa poetry and she is also hailed as a goddess.

The *padāvalis* of Vidyāpati on the other hand reflects on an entirely different Rādhā. Vidyāpati's Rādhā is his true heroine who though is described in the typical ways of the rhetorics of poetry she sheds her divine status entirely and emerges as a sexual being. As a court poet Vidyāpati used Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa to explore the world of literature and their characters seemed to have provided him with a perfect mould to portray his patrons as the protagonists indulging in the same passions of the divine couple.

In this context, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* can be seen as almost the last stage in the formation of Rādhā's career as she transforms out and out into a divine entity. And the composers of the *purāṇa* used all possible methods to embellish her as a goddess.

## ***Brahmavaivarta Purana: Defining the Text***

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* falls into the genre of the *Upapurāṇas* and can be dated between the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>1</sup> Being an *Upapurāṇa*, it can be regionally identified as Kunal Chakrabarti points out that though its 'locale cannot be specified but so completely remodeled in Bengal, that it can be taken to represent unambiguously the specific regional context of Bengal',<sup>2</sup> a region peripheral to the brahmanical influence.

The authorship of Bengal *Purāṇas* has been attributed to Krishnadvaipāyana Vedavyāsa, more of a generic name which provides the 'the necessary authority and a context determined meaning'.<sup>3</sup> But they were actually brought together by a host of authors governed by the 'overriding motivation of self-interest'<sup>4</sup> who belonged to the brahmana varṇa. Thus the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* was also put together by the local brahmanas of Bengal.

The *Upapurāṇas* were written in order to contend with the particularities of the regions that were peripheral to their influence. These new sets of *purāṇas* were composed to accommodate the new variables and

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<sup>1</sup> R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Purāṇic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasisdass, Delhi, p. 166

<sup>2</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, NewDelhi, 2001, p.50.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.27.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p.28.

to suit the requirements of the region, which ‘offered a balance between the puranic brahmanical tradition and the exclusively local tradition of a region’.<sup>5</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti sees the Bengal *Purāṇas* performing ‘the delicate task of widening the scope of the brahmanas to incorporate as many local cultural elements as could be accommodated and to induce as many local people to participate in this interactive process as was considered viable by the local brahmanas, without endangering their social superiority’ and calls this technique of accomplishing this task the ‘*Purāṇic Process*’.<sup>6</sup> These *purāṇas* are seen as ‘instruments for the propagation of brahmanical ideals of social reconstruction and sectarian interests, a medium for the absorption of local cults and associated practices and as a vehicle for popular instruction on norms governing everyday existence’.<sup>7</sup>

By virtue of being beyond the brahmanical influence, Bengal provided the brahmanas with a powerful challenge in the form of the presence of a dominant goddess cult. And its presence was so overwhelming that the brahmanas could not have possibly ignored it, so the goddess was adapted and assimilated within the brahmanical order through a series of reconstructions. She was embellished with brahmanical attributes, provided

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 32

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p.52.

with a genealogy, associated with a theology praising her capabilities and attached to the established male divinities. And thus, as Kunal Chakrabarti points out, the worship of the mother goddess was the ‘single major pre-existing factor (which) was generally isolated, transformed and legitimized, then used to promote and transmit traditional ideas’<sup>8</sup>.

Rādhā’s personality too underwent such changes in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*. Divided into four khandas- *Brahma*, *Prakṛti*, *Gaṇeśa* and the *Kṛṣṇa- Janma khandas*, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* follows suit with other puranas and upholds Rādhā as a great goddess. It is the *Prakṛti Khanda* and largely the *Kṛṣṇa Janma Khanda*<sup>9</sup> which showcase Rādhā’s personality.

The sectarian perspective of the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, which largely has been identified as being the product of the Vaiṣṇavite school<sup>10</sup> because of the influence it has on the text has been identified as belonging to Vaiṣṇava tradition. It upholds Kṛṣṇa as the ultimate godhead and Rādhā as

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<sup>8</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, ‘Divine Household and World Maintenance: Gaṇeśa in the Bengal Puranas’, in Kukum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti (eds), *From Myths to Markets: Essays on Gender, Manohar and Indian Institute of Advanced Studies*, Delhi and Shimla, 2001. p. 59

<sup>9</sup> R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Puranic Records on Hindu Rites and Customs*, Motilal Banarasidas, Delhi, 1975 (reprint) p.166.

<sup>10</sup> C.M. Brown. *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India- A Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, Claude Stark and Comp, USA, 1974. Brown talks about ‘the extant Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa as being a ‘product of a vaiṣṇavite Krishnaite school’ wherein ‘Krishanism forms the basic theoretical framework’. He also adds that through ‘a process of adaptation and synthesis, a new structure was created- the emerging feminine theology associated with Radha as Prakṛti’. p.38.

his divine consort as she is associated with him through various theological and cosmological terms in the text.

As all *purāṇas* do, the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* applied the concept of *prakṛti* and *puruṣa* of the *Sāṃkhya* school of thought to assimilate Rādhā into the brahmanical fold. *Prakṛti*, the feminine principal, as the material cause behind creation, was attributed with divinity and thus a model for the concept of a supreme or great goddess was created. This use of the complex philosophical theory is one of the ways to explain the position of Rādhā in the cosmology.

Kunal Chakrabarti says that this equation with the ‘abstract energy’ ‘ensured and justified her inclusion in the brahmanical pantheon without necessarily subverting her original identity’.<sup>11</sup> He also points out that ‘she may embody that vast storehouse of unbound energy called *śakti*, she is at the same time trapped into multiple identities of a graded divine order’.<sup>12</sup> He also notices that though the goddess is considered the driving force behind the god as the consort ‘she loses much of her individuality and is reduced to the status of clone of those who now appear to be her dominant partners’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001, p. 81

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p. 185

<sup>13</sup> ibid



The attempt here is to delineate Rādhā as depicted in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* and bring out her position within the text.

### **Cosmological aspect: Radha as the Universal Mother**

Rādhā is introduced in the BVP as emerging from the left side of Kṛṣṇa's body (I.3.3)<sup>14</sup> and is identified as the *prakṛti* of Kṛṣṇa who himself is the *puruṣa* (I.30.4). This concept of *prakṛti* has been borrowed by the authors of the purāṇas from the *Samkhya* School, one of the six major schools of philosophy. In the purāṇic worldview, *prakṛti* becomes the goddess who initiates the process of creation. Thus equated with *prakṛti*, Rādhā becomes the feminine principal creative material with which Kṛṣṇa undertakes the creative process.

Further in the *Prakṛti Khanda*, the meaning of *prakṛti* is explained as the world's distinguished creation, which has three *guṇas*- *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* (II.1.5.8). Kṛṣṇa, the *puruṣa* and Rādhā the *prakṛti* are hailed as eternal and inseparable. Going beyond the *Samkhya* concept, the BVP states that it was because of Kṛṣṇa's wishes to create the world that this primordial

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<sup>14</sup> The first number shows the order of the Khandas e.g., *Brahma Khanda* is I, *Prakṛti Khanda* is II, and so on. The second digit is for the chapter number and the third for the verse. All verses from R.N. Sen's translation of the BVP.

*prakṛti* came up. Here, Rādhā is also identified as Kṛṣṇa's creative power, *śakti*- the giver of majesty and strength (II.2.10).

Together, *puruṣa* and *prakṛti* or Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā create the world. *Prakṛti* conceives and after keeping the 'golden germ' for a period of hundred 'mānvantaras' she gives birth to it. But angry and distressed, she throws this 'golden germ' into the cosmic water (II.2.49-50). This selfish act infuriates Kṛṣṇa and he curses *prakṛti* /Rādhā and all others who are to be born to remain childless (II.2.51-3). The egg, which had been thrown away splits into two from which a child is born (II.3.1-3). Brahma and Śiva are subsequently formed from this child's abdomen.

Thus willingly or unwillingly, Rādhā becomes a part in the process of creation and acquires a new status unknown to her personality- that of a mother. Throughout the text such examples can be multiplied where Rādhā is addressed as '*mother of the world*' (II.15.29-37). Various characters in the text respect Rādhā as a mother. Rādhā is addressed as mother by Śrīdāmā, a cowherd and friend of Kṛṣṇa, and is '*dear to Rādhā like her son*' (II.V.32-50).

Rādhā herself talks about her role as a mother while explaining the etymology of her name to Yaśodā, Kṛṣṇa's foster mother. She tells her the meaning of the second syllable of her name *dhā* as '*sustainer and mother*'

and also says that she is the ‘*mother of Mahāviṣṇu including countless worlds and their inhabitants*’.<sup>15</sup> (II.101.65-75)

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* thus portrays Rādhā as a mother and attempts to exalt her infinitely. She, as a mother is said to be closer to her children than Kṛṣṇa as she can act as the bridge between them. This role is extended in terms of a unique position of Rādhā as the ideal devotee of Kṛṣṇa, which we will see later. As a mother she is eligible to greater adoration and respect than Kṛṣṇa - the ultimate godhead himself (IV.52.34).

Rādhā is thus given the role of a creator, a mother in the text as the authors of the *purāṇa* try to project Rādhā’s new role that was unknown in the history of her career until now. Scholars have explained this portrayal of Rādhā by the brahmanas, as an acknowledgement of the prevailing local tradition of a particular region by the brahmanas. They could assimilate the predominant deities, in this case a goddess, by sanctifying their previous forms and in this process the complex philosophical terms of the *Samkhya* school came to their aid.

But the brahmanas could not succeed entirely as chinks in Rādhā’s role as a mother becomes quite apparent. As *prakṛti* she is angry and distressed at the sight of the ‘golden egg’ she gives birth to and casts it away

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<sup>15</sup> The term used is *Mahāviṣṇomatr*.

and the BVP does not provide any explanation for her action. She further curses her sons when they intervene while she is making love with Kṛṣṇa and Śrīdāmā as well, out of anger.

Thus, on the one hand, Rādhā is portrayed as a mother but on the other she hardly ever acts upon her motherly role. This aspect of her personality exudes ambiguity: at one point she personifies motherhood par excellence and at another she is attributed with human qualities: her anger. This ambiguity to an extent can be explained in terms of the needs of the Purāṇic religion to maintain a semblance of reflecting the sacred order into the everyday reality of the human world.

### **Mythological aspect: Rādhā as the divine consort**

It was because of her anger, Rādhā is said to be born on the earth as a mortal and experience a separation from Kṛṣṇa for a period of hundred years. The reason for her earthly sojourn is explained in a myth where her anger brings about the curse of Śrīdāmā, a cowherd and a friend of Kṛṣṇa.

The myth shows that she is highly enraged after hearing about Kṛṣṇa's unfaithful behaviour and demands that Śrīdāmā, guarding the palace door of Virajā, a cowherdess with whom Kṛṣṇa was dallying, moves aside. Śrīdāmā does not let Rādhā in and full of rage she lashes out at Kṛṣṇa who arrives at

the scene. Śrīdāmā then reminds Rādhā that her entire existence is dependent upon the worship of Kṛṣṇa. Rādhā finds Śrīdāmā's behaviour demon like and curses him to be born as one. He in turn says, '*Mother your anger is human and so you will be a human...fools will call you on earth, the wife of Rayaṇa*' (IV.2-3).<sup>16</sup>

Here, Kṛṣṇa himself casts Radha's grief aside as he promises to follow her to the earthly Vrindāvana. His birth as a human has the sole purpose of propitiating Rādhā and to accompany her to earth (IV.6). He also explains the inevitability of the whole situation as his own desire.<sup>17</sup>

The myth thus explains Rādhā's as well as Kṛṣṇa's earthy incarnation and Rādhā is born as the daughter of Vṛṣabhānu and Kalāvati in Vrindāvana. The text narrates an episode of storm where Rādhā appears to help Nanda, foster father of Kṛṣṇa, when he is unable to look after the child Kṛṣṇa and the cows at the same time. This episode marks the beginnings of the *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva,<sup>18</sup> but this is the only trope that the poet has written about. So unlike the *Gītagovinda*, Nanda in this text knows who Rādhā is and praises her as a

<sup>16</sup> *Rayana* is said to be the variation of *Ayana* as he was known in the myths of Bengal.

<sup>17</sup> Thus the compilers explain the curse by a mere cowherd the pre-destined events caused by the supreme lord-Kṛṣṇa.

<sup>18</sup> I. 1 of *Gītagovinda* from B.S. Miller (ed and trans), *Love song of the Dark Lord: Jayadeva's Gītagovinda*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1977.

goddess. Then Rādhā takes the child Kṛṣṇa a way to protect him where Kṛṣṇa changes into a young man and reminds Rādhā about her real identity.

As a new development in the entire history of Rādhā's career, Brahma solemnizes the marriage of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*. (IV.15.125-30). In the traditional narratives of the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa myth, particularly in the social context of Bengal, the relationship between them always had an illicit context with incestuous overtones. Rādhā was the wife of Ayaṇa, the brother of Yaśodā – Kṛṣṇa's foster mother, which brought about the entire debate regarding *parakīyā* i.e. a woman belonging to another man and the *svakīyā* i.e., the legally wedded wife.

As we have seen in the last chapter, in the case of the *Gītagovinda*, the marital status of Rādhā has been kept ambiguous and in the *padāvalis* of Vidyāpati Rādhā is clearly a married woman who is in love with Kṛṣṇa. But Rādhā's position in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* completely changes the tone of their relationship and through their marriage Radha becomes Kṛṣṇa's legal divine consort.

The episode of Rādhā's marriage to Rayaṇa (as he is called in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*) was a result of Śrīdāmā's curse as explained towards the beginning of the *Kṛṣṇa Janma Khanda*. This dilemma is solved towards the end of the same *khanda* when at Yaśodā's request to reveal

herself, Rādhā says ‘I was but the wife of Rayaṇa and hence a mere shadow of the real Rādhā. Rayaṇa is the digit of lord Hari and is the best of his adherents’ (IV.III.65-9). Thus a concept of *chāyā Rādhā*<sup>19</sup> is brought in as an explanation and to uphold Rādhā’s position as Kṛṣṇa’s legally wedded wife putting at rest the questions about Rādhā’s status *vis-à-vis* Kṛṣṇa.

The compilers of the text have taken immense care to establish Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa’s consort. Apart from the myth explaining their relationship as that of a husband and wife, there are various incidents wherein others gods and goddesses or Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa themselves, uphold this concept.

Kṛṣṇa makes Rādhā recall her identity and tells her that she is his better half and this is no difference between them (IV.15.50-64). Deities like Brahma extol Rādhā as the outcome of Kṛṣṇa and as being equal to him in every aspect (IV.15.103-4). Durgā associates Rādhā with Kṛṣṇa as the substance and attribute are related to each other (IV.17.211). Others like Nanda, Yaśoda and Uddhava too praise Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa’s counterpart at various points in the text.

Apart from these associations, the different names of Rādhā, their etymological explanation further confirmed it all over again and her epithets

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<sup>19</sup> This concept of a shadow is used in the Mahābhārata when Sītā similarly gives away her physical form to lord Agni in order to preserve her sanctity.

also bring out the relationship in the BVP. She is hailed as *Raseśvari* on account of being the wife of the lord of the *Rasa* i.e. Kṛṣṇa. She is dearer to Kṛṣṇa than his own life so she is called *Kṛṣṇaprānādhikā* and is his favorite consort so *Kṛṣṇapriya*. Rādhā is *Kṛṣṇasvarūpī* because she can bestow on her votaries the form of Kṛṣṇa and is equal to him in every aspect. As she emerged from the left side of Kṛṣṇa's body so she is known as *Kṛṣṇavāmasambhūta* (IV.17.221-34).

The myths and the epithets associated with and highlighting Rādhā's married status, project the anxiety of the brahmanas to provide a social sanction and legitimacy to Rādhā's relationship with Kṛṣṇa. Moreover, they were also trying to assimilate Rādhā as a goddess in the brahmanical pantheon and put a rest to the *parakīyā -svakīyā* debate so as to legitimize her status. So the most convenient step was to portray Rādhā as Kṛṣṇa's legally wedded wife.

### **Practical Aspect: Rādhā as an Ideal Devotee**

The union of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa provides the devotees with a common meeting ground and their relationship is that of a '*Bhagavān*' who manifests



himself in aesthetic experience or *rasa* and the '*hlāḍini śakti*' or the '*love potency*',<sup>20</sup>

In the context of devotion, Rādhā becomes a model devotee of Kṛṣṇa and the love between them provides the metaphor for the divine human relationship. So, the human devotee is to emulate Rādhā in order to experience the benevolence of Kṛṣṇa. In such a situation, where Rādhā becomes a mediator in the human divine relationship, C.M. Brown points out that her marital status becomes significant because now her own feelings for Kṛṣṇa become a model for all human devotees.<sup>21</sup>

As C.M. Brown points out that in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, it is Kṛṣṇa who declares that 'he will not grant *mokṣa* to anyone who does not revere Rādhā and also affirm that the worship of Rādhā is more pleasing to him than his own'.<sup>22</sup> The authors of the *purāṇa* were trying to rework the image of Rādhā and were ready to provide all legitimacy that was needed,

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<sup>20</sup> Shrivatsa Goswami, 'Rādhā: The Play and Perfection of *Rasa*' in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds.) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984, pp.74.

<sup>21</sup> Brown, *God as Mother: A Feminine Theology in India (An Historical and Theological Study of the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa)*, Claude Stark and Co., Hertford, Vermont, 1974, pp.201-2.

<sup>22</sup> C.M. Brown, 'The Theology of Radha in the Purāṇas' in Hawley and Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984.

thus Kṛṣṇa himself is made to declare that Rādhā is the best and supreme vehicle through which his devotees could reach him.<sup>23</sup>

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, as seen in the previous section, meticulously projects Rādhā as a *svakiya* of Kṛṣṇa or the legally wedded wife, unlike the *Gītagovinda* or the *padāvalis* of Vidyāpati, which describe her as *parakīyā* or a woman belonging to another man. The *svakīyā* status of Rādhā provided by the text, though exalts her position as an ideal devotee, she is actually subordinated to Kṛṣṇa. Out of five modes of *bhakti*, Rādhā adores Kṛṣṇa through the ‘*dāsya bhāva*’ or ‘servanthood with an added quality of service’.<sup>24</sup> As a *parakīyā*, she was the beloved of Kṛṣṇa and their relationship was based on the *mādhurya bhāva* of *bhakti* in other words passionate love was the basis of their relationship.

Daud Ali, on the basis of Richard David’s definition of *bhakti*, conceives it as a ‘relation that occurred not between equals, but rather between a superior lord and his inferior subject’.<sup>25</sup> A relationship ‘thoroughly hierarchical with ‘participatory sharing’<sup>26</sup> can be seen in, as mentioned above, the five modes of *bhakti bhāvas*. Among these *mādhurya*

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> Goswami, Rādhā: Play and Perfection of Rasa’, in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds.) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984, p.79.

<sup>25</sup> Daud Ali’s dissertation, *Regimes of pleasures in Early India: A Genealogy of Practices at the Cola Court*, University of Chicago, Illinois, 1996, p.144.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp.144-45.

emerges as the most egalitarian of all the bhavas as it provides a comparatively equal status to the beloved.

The depiction of Rādhā's love for Kṛṣṇa, nevertheless, brings out the intensity and devotional aspects of the relationship and one of the facets of Rādhā's personality.

### **Translating Rādhā's Image: Status Undefined**

In the process of examining the career of Rādhā as a universal mother, divine consort and an ideal devotee, not for a single moment she steps out of the shadow of Kṛṣṇa, as it were. And the association with Kṛṣṇa becomes her chief claim to fame.

All the roles of Rādhā are interrelated in some way or the other and the effort in the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* has been to sanctify and legitimize all of them. As her image is carefully gleaned out from the earlier portrayals and given a different perspective, one can perceive that the aim of the compilers was to adopt her into the brahmanical pantheon.

Though Rādhā was provided with the regular features of a goddess, suitably attached to a lineage and embellished appropriately, there remained gaps in her personality which become visible in terms of ambiguities apparent in her embodiment.

Rādhā at times seems to betray human aspects and on the other, comfortably acts as a divine entity. Many a times she bursts out as an angry being and failing to fulfill her motherly duties and roles. Quite a few times she is jealous as a human female and shows herself as being very possessive about Kṛṣṇa demanding him all to herself. Other than acting as an unwilling mother and a subordinate mediator between the ultimate lord Kṛṣṇa and his votaries, Rādhā has never been really assigned any functional aspect to her personality. She never had any roles which other goddesses like Durgā as the demon slayer and maintainer of the world order, enjoyed. Rādhā exists because of Kṛṣṇa, her identity emerging out of him and dissolving into him.

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* provides her with every possible attribute befitting a goddess but somehow fails to sustain that image, as there always is an ambiguity visible in her character. In spite of providing her with positions unknown to her—that of a divinity and the consort of Kṛṣṇa, the *purana* does not succeed in portraying Rādhā as a goddess *par excellence*.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION: DEFINING RADHA

The attempt in this study has been to understand the vast realm of Rādhā as she appears in the literary traditions – secular as well as religious. Rādhā was perceived and represented variously in these two traditions and patterns of linear continuities and discontinuities are evident throughout in the identity and image as brought about by these two streams.

In the secular tradition of literature, painting and music, Rādhā becomes a *nāyikā* or a heroine. Here her sexual identity becomes prominent and her physical and emotional states are highlighted all along. As a *nāyikā*, Rādhā embodied the role of a woman who is in love with Kṛṣṇa. Her physical beauty becomes the focus and she is described in a highly stylized way. But her relationship with Kṛṣṇa remains equally important.

In the brahmanical pantheon, Rādhā emerges as a goddess firmly adhering to abstract theological concepts and as the divine consort of Kṛṣṇa. Thus, in the religious sphere, Rādhā is primarily seen a goddess firmly attached to Kṛṣṇa -- her identity stems forth from the virtue of

being a consort. She is praised as a great goddess, the feminine power or the *hlādinī śakti* of the ultimate Vaiṣṇava godhead Kṛṣṇa. She is further hailed as a universal mother who mediates between human devotees and Kṛṣṇa, facilitating a close bond between them. Exemplifying the role of an ideal devotee, Rādhā is to be emulated so that human beings can attain the ultimate bliss.

An attempt has been made to study those textual traditions that portray Rādhā's career and these include Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*, Vidyāpati's love poems and the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*.

The *Gītagovinda* is one of the first texts, among the body of literature that deal with Rādhā, to give a detailed sketch of her character and provide her with a new status. B.S. Miller sees Jayadeva's heroine as someone who is 'neither a wife nor a worshiping rustic playmate' but as a 'jealous, solitary, proud female who is Kṛṣṇa's exclusive partner in secret love.'<sup>1</sup>

The structural and the contextual uniqueness of the *Gītagovinda* allowed Jayadeva to portray Rādhā both as the heroine or the *nāyikā* and a goddess. The new genre of a literary structure used by Jayadeva provided

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<sup>1</sup> B.S. Miller, 'Divine Duality of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa' in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds.) *The Divine Consort: Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarasidass, Delhi, 1984, p.13.

him with an avenue to embellish his heroine with the characteristics suited to a classical erotic beauty. Thus through the poetic metaphors accorded to her, Rādhā appears as the ideal beauty of the erotic genre, wherein the focus is on her physical and psychological aspects.

She acquires an image of an erotic heroine with a direct appeal to her body and there is an emphasis on her anatomy. And it is through this identity of a sexual being that she could bring Kṛṣṇa under her power and take his position in the battle of love. Wendy O'Flaherty in this context notices that 'despite her generally inferior status in the *Gītagovinda*, Rādhā triumphs in the end and assumes the inverse position in the love play with Kṛṣṇa' and she is called Candi which can be a 'possible indication that she has transcended the bounds normally assigned to Rādhā'.<sup>2</sup>

Here one can bring forward the argument that this image of Rādhā as an erotic heroine and with a corresponding identity of a sexual being provided the poet with a leverage to create a Rādhā who could become dominant in the sphere of sexual politics and enjoy her position as well.

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<sup>2</sup> Wendy O'Flaherty, 'The Shifting Balance of Power in the Marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī' in Hawley and Wulff (eds.), *The Divine Consort : Radha and the Goddesses of India*. Motilal Banarasiidass, 1984, p. 138.

Jayadeva's Rādhā is simultaneously a divine object and a vocabulary of reverence is strewn throughout the text and the culmination of this image is seen in the tenth canto where Kṛṣṇa asks Rādhā to place her feet on his head. The traditional account explains this incident through a myth in Jayadeva's life wherein it is said that before penning down this particular verse, the hesitant poet went to have a bath. When he came back the incomplete lines were already there, which are said to have been written by Kṛṣṇa himself who came in the poet's absence to eat his lunch and finish the lines. The poet took this as a sanction from the lord for writing about an otherwise blasphemous behaviour. In other words the poetic license is tied with a divine legitimacy without which it does not seem possible to make Rādhā put her feet on Kṛṣṇa's head.

Rādhā's enumeration of Kṛṣṇa's qualities and her act of remembering were interpreted on the level of devotion and she is said to have become a divine ideal devotee who is to be emulated by mortals. Sumanta Banerjee explained that though the later religious leaders like Caitanya chose the theme of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's love and their actions, they invested them with a concept of *bhakti* in order to accommodate it within the ambit of Vaiṣṇavism. And it was in this process that Rādhā



became a 'submissive devotee' and her personality got 'increasingly sanitised.'<sup>3</sup>

Thus it is through her image of erotic beauty rather than as goddess that Rādhā in the *Gītagovinda* appears as the 'triumphant heroine whose lover is in her power.' (XII.II).

Vidyāpati too, like Jayadeva, attempted a fusion between the genres of the folk and the classical Sanskrit poetry, which together with the use of Maithili provided Rādhā in his love poems a far greater role to play and wherein she also becomes a complete individual.

Without a tinge of any divinity, Rādhā seems to have been comfortably portrayed as *parakīyā nāyikā* who though she hesitates to venture out to meet the other man in her life, nevertheless has the courage to defy societal norms. She becomes a social entity and Vidyāpati does not hesitate to make his Rādhā the focus of his attention. As and when he describes her, he does so by keeping in mind the parameters of the courtly literature. Unlike Jayadeva's Rādhā who could be interpreted both as *nāyikā* and goddess, one can argue that in Vidyāpati's padāvalis she becomes his true heroine.

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<sup>3</sup> Sumanta Banerjee, *Appropriation of a Folk Heroine: Rādhā in Medieval Bengali Vaishnavite Culture*, Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, Shimla, 1993, p. 33.

Vidyāpati's Rādhā was for once and all the courtly *nāyikā* and this secular identity of hers is made possible because of the use of a vernacular language and the dominance of the folk culture. Rādhā could also complain against Kṛṣṇa charging him with cruelty and insensitivity while love making and without in any way undermining rules or regulations.

The broader point which emerges here is that, it is only as a *nāyika*, that Rādhā in both Jayadeva and Vidyāpati's poem can exercise her individuality.

In the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, the question turns on more towards the contradictions and ambiguities in the ways Radha is characterized and the episodes relating to the important junctions in her life are enumerated.

Rādhā acquired newer positions and grew complex in her roles as she is portrayed as a mother and divine consort, which are unique to the *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa*, bring out these contradictions and ambiguity as seen in Chapter III. She discards her egg in the *Prakṛiti Khanda* out of anger and the text provides no explanation for this mother throughout the text. Thus her anger and motherhood reflect two contradictory poles--human and divine.

Explaining the same kinds ambiguities in Pārvati, Kunal Chakrabarti says that this 'should appear quite natural if we hold that the

social utility of religion derives from the construction of a divine cosmos for the purpose of legitimation'.<sup>4</sup> He also talks about the divinities being 'partially modeled on human beings' who 'share human concerns, although to a limited extent, for they are the ideal stereotypes.'<sup>5</sup>

The Bengal Purāṇas were obsessively concerned with the goddess cult that provided the brahmanas with the best option to interact with the local traditions. Kunal Chakrabarti equates this 'ultimate puranaic concession'<sup>6</sup> with the ambiguities seen in the characters of the goddesses. He explains this by saying that 'the primary objective of the authors of the *Purāṇas* was not to enhance the position of the goddess more than what was necessary in their judgment, but to create a divine paradigm which would encourage a social order directly antithetical to the exalted position of women in society.'<sup>7</sup> Thus the authors of the Purāṇas, 'had the doubly difficult task of insidiously undermining the status of the goddess under cover of formal acknowledgement of her position and in an atmosphere of her overwhelming presence'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, 'Divine Family and World Maintenance: Gaṇeśa in the Bengal Purāṇas' in Kumkum Sangari and Uma Chakravarti (eds.) *From Myths of Markets: Essays on Gender*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla and Manohar Publishers and Distributors, New Delhi, 2001, p.69.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.69

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 65

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

The *Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa* depicts Rādhā as the divine consort of Kṛṣṇa as Brahma is made to solemnize their marriage. Though Rādhā is supposed to have achieved a lot and jumped up high in terms of her relationship with Kṛṣṇa and status, she rather lost her individuality, which was so characteristic of her in the secular sphere.

Wendy O’Flaherty defines a consort as, ‘literally denoting a partner or spouse, which is ‘a heavily loaded term, for the consort is usually implied to be mere appendage, far inferior in power and status to his or her spouse’.<sup>9</sup> Thus as Kṛṣṇa’s consort, though she is his *hlādinī śakti* she ‘loses much of her individuality and is reduced to the status of (a) clone’ of Kṛṣṇa ‘who now appear(s) to be her dominant partner’.<sup>10</sup>

Rādhā’s birth on the earth as a mortal is accounted for by a curse by a cowherd called Śrīdāmā. In spite of being the great goddess, she could be affected by Śrīdāmā’s curse, which although justified as punishment for her anger, hardly provides an explanation.

As a consort she becomes a mediator between Kṛṣṇa and his devotees but at the same time, Rādhā has to play the ‘role of a docile and

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<sup>9</sup> Wendy O’Flaherty, ‘The Shifting Balance of Power in the Marriage of ‘Siva and Parvati’ in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds.), *The Divine Consort; Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984, p. 129.

<sup>10</sup> Kunal Chakrabarti, *Religious Process: The Purāṇas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2001, p.185.

accessible servant'<sup>11</sup>, which undermines her position as well. She now is a *svakiyā* or the legally wedded wife of Kṛṣṇa, which Marglin sees as a 'contractual relationship of mutual obligation'<sup>12</sup> within which 'propriety and hierarchy appropriate to conjugal relationship hold sway'.<sup>13</sup>

There is a marked change in the behavioural pattern of Rādhā as she becomes a *svakiyā*, noticed by both Marglin and Kinsley. For Kinsley she becomes a 'selfish, vindictive and insecure wife' with an implicit feeling of possessiveness'<sup>14</sup> who 'loses her innocence, her intensity and a considerable part of her charm'.<sup>15</sup>

The detailed description of Rādhā a heroine in the secular sphere and Rādhā as a divine being in the religious field is provided, in order to mark not only the different ways in which she has been portrayed but also to indicate that it was only in the secular tradition that Rādhā's character received more individuality in terms of her position and relationship with Kṛṣṇa in terms of the roles she could play and the freedom with which she could express her views.

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<sup>11</sup> Wendy O' Flaherty, The Shifting Balance of Power in the Marriage of 'Śiva and Pārvati' in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds.), *The Divine Consort; Radha and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 1984, p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> Frédérique Marglin, 'Sexual Union' in J.S. Hawley and D.M. Wulff (eds) *The Divine Consort: Rādhā and the Goddesses of India*, Motilal Banarasidass Delhi, 1984, p. 303.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>14</sup> David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Vision of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1986, p.94.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

As far as she is portrayed as a *nāyika*, Rādhā appears free of any trappings apart from those of her physical and psychological aspects. The poetic license seems to work better without creating any rifts in the way she is depicted. But as soon as Rādhā's character acquired a divine aspect her individuality suffered the most. In the *purāṇic process*, though Rādhā was accorded divinity, she could no longer express herself as she wanted and had to be portrayed in the larger context of the 'heavenly sphere' wherein everything had to be ordered according to the needs of the brahmanas whose own purpose was being served in this process.

Though the outer world worked upon her portrayal it was only in much as to alter her portrayals wherever as she was depicted in the roles of a mother, a consort and a devotee. Within, through her behaviour she seemed to have resisted all the effects of the contextual aspects, leading to the contradictions and ambiguities that seek explanations throughout. The media - divine and the secular - only provide a platform to discover the patterns of her character as she walked from one frame to the other.

Finally, and tentatively, it is important to remember that these images, with all their ambiguities, co-existed, and would have circulated simultaneously in the socio-cultural realms of early medieval /medieval eastern India. We can suggest then, that in so far as such representation

were generated by a specific social context, they may point to a relative fluidity of sexual roles in general, and gendered identities in particular.

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