

Tantra Works on the Krishna-Cult.

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Tantra works pertaining to Vaiṣṇava worship occupy quite an important position in the domain of Tantra literature. They deal with the worship of various forms and aspects of Viṣṇu and His incarnations, e. g. Viṣṇu, Nārāyaṇa, Rāma, Nṛsiṃha, Kṛṣṇa, and so on. While some of the works deal exclusively with one or more of these forms, there are others of a more comprehensive character, like the *Śāradātīlaka*, *Prapañchasāra* and *Tantrasāra*, which treat of them only incidentally. It is, however, to be regretted that the major portion of this extensive literature has not as yet seen the light of day and is known, sometimes only in name, to a narrow circle of scholars. A bird's-eye view of the section of this literature, which deals with the cult of Kṛṣṇa is proposed to be taken in the following pages. An idea of the vastness of the Tantra literature of the Vaiṣṇavas may be formed from an account of the Pañcharātra section of it as given by Otto Schrader in his introduction to the edition of the *Ahirbudhnyā-Saṃhitā*.

The cult of Viṣṇu—specially in the form of Kṛṣṇa—is immensely popular in Bengal, which is pre-eminently known as a stronghold of worshippers of Śakti—the Supreme Being conceived in the form of eternal energy. The deity is worshipped here according to directions laid down in the Tantras as well as

the Purānas. There are quite a good number of families in Bengal members of which, though not belonging to the order of Chaitanya, who is generally believed to have revived—if not introduced—Vashnavism in Bengal, are initiated for generations into the Tantra form of the worship of Kṛṣṇa. Some of the rites in connection with this worship, e. g. the *Rāsa* festival, is performed strictly in accordance with the injunctions of the Tantras. It is owing to this popularity that the literature relating to the cult is found to be preserved in works manuscripts of which are widely known principally in Bengal.

One of the most popular works of this cult is the *Gautamya Tantra*, which is quoted in the *Tantrasāra* of Kṛṣṇānanda (16th century). It deals with the details of the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. An edition of the work complete in 34 chapters has been published with a Bengali translation by the Basumati Press of Calcutta (1334 B. S.). The editions published in the *Tantrasaṅgraha* and *Sulabhatantraprakāśa* series are, however, complete in 32 chapters. A commentary of the work by Rādhāmohana is preserved, though in a fragmentary form, in two manuscripts belonging to the Vangiya Sāhitya Pariṣat of Calcutta. This Rādhāmohana seems to be identical with the famous Vaiṣṇava writer of the

same name and author of works like the *Kṛṣṇabhaktisudhāṛṇava*, *Kṛṣṇārchanachandrikā* and commentaries on the *Śuddhitattva* of Raghunandana and the *Nyāya-Sūtras* of Gautama. He is stated to have flourished during the early part of the nineteenth century and to have been a friend of the well-known Indologist Colebrooke.

The *Bṛhadgautamīya Tantra*, which is also referred to in the *Tantrasāra*, is a work of the same type as the *Gautamīya Tantra*. It does not, however, refer to Gautama and gives the line of teachers of the work as follows:—Śiva, Brahmā, Nārada.

Still another work referred to by Kṛṣṇānanda in his *Tantrasāra* is the *Sanatkumāra-Tantra*, manuscripts of which have been noticed by H. P. Shastri, Eggeling and the present writer. Hymns of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa are occasionally found to be associated with this work as also with works like the *Rāsa-Tantra* and the *Vaivasvata Tantra*, manuscripts of which are scarcely known.

Manuscripts stated to form part of a work called the *Kṛṣṇayāmala* have been reported from different places, e. g. Bikaner, Benares and Bengal. One manuscript deposited in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal contains what is called the *Chaitanyakalpa* portion of this work. The section deals with the Tantra form of worship of the great Vaiṣṇava preacher Chaitanya (15th century).* As a matter of fact, the work seems to be of a later origin. And it is not included in the list of Yāmālas (which are stated to be eight in number) quoted by Bhāskaraṛāya in his commentary on the *Nityaśoḍaśikāṛṇava*.

The *Rādhā-Tantra* is an interesting work. It depicts Kṛṣṇa as a worshipper

of the Divine Mother, who is stated to have been worshipped by Him in accordance with the rules of Tantra rituals and in the company of female companions in the person of Rādhā and others. The various incidents in his life are all represented as being connected with this worship. The boat in which he is described as having indulged in a mock altercation with the milkmaids who were crossing the river in it with their products is here identified with the goddess Kālī. The work, however, does not seem to be old. It has not been referred to by Kṛṣṇānanda in his *Tantrasāra* or by Rāghava Bhaṭṭa in his commentary on the *Śradātīlaka*, though a number of other works dealing with Kṛṣṇa-worship have been referred to by them in the section devoted to the treatment of the process of the worship of Kṛṣṇa. It is reported to have been referred to in the *Śaktiratnākara*, which also to all appearances is a comparatively later work. MSS of this work, which deals with the details of Śākta worship, have been described by R. L. Mitra, Aufrecht and Hrishikesh Shastri.

The work might have a Bengal origin. MSS of it deposited in the libraries of Bengal are all in the Bengali script, though MSS of other works from different parts of India and in various scripts are also found in them. Of the few manuscripts reported from outside Bengal details as regards script are lacking. The reference to the *Naukā-khaṇḍa* (or *Tarī-khaṇḍa* as it is called here) incident of the life of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, which is so popular in the Vaiṣṇava works of medieval Bengal, might not quite unlikely be due to its composition in Bengal.

Another little known work which describes the story of Kṛṣṇa and His greatness and lays down the rules for His worship is the *Maheśwara-Tantra*, the only known manuscript of the last part of which, complete in 51 chapters,

* The topic is found also in a number of other works of the Tantra class, e. g. *Isana-Saṁhita* assigned to the *Kulārṇava Urdhvamnaya-Saṁhita Gudhavatara* section of the *Viśvasara-Tantra*, *Chaitanyakalpa* section of the *Brahmayāmala*, etc.

is found in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.

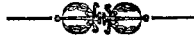
Besides these works of the original Tantra class (which consists of works of unknown authors in the form of interlocution between divine beings) there are other works of unknown dates and authorship based on the former class of works and dealing with the rules of worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

One of the earliest* and most authoritative works of this type is the *Śāradātīlaka* of Lakṣmaṇa Deśika. It devotes three full chapters (15–17) to the description of the worship of the various forms of Viṣṇu. One of these chapters (17. 82ff) deals with the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa.

The *Tantrasāra* of Kṛṣṇānanda, the most popular of the Tantric compilations of Bengal, has sections describing exhaustively the details of the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa according to the Tantra form.

Of works pertaining exclusively to Vaiṣṇava rituals, the *Kṛṣṇārchanachandrikā* of Rādhāmohana appears to be a hitherto unknown work. It deals with topics like initiation, details of the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa, etc. and describes a number of ceremonial rites to be performed by a Vaiṣṇava, e. g. on Janmāṣṭamī, Rādhāṣṭamī and the Rāsayātrā day. The author is stated to have consulted various works before he compiled the work. The only known manuscript of the work is deposited in the library of the Vāṅgīya Sāhitya Pariṣad of Calcutta.

Reference should be made to one more work—the *Sādhanaḍḍīpikā* of Nārāyaṇa Bhaṭṭa. It describes the details of the worship of Śrī Kṛṣṇa. In the beginning of his work the author refers in respectful terms to Śankara, who hailed from Kānyakubja (modern Kanauj). A manuscript of the work in Uriya characters complete in seven chapters is in the library of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.



Joy in my breast.

Walk slow, walk slow, He is in the vale;
Speak gently and low, He is in the dale.

Hush ! silence ! no noise, He descends from the hill,
Lo, mark, oh boys, He walks by the rill.

Sweet sonorous sound comes from the flute
And I expectant with the harmony of the lute.

From North and from South, from East and from West
There is radiance spreading, and joy in my breast.

—MadhavaNag



* The earliest and most authoritative of these works, the *Prapanchasara*, ascribed to the great Sankaracharya, however, does not deal with the worship of Krishna, though it has several chapters on Vaiṣṇava worship.