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The sculpture reproduced on the end paper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From Nagarjunakonda. 2nd century A.D.

**Courtesy**: National Museum, New Delhi.
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A Life Sketch of the Poet

Bhakta Charana Das, a major poet of medieval Oriya and a celebrated name in Oriya literature, was born around the year 1729 and lived up to 1813. One cannot be very exact about the years because there is no evidence about them. There is some difference of opinion about when Bhakta Charana was born and when he actually passed away. One has to derive the dates from mostly secondary hints and allusions. Yet, though scholars have differed about the exact years of Bhakta Charana's birth and passing away, they have a broad agreement as regards the period he belonged to. Bhakta Charana was born roughly during the decades of the eighteenth century, lived quite long till a very old age and passed away sometime in the first decades of the nineteenth. He was also a contemporary of both Dinakrushna Das, the writer of Rasakallola and of Upendra Bhanja, the king of kings in the realm of Oriya ornate poetry. There is an inference which says that Bhakta Charana came slightly after Dinakrushna and perhaps slightly preceded or was contemporary to Upendra Bhanja.

Bhakta Charana was a name donned by the poet by virtue of his initiation. His family name was Bairagi Charana Pattanayak, which suggests that he came from a Kayastha lineage. Bairagi Charana is the name which Bhakta Charana has used in the colophons of cantos in Mathura Mangala, his magnum opus, though he seems to have given it up in his other works. In the former he has used both the names simultaneously, almost interchangeably. Bhakta Charana was born in a Kayastha family in the village Sana Padara in the neighbourhood of Khurda in the district of Puri in coastal Orissa. He has never, in his works, told us anything about his parents, as is the way with those who renounce the world and take to a monastic order. It is said that later one of the members of Bhakta Charana's family had the credit of earning the title of Mahapatra from a ruling chief of the locality.
and since then the family members have been known as Mahapatras, not Pattanayaks.

Bhakta Charana had his early education in the most traditional way. The curriculum included simple arithmetic and book-keeping. After the alphabet, the children were introduced straight to the more popular kayyas and song compilations. Some of them were in Sanskrit besides the mother tongue. After the elementary level, those who aspired for higher learning had to sit with teachers of Sanskrit and go in for further erudition. Rote learning was of course a mark of the highest excellence. Those fewer again who aspired for the king's court and his patronage had to take learning more seriously and delve into the wider areas of philosophical and poetic studies. The works of Bhakta Charana do suggest his close acquaintance with Sanskrit poetics, grammar and the rules of the poetic craft. Besides, he had thoroughly studied almost all the reputed works existing in his time including the Shrimadhhagabata and the Haribansa both in Oriya, written by Jagannatha Das and Achyutananda Das respectively.

Bhakta Charana had also studied Ayurveda, the science of ancient Indian medicine. It seems he was a skilled practitioner in that science and treated afflicted persons. He had quite a reputation in treating somewhat successfully difficult diseases like asthma, tuberculosis and leprosy. He had himself written two treatises on the science, based on his own experience as a healer, but the manuscripts are yet to be traced out. In one of his works, Bhakta Charana has depicted no less a person than Shri Chaitanya as a healer of ailments, mundane and otherwise, and his use of appropriate allegories only proves how well-versed he was in the field.

Bhakta Charana headed a monastery which had four sister monasteries under its management, not very far from one another. Needless to say, these monasteries depended to a large extent on the patronage of the local kings and chiefs. A story says that in the beginning, the poet was living in one of these sister monasteries, the one situated at a place called Dasapalla. Dasapalla was ruled by a feudatory chief, who
patronized the monastery. Things were all right as long as Bhakta Charana was in the good books of the chief. But unfortunately, there was some difference between the king and the poet. It seems the poet could not comply with a request made to him by the king and thus did not oblige him. No one knows what the nature of the royal request was, but it was enough to incur the king's displeasure which necessitated Bhakta Charana's shifting his residence from Dasapalla to another sister monastery. There, of course, he had better luck. There at Sanapadara, he had two monasteries, one of which was built with the help and patronage of Sm. Mukta Dei, the sister of the then Gajapati king ruling at Puri. Mukta Dei, it is said, was a disciple of Bhakta Charana and proved her allegiance to the teacher by building a seat of worship for him with the necessary land-grant and other things.

The story, however, does not end there. It tells us that though Bhakta Charana did start his monastic life at the new place, Sunakhala, he was longing back to the deity which he had been worshipping at Dasapalla, his previous seat. Evidently he had a new deity at this second place which he did worship and to whom he could offer his oblations; but he could not reconcile himself to the fact that he had left his more familiar previous one at Dasapalla. The memory of the deity haunted him all the time and caused him unbearable remorse. He spent his days most unhappily and as a Vaishnava in anguish, became restless at heart. This new place of his residence seemed to have no meaning to him without the deity he had been so fondly worshipping at the other place. The infatuation got the better of him and he found hardly any way to overcome it.

And something happened in the meantime. The departure of the poet from the kingdom further infuriated the king of Dasapalla and in a rage, he ordered the deity to be taken away from the temple and thrown into a river. That was perhaps the last thing a king could do. But that brought things to a solution. The legend says that on the same night the deity appeared before Bhakta Charana in a dream, told him where He was and commanded him to rescue Him from there. With
great joy and gratitude, Bhakta Charana did exactly as he was advised and got the deity back to him, installed where he now wanted Him to be. The deity remains there even today. The king must have come to know about the recovery and reinstallation of the deity and no one knows if he did anything again in retaliation. The legend, as all genuine legends, is completely silent about it.

Bhakta Charana must have been a very busy person. About his outward appearances it is told that he was a short-statured, lean and thin person and had sparse hair on his head. He had the landed estate of the monastery to look into and manage and see to the routine management of the deity and the temple. It seems he had hardly any time to go out and make frequent pilgrimages. Yet, it being a practice among the Vaishnavas to visit at least the four dhamas in India, Bhakta Charana visited Shri Badrinath in the Himalayas, Shri Dwarakanath at Dwarka in the West, Shri Brundavana, the seat of the great Lord's Leela and Shri Jagannatha at Puri in Orissa. A Vaishnava is not recognized as a Vaishnava among other Vaishnavas in Orissa if he had not undertaken the said pilgrimages and his hospitality is not accepted by the latter. It seems to have continued till today. Bhakta Charana's visit to the holy places all over India must have given him abundant experience and must have served as a very enriching factor in his life as a poet. The vivid description of Brundavana in Bhakta Charana's Manashiksha is a case in point.

Bhakta Charana died in 1813. He was an octagenarian by that time. It is traditionally believed in the Indian Bhakti lore that men of God had, as a rule, a premonitory vision about their death. There is also the same association in Bhakta Charana's case. It is said that about a week before his passing away, he left his monastery at Sunakhala, with a few others from the village for Puri. The entire way was covered by Samkirtana, chanting and singing His name and His praise. Puri had been the place where Shri Chaitanya and his associates in the faith had spent many years in the early sixteenth century. They did not live together and had different
places of residence. They came together when they had serious discourses as well as collective chanting and singing sessions. Bhakta Charana once arrived at Puri and went to stay in one of these monasteries sanctified by those old associations. There he breathed his last in 1813 on the 11th day of the second fortnight in the month of Kartika.

Bairagi Charana Pattanayak christened as Bhakta Charana Das had renounced the world and joined the monastic order. He had been duly initiated into that order by a guru. In his works, he mentions more than once that one Madhavacharya was his guru and that he belonged to his Sampradaya (order or cult). This has led a few scholars of literature to believe that Bhakta Charana belonged to the order of the great Madhavacharya, who along with Nimbarka has been ascribed the credit of having propounded the dualistic interpretation of the Vedanta philosophy. The Vaishnava scholars however have refuted the inference and submitted instead that Madhava-charya should actually mean Madhavadas Goswami from whom Bhakta Charana had his initiation into the Vaishnava order. It may also, they go to add, allude to Shri Madhavendra Puri, a reputed name in the lineage of initiators and teachers held in high esteem by the Vaishnavas exclusively following Shri Chaitanya.
The Works of Bhakta Charana

Bhakta Charana Das did not write very much, but whatever has been discovered till now has earned him a distinguished place in Oriya literature. *Mathura Mangala* is the best known and most appreciated among his works. Besides that we have *Manashiksha*, *Manabodha Chautisha* and also *Kalakalebara Kanhai* written in chautisha style. *Gopamangala* is another of his works the manuscript of which is yet to be traced. It has already been mentioned that his two treatises on ancient Indian medical practice are still untraced.

His written works reveal that Bhakta Charana had not only studied the *Bhagabata* and the *Bhagabad-gita* but also had access to the sacred *Puranas* and the *Samhitas*. Some of these were then undoubtedly available in Oriya versions also. Besides these, poet Jayadeva's *Geeta Govinda* must have been a widely read and widely sung book during his time. The Gaudia sect of Vaishnavism had also its treatises both in Bengali and in Sanskrit. Not of less importance were the books on Sanskrit poetics including the *Suhitya Darpana*, written by Biswanatha Mahapatra of Orissa. Bhakta Charana, as a writer, appeared when ornate poetry was very popular. The literary firmament in Orissa during his time bore a galaxy of brilliant talents to the magnitude of Dinakrushna Das, the author of *Rasakallola*, and also Upendra Bhanja who is now exalted as Kavi Samrata, the greatest and the most celebrated among the kavya writers of the reeti age. Whatever he wrote bears the stamp of that heritage.

In terms of denomination, Bhakta Charana belonged to the Gaudia flank in that canvas called Vaishnavism. It is thus very natural that the Krishna legend would preponderate as a theme with much that he wrote. Shri Chaitanya was worshipped by his Gaudia followers as an incarnation of Lord Krishna and Bhakta Charana was no exception to that. But *Mathura Mangala*, as a literary piece, is much more than a mere depiction of the Krishna legend. We shall discuss
Mathura Mangala later in detail in this book. But it should suffice to say at the moment that Bhakta Charana has elevated the legend almost to the height of a folk narrative excellent as poetry and also brilliant as a special treatise on unconditional devotion, a devotion which does not expect anything in return, not even liberation from the travails and trammels of this world in order to escape to a heaven where one enjoys permanent bliss.

Manashiksha is a treatise dealing with the essential tenets of the Chaitanya cult and faith. It is written in a lucid style in two-line stanzas of nine letters each. Available literature says that it was Jagannatha of the Panchasakha group in Orissa belonging to the early decades of the sixteenth century who had used this nine-letter line style in his Oriya rendering of the Bhagabata. Popular since that time it is even today followed by many who write on popular themes for the lay readers. Manashiksha, of course, bears the frame of a catechism, precious and valuable to those who follow the order. But in respect of literary perfection and imaginativeness, it stands no match to Bhakta Charana's very first score, Mathura Mangala.

Manabodha Chautisha is a song written in a tone to bring consolation and seem to show a way to those who think that the world is too much with them and wish to assure themselves that there is an escape. That even is no small a solace. One does surmise that the chautisha was not written in order to tempt more and more people away of this world. The very words and the foremost appeal they seek to communicate plead for renouncing the world that is so transitory and does seldom mean anything but a routine sojourn in mud and flesh which has no significance when one begins to brood over the permanent promises that the heaven has customarily stood for in most of the world religions. One can compare the Manabodha Chautisha with Shankaracharya's Mohamudgera and even with the Bhajagovindam hymns. All these have inspired many people in India to arrive at a working katharsis giving trust to people to live more meaningfully in the world always reminding themselves nevertheless how paltry and evanescent this world really is.
A chautisha borrowed from traditional Indian literature comprises of thirty-four stanzas of rhymed alphabet, stretching from 'ka' to 'ksha' through the thirty-four letters. The first specimen of a chautisha yet available in Oriya literature is the Kalasa chautisha by Batsa Das, written quite a few centuries before the Manabodha. Many people in rural Orissa, the folk who are illiterate have held the latter chautisha so dear to their hearts and have derived so much raison d'être to live a life in this world that they have thought it a privilege to get by heart all the thirty-four stanzas. This phenomenon proves that lyricism and the emotional incumbents have always had a greater appeal to people in a poem or a song than the philosophical messages conveyed through it.

It would have been full justice to have rendered here the entire chautisha in English translation. Of course no translation will ever be able to communicate the sweet and infecting subtleties of the original. The poet has been completely oblivious to the so-called sophistications of conscious poetry-making and perhaps that is why has come out in his best expressions. Very seldom has a poem giving arguments for world negation sounded so much affirmative and enticing by its poetic persuasiveness and vigour. The poem lures the readers to read and recite it over and over again and in the process the readers are caught unawares and discover that they have now got it by heart. Space will not permit us here to reproduce the entire poem in English translation. Hence we ought to be satisfied with a couple of stanzas only. For example, the first two stanzas, each line of which begins with the letters 'ka' and 'kha' respectively, ought more or less to convey a message like this:

Hearken to my words, Oh, the mind that is me, let us go and have a darshan of the deity at Puri, the black-faced one! What has made you to count so greedily upon all this temporary things that you have amassed around you as yours? Are you going to take all these with you when you have to depart from this world and are no more? And do you know what will happen to this body of yours after you die? Dogs and jackals will then be fighting over the dismembered rib bones of your
body in order to munch on them. Now, you, oblivious of the end consequences, must have a soft bed on which you must lay your body and give it comfort, a body which will decompose and begin to stink the moment you are gone.

And the two stanzas with the letter 'bha' and 'me':
This your body, a fragile and incapable boat only, no one has ever been successful in getting across the ocean that this life in the world is, with the help of that boat. God, whom you seek, is accessible and very near to bhava, but very very far and inaccessible to those who have not cultivated that. Bhakta Das submits that this life here really counts for nothing. This world is only a falsehood and an illusion. There is nothing and nobody here one can depend upon. Nobody has come here to stay for ever and you shall also die one day. Now you are bereaved and weep for somebody who has died. How fast do you forget that you too shall also die one day!

The remedy lies in shunning all this and seeking with all one's heart Him who is real fashioner of all this world-play, the master-ordainer of all our destiny. He has been variously described by Bhakta Charana. At places He is Jagannatha, the dweller at Nilagiri, the blue mountain, meaning Puri. At others, He is also Govinda, Hari, Madhava and Shrikrushna. Only in one instance He is Shri Guru and yet in another, strangely, He is the Shunya Devata which is extolled as residing in the body itself. These epithets have been used so interchangeably and with so much ease that one is tempted to infer that when Bhakta Charana composed Manabodha Chautisha he had not cramped himself into any religious order or denomination in order to sing of God and speak of redemption from this world. The thoughts propounded in the chautisha do not point out to any particular path absolutely proclaimed as the only right one among the many which are therefore inferior and less sure. On the other hand they fall in line with the archetypal Indian way of world renunciation. Needless to say, it is therefore that Manabodha Chautisha, as a poem of deep introspection, has attracted people from all quarters. People belonging to all denominations yet with a longing that is not content to take this world as sufficient and
gropes for other things. Even its apparent spirit of world-negation has been to some not an appeal to negation only; it has been instrumental in engendering a sense of dissatisfaction at the little the usual and ordinary man tends to remain contented with, goading him to think that there is more, an ever-increasing more, to be cherished and lived for.

Kalakulebura Kanhai is also a chautisa. Manabodha Chautisa has stanzas of four lines each while this has stanzas of two. Both the chautishas can be sung each with a vani or tune which has been used by many others after Bhakta Charana and these still continue to be popular folk tunes. The theme is of course the very popular Krishna theme and refers to only one occasion from Krishna's life. It is when Krishna had to leave for Mathura following a summons from the demon king Kamsa to Krishna's father, the milkman King Nanda, to send Krishna and his elder brother Balaram to his court. It is also the same theme in Mathura Mangala where it has been used in a grander way. Krishna as is said in the original Bhagabata story was the apple of the eye for the milkmaids with whom he had his many exploits and adventures. The gopis (the milkmaids) would not allow Krishna leave them and leave them in utter langour. That would be indeed a great disaster as far as the gopis were concerned and hence they thought they would block the way and would not let Krishna's chariot leave for Mathura. It was true that Krishna was leaving for Mathura only for a couple of days. But that was no solace for the love-hungry gopis.

Kalakulebura Kanhai begins by conveying the sorrowful tidings that Kanhai or Krishna of black complexion along with Rohini's son Balaram, his brother, is about to leave for Mathura. The first stanza beginning with 'Ka' in its two lines calls upon all the fellow milkmaids to come out of their houses and watch them leaving. The black and fair complexions of Krishna and Balaram sitting together on the chariot suggest to the poet's imagination the images of Ganga and Jumana descending together from the heavens. Then the narrative recalls episodes from Krishna's life while he had been here at home, how he sucked up Putana's life while she was giving him a suck and also how he had lifted the entire Gobardhana
hill when it rained incessantly and threatened a catastrophe for the whole populace. As sons of the milkmen's families, the boys had to wander livelong days in the forest with the herds of cattle. A couplet invokes the gopis to thus come out and block the chariot's way and not let it move farther. A gopi fondly cherishes to decorate Krishna's face with the paste of sandalwood and frankly confesses no damsel will ever be able to hold up her continence once she has had a look at the most beautiful face. The departure is too sad to bear up and Jashoda, Krishna's mother, would surely die seeing her son going away from her. Not that only Jashoda would die, the event would spell death also to all the young milkmaids who had ever an association with Krishna. Because Krishna was not the son of a single mother only, he had been the very life of all the gopis.

The descriptions go on from letter to letter, describing child Krishna at his best with the traditional allegories and epithets. A line jealously states that one will never find a son in any other family so beautiful as Krishna and that it was surely a bad day that has dawned for the entire Gopapura that it had to part with him. The gopi finds him all covered with flowers, looking as graceful as it could be. Suddenly she feels a mild tremor on her left eye brow and takes this good omen for a possibility that Krishna would grant her a special privilege and cast a look exclusively at her. A climax comes to the chain of eulogies when we come to the letter 'ha', the last but one in the alphabet and the gopi proclaims that she and the entire horde of gopies like her would never give up Krishna's company, would always aspire to sit on his lap as his paramour even though they would be condemned as unchaste. And the last couplet declares that the gopis have pledged to shed all shame and all fear in order to reflect Krishna's image on the mirror of their consciousness, heart and what not, and Bhakta Charana hastens to add that it is therefore that he too remembers Him and contemplates upon Him day and night without a lapse.

Manabodha Chautisha and the Kalakalebara Kanhai are both chautishas and have been composed for the lay devotee and the lay singer. One is in no way surprised to see
that the two chautishas have maintained their popularity through the intervening several centuries and many people, chiefly in the villages have only adored to get as many stanzas of the two chautishas by heart as possible. Long before Orissa had its modern schools imparting formal education to children, there were traditional schools in the villages, entirely sponsored and managed by voluntary teachers, of course patronized by a few families in the village who thought education was a useful commodity and gave one a more respectful go in society. There were not many in a village who had had an introduction to the three R's, but nevertheless an educated person did enjoy a special status in the eyes of the many who did not have a schooling. The children who sat with those voluntary teachers eking out a living as they were extending some knowledge in the elementary arts of reading and writing and a bit of arithmetic, were deemed to have qualified themselves as real pupils when they passed out of the schools to enter their life if they could read the Oriya Bhagabata as well as sing from memory the lines from Manabodha Chautisha and the Kalakalebara Kanhai, along with a few other texts. That is really significant and should indicate how immensely popular these chautishas were and both of them had been written by Bhakta Charana. One cannot say that there was a dearth of other books to be used at this level. Apart from the more serious things, there were the innumerable other chautishas by apparently more celebrated poets and authors. The comparatively more celebrated were in the kings' courts with a visible royal patronage. Some others had their seats of activity around Puri and its neighbourhood because that led more easily to better publicity bringing in greater fame. But Bhakta Charana was far away from all that din and glamour, managing a small monastery of his own and writing at his leisure, almost as a hobby. He was anything but a prolific writer. Yet it is surprising to see that almost everything he wrote, the four works of his that we now know of have all stood out to be remarkable items of creation and their popularity has not waned even at the teeth of years. People have all come to love
Bhakta Charana as an author and a singer of the Lord’s glory, as a man of deep contemplation who has so candidly brought home the millions to the eternal truths about the permanent and impermanent in our lives here upon earth.

Yet, one cannot afford to place Manabodha Chautisha and Kalakalebara Kanhai at par with each other. Their author being the same, the language expressions are of course of the same calibre and have the same candour and lucidity about them. But they belong to two different worlds. Manabodha Chautisha, at least in its philosophical appeal, belongs to the Indian great tradition and compared to it, Kalakalebara Kanhai to the Indian little tradition. No dishonouring is meant of course to the latter when such a statement is being made. Every culture, according to the social and cultural anthropologists, has a great tradition as well as a little tradition. The great tradition denotes the general world-view cherished by a particular culture. That seems to be the main theme which has percolated the entire structure and manifested itself through the many variations. The variations are the little traditions. Adoration of Krishna and the rich store-house of literature that has cropped up in India from almost time immemorial nevertheless belong to the little tradition, because it has been only one of the expressions of the Indian great tradition. The great tradition is the age-long Indian attitude to life and to world, that dissatisfaction to look beyond what is fleeting to the more permanent and the essential. The apparent and less permanent ones are the denominations and the cults. Kalakalebara Kanhai has been woven around a cult, the cult of Krishna. But Manabodha Chautisha is beyond all cults in its appeal and in its purview. It can be sung by people irrespective of their denominational adherences. But people who do not belong to Krishna cult and Krishna worship may not feel that attracted to Kalakalebara Kanhai in contrast to those who are devoted to the Krishna cult.

But all will be equally attracted to the two chautishas as songs and pieces of literature. Only, we can perhaps infer that Bhakta Charana wrote his Manabodha Chautisha much
earlier than when he set himself to write *Kalakalebura Kanhai*. During the *Manabodha* phase, he was simply an aspirant deeply dissatisfied with the drab insufficiencies of ordinary life. He could not be content with what that life did give him and was aspiring for more permanent moorings that could give a real meaning to all that one lives as a life. He had not yet come to belong to any particular denomination. Hence *Manabodha* gives vent chiefly to an inward directed attitude when what one has been is all put into a melting pot in favour of something more and something else one would like to be. What one would like to be is of course very dubious and uncertain at that level. But the longing is undoubtedly genuine and sincere and that justifies it. *Kalakalebura Kanhai* was written in a later phase, when Bhakta Charana had already made a choice and had belonged to the Krishna cult and the Chaitanya fold. The Krishna worshipper in him got the better of his godward emotions to write this chautisha with one of the Krishna episodes as the theme. Thus to the receptive reader, *Manabodha* will work as an invitation toward self-enlightenment while *Kalakalebura* will perhaps offer him much less, an invitation to a particular form of worship and adoration.
Two Major Works

Mathura Mangala

Mathura Mangala is the magnum opus of Bhakta Charana. It is also the most voluminous. One cannot for that matter claim that his other works, though much smaller in bulk, are in any way inferior to Mathura Mangala. These may be smaller in bulk, but we cannot claim that they have had less impact. We have already had a glimpse of Manabodha Chantisha as well as the yet smaller Kalakalehara Kanhai. Each of Bhakta Charana's works including even the catechismic Manashiksha is unique in its appeal and must have been written because of different inspirations. Or, one may also infer that they mark the various stages in Bhakta Charana's religious and spiritual development and hence suggest his attitude towards himself as a bhakta, towards the world as a place of God's Leela, and also towards God, the Master of that Leela. Mathura Mangala is a kavya and has been written in the kavya style for that matter and Bhakta Charana's other works are not kavyas. But all his works except Manashiksha are rich as poetry, giving expression to the moods and stances of the poet with so much spontaneity and ease and yet with so much mastery over words, metaphors and imageries.

Mathura Mangala depicts a story which has been so popular in the total gamut of the Krishna legend. the departure of Krishna and Balaram to Mathura at the behest of Kamsa, the king of Mathura. Kamsa, ironically, was Krishna's maternal uncle. Krishna was born to Devaki, Kamsa's sister. Born to Devaki by a divine dispensation and stealthily taken away by Devaki's husband to Gopapura, a village or a principality in the neighbourhood he was brought up by Nanda and Yashoda. Nanda was the local ruler, a sort of a chieftain among the milkmen families, swearing allegiance to Kamsa. Krishna, though a child, was no less than an incarnation of God and hence showed signs of his extra-human deeds, lifting on the tip of a finger of his hand the huge Govardhana hill in
order to save his kinsfolk from the devastations of an excessive rain. He had also done to death in his ingenious ways all the Asuras Kamsa had deputed from Mathura to get rid of him by killing him. Another legend said that Kamsa had sent his own sister Putana to give suck to child Krishna and thus bring an end to his life with the poison that she had put into the milk of her breast. Krishna, a child of only a few days, of course proved the better of the woman by sucking off her life along with the milk. Kamsa had thought that he could do away with the child by this simple device but things went the other way. These episodes about the exploits of child Krishna have been very elaborately dealt with in the Bhagabata. These exactly have inspired the Vaishnava poets all over India, and the result has been the innumerable kavyas which have so much enriched Indian literature. The Oriya Vaishnava poets have also aptly taken up the legends as themes and produced kavyas which are excellent pieces of literature.

Orissa, as a cultural-geographical unit did have its share in this cult of Krishna worship. Krishna, of course has two very distinctive identities in the total gamut of the Indian heritage, the child Krishna of his early days and Krishna as depicted in the Bhagabud-gita proclaiming spiritual wisdom to Arjuna in the battle of Kurukshetra. These two roles of Krishna, though the legendary hero is of course the very same person, have inspired two different cults in India almost from the very old times. The two cults have seldom intended to come near each other and get bound together in a sort of synthesis. The two varieties of worship have as it were represented two very different temperaments, two different attitudes altogether. And these two attitudes represented by two camps of cult-worshippers have not very much tried to reconcile the one with the other. That is strange, but that is very true. The Bhagabata has two of its books, the tenth and the eleventh, devoted to the two Krishna images, though the latter does not have any allusion to the Bhagabadgita. But it is curious to observe that though the Vaishnavas irrespective of the many shades and sorts do accept the Bhagabata as their very first book and the most sacred one, they have always seemed to be divided as far as their cults matter. The child
Krishna has yet to be reconciled with the Krishna at the battle of Kurukshetra. The Vaishnava faith, especially the one belonging to the Chaitanya model, has had all its obsessions with the former and it seems, most of the literature that the Krishna cult has produced, both of the creative and the catechismic varieties have chosen to dwell only with child Krishna, sidetracking His other image by almost not mentioning it.

Bhakta Charana did not have to choose one from the two images of Krishna when he decided to write Mathura Mangala. The choice had already been made, because he was a follower of the Gaudiya variety of Vaishnavism of which Shri Chaitanya was the espouser and the propounder. One should not be surprised therefore not to come across the other image of Krishna in the book being discussed here. Of course, it so happens, almost always that when a bhakta happens to be a poet and wants to prove his credentials as a bhakta through his creation in poetry the poet more often than not gets the better of the bhakta and the cult-workshopper in him. That lapse, if it can at all be called a lapse, in Bhakta Charana makes Mathura Mangala a beautiful piece of literature, raises the book to the level of superb poetry. And, as one begins to go through the descriptions and depictions, one very quickly forgets that one is going through words and lines that have sought to prove a cult. There is undoubtedly an elevation, a very spontaneous transcending the boundary lines. The deepest and the sincerest appeal of the work ceases to remain cultish. That is what every sincere literature virtually does and Mathura Mangala has very aptly done it.

Mathura Mangala consists of thirty chapters, or chhandas, as they have been called by the poet. A chhanda or a chapter written in verse is one that can be sung. There has been a regular chhanda tradition in Orissa, perhaps long before what a person wrote had to be written down in order to be read. Verses were sung and had to prove their real acceptability by that. After this first test perhaps, somebody or the poet himself put them down on palm leaves. These chhandas were also called Vanis. That will mean when a particular poem became very much popular and everybody began to love
and appreciate it as well as the tune in which it was being sung, another writer when he wanted to compose a poem of his following the tune of the first one, he simply stated that his was to be sung in the vani of the erstwhile famous poem, without caring to mention the name of the tune or the raga, that was a very interesting feature in Oriya literature in its early days. What is more, these vanis have continued even to our times and thus immortalized some of the creations of those times. There are poets who still use those vanis when they write and to prove that it has a relevance, there is also a corresponding world of readers, singers and appreciators.

Bhakta Charana has likewise used quite a number of these vanis in Mathura Mangala. 'Brutta' is another word synonymously used in Oriya with vani. Some of the vanis or bruttas Bhakta Charana has used in this book are: Kalasa vani, Dutai Baramasi vani, Asadha Shukla vani, Biprasingha Chautisha vani, Madhupa Chautisha brutta, Bahuda Basanta brutta, Abakasha brutta and the Banabasa Chautisha brutta. Besides, Bhakta Charana has made use of the various ragas also. These ragas are: Bangalashri, Chakrakeli, Kamodi, Bilasamanjari, Kali, Ahari, Baradi, Kalahamsa Kedara, Kafi, Kalyana Ahari, Kedara Kamodi, Kanada, Deshaksha, Kaushika, Panchama Baradi and Kalyana Ahari, to mention some of them only. In more than one areas of cultural contact and contamination. Orissa has since the beginning of culture-migration acted as a bridge between the north and the south in India, between the Aryan and the Dravidian heritages. This has happened in the realms of music also. Imbibing very much from the classical music tradition from the north and the Karnataka tradition from the south and making them meet, mutually accommodate and be synthesized upon its own base, a very receptive one. Orissa has evolved in course of the centuries what is now called the Odisi music. Several healthy and creative permutations and combinations have been allowed to take place and Orissa has become richer in that very process. The names of some of the ragas referred to above very clearly bear the imprints of those amalgamations. Bhakta Charana and many other verse-writers of his like down to the nineteenth century have freely used those ragas. Even today,
right at the last leg of the twentieth century, most of the poems written for the consumption of children, even those written by poets who will never use them when writing for adults do take to those ragas. Every illiterate person in Orissa, together with hordes and millions of literates, even today, are able to sing those ragas as soon as they come across them in the books of verses available to them.

The gopis would not allow Krishna and Balaram to leave for Mathura. The father of the two adorables, Nanda, was a king no doubt, but he was king only of a very small principality. He was a vassal to Kamsa who was the mightier one. The latter had every right to summon anyone from among his subjects and the orders had to be obeyed. Hence king Nanda had no other alternative but to abide by the orders. Moreover, there was a family explanation also. Kamsa was no other than a maternal uncle to the children and hence, though Nanda had reasons to sense danger in thus handing over Krishna and Balaram to Kamsa, there was no limit to speculation about what odds would happen as a result of this handing over. Nanda just could not say no. The gopis, on the other hand, had no obligations for Kamsa. They loved the two children, and especially the younger one, Krishna, who had come in the long run to fill so much in their lives, in their thought and concerns. Krishna was the very apple of their eyes. And that was what only mattered. This is the essential tension with which the poet starts in Mathura Mangala. The instigations of the day-to-day world so much governed by law and authority and the obligation which love, powerful love calls for, and the conflicts of a situation and of the persons in that situation - this is the starting theme. With the Krishna legend serving the base, with the entire bhakti movement as the background which provide the relevant horizons and with the whole Vaishnava history to provide the necessary colours and in the hands of one of the master poetry-makers in Oriya literature, Bhakta Charana who is also a devout and dedicated bhakta, what has been produced is Mathura Mangala, acclaimed and appreciated by all who go through it. And mainly because of this work, Bhakta Charana continues to occupy an esteemed place in the hearts of legions of Oriya readers.
We shall now enter straight into the book itself and deal with the chapters one by one, trying to understand the poet, Bhakta Charana, through the particular stances and nuances to which he has given impression in his depiction of a legend and its episodes, which were already so familiarly known in India's religious lore. In most of the Oriya books written around Bhakta Charana's time, the invocation in the beginning of a book is invariably to Lord Jagannatha, the presiding paramount deity of Orissa. *Mathura Mangala* does not begin with anything like that. The Gaudiya Vaishnavas of Orissa have not traditionally recognized Jagannatha as an entity in their list of invocations and Bhakta Charana, every true to the denomination he belonged to, had to follow the tradition. Krishna, instead, is the idol of his invocations. "Hail to Govinda, the most adored in Gokula, the younger brother of Balaram and the slayer of the demon Kamsa, etc." - is how the book begins with. He is seated on Garuda, the redeemer from all the hells, the Karanasarira or the primordial cause and substance of which all created substances have been formed. He is the one who is both rupa and arupa, both the source and the emanations, always assuming a body for the good of the world's creatures. Bhakta Charana says that he is already very tired of this world and its ways and wants to seek an emancipation from all that by borrowing a few things from the Krishna episode as described in the tenth book of the *Bhagabuta* and as narrated there by Shuka, the sage, for the benefit of king Pariksheeta and putting them down to poetry. Using a comparison with which he was so closely associated, Bhakta Charana declares that the legend and the life of Krishna is as it were an ocean of nectar which is the only antidote and medicine to the disease caused by the sins of the Kaliyuga. The poet begs of Krishna's favour and grace so that he can sing of the latter's life in poetry and rhyme. Krishna, the Lord, as the poet sings and entreats, should be seated on the pedestal of his heart, use him as an instrument and give him the appropriate lines.

Bhakta Charana takes the readers to the time when the demon Kamsa had become all-powerful and all-tyrannical
upon earth, who subdued all the other rulers and ruled supreme like an absolute tyrant. He was a menace and a terror to brahmans and the sacred cows. The degree of his oppressions moved even the gods in heaven and, as has always happened in a time of great stress and helplessness like this, they approached Lord Vishnu in His celestial abode and prayed that He please assume an Avatar and take birth on earth to get rid of the menace. And, as it has always happened whenever the gods have approached him with a prayer as this, Vishnu revealed to them to their great relief that He would before long be born as a son of Devaki and Vasudeva and grow up to kill the Asura. And so it happened and Krishna was born. The familiar story about how the newly born child was transferred to safety and under what circumstances and what all happened during the first years after the birth, has been elaborately narrated in the Bhagabata and Bhakta Charana has of course taken the clue from these, adding his own emphasis, understandably.

After Kamsa came to know that Krishna was alive and safe not very far away from his palace, he deputed his agents to kill him and solve the problem of his being killed by Krishna for good. The attempts failed adding only insult to the Asura's anger and fear. It seems he was also scared a bit beacuse of the inability of his deputies who were done away with by child Krishna. Kamsa consulted his minister and told him his own design he wished to execute next, summoning the two obstinate brothers to his palace and getting rid of them himself. And as Kamsa proceeds on to explain the need of doing something really effective. Bhakta Charana, the poet, has so aptly put the following words and allegories into his mouth : "This is verily almost the same thing that happens when you have a bodily ailment to grapple with. An ailment when it first appears seems to be so insignificant and as it were of no concern at all. You seem to connive at it and do not take any precaution against it. And thus connived at and neglected, it aggravates and ends by becoming fatal. When a tiny bit of a cloud appears in the sky, one takes that for being of no consequence at all. One thinks that it will be blown away by the winds and that there is absolutely no fear of rain which

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it can cause. But the tiny patch grows gradually to become a huge mass and ends in a heavy downpour, sometimes even causing a havoc. Often there is a tiny spark of fire, just one glint of it hidden in a pile of ash and people seem to make little of it. Yet the spark often gets blown up into a big fire with a favourable wind and brings great devastation.” Likewise Kamsa, the alibi of the poet, concludes, that the young boy growing up at King Nanda’s palace is a potential danger and ought not to be neglected and ignored as of no consequence. The preceding facts do suggest that he cannot be thus connived at and hence it is necessary to find out a means to eliminate him before it is too late. Kamsa is almost visibly scared of the danger when he says these words: If we do not eliminate Krishna when we have time, he will prove the better of us and eliminate us in the long run.

Kamsa did not wish to make any more delay. He wrote the letter of summons on that very night and handed it over to Akruta explaining to him his errands. Then only he could go to sleep. But he could not have his sleep. Krishna seemed to pester him as an obsession. He saw Krishna’s apparitions in whichever direction he wanted to cast his eyes. He feigned to sleep and had a dream, and there was Krishna again in the dream. Phantoms began to appear right in front of him, phantoms of a slain head which was his own. All the ill omens suggesting his hour of death fast approaching began to haunt his imagination. He was scared back to a waking state, the hangover of a ghastly dream so much hovering over him. Kamsa sought a relief by consoling himself with the consolations given in the scriptures that what all appears in our dreams does not really come true. It is said that he was exceptionally versed in scriptures, like Ravana. The consolations lulled him into a brief spell of sleep. And soon it was dawn and the night was over as far as the world was concerned. Akruta, who had to carry the errands, got up from his bed and watched the sun rise up on the eastern sky. He was quickly through his morning chores and prepared to leave with his chariot. Bhakta Charana, the poet, takes us into confidence and says that he too was present there to make his chariot ready.
This brings us to the second chhanda of the book. Akrura, though an Asura himself and a royal servant of Kamsa, the king of the Asuras, was at heart a devotee of Krishna and hence was very happy as he was on this errand. He will have the great fortune to drive the chariot back to Mathura with Krishna and Balaram seated on it. As he drives on and as his destination approaches, he is simply lost in the thought of that privilege. He could only be thankful to Kamsa for having given him that privilege. He has already ecstatic hallucinations and it seems the footprints he comes across on the wayside sand he is prone to mistake for Krishna’s and that is an occasion enough for a joyous reverie. In this state of mind, he was already in the vicinity and as he entered the greater boundaries of Nanda’s principality, he really had before him the two brothers and their friends with the herds of cattle. They were busy milking the cows as the calves were licking their bodies which were already smeared with the saliva from their mouths. All of them were real experts in milking the cows, filling up the milkpots, giving instructions to one another, at times very fondly calling one another names. Bhakta Charana can see through Akrura’s eyes that the cowherd lads were clad all in the same way and each one of them had as it were the same gait. For a while he was even in a fix to distinguish the two brothers from the rest of the herd. Krishna could realize the bhakta’s disappointment and condescended to behave in a way by which Akrura could know. The two brothers now escorted him to their house, entertained him with sumptuous hospitalities and asked him about the purpose of his coming. The omniscient Krishna ought to know things and Akrura had no misgivings about it. Yet he did explain why he had come. That meant a decision to be made by Krishna’s father and the summons were actually addressed to the latter. As for Krishna and Balaram, so Krishna actually said, they would go with him if their father permits.

Bhakta Charana reaches his excellences when he describes the situation where Krishna himself went out of the herd of his mates and embraced Akrura. It was an embrace of love, signifying how God himself would come down in love to
embrace a devotee of His. A real master in comparisons in which Bhakta Charana has perhaps only match of his kind in Oriya literature is Gangadharma Meher of the early twentieth century. He says, as he describes with the tears of joy that roll down the eyes of Akrura in embrace with Krishna the God, that Akrura got himself utterly dissolved and lost in love as he touched God, in the same way as salt gets lost and dissolved as it comes to touch water. The feeling was principally one of awe and wonder, of joy that one would have the privilege of an experience as this.

But, if Krishna's father Nanda does not send the two lads with Akrura to Mathura as Kamsa has desired, Akrura apprehends that he would be punished for this and it would be deemed as his failure. Krishna is, as things ought to be, cognisant of Akrura's feelings and hence reveals what all is going to happen. He assures Akrura that they, the two brothers, will of course go to Mathura with their father's permission, he himself will have his encounter with Kamsa and the latter will of course meet his end, thus ending the miseries and sufferings which have been due to the atrocious rule of the Asura. Akrura reassures himself with these words of Krishna and hastens to hand over the letter to king Nanda.

The third chhanda in Mathura Mangala is very popular. At a time before modern education had spoiled the tastes of people and taken them away from their moorings, at least several lines of this chhanda were on the mouth of the most people, literate or illiterate. There was then of course not very much distance between the so-called literates and the others. Everyone had a root. This chhanda describes the text of Kamsa's letter to Krishna's father, Nanda, the letter with which Akrura had been deputed by the Asura king. The letter sounds as if Nanda is reading aloud the letter written to him by Kamsa. He was after all a vassal chief and had of course his official obligations to obey Kamsa's summons as a subordinate. There was also a second relationship, the one through the family. Krishna was the son of the Asura's sister, though he had not been very kind to her. He had taken the lives of all her seven issues as they had been born in the prison cell where she with her husband had been kept confined. Kamsa had to
take all these measures because he had been told by Narada that a son of his sister, Devaki, will grow up to kill him, as ordained by the gods. Kamsa had good reasons to be afraid. Hence, when he wrote the letter, he was not so much playing the role of the maternal uncle as that of a powerful king communicating an order to one of his vassal kings. The tune of the letter was undoubtedly one of authority. Bhakta Charana has taken every care to put the appropriate words into the letter so that the whole thing sounds like an order which had to be obeyed.

Of course, the real intentions has to be covered up with gestures. There is a family relationship too and hence Kamsa has every right to summon the sons of his sister, his nephews, to his palace to witness a special festival being celebrated at the royal headquarters. As a part of the duty of any vassal towards his superior, the milkman chief is also instructed to himself report at the festival with about a score of his kins along with about a hundred and odd earthen pots full with curd. But Krishna and Balaram will have to come with Akrura for which a chariot sent and should not be delayed because of the other preparations. Words have to be indeed chosen very meticulously in order that the real motives will remain concealed under a cover of cordiality, at the same time leaving no doubt that it is a letter of authority and has to be obeyed. Kamsa begins his letter with an imposing air of authority and says that the milkman king has to come immediately after he gets his letter of summons, otherwise he may have to run the risk of being beheaded by the more powerful one who is writing the letter. Then there are quite a few lines of self-eulogizing, trying to impress upon one of his vassal kings how high, mighty and capable he himself is. All that is to suggest that any disobedience will have its dire consequences. Kamsa says that if he unleashes a flight of anger, there is a tremor which shakes the whole earth in the points of its axis. Even Yama, Death, is afraid of his might, not to speak anything about the lesser beings and entities. He can smash to dust the highest of the mountains with but one strike with his fist. He excels the most liberal Ravana in making gifts, excels even Bruhaspati in his learning. He is one of the most religious of
people and has been like a father to the subjects of his kingdom. Even the winds will stop if he pleases to command them to stop blowing. The god of fire sometimes has to blush at his exhibition of lustre and vigour, and the most stubborn and valiant of the kshatriyas would rather avoid an encounter with him. The gods begin to flee from their abodes if he just flings a frown at them. There are also the other things said in a conquettish vein. Kamsa says that he is like the moon for the pond of lily flowers that the yadavas are and poor cupid is no match for him in terms of beauty. Kamsa admonishes Nanda for not coming every now and then to Mathura to have an audience with him though aware of the Asura king’s great qualities and great achievements. This is verily an act of insubordination and the disobedience does not befit a mere milkman, just a paltry thing.

After this bit of self-introduction in superlatives and the word of warning, Kamsa informs king Nanda that there is a special festival being celebrated at Mathura and he should come to attend it, in which case all his offences of disobedience would be condoned. He may take some time to make the formal preparations, needed of a vassal chief coming to pay respect to his superior, but the two lads should immediately be allowed to leave, using the chariot which Akrura has taken for the purpose. Kamsa’s pleadings about why the nephews ought to come is of course very interesting. Kamsa submits in a somewhat counselling tone that it will greatly benefit the children if they have this big chance of witnessing such a festival. They will be in company with the galaxy of great personalities who would be present at the festival and hence will learn to shed off their fear of and shyness at great audiences. And the concluding words bring us to the climax of it: Kamsa says that king Nanda is already aged and old and he ought to have only a few years to live in this world, because this body is after all made of mere earth, a false and paltry formation and must return to the earth. Therefore it behoves the old father to get his sons introduced to a great and powerful person as the Asura king, that would be only to the gain of the children who have to take after their father and hence should be acquainted with the proper things. King
Nanda thus completed reading the letter, sent for his kinsmen to convey them the news and busied himself making the necessary preparations.

News spread about Kamsa's summons and Akrura's errand to take Krishna and Balaram to Mathura. News spread also where the gopis were, to the river ghat and to the houses where the damsels were busy around their household chores. And how little did love know about the urgency of the mighty Asura King's summons and how little did it really care? So much of the gopis' lives was filled with the love they had had for Krishna, the meetings on the riversides and under the beautiful groves, the flute-playing that held them in rapt attention wherever they were, the courage and the zest their love towards Krishna had given them to defy all the sacrosant traditions of family, of morality and of decorum. The many embarrassments that Krishna put them into were so disarming and hence were a cause of so much of their real joys, his breaking into their houses with his regular gang and the stealing acts, the complaints they made before Krishna's mother just to enjoy an act of teasing one they held so much dear to the heart, in a word the many feelings of ambivalence which had undoubtedly only unceasing love in its core, - the departure gave them now an occasion for recollecting all that. The impending separation could not be made bearable. Bhakta Charana says, the condition of the shocked gopis was like a tree which is struck by a thunderbolt. In the thought of the sad bereavement, they could not imagine what their life was going to be without their usual encounters with Krishna. They began to muster in groups of five or seven and tell their woes to one another. There was no doubt that, if Narayana really had to leave for Mathura, they could not continue in life and had to die, unable to bear the pangs of that separation.

One of the gopis said it would be like becoming blind in both the eyes after the departure of Krishna to Mathura because the eyes were verily Krishna himself. Another added that lilies would not blossom any more in Gopapura as the chandrama (the moon) was leaving the place. Another in her utter frustration suggested that they should all go to river the Yamuna and commit mass suicide by drowning themselves.
The drowning would be in protest against king Kamsa, who gave the orders to take away Krishna to Mathura. That would be indeed a retaliation for having caused this misfortune for the gopis. Kamsa would have the entire share of sin for having caused the death of so many women and that would bring him bad days, the end of his life of great pomp and ultimately death. To complement it with a contrast another gopi said in much mellow a tone that more appropriate it would be if Kamsa would cease to be harsh on them and order Krishna's trip be cancelled in exchange for all the years the gopis had to live added to his tenure of life. They would die and sacrifice their life-years in Kamsa's favour. The lamentations seemed to be more and more visible as more gopis came to join the group; they embraced one another as if they wanted to express their sympathy at one another's calamity that had befallen them all. If a gopi hit her breast with her own hand, another could not hold herself erect and her heavy emotions let her fall down like a lump on the ground. One of them, who perhaps knew, thought she had the clue to the whole episode. She said that the women of Mathura were notorious for their acts of sorcery and can exercise their charm on others. They have evidently given some medicine to be used as a spell against Krishna's father and mother, as a result of which they have agreed to send the children to Mathura without making a protest.

That was enough to cause a loud wailing. The gopis in the meanwhile came to the house of king Nanda and could see the people absorbed in deep musing while preparations were being made for the departure of the two children. They had a straight question to ask Krishna to tell them why Akrura had come from Mathura and whether it was true that preparations were being made for his departure for Mathura. Krishna gave them the needed information, but added that they knew they were going to Mathura but did not know what would happen to them when they are with Kamsa in his place. Of course it was a matter of three or four days only and there was nothing to be worried about as their parents also were accompanying them. These references are of course taken from the Oriya rendering of the Bhagabata by Jagannatha Das, who be-
longed to the first decades of the sixteenth century. But these cannot be taken for just borrowed, because Bhakta Charana masterfully added his own poetic stances with them and transformed them to something very original, completely in his own style.

And now that the gopis were physically face to face with Krishna, the expression of their woes reached its climax and touched the very heights of emotional overtones. It has to be remembered that in the Gaudiya variety of Vaishnavism, biraha or the sorrow caused by separation plays a significant part as the union. In a sense, especially when the Vaishnava poets deal with this theme, the former is treated as more significant than the latter because the sorrow of separation really leads to the joy of union and hence does play a major role. Bhakta Charana had to do proper justice to it and the fifth chhanda is the outcome of that. The gopis come out straight with the complaint to whose charge Krishna would entrust them if he has really made a decision to leave thus deserting them and depriving them of all their rights to the amorous experiences with him. They say it with all seriousness that they will be unable to live without him even though only for about a couple of days. They entreat Krishna to give them some poison so that they may all end their lives by taking it so that he can eventually leave without any qualms whatsoever. How can they really live without him for several days, because they could not do without him even for a moment? Then, as usual, came the reminiscences of the days past, a mastication of the pleasurable experiences they had had in the days spent with him. Everyday, when Krishna was away in the Brindavana with his herds and his pals, the gopis just counted the hours and the minutes restlessly looking forward to the time he would come back. They had their confidence reaffirmed and restored to them when they actually saw him coming back.

The expectation here resembles the lilies in the water that open only when they have the assurance that the moon has appeared. Or, it is just like the lotus flower opening up with its full lush and lustre with the advent of the sun. The blind
verily get back their eyes, an utterly penniless person comes in possession of gems and jewels. And during the daytime when Krishna is away, the music of his flute comes to their rescue and keeps them sustained during the hours of waiting. The flute indeed becomes a substitute for the cupid's arrows and does its job. Then they give an account of Krishna's exploits which had made him already indispensable for the inhabitants of Gopapura, their quarrel with Indra and the protection Krishna gave them by lifting the Govardhana, the slaying of the Asuras, and his swallowing of the forest fire thereby saving the entire populace from total devastation. They have great sympathy with Yasoda, Krishna's mother, who will now have no one to tie with the ropes whenever she had a flight of anger. Who else would be bold to dance and frolic over the hood of the deadly serpent in the river Yamuna, who would tease them at the river ghat by demanding his dues when he played the notorious boatman and ferried them across the river? Who will dance as an innocent child of the heavens as they would clap and create a rhythm and whom they would take to the Nandarani to be flogged and punished because he has stealthily broken into their houses and eaten up all their store of curd and butter? The imagination in distress also recollects the story of Krishna's stripping them of their clothes, alluring them even at night to the forest by playing on his flute and the ecstatic as well as the great erotic moments of the Rasaleela. All these are familiar stories from the Bhagabata, but they bear a novelty and a uniqueness with the grandeur that Bhakta Charana gives them with his unique use of words. The recollection extends itself to the gopis, smearing Krishna's body with sandal paste, embellishing him with fragrant flowers. The memories do not have to stop there, because the acts of adoration do have their climaxes and culminations, the uniting of the breast with his breast, the heaving of sighs and the blushings as a fulfilling hangover. In the long record of the merriments, there were also playing a game of dice with Krishna. the inviting looks cast at him passing by when his eyes were as it were transformed into amorousness, the suggestive movements and slants of his eyes which undoubtedly had their reciprocal returns, even the
unrobbings and the impetuous kissings poured upon them. Then we have the exorcizing exploits with Radha and the secret flirtings with Brundavati. The gopis do not have an inkling of doubt that river Yamuna will dry up Krishna is not there, the trees in the forest and the many birds and animals who dwell in its cover will of course put an end to their lives, and the real climax as it were, the entire Gopapura will be divested of all its beauty and grace as a woman verily becomes when her husband is not with her by her side. The pain, impatient to speak itself eloquent in a Vaishnava poet's creative skillfulness curses king Kamsa for having played the role of the villain to all these many episodes. The gopis begin to remember the playing with colours with Krishna during Holi and waiting for him beside their nightly beds especially decorated for his coming. When he did arrive, they entertained him with the tambula, they smeared his lower eyelids with the soothing black paste and arranged his hair into braids and beautiful locks. When the enchanter was busy playing with his pals on the banks of the Yamuna, the gopis manoeuvred a pretext to go to the river ghat to fetch water.

The almost endless descriptions do everything but bore the reader. When the gopis ask Krishna to permit them to pull down Akrura's chariot and dismember it into a heap of shambles, Krishna has only one sentence to reply with. He says that they are going to witness a festival and would return within days. There was nothing to apprehend about because God would always be there to protect them. Now Bhakta Charana takes the ball from the gopis to Yashoda's court and allows her a full chhand. She clasps her son in great distress and the lamentations begin. Bhakta Charana, the poet, concludes the chhanda by saying that he too has joined the bereavement along with the others. He was very much present at the scene of the occurrence, though of course, there was one very conspicuous difference: Yashoda had Krishna, her son, seated on her lap as she was wailing, while he himself, the bhakta, was wailing at his feet as he clasped them with his hands. The comparison is indeed superb and takes the reader almost instantaneously within, to the bhakta in him.
The sixth chhanda brings us to yet another very popularly sung cluster of stanzas in *Mathura Mangala*. The description shows with great vividness how emotionally dependent a mother can be on her child and she has every right to be more dependent when the child is no other than Krishna himself. Yashoda believes she cannot live without seeing Krishna before her eyes. How can a fish live without water and what will become of a kingdom bereft of a king? Where will she get a substitute for him for whom she will make a bed every night, whom will she adorn with the choice ornaments and from whom again will she cleanse the dust off and on whom will she put the swaddling clothes? Yashoda then recollects the freaks and frolics of her child in times of being fed, his exploits with stealing butter and other milk-products, sometimes breaking the very pots in which they have been kept. Krishna pampered and overprotected as he is, is afraid of all and sundry, afraid of the dark and even of his own shade and Yashoda wonders how he will manage without her at Mathura where streets will be so jammed and crowded with horses and elephants. The child who is at times afraid of the paintings on the wall, how can he face the Rakshasas who inhabit the city of Mathura? Krishna is often scared of the figures he sees in his dreams, seeks protection in embracing the mother in a state, half asleep and half awake. In the mornings he is unbearably hungry and must have something to eat immediately - so dependent and helpless he is indeed! It is so pleasant to hear the women complain about his many mischiefs and how much she enjoys Krishna making false complaints before the father that the mother has beaten him! With tears rolling down her eyes, Yashoda kisses the child and cautions Balaram that the latter being the elder one must take good care of his younger brother while away in Mathura.

Every mother thinks her son to be the most helpless in the world and hence fancies that he needs the utmost protection. Even the mother of Krishna, the very God-incarnate, is no exception. Yashoda is sure Krishna will be scared to see the bustle of people in Kamsa's capital. She warns Balaram that Krishna is very innocent and has yet to learn how to manage himself by himself. Hence Balaram to be always in
charge, would not leave him alone and should not venture into
great crowds. Bhakta Charana does not forget to be impar-
tial. Balaram's mother, Rohini, has also her share in the
wailing session and she of course addresses herself only to
Balaram and not to Krishna. She is concerned with what
would happen to Balaram when he is away in Mathura. The
love of a mother loves to be too blind to have other children,
even of the same family, in consideration.

In the meantime, it was getting late and Akrura was
quite conscious of that. In no way did he want to incur the
wrath of the Asura king. Everything was ready except the two
brothers. It really took quite some time and they were ready
too. With their special dresses on, they looked as beautiful
and attracting as more than a million of cupids taken together,
as Bhakta Charana describes it. A crowd soon gathered and
the gopis stationed themselves right in front of the chariot.
Akrura was soon at his proper place. The poet compares the
two brothers with two wild lions, their pals, the other milkmen
boys, as so many wild elephants and the gopis with nothing
less than lionesses. The entire village was agog because of
the occasion. The whole world expressed a feeling of relief
and joy. Her expectations that Krishna would go to Mathura,
kill the Asura king and put an end to the oppressions perpe-
trated by Kamsa was fast going to be a reality. It was the
beginning of the end. Krishna got himself up to the chariot
and was seated. Bhakta Charana concludes by observing that
he too was feeling forsaken as the Lord drove away.

This brings us to another moment of climax as far as the
kavya is concerned. This was verily the crisis point. The
gopis would not want that Krishna should be away from their
eyes even for just a few days. Yet, what under the sky they
could do to annul an order of the mightiest Asura king,
Kamsa? Most probably Akrura had full sympathy with their
sorrow, but what he also could do, being only a subordinate?
In his heart he was on the side of Krishna and of the gopis, yet
he was an obedient executor of orders. Krishna was already
seated on the chariot and the chariot was about to start.
Viewed from every respect from the outside, it was getting
late. And the helpless gopis were in front of the chariot. They
thought in their excitement they should be able to undo the whole thing, and if necessary, smash the chariot to pieces. They could not actually do that. Love and bhakti, when they raise a voice against power, it is always a defiance in the eyes of power. Bhakta Charana gives a whole chhanda of about twenty stanzas where the gopis give vent to their feelings of protest again. Biraha must get its pride of place in any treatment of Krishna, especially when poetry is the medium.

Bhakta Charana belongs to a period in Oriya literature when reeti or the archaic, ornamental style was the accepted way, at least in the courts. Our poet did not totally belong to that style, nor did he belong to any court. Yet he was not completely free from the reeti influence and had a strong fascination for it. Reeti or ornateness tended to give more importance to how one expresses a sentiment than the genuineness of the sentiment itself. The poets who chose to take up this style had to take the help of ornamentalities in word-use. One wonders why Bhakta Charana chose to use that style especially in this chhanda which had to depict a peak situation. The gopis begin by comparing Krishna with Rama. Rama of the Treta had forsaken only one woman, while in this case, they are an innumerable lot, sixteen thousand of them, according to the Bhagabata. Ramachandra had slain only one Vali, while Krishna by his departure to Mathura is going to be the cause of the death of all the many thousand 'Valis' (women, according to the Sanskrit meaning of the word). Krishna has actually several points of similarities with Rama. For the first, Rama had left for the forest leaving behind his parents and Krishna is now deserting the many kiths and kin of his. Rama had taken one of his brothers as companion to the forest exactly as Krishna has also Balaram, his brother, with him. Rama, when he had left for the forest, left Ayodhya on a chariot as exactly Krishna is also using a chariot as he leaves. Only in one respect Krishna lags behind the counterpart of his: Rama had a woman with him when he left, while Krishna has none.

The comparisons do not quite fit in and there are loopholes. Yet that is no reason why they should not be tried. That has always been a defect and a weakness in the reeti style.
of poetry everywhere. Yet, the defect perhaps has made the poets even bolder to use more and more comparisons. Bhakta Charana also seems to give himself in to the trick he has chosen to use as a technique. The comparisons begin to multiply. A gopi did not quite approve of comparing Krishna with Rama and observed that with flowers in full blossom, the wasp, the exploiter, is drawn towards them, sits on them and drinks of them as if he was really in love with them: the flowers meek and of simple faith as they are, believe that the wasp is what he professes to be a lover: but after the entire bout is over, he deserts the flower and flies over to another flower. to repeat the same story. A second gopi then compared Krishna with the young cuckoo bird being nurtured in the nest of crows. The crows take it for their own child and give succor and care to it: but as soon as the young bird is able to fend for itself it leaves the nest and flies away. Yet another compares him with the ocean. The ocean has all the pearls and precious stones stored within it, yet the water is brackish, not sweet. and you are deceived if you ever begin to put it in your mouth thinking that as it looks so pure and transparent, it must taste sweet. The frustration increases with the increase in the use of words and the metaphors. In their helplessness, the gopis make a full barricade before the chariot and will not let it go. They again entreat Akrura to go back from where he has come, because they will never allow Krishna to leave them.

Krishna was sitting silent on the chariot as if he had no role to play in the happening. The gopis nevertheless were not to be vanquished and continued pouring their wailing complaints on Akrura and Krishna by turn. With woe-inspired allusions to what Krishna had done in way of his many extraordinary acts to save them and the entire populace of Gopapura, they wonder at his indifference now at the time of his departure. They say they had had the great privilege of having him as a companion, saviour and what not because they had once worshipped at the temple of Lord Shiva. Of course, as Bhakta Charana has preferred to follow the reeti poetic exercise in this chapter cannot just say Shiva directly, but has to go the round about way. Hence Shiva is here
described as the husband of Durga, who sits upon the lion, who is the enemy of the elephant that has a special pleasure in destroying a whole pond of lotus plants. One gets Shiva only by threading these references carefully and sometimes the real sentiment may be lost while one gives oneself to this strenuous mental quiz. You have to start with lotus and thread down step by step upto Durga's husband who of course is Shiva.

Then we have the same old accusation that the women of Mathura had evidently gone through severe austerity and as a reward of that will now have Krishna in their midst to enjoy with. It is said that the lily flower faces of those women will now bloom up when they have a look of Krishna, who will do for a moon. And as the sirisa flower withers away in rain and as the sephali flower drops down to the ground with the coming of the sun in the morning, likewise will be the plight of the gopis. Bhakta Charana has used as many as six intermediate references which have to be threaded together to give us the word 'sun'. There is a reference also to the tortoise which deserts its own eggs thus leaving them to be hatched out utterly uncared for. And now comes perhaps the last recourse to which every case of heightened frustration takes; the gopis announce that they will take fatal poison in the very presence of the two brothers and thus put an end to this crisis by putting an end to their lives. Poison in Oriya is 'biṣa' and with a little change of the 'sa' sound, it becomes 'biṣa' which means twenty. Bhakta Charana takes advantage of the pun and instead of directly saying the Oriya word for poison, he deems it wise and witty to say it rhetorically as nineteen plus one. Does he do like this in order to divert our attention to a simple arithmetic in order to mellow down for us the sting of a sad situation? The poet perhaps does not remain genuinely himself when imitating a style that is very powerfully in vogue.

When the gopis will thus end their lives by taking poison, the world will know that Krishna is responsible for all these deaths. He will be accused of having killed so many women and killing a woman is a heinous crime in the moral codes. Akrura had also his full share of accusations from the
mouth of the gopis. Bhakta Charana says by concluding that when a mortal is given in to his sense of distress, he is no longer able to contain himself within the bounds of shame and the inhibitional requirements befitting his family or clan. This brings us to the next chhandha where the poet gives a chance to Krishna to open his mouth and say a few words in consolation. He says it of course with the very familiar epithets. He assures the gopis that the moon cannot really go away for all time from the lilies, the wasp can never leave the lotus flower. Taken out of water, the fish cannot live, and the lark cannot do away with the cloud that gives rain. After all, the separation is only for four days and he promises he is coming back from Mathura.

The gopis, so much possessed of their grief and distress would not believe in Krishna's assurances. They also have many examples to support their suspicion. Is it not true that the wasp is often led away when it sees another lotus flower and does not come back to the first? The lark has to die if the cloud becomes merciless and refuses to give rain. The real reason that Krishna was leaving, the gopis at last came out to speak of the real suspicion in their hearts, was that the women of Mathura knew black magic and would surely cast their spell on Krishna and the latter would never think of coming back. Krishna of course knew the trick to dispel these misgivings of his women. He says, with the help of several comparisons, that the women folk of Mathura were no match for the gopis who were his very own and he will never be so coaxed and trapped away. Who will be such a fool to prefer paltry brass to pure gold? These words only could pacify the fever of infatuation and Krishna had some success. After that things were seemingly easy and after a few assurances and reassurances, the gopis seemed to give in. Krishna of course had to swear in the name of Vishnu and had then to depart. Bhakta Charana observes that the gopis did not insist any more about Krishna's not going, they were not fully convinced and had doubts in their minds, nevertheless. And Krishna had to request Sudama, one of his peers, to give the necessary consolations to the gopis so that they would not unnecessarily languish for the next four days till his return. Then the
chariot moved on and the gopis were left behind. They bore the most plaintive look and did not know what to say further. And Bhakta Charana describes the sullen situation with the familiar epithets again: they were as the forest after the spring season, as rivers after the months of rain, as moon during the first fortnight of the month, a lotus tank in winter, lilies in daytime when the moon is away. They were as a woman when the husband is not beside her, as verily the world forsaken by dharma, as a brahmin without the Vedas, as a man with no resources at all, as a woman who is not blessed with a son, a king who has lost his empire, a scholar who has forgotten all what he had once learnt, as a child without mother, a beautiful person but having no eyes, as women without ornaments and as a mountain bereft of its trees. They went back home, utterly curbed and broken down. The time sat heavy upon them, but they had nothing else to do except to digest their sorrow and entertain a hope that Krishna would come back before long.

In the tenth chhanda, the chariot manned by Akrura is on its way to Mathura with Krishna and Balaram seated on it. Bhakta Charana takes this occasion to compare Krishna to Indra on his chariot in the heaven, and upon the earth here, to Lord Jagannatha on his usual annual procession on the chariot. As they were about to enter the boundaries of the Asura's capital, Akrura took Krishna's permission to stop the chariot for a while so that he could take his bath in the river Yamuna. And there, as the best of miracles would have it, he witnessed the Lord Himself in his heavenly abode being reflected on the water. Akrura, in a moment of distrust and suspicion, thought Krishna had run away from the chariot to hide in the water and was afraid how he could face the Asura king. In his doubtsfullness, he looked ashore and did find them seated on the chariot. Thus, he thought, god had specially favoured him by appearing in the Yamuna water. Yet there was a doubt and he dipped himself again in the water to verify if the occurrence was true. He saw the reflections again. It was the primordial Vishnu, with his ayudhas in the four hands, in the assembly of the gods and with the very luminous beauty of His heavenly abode. There were Lakshmi, Saraswati and Narada, every-
body at the proper place. Brahma chanting the Vedas. Bhakta Charana by this has perhaps to say that Krishna was the Avatarin, the source of all the Avatargas and the highest of all the imaginable concepts of gods.

As they arrived at the boundaries of Mathura, they waited a while there for the others to come and join them, the milkmen with milk, Krishna's cowherd friends and of course his parents. The whole troupe reached Mathura at last and Kamsa was informed by Akrura that the two brothers along with their father and mother had come. The guests were of course not presented that very night before the Asura king. They stayed for the night in a grove just outside the capital walls and Akrura left them there to immediately go to Kamsa to inform him about the arrival. Bhakta Charana has made a slight departure in the details of the story. He says that Akrura really expressed a desire before Krishna that the two brothers should stay for the night at his house and leave for the king's audience the next morning. After his experience while taking bath in the Yamuna, he perhaps so much wished to have the adored one as his guest so that he could have the special privilege of the hospitalities. But Krishna declined saying that it was not proper and that he should first present himself before the king before doing anything else. He gave him the assurance, in an aside, that when the real job was over, that is, the slaying of the Rakshasa and thus getting rid of the tyranny, he would surely visit Akrura in his house and that would be more in the fitness of things.

Kamsa was of course glad to know that the would-be victims had come and were now at his disposal. In that very night, he summoned all his chiefs to convey to them his worries about Krishna who had already slain all the rakshasas he had deputed to Gopapura on the killing missions. He even took the life of his sister, Putana, who herself should have done away with him while giving suck to him. Kamsa was also not unaware of the other extraordinary feats of Krishna, like the lifting of the Gobardhana hill to frustrate the designs of Indra, the king of the heaven. Now that Krishna had come to Mathura, something had to be done, some device had to be found to finish him up for good, so that there would be nothing
to be worried about in future. The chiefs replied by submit-
ting that Krishna was an easy thing to be finished up without
any special effort, because he was just a boy and did not know
the art of fighting. Secondly, he was not a real prince, and
hence had no proper training in the arts. He was just a
milkman boy and it would be no great problem at all for the
Asura heroes. Kamsa said that he did recognize their worth
and their skills, yet he had already made up a design which he
wanted to tell them and know their opinion.

There will be doors past which Krishna and Balaram
will have to pass before coming to the king's audience. At the
first door they will have to manage with a wild elephant. And
if per chance they get the better of the elephant, they will
encounter the most capable of his wrestlers who will surely do
away with them in a fight. This would be the most fitting
because the children's parents will also be present there and
will witness the death of their children with their very eyes.
And if the children happen to prove difficult even for the
wrestlers, Kamsa himself who would be present there, will
surely join the fray sword in hand and kill the boys. Arrange-
ments have to be made, so that Krishna's parents will be
seated in the galleries and will see the death of the children
from a vantage point. The asuras had of course nothing to add
to the plans and were all satisfied at the ingenuity with which
the details had been taken care of.

Bhakta Charana, after he has described these deliber-
ations of Kamsa with his near associates, remarks sarcasti-
cally that all this was good and very intelligently planned
indeed, but it was nevertheless like trying to catch the wind in
a trap spread for the purpose. The very same evening, on the
other side, king Nanda and his kinsmen along with the two
children and their pals stayed overnight in a grove in the
outskirts. They erected their improvised dwelling places for
the night, made arrangements for the cooking and had their
meals. The milkman boys were seated around Krishna just
like a constellation of stars round the moon and waited for his
suggestion about what they should do next. Krishna suddenly
got an idea and suggested that they should all go to Mathura
to have a look at the life of the city. That would be really an
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interesting experience. And the whole group, the youngsters, was ready to start in a moment. Bhakta Charana devotes quite a few stanzas to describe the occasion, the dresses they had on their bodies, the indigenous instruments they played as they were marching on. The most beautiful sight that Krishna presented of course follows after one comes across the usual descriptions in the Vaishnava lores. The entire show was an exotic one and had an erotic appeal, again according to the Vaishnava way of describing the things. The ornaments on the various limbs of the body and the choicest flowers each in its proper place had a peak erotic appeal. Bhakta Charana uses Cupid as an archetype in order to be able to communicate to us the real impressions. Krishna's eyebrows suggested Cupid's bow, the streak of the black paint on the lower eyelid is the string of that bow, the two cheeks can only be compared to no other than Cupid's two palms, the glowing red lips on the lotus face are just petals of a red hibiscus. And all this have combined to make the adorable Krishna so enchanting and beautiful that any belle belonging to any family will be out of herself and have a swoon and give in to Cupid's snare, who will take full possession of her. Or, it may be Indra, the king of the heaven with his entire pantheon of gods out in a joyous procession.

Bhakta Charana comes back again to his main archetype of the Cupid. He hastens, as if in protest, to say that it is not Indra, but Cupid instead, the god standing for erotic love, who is out on the streets of Mathura. When one happens to cast one's eyes upon him, one's eyes and one's mind are soon out of one's control and there is an irresistible temptation to forget one's shame and come out leaving behind one's house, relations and what not. Walking gradually on, they came at last to the city gate and came across a boundary wall. The door was made of copper, with iron hooks on it and it was guarded by the Asura's men. There was a flag flying over the doorway. Krishna was all in praise for this wonderful edifice got constructed by his maternal uncle. The whole construction was just like a cage made of gold and other very precious gems and stones, in which the Asura king had found a nest for himself. Krishna goes further to say that this marvel of a
golden cage had a crow as its inhabitant, little knowing the preciousness of its abode and always wanting restlessly to fly away. Verily all this shine of an abode houses an inhabitant who is not worth it, according to the words expressed through Krishna's mouth. There are a few comparisons to substantiate the observation. It is exactly as a wicked person does not so much relish a good man, as an ignomus has no aptitude to study the Vedas, as an adulterate woman does not like the presence of her husband, and of course, as the pig has nothing much to do with the taste of a banana. How ill-fitting is indeed a dog in a sacred place of sacrifice, and the Asura king Kamsa was in the same way very much out of place in this so beautifully constructed a city. Krishna munched the following words to suggest what was now in store for Kamsa, his maternal uncle: "As ill luck would have it, he has now summoned me here, to his capital. His days are now numbered and he will soon die and be deprived of all the possessions and wealth he has piled up as his kingdom. He has only this one night to enjoy what all he has amassed as life. Tomorrow will mark his end and the kingdom will go to Ugrasena, his father." Krishna, feigning that he did not know anything thought it worthwhile to ask the sentry at the city gate if everything was well with the Asura king. He added that he and the others with him had come there for a darshan of the king and if they would have luck, they would surely get an audience with him and tell him all what they had to tell him. The watchman understood and gave them permission to enter into the inner precincts of the capital.

It was again a real scene as Krishna with his herd enters the city, Mathura. Its entire populace had great excitement to witness Krishna walking down the streets before their very eyes. The most excited, it seems, were Mathura's womenfolk. Krishna, as he was walking, gave the suggestion of a wild and infuriated elephant negotiating the streets. A whole crowd was soon seen by the roadsides and everybody wanted to have a full look of the cowherd boy of whose exploits and extraordinary feats they had already heard so much. They had heard about how the mighty boy had slain all the rakshasas Kamsa had deputed to Gopapura to put an end to his life. In the list
were also the lifting of the Gobardhana hill and the subduing of the colossal black serpent in the Yamuna. They had only heard of the heroic acts and had never seen the hero of these acts. And again we have the familiar bouts of erotic descriptions, that we so much encounter in the Krishna legends, especially when they are being spoken through the medium of poetry. Cupid is verily coterminal with the Krishna concept there and the women of Mathura could not therefore be very different in their reactions than their counterparts in Krishna's own native place. They are unable to even move when they have cast the first glance at this beautiful boy. Cupid's arrows made them virtually helpless and undone. They had their bodies completely wet with sweating. Here are Bhakta Charana's details about what happened to them: a housewife was having a game of dice and was busy in making her moves on the board when she got the news that Krishna was to be seen on the streets of Mathura. She could no longer concentrate on her game and like a flash of lightning, left the game and rushed out of her house to the street. Another woman was mirthfully busy with one of her female companions bathing in the Yamuna when she heard about Krishna walking within the city in her very vicinity. She forgot that she was taking a bath and getting out of water in that delicate state, began to run towards the street. Bhakta Charana, keeping up the tradition of other poets of his category so faithfully, has a time to say that the high breasts of this lady were shining protruding out from under her wet clothes sitting tight on her body. There is also time enough for a comparison, to say that it was verily Shiva, in from of the linga, who had found a hiding place under cover of the lady's wet clothes to escape Cupid's arrows. It all happened in night time. Yet another lady, so adept in her art of erotic coquetry was apparently showing at the moment that she was annoyed with him and in a show of anger she was casting her glances to the ground below, waiting to be coaxed back by the husband. When lo, she got the news that Krishna was there in Mathura. She immediately threw her anger to the air, forgot the fray she had with her husband and the husband himself came out on the street to ask if Krishna had already passed by that way. A fourth woman
was busy playing on the harp. Her lady attendant came and gave her the news. She forgot all about her harp and rushed away to have a look at the legendary boy hero. A fifth was singing a song in her sweet voice and was totally immersed in the pleasure of it; another was having a session of erotic raileries with her husband. They also rushed out of their homes when they heard about Krishna. Yet another lady had just finished eating her supper and hearing that Krishna was passing by her home, rushed outdoors. She did not have even the time to take her usual betel after the meals. A lady was teaching her parrot and her maina to talk and left them and rushed out to have a look at the milkman prince. Bhakta Charana's descriptions continue without end. They are not afraid of the repetitions. Yet they do not bore the reader. All the codes of decorum and decency were thrown overboard. The attraction of Krishna was so all-demanding and powerful. Love indeed has a power that makes one who falls in love bold and makes him oblivious about the inhibitions of traditional usage. A lady was just halfway through wearing a sari; another became so careless that her wearing fell down clearly exposing her breasts; but she did not have time to put it back to its place. In a word the people of Mathura reacted as a thirsty person behaves while he rushes where the water is, or as the insects rush to a fire.

Of course, all the examples are about the restlessness of the ladies of Mathura. The poet seems to forget about the menfolk, quite understandably. The restlessness of the ladies found a resting place when they came face to face with Krishna. Here also we have a few more comparisons, of the usual categories, of course. As rushing water stands still at the place of an embankment, as a she-elephant restless to have a mating becomes still as she meets a he-one, as the lotus flower becomes poised gleefully still before the sun, as the restlessly rushing swarm of ants becomes still as it settles down on a spill of molasses—in the same way the ladies of Mathura became still as they stood surrounding the new comer Krishna. The streets soon wore a festive mood with this joyous assembly with Krishna dancing in his usual way in the middle. Bhakta Charana says even the gods of the heaven did find some time to witness this happy occasion from above.
Two Major Works

Krishna's coming to Mathura did really bring mangala or auspiciousness to the city and the very name of the kavya rightly suggests it. The night visit of Krishna to the capital before his actual official audience before the king had a really very interesting significance in the way of demonstrating that though the real enemy was Kamsa, the people of Mathura were anything but inimical and in fact, they were in a way waiting for the coming of Krishna to Mathura so that the menace might be brought to its logical end. The fifteenth chapter of the book also continues to speak of the happy encounters of the common people of Mathura with Krishna. The latter happened to see the royal washerman coming with the huge bundle of clothes on his shoulder. Knowing who he was, the crowd had already begun to make way for him, but Krishna seemed to have a hunch and desires to have an encounter with him. He started a conversation with him, introduced himself as no other than the king's nephew. He said that he should have real good dress befitting the relationship in the place of the dirty and the worn-out ones he had on his body and pleaded that the washerman should give him proper clothes from the bundle he was carrying to the palace. Wearing those would make him really look fit, a real nephew of the mighty king and that would also bring satisfaction to the king himself who would endow him with new privileges in return for the good job thus done. The washerman would not listen to these words and would not even care to stop. This provoked Krishna to turn an extremist who knew how to have his way by all means. He would not let the washerman go, blocked his way and ordered his gang of milkmen boys to rob the obstinate person of the entire bundle of clothes he was carrying. The washerman in his annoyance, had a few invectives to throw out, even referring to Krishna's lack of appropriate conduct due to his birth in a low-status clan and compared him and his clansfolk to the animals in the forest. The washerman was conscious that he had royal protection on his side and so had his full mouth of abusive words.

Krishna, though the god-incarnate in disguise, had also that rare ability of reaction as any other person of flesh and blood, quite befitting the ordinary emotions of our world. He too had his bout of a bad temper and returned the insulting
words with a slap on the washerman's face, using his left hand, of course. The slap was a fatal one as far as the victim was concerned. And Bhakta Charana adds to temper the whole situation with an elevating diversion that this was an occasion for his liberation also. As he met his end while looking at the face of no less than God Himself, he attained *kaivalya*, immediate liberation to heaven, a reward which aeons of austere tapasya may not be able to give us. Whatever might have really happened or not this served as a retributive example for Krishna's future encounters. After the death of the washerman, the gang opened up the bundle of clothes and each chose a dress for his own liking. Krishna also looked more smoothly fit with the new clothes he put on. Things went very smoothly after that. The person in charge of the king's make up in Mathura happened to be in the crowd. He volunteered of his own accord and gave a new glistening look by his skill to Krishna and his companions. Then he went to the maker of flower garlands and had one of his choice around his neck. Bhakta Charana ends this chapter with his words of adulation for Krishna saying that the latter has always been kind to his devotees.

After the make-up with the flowers, Krishna met also Kubuja, the limping lady who decorated the two brothers with sandal paste and many other fragrant paints. As she was doing her job to her heart's content, she had the touch of Krishna's divine body and thus her limping was gone. Instead she turned instantly to a very beautiful woman and did not really know whom she would offer this handsome body of hers for a real satisfaction. She thought that it would be best if the bounteous Krishna himself could accept her and enjoy it. She expressed her desire to Krishna who said in reply that she should not suggest that in the presence of his elder brother, but of course, he promised that after doing away with Kamsa and his real mission was over, he would surely come to her and have her desire satiated. That was enormously more than what the lady had really expected. She returned to her home with a heart full with joy, made the preparations which would be befitting for a visitor of the status of Krishna and waited. She dressed herself with the best of ornaments she had. She
had no doubt that Krishna would surely do as he had promised her. Bhakta Charana, who says with his own original candour about this episode from the Bhagavata, concludes the chapter by saying he too must now learn to offer his whole mind to Krishna so that he may be blessed with the supreme fortune of becoming the latter's maid whom he could really accept and enjoy.

Kamsa was duly informed by his men of how Krishna had killed the royal washerman and had also exploited his other attendants for his own purpose. He was informed of how Krishna had taught a lesson at the city gate to his sentries by fighting with them and done away with quite a good lot of them. The information made Kamsa very nervous and he thought if he had done the right thing in summoning this formidable nephew of his to the capital. For the first time also, he began to lose his confidence on the capability of his own men and the protection they could really give him as they had been so boastfully promising. He decided to depend only on himself from now on and finish the enemy himself. At last the morning came. Bhakta Charana has described this advent of the morning in his typical way with his characteristic points of emphases, though it surely is one among the most beautiful descriptions of morning in Oriya literature. Krishna and Balaram were also through their morning chores and were dressed up for the day. The entire team was also soon ready for the impending exploits of this momentous day. The stipulated time for going to have the king's audience also arrived.

As Nanda and Yashoda along with the two sons and their pals and the many milkmen with their loads of curd came out to the street and started moving, it presented an unprecedented scene and the people of Mathura, specially the women, came out with great enthusiasm to have a full view of them. As usual with the Vaishnava way of describing Krishna with his erotic appeals, Bhakta Charana has also his full content again with the familiar allusions with the familiar comparisons, without of course boring the readers. This is a temporary diversion of course trying to divert the reader's preoccupation with the horrors that the day had in store for itself. Even a grey-haired very aged woman is erotically aroused when she
views the adorable one and bemoans her fate lamenting that she should have remained young on this eventful day. It may be questioned by a non-committed appreciator of poetry whatever it was all necessary to bring in these bouts in erotic allusions when readers should have been mentally and emotionally prepared to witness and appreciate the imports of the killing of Kamsa. But, one may like it or not, that is the weakness as well as the strength of all Vaishnava poetry written around the Krishna legend.

At the first gate was the elephant. Bhakta Charana feels a shiver on his body because of the very thought that Krishna has to face this mighty elephant. The mahout flung a challenge at Krishna inviting him to prove his might, subdue the animal and only then proceed ahead. With some initial exhibition of tricks and skills, the two brothers got the better of the elephant and Krishna ultimately did away with it by one stroke with his flute and finished up the mahout also by dealing a fatal blow on him with the tusk of the dead elephant which he had pulled out of its mouth by this time. At the second door, there was Chanura, the wrestler with his associates and Krishna had to kill him also. The lesser ones were also done away with by the two brothers. Kamsa was watching all this happening from his seat at a very high place constructed especially for the purpose. In his rage at the success of the boys, he gave orders to his persons to take Nanda, Yashoda, Devaki and Basudeva to the gallows immediately and wanted to proceed to meet the brother himself. Krishna did not leave even a moment to be lost and before the executions got time to be implemented, he climbed up the ladder to meet Kamsa on the high platform. He gave Kamsa almost no time for offering a resistance and took him by a tuft of hair on the Asura's head. It seemed that was enough and the Asura breathed his last by the very shock of it. But he was fortunate because he died in the hands of the Lord and Bhakta Charana says, the event attained for him his liberation, the washing away of the many deadly sins he had committed, and above all, a sure place among the most virtuous in heaven. The final event brought relief to the world and the people of Mathura got rid of the tyrant's rule. The gods in heaven also
heaved a sigh of relief at the fall of this atrocious ruler. Shiva had a round of tandava in way of a celebration and Indra's exultations seemed to know no bounds. The bad days were over.

After the end of Kamsa, Bhakta Charana had to give enough space in *Mathura Mangala* to record the routine lamentsations of Kamsa's queen. When the news of the end reached the harems, the queens with the legion of their attendants rushed out to the place where the dead king lay and thus began the lament round the body. They, of course, lamented over the days they had spent with the king and wailed over the fact that those hours of happiness would not be available now any more. They also remembered to mention how the king had ignored their warnings against not to go in for a confrontation with the formidable Krishna. Even the counsels of his ministers fell on deaf years and Krishna was summoned to Mathura. Kamsa ought to have learnt from what happened to the rakshasas he had deputed to do away with Krishna. But that was not to be and the end came, inevitably. All this has a place in the Oriya *Bhagabatta* and in Dinakrushna Das's *Rasakallola*, the two works which have provided most of the theme to the poet of *Mathura Mangala*. But then we come across an episode in the book under review which is completely Bhakta Charana's own creation and fabrication. That shows to the readers that Bhakta Charana was in all probability first a poet and then a bhakta and a follower of a particular sect of the path of bhakti.

As informed to us through several lines of very beautifully worded poetry in *Mathura Mangala*, Krishna came to know about the lamentation of the queens who were no other than his own maternal aunts. He made time to go to them and consoled the bereaved wives. He had made up a countenance that suggested how he too had been deeply affected by the demise. Sobs came out of him as he approached the loudly lamenting ladies and tried to console and soothe them back by words and pleadings very carefully chosen for the occasion. The motive was to demonstrate that he too had had a shock of his life and wondered how all that had happened. He feigned as if he knew nothing about why and how the accident proved
fatal for the Asura king and marred the mirth of the great occasion. Bhakta Charana puts the following expressions into Krishna's mouth by which the latter wanted to suggest how it was a personal loss and impoverishment for him also. In all intents and purposes, the loss could be said to be greater for him than to the queens. And he really starts in exactly a vein which suggested it. He began by saying that the loss actually did not mean much for the queens; but for him it was an irreparable one because he had lost his maternal uncle who had been so great and mighty a man. Krishna cursed himself when he said he committed in the past something unpardonably offensive for which providence had thought to retaliate and punish him by causing him this loss. He said he felt orphaned and helpless and did not really know where he should go and take refuge as his most dependable shelter and support was now no more. The wailings then took an autobiographical turn when Krishna recalled, as ill luck would have it, fate had forced him to be brought up in the house of an alien, had to look after the cows in return for a means of livelihood and had to be content with whatever one could thus manage to get. But he had always got strength from the hope and a consolation that when he would grow up to be a big boy, he would have all the happiness in the palace of this mighty uncle. With that high hope he had come this time and lo, he had to see his aunts widowed. Fate, he added, had really been very cruel to him and deprived him utterly of everything.

Next, Krishna began to enumerate the qualities the Asura King had been endowed with and which had made him so great. The list was almost inexhaustible. He wielded great power which enabled him to keep his parents in prison cells and kill the six boys who were born of them. His own case was of course a different one as his father was able to steal him away to Nanda's place before Kamsa had the information that he had been born. And when the generous uncle came to know where the newborn baby was, he deputed even his own sister, Putana, to breastfeed him. He had also sent many asuras to have an encounter and did a great service to them by thus helping in the liberation of their souls. Kamsa, his maternal uncle, was indeed great, a storehouse of unique qualities and
powers and there would be no end describing these. As he, Krishna, grew up in years, Kamsa, the uncle, thought with great affection of him and deputed Asura to bring him to Mathura so that the nephew could grow up properly under his near and proper supervision.

And, when the nephew came, the king wanted to ascertain by a few appropriate tests how capable the former was by putting him to encounters at his gates. He had his best elephant deployed at the first, and after the boy had proved the better of the elephant, he had his ablest wrestlers and strong men at the second. The strong men had to die because it had been ordained so by inescapable fate and the Asura king was very pleased that the nephew had real qualities to be proud about. "He was seated on a high platform to receive me with all the pomp and majesty befitting so great a king and so great an occasion. He ordered festive music to be played and also had Nanda, Yashoda, Devaki and Basudeva seated on very high places so that the latter could have a clear view of the reception." Krishna added he thought he ought to go himself to the platform to pay respects to his uncle as it would be insulting to pay respects to the powerful Kamsa by his own nephew standing at so low a place. The uncle might also take it as a disparagement. With these second thoughts in his mind, Krishna thought he should climb up to the platform. The maternal uncle, with all his affection, would come to embrace him and being just a young child, he was afraid of the great man approaching him and moved back a little. The Asura king hastened to get the nephew in his embrace and so lost his balance that both fell down from that great height. As the body of the king was a delicate one and had met with any hardship in life, it could not bear the fall and thus the end came. It was really an unfortunate incident.

Hence, Krishna pleaded, his own loss was indeed much greater than that of the queens. He had been deprived of all the privileges he could have enjoyed being the nephew of the mighty Asura king. Perhaps fate itself was jealous of him and would not allow him to that privilege. This, he concludes, was his punishment for perhaps having snatched away somebody's food when he was about to partake of it or for having hit at holy Linga and broken it to pieces. As a result all his
hopes were thus shattered and he was reduced to the pitiable state of an orphan. The mood of this entire field of lamentation changed as Krishna also joined his share of laments to those of the queens. It had surely its effect. The loud wailings began to stop and the queens moved away from the dead body. They, it seemed, took solace and calmed down and reconciled themselves to what had happened. It was Krishna again, according to Bhakta Charana, who performed the last rights and arranged a funeral. He made Ugrasena the ruler of Mathura and released his parents from their confinements. Nanda and Yashoda had to go back to Gopapura and the two brothers stayed back. Krishna had also time to comply with the promise he had made to Kubuja.

But could Krishna live and spend his days in peace in Mathura, away from the gopis? the poet asks. He was before long remembering his time and the exploits with them and languishing as he looked back. The pangs of separation he could feel even in his body, and of course had hallucinations and dreams. He dreamt about his playmates, his life with mother Yashoda, and above all, his brisk flirtings with the gopis in the forest groves when beautiful spring reigned supreme to add to the stimulations of the occasion. And as a climactic height to these dream experiences, he also saw Radha sitting in a game of dice with him. This was indeed more than he could bear and became restless. Just to know how these very dear ones of his really were, he resolved to depute Uddhava, one of his very chosen devotees to Gopapura to have some first hand information. Krishna had promised all of them to come back after three or four days. There was already a delay and he wondered how they would be spending their days sans him.

As the morning dawned, he sent for Uddhava and asked him to proceed immediately to Gopapura and bring him the necessary information. There is an allusion in the words of instruction of Krishna that he was the very life of his playmates and the gopis and they verily his body. He also remembered to write a letter to them. Uddhava had good reasons to feel himself specially blessed and privileged to have been chosen for such a mission. He soon reached
Gopapura and came across a group of boys who told him how sad they have been since Krishna had left for Mathura. As Bhakta Charana would say it with his characteristic comparisons, they have been like the stars without the moon and as the branches without the trunk of the tree which holds them together. The playmates started narrating their personal experiences together with Krishna. When they came to know who this stranger was and why he had come, they escorted him to Nanda's palace and gave news to Yashoda that there was this man with errands from Krishna. Tears must have rolled down the eyes of the mother as she came out to meet the person who had information from her son. Bhakta Charana does not say that straight, but simply says, in a feat of identification, that tears were falling down from his own eyes too.

Uddhava had an errand from Krishna, but the mother, as she eyed upon him, in her sorrow and joy that must have overwhelmed her, felt that the person was Krishna himself. Of course the hallucination was soon over and after the initial rituals of hospitality she started narrating to him her tales of woes. She begins by saying that once Akrura had come with the Asura king's summons and took away her son and wondered if Uddhava had now come to put an end to the life of the bereaved parents. Of course it would be good if that really happened, because that would mean the end of the pangs they were suffering from because of the physical separation from Krishna. Her plight was exactly as that of a blind person without his stick, as the lotus flower in a dry pond withering under the scorching rays of the sun, as a shoal of fish in hot water and as bees after their hive had been looted away by usurpers. Uddhava was listening with great sympathy all that Yashoda was saying in her woe and said something in reply to console her. He too, of course, was a person who was given to Krishna, but his was a different story and a different relationship. It was one of knowledge, of austerities. Bhakta Charana being a believer in the path of love and adoration, has a real dent here and has a real point to make. In a way, he had perhaps taken the entire pains to write Mathura Mangala in order to make a point.
The real theme begins with the twenty-fifth chhanda. Seen upon the context of the denominational contentions which then prevailed among the Vaishnavas of Orissa and which should have inspired Bhakta Charana to write *Mathura Mangala*, the principal theme does not seem to be Krishna's killing of Kamsa and bringing relief to all concerned in the kingdom of the Asura, but the confrontation between Uddhaba and the gopis, and of course the dictum that the gopis were greater devotees. Bhakta Charana, being primarily a poet and only then a devotee of a particular denomination, poetry got the upper hand with him than catechism, at least in *Mathura Mangala*. We shall of course come to these issues later in the subsequent pages of this book.

Uddhaba is now escorted to Krishna's mother, Yashoda, who is so happy to know that there are tidings from the beloved son. But she is apprehensive too, as all mothers are, at least as an archetype in Indian legendary literature. In her hallucination, she even sees Krishna instead of Uddhaba as she casts her eyes on the latter. There is of course another chore of the customary hospitalities and the expressions of a mother's sorrows with the usual metaphors. And Uddhaba tries to console her saying that Krishna would of course come back before long. But, as he begins to describe Krishna, his ways and styles are so different from those of the gopis, those with which the readers have been so familiar in the preceding chapters. Uddhaba makes a dent with the philosophical descriptions, says that Krishna is present in all creatures and beings as their essence and there is not a single entity which does not bear him. He is just like the one-lettered mantra Om, present in all mantras and in all scriptures. He is present on land, in the waters and in the sky. The world is always vibrant with his presence and hence one should not give oneself vainly to useless lamentations fancying that he is not here because he is bodily somewhere else. Krishna is present in Yashoda's body, as he is present in his own body. Uddhaba pleads with the acumen of his philosophical wisdom with which he is so brilliantly armed. Reasoned with Uddhaba's angles of emphasis, it is Krishna within us who wails and makes us wail in ignorance, who laughs and makes us laugh, who attracts us.
towards him and saturates us with that keen sense of being attracted, he is verily himself caught in the net of our longings for him and causes these painful languishments.

And the explanations go on. Krishna is the eliminator and the restorer, Uddhaba says to add. All creation has been possible because of Krishna, and Krishna is eternally present in everything, beginning with the meanest of the mean and extending to the Supreme Truth, the Brahma. All Uddhaba’s philosophizations seem to fall on deaf ears and queen Yashoda would hear nothing of that sort. She has no need to know those speculatory superlatives, she pleads back. She only knows that Krishna is her son and that is all and enough. The yogis, those who practise austerities do understand Krishna to be this and that and take refuge in the speculations, but for her, the mother, the only real truth is that she is his mother. That is the very first thing and abrogates all other attributes. The only verity that remains imprinted in her heart, always, is that Krishna is her son, and of nobody else. Uddhaba seems to get a point here and comes forward to say that the mother should not give herself in to such infatuations and should not claim as ‘mine’ the great one at whose feet the wise men worship seeking liberation from this world. Krishna is not a body, nor is he bodiless: he is beyond the two conceptions. He is Shunya, the great void, the Infinite and the Illimitable. He is the prime entity according to those who have realized him, the great seers and the rishis. Even the lesser gods like Shiva and the many others have failed to realize him in his complete dimensions and it is only unfortunate that Yashoda, in her utter ignorance, should think him exclusively all her own.

Yashoda would not give way, specially when the poet is on her side as a protagonist. Her words in protest now do have a philosophical strain and clearly represents a particular school. Of all the relevant descriptions used to introduce Krishna, the most convincing and hence the most relevant is the fact that Krishna is her son, her very own whom she has known and nurtured as a mother. All the conceptions of Shunya and the like are too abstract for her, and has no use as far as she is concerned. Madhava is her son and she his
mother - all that is so simple and easy to comprehend. The other attributes are like air, in no way palpable and hence do not serve any real purpose. It is like the moonbeams reflected upon water and therefore can never be compared to the real moonbeam that falls on your body. You can see it, feel it: the former with whatever beautiful description one may give it, is just a reflection. Krishna is her son and that for her is the only truth. however much the great and wise ones may in their delusion describe him as Brahma and other equivocal terms. The yogis choose him as an object of their meditation because they seek their redemption. That is entirely a different thing and a different approach and does not bear any relevance for her. Uddhaba should rather try to convince other people who have an appropriate propensity for Brahma realization and eventual redemption, but not Krishna's mother and his kinsfolk who have experienced him as so real. He should rather go back if he has no tidings about the Krishna they adore in flesh and blood. Yashoda starts remembering many occasions when Krishna was present before her very eyes and wants only to know when her son would be back again. The memories land her in a bout of wailing and she is beyond her control before long. This is all to Uddhaba's great puzzlement and he does not know how to console the lady in ignorance. There is no question of convincing her to his own point of view.

He hastened to assure the mother again that Krishna would of course come back and that too before long. This brought some relief to her no doubt, but she was not willing to believe his words. She compared him with Krishna who had promised that he would be back in a few days but did not. The comparison very much embarrassed Uddhaba. How could he be equated with Krishna, who was the Dispenser of the worlds, whose designs were beyond the reach of the Vedas, whom no human mind was able to comprehend in full and who was the Supreme Purusa, without form? Yashoda would not understand the many epithets Uddhaba used in a way of describing Krishna, and in a vein of protest, she asked if all the attributes used in compliment by him would ever falsify that Krishna was her son and she was his mother. To describe him as Brahma was indeed belittling the real fact that he was
her son. The other facts should come after that and were no match to it. The people of Mathura should be very strange, she submitted. She had already had Akrura as the first example, the man who had come with a letter from the king and took the two brothers away on the chariot. And then came the second one, who tried to console her with empty polemics that had really no significance as far as she was concerned. As she was uttering these words of retort, she again gave herself to yet another bout of wailing.

In the meantime, a gopi, passing by king Nanda's house on her way to the river, pitcher in hand, chanced to see the chariot that was parked there and began to speculate if Krishna was already back home. A streak of jealousy seemed to get the better of her and she thought that Krishna had come home, stealthily, to take his parents with him to Mathura, thus leaving the languishing milkmaids to eternal bereavement. She peeped in to know further and saw Yashoda in conversation with Uddhaba. But in her infatuation, she also mistook Uddhaba for Krishna, left the pitcher there and ran back to the village to give the good news to the other gopis. That was enough to create a real consternation and quite naturally, the milkmaids believed her words. They were indeed waiting to hear news like this. They soon began to cluster together in big or small groups and rushed to reach the place with loud complaints to give them strength. They narrated what had been their plight while the apple of their eye was away; they did not have any desire even to take their usual daily food, their houses looked as forsaken as the forest wilderness, their bodies had famished and eyes blinded with torrents of tears. They were like tanks, parched in dead mud after water had dried up completely and like an insect blinded by light. And the usual comparisons went on. The gopis compared themselves to fire, on the point of being extinguished because no ghee was being put on it. And of course the climax was reached when they began to narrate that there were also the Cupid's irrepressible tortures and there was nobody to whom they could express their feelings and who could understand their condition. Of course, now that Krishna was back, Cupid would surely take to his heels and thus there would be at last an end to their grief.
With these tumultuous feelings expressed aloud, the gopis soon arrived at Krishna's residence. Bhakta Charana takes care to remember that he too was in a sort of identification mentally, with the elated gopis. But the elation was soon gone as the milkmaids came to know that it was Uddhaba and not Krishna as they had so dearly fancied. The anticlimax had its way and resulted in real desperation, and quickly turned to an orgy of angry exhibitory words. Bhakta Charana uses the situation to his heart's content and has devoted a whole chhanda for that. The condition of the gopis was like that of a chakora in a moonless night. They bewailed their predicament with the finest of the classical poetic comparisons. They had been reduced to just dry pieces of twigs and Uddhaba was instrumental to set fire on them: it was like a patch of dark cloud full with the promises of causing rain, but it deceived them by hitting them with a thunderbolt which uprooted the trees that they were. One of the gopis, in an ironical mood, wanted to remind the others what Krishna had done with Kubuja while at Mathura and was soon beyond herself in anger. Yet another came forward to say that it was all a mirage, an utter betrayal, like the empty wooden apple of dropped down along with its excremental stuff by an elephant. The apple looks so beautiful from outside but has indeed no content. The occasion was as humiliating as extending an empty pot to a person who is dying of thirst. Uddhaba was very much present there listening to the words uttered in great dismay and was wondering with full admiration and awe how ultimately these milkmaids had held Krishna in their hearts. He realized also how dearly Krishna thought of these women who were so innocently given to him and understood why he himself had come on an errand to convey to them the needed words of consolation. And lo, he now comes forward with those words. He could not but communicate himself in his own way and according to his own patterned images.

He begins by pleading that all these lamentations are not really necessary and they are expending the many condemning words in vain, not caring to know on whom they are
using them. They are condemning one who is no single person's possession exclusively, but belongs to everybody under the sky and omnipresent. He now wants to say why Krishna has deputed him and what news he has brought them from him. That is enough to pacify the distressed ones and they soon sit in lines waiting to know what the messenger has to say. Brunda, the most prominent of them, then impatiently asks him to reveal the errands. Radha is evidently not present there and does not find even a mention in the list of about forty names that Bhakta Charana gives us on this occasion. What Uddhaba has to say is very short and simple. He gives them the assurance that Krishna would surely come back and put an end to their woes. He has come to them with this good news and they should not waste any time now pining and languishing. One of the gopis further asks him when exactly Krishna would be back and therefore for how many days they have to wait with patience. Bhakta Charana ends the chhanda by saying with the gopis that when the stipulated time is over and yet Krishna does not come back, they have then only one alternative before them - to die and put an end to all this tortuous experiences of living without him. Bhakta Charana never conceals the fact that he is always on the side of the gopis and hence should have looked upon Uddhaba, a devotee of Krishna, belonging to the alien camp exactly as the gopis ought officially to deal with him, in full compatibility with the denominational requirements.

Uddhaba had the very same reply to give to the gopis, that Krishna would be back amongst them in a few days' time. But he thought, as Bhakta Charana would have it because of the catechismic necessities, to say to the bereaved ones a few words in consolation which he guessed would sustain them definitely during this period of waiting. And he thought it worthwhile to take the help of his own philosophical schooling to find the appropriate words in way of consolation. He had done the same thing during his encounter with Yashoda and had failed. Reason says he should have been more careful with the gopis, whose relationships with Krishna had a more special stance than in case of the latter's mother. He begins by
saying that one ought not be so deluded as to fancy that Krishna has left them because he has been physically away but for a few days. Krishna, the Supreme Lord, is omnipresent, is not subject to anybody's excesses of infatuation. One can see him and experience his nearness only by meditating upon him and practising all prescribed austerities. He does not have a particular form and is never limited by the ignorant person's image-making habits. He is as spread out in every object as moonlight. He assumes many forms yet he is formless: hence one can realize him by the strength of one's devotion and affirming attitudes. The gopis would therefore do well. Uddhaba concludes, if they would choose the path of meditation and meditate upon Krishna as verily no other than Brahma.

The gopis were listening to Uddhaba's words with rapt attention. trying perhaps to understand what he was saying. This might have induced Uddhaba to think that he had a better audience here than what he had with Yashoda and thus enthused, poured the entire philosophy with the enthusiasm of one who swore by that philosophy and would not welcome any other. He adds that the only way by which the gopis can get rid of their infatuation is to look upon Krishna as Brahma. They must preserve the eternal Krishna in their hearts and thus get over their sorrows over Krishna as a person whom they have known and loved. This body is indeed a temporary thing and hence, instead of limiting one's relationships with him to the body only they should transcend the body and be redeemed. He is realized only by the yogis who have gone through the six chakras as a part of their sadhana and have closed their outward eyes in deep concentration to feel and see his presence in their hearts. There he is verily and eternally seated upon a many-petalled lotus with the usual symbols and arms in his four hands. Only in that magnitude one must seek him in contemplation and then only one can experience him all the time and will thus be free from all the false ideas of impermanence.

The gopis would not leave Uddhaba unchallenged and hence a debate starts. Bhakta Charana of course is very clear
about his briefs; he must see that the gopis would win in the end and therefore pleads their point of view as if with a personal fervour and thus comes forward with his best words and metaphors. The gopis had offered themselves wholly to Krishna; Krishna had become a part of their very existence. Their life with Krishna had no philosophy to support it and give it scriptural substantiality. Only later, many centuries after, we had the learned scholars of Sanskrit who so competently gave it a philosophical clothing. And then only it came to proclaim itself as a school and Bhakta Charana was a devotee who professed by this school. But the gopis had loved, loved without questioning and without expecting anything in return, not even liberation in heaven, as many scholars and stalwarts belonging to this school did. They had simply loved and love evidently has its own logic, certitudes and convictions. These are not proofs at all, but do sustain one in one's love as any other proof. Bhakta Charana, as he goes to give expression to the gopis, retorts to Uddhaba's phosphorization, represents the poet in him at his best and seems to forget that he is pleading on behalf of a particular school or group of devotees. He comes forward with the best of metaphors and takes the readers almost spontaneously with him on his side by virtue of his strength and excellence as a poet only. Even those readers, the seemingly Mayavadins on the side of Uddhava would probaly forget the respective alignments and feel moved by the sincere pathos given expression to through the feelings of the gopis.

The gopis stop the messenger short quite in the middle of his pleadings, thinking perhaps he is going too far and transgressing too much, hurting their inmost sentiments. They retort by observing that all the knowledge that he is using in his support is like the yeast that curdles and spoils a whole jar of milk. All his arguments about the right knowledge and the right attitude born of it has been used in the wrong place and for the wrong persons, they plead. They submit that only the Brahmavadins would have an inclination to appreciate and relish from what he says and they are no Brahmavadins. Jnana, rigorous and austere knowledge, was just like the empty wooden apple that an elephant has just
caused to show itself along with the latter's lumps of excreta; it looks so bright and shining from outside but has been shorn of the contents. The so-called Jnana without the candour of love and concern likewise sounds so grand and juicy to the superfluous ear, yet has no worthwhile content. The messenger in his arrogance is comparing a piece of pure diamond with a paltry piece of hailstone, they remark. The hailstone's span of life is so temporary and brief though it has the look of a real diamond piece. Their love towards Krishna is verily the river Ganges, the river among all the rivers whereas Jnana is only a minor and a very insignificant streak of waterway that cannot be compared with the former. The four varieties of liberation said to be the goals of all pursuit of knowledge are of no avail because they do not make one worthy of love. The men of knowledge, devoid of the capacity to love, are really like the very low menials who never get a chance of approaching the one they search after to realize.

Comparisons are made to pour in one after the other, always suggesting that the one path is decidedly the better and the more spacious one than the other. The gopis point out that a person who has already had a taste of nectar would not be tempted by the mahua flower, one who has the most precious jewel put in her necklace would not go in for other lesser ones, and one who is used to the fragrant jasmine will not be enticed by the vasak. Thus, they, the gopis, had no use for the so-called knowledge of the Brahman, as they were already in possession of a much superior wealth and therefore Uddhava would do well not to waste any more of his time with them and go back to Mathura.

The stanzas that follow do clearly demonstrate that the gopis too can argue at a philosophical level and Bhakta Charana's scholarly schoolings do come to their rescue and provide them with the appropriate threads. They submit that what the wise Uddhava alludes to as Brahma has also its manifested body in prakruti. Brahma is incapable of any movement and hence of any emotion, whereas bhakti was like the mother earth, the storehouse and giver of all rasas.

One who has learnt to love and adore the Supreme Lord is also full of the same heavenly bliss himself and the knowl-
edge of Brahma can be assigned the status of his servant in comparison. The gopis then come forward with a piece of advice, almost assaultively and recommend to Uddhava to take to the path of bhakti and turn away from the path of dry and ineffective knowledge. This conversion should mean for him to adore the Supreme Person, adore him with supreme attachment, in the saguna way serving him as if he is concretely present right before him. That adoration should accept him as of the highest price, more covetable than all the other things one would otherwise aspire for, one's pride, shame, sense of importance, caste, clan, family and worldly possessions. Only when one has shunned all these lesser goods, one becomes capable of real love. But that is the right way and Uddhava should do well not to be eluded by the arrogance of gaining the knowledge of him, because that was destined to end in a failure.

That love giving us god-realization ought to be pure and absolutely undefiled and uncorrupted by knowledge. Even a little amount of knowledge contaminating bhakti will cause an eventual debasement of the whole pursuit, in the same way as a woman completely given in devotion to her husband brings debasement to the wedlock even once she has an involvement with another man. And therefore, the gopis asserted, as if were in an air of self-righteousness, they had cautiously kept themselves leagues away from the path of knowledge so that they could be singularly steady in the path of bhakti. Uddhava was all the time listening to what the milkmaid belles had to throw at him as the right and the only wisdom. The gopis could mark from his demeanour that he was gradually being convinced, and wishing to take him yet further to confidence, had also now a few words for him in approbation. They said that they would now tell him something which they would normally never reveal to anybody less worthy. But they knew that Uddhava had lived an unsoiled life and hence did deserve the real intimate secrets of a spiritual life. It was a secret they had preserved very carefully in the inmost sanctum of their hearts. The so-called knowers of Brahma would not understand it because they had a heart made of dry wood. Uddhava's very first utterances
had given them an impression that he too belonged to the same category of persons. He talked to them of the omnipresent Brahma from whom everything had sprung out and in whom everything was, moved and had their being. The gopis said very categorically that they had not cared to know him. Their supreme object of adoration was a person, a person in flesh and blood.

That person was Krishna and Krishna only. It was the Krishna whom they knew and came to adore and accept as everything to them, the Krishna who had subdued the formidable serpent in the water of the Yamuna, who had sucked away the life of the Asura woman Putana, who had come to breastfeed him, he who did away with the mighty rakshasas deputed by Kamsa in order to kill him. That very same Krishna and no other one they adored and worshipped as prime Brahma and would not have him exchanged for anybody or anything else. It was Krishna who had swallowed the forest fire and saved his people, it was he who did lift up a whole mountain on the tip of his finger and befooled the king of the heavens; he verily is their Brahma and none else. It was at his feet that they took their refuge everyday. This was the truth they knew as the only truth and would not be deceived by anything else. Then the gopis began to refute one by one the tenability of all Uddhava’s arguments in favour of the path of knowledge. This brought to full bout the usual tug of war that was waged between the two exclusive points of view, between the exclusive adherents of devotion and knowledge claiming that only one’s point of view was the absolute truth. It was Bhakta Charana, the poet, who wrote a whole kavya in order that he could prove his point had himself said and put forth these philosophical arguments, using, of course, the gopis as alibi.

The refutations start by saying that if, as Uddhava has already asserted, the supreme Deity is eternally present in the hearts of men, then whom should one recall and address to when one is praying and whose name one should take when meditating? And further, if, whom we seek, the eternal Being is present in our body, then who it is who has asked Uddhava to come to Gokul and whose messages he has now commu-
nicated to the gopis? Uddhava hastens to say in reply that it is the Flute-player, Krishna, who has deputed him on this errand to assuage the sorrows of the gopis because of their temporary separation from Krishna. This places the trump-card in the hands of the gopis and they retort back with a triumphant grin on their lips saying that what he has said clearly proves that the Krishna whom they know is the Supreme Person, that he is the highest authority; and even Uddhava's Brahma is only a subordinate of his. It is Brahma indeed who takes behests from Krishna and acts accordingly.

The retort was enough to put Uddhava into a spell of introspection and he started having second thoughts. A change began to intervene within him and he wandered how the gopis, so innocent and ignorant to all intents and purposes, could really utter such jewels of wisdom. They had not gone through the sacred and relevant books, did not know anything of the path of wisdom; yet, the truths they could give expression to did have a relevance and this proved that they were verily the body of the Great Lord, and there was none, not even the very eminent gods who stood higher in respect of god-realization in comparision with these simple women. The hordes and legions of the yogis and ascetics who had chosen to follow the path of the spirit, practising severe austerities would never be able to attain to what the gopis have realized: Uddhava speculated within himself. The ascetics had been led astray in the path of knowledge and one must bow his head in humility before what the gopis had been able to attain, he said to himself in a sense of great awe and admiration. At last he opened his mouth and said that he had come to them as a messenger from Krishna and had a piece of information to be conveyed to them. But he was sorry that a duel of words had started between them and now there should be an end to it. The duel was virtually over with these words of Uddhava. And Bhakta Charana, who was all the time engineering the presentation of the duel on behalf of one of the sides, must have of course felt quite elated about the victory.

The gopis were no doubt very visibly elated. And they came out further with more metaphors and illustrations to say
that they were right. They said that the duel had started because the messenger in his gullibility had compared the lion with the elephant and a mere rivulet with the mighty and majestic expanse of the ocean while the two were never to be compared. They advised Uddhava not to sulk any more as the duel was after all over and he had already come to terms, and wanted to favour him for his own benefit and enlightenment as it were by describing to him many more qualities and capacities of Krishna suggesting how great the latter really was. They of course knew much better also. Thus there was a second pouring out of sentiments expressed through the adornments of a poet who knew how to use his words that would really convince and convert the seemingly unconverted.

One of the gopis who started this session only with difficulty because of the anguish that the absence of Krishna had caused to her and to the whole horde, said that without the mirth and the rejoicings that Krishna's physical presence gave to all concerned, the whole place had the look of a dilapidated habitation consumed by a fire. Even their bodies bore the imprints of that bereavement. She recollected how suddenly at night they heard him playing on his flute somewhere: the flute was so enchanting and inviting that they, as if under the spell, the whole lot of them forgot for the moment that it was night and set out to the forest groves; let their eyes meet his and were out of their wits. It was followed with all sorts of passionate exchanges and at a certain moment of climax, when everybody was entirely lost in the merriments, he vanished away with Brundabati, almost befooling all the others. It was pitch dark and when the gopis realized what had happened, loudly called after him in great distress. And he came back and of course assuaged the fervour of the whole group by reassuring embraces and the like.

Another had yet another account to give of his exploits. She recalled how on a certain day Krishna was reclining under the Kadamba tree. The gopi seemed to fancy, in a flight of infatuation, that it was not Krishna, but Cupid himself who was sitting there: he looked even more beautiful and enticing
than Cupid. She did not want to describe and dwell upon what Krishna did to her as she got herself voluntarily caught in his snare. As a pleasant association she remembered the many exploits of the hero with her as they were taking a bath in the river. The gopis longed back to those pleasurable experiences that made them feel dismayed and dejected. It was really so unfortunate that all those happy experiences had been withdrawn from them by a cruel dispensation. Yet another of the pining ladies came forward to give free vent to the real cause of their sorrows saying that Krishna had promised to come back within four days but stayed on because he fell a victim to the snare by Kubuja forgetting all his links at his homeplace. That seemed to be the nub of the whole affair. All the big people, she remarked in great remorse, had been more often than not only betrayers, including even the more renowned gods in the heavenly pantheon and Krishna was no exception. Her compatriots, all of them burning under the pangs of separation, seemed to agree with her. In an orgy of envy and jealousy they even ironically wanted to thank the women of Mathura for having so successfully exercised their arts on the easily impressionable Krishna and thus usurped a treasure that was not theirs, thus dispossessing its real possessors. The listener, who had already been won over, was listening to these tales of extreme loss with full sympathy and that perhaps encouraged the grieved ladies to pour out more tales.

And suddenly a strange thing happened, as Bhakta Charana narrates, culling a kindred story depicted in the Bhagabata, yet giving it his own personal variation. A wasp, as it was flying away in its way, was allured by the fragrance of the gopis, mistook them for flowers, dived downwards and landed sportively at the feet of Brundabati, the queen of the gopis. Brunda got frightened and lashed it away, but the wasp came back again and kissed her toes. That was enough to infuriate and in a sort of languid association she had now words of abuse for all things black, the wasp of course, but also the bird cuckoo, the black cobra. Rahu, the black demon and of course the great betrayer Krishna who was of dark
complexion. The wasp, a sucker of honey from the flowers, always forgot the flower it had sucked the honey from. So also was Krishna, the arch-betrayer. The gopis had held him as the apple of their eyes since he was just a child, had put their bodies and all they had as possessions at his disposal and as ill luck would have it, he ended as a traitor. The cuckoo and the black cobra too belonged to the same tribe. The lotus flower with its looks fixed upon the sun, grows up to full bloom and hopes to offer everything it has before the sun. But ironically, the heat of the sun's rays sucks away the water from the pond where it grows, renders the pond parched dry thus resulting in the withering away of the lotus too. Krishna had verily behaved as the sun, causing the water of love dry up with the heat of his separation leaving their deprived bodies as dried up mud.

Brunda in her annoyance advises the wasp to go back to Mathura and kiss the feet of Krishna, one very much like the wasp itself and also to serve errands for the women of Mathura. She blames the poor wasp as carrying on its sucking limbs the pollen of the flower that the love-making women of Mathura had worn as Krishna was holding them in tight embrace. The memory is really tantalizing and therefore unbearable. The wasp can as well become a messenger, Brunda retorts in a tormented vein, by going to Krishna and telling him the woes of the gopis on their side. Tell him that he would surely have the whole burden of the sin if the gopis famish under the separation from him and die in the long run. Then comes her accusing finger complaining that if it was Krishna's ultimate design, why then he enticed and exploited them with his flirtings, kissings and feignings. He gave them assurances of an intimacy and when they had believed in his advances, cast them away as paltry glass pieces. The gopis in their innocence, had taken him for a god and looked upon him with great awe and unflinching devotion. How little did they then imagine that they would thus be discarded and deceived? The gopis became blind because of their youthful age and the enticements the age always brings in its wake. And now they have to reap the dire and inevitable consequenc-
es. In their craze they went astray, forgot their shames and cast away the inhibitions, made secret love with him and became fallen women. They have really fallen into the clutches of a cheat, an impostor. Still they harbour a hope that Krishna would come back, become their own again, and hence have decided to suffer in that waiting. They wait in bouts of constant lamentation, preserving the signs of the scratchings made on their breasts by Krishna, as their only adornments.

Uddhava was watching the entire happening and listening to Brunda’s woes and accusations. He had only awe and great admiration for the gopis and was becoming aware how small and insignificant was all his philosophical explanation before the deep devotion with which these women had cherished the Lord. He felt baffled and elevated at the same time. He stood up full of feelings which had taken hold of him and bowed at Brunda’s feet. This brought embarrassment to the innocent Brunda and she begged to be pardoned because she thought she had in the heat of her bereavement and sorrow said so many odd things to a close devotee of Krishna, so well-armed with all the knowledge. This lands the readers into a session of confessional dressed in beautiful poetry. Uddhava had his last say, acknowledging his insufficiency and acknowledging the greatness of the gopis’ devotion. He compliments the latter by saying that they were no doubt superior to him because the love of Krishna was housed in their bodies, a level of identification in love, which was yet not attained by him in spite of all his philosophy and wisdom. In his elations, he even adds that even the great gods have not been yet capable of such a closeness, a secret indeed exemplified by the gopis only. The gopis knew how to love the Lord with their bodies and that was the highest kind of love and all his knowing and realizing was no match for that. These sentiments of his were soon getting the better of him and he again clasped Brunda’s feet with his hands. His body was then all shivering with this new relization and he was already quite unaware on his feet jumping and dancing, chanting the name of Hari without cease. That was a real triumph.
Uddhava at that very moment gave up the path of jnana and saluted at the feet of bhakti, as the poet enunciates it. It is clear bhakti should not have any longer any animosity against jnana after the latter had been convinced and declared its defeat. The gopis, the protagonists of the bhakti flank, wore a different mood immediately and escorted Uddhava to the places which bore the memories of the beloved Lord's leela. They took him to the groves where they had trysts with Krishna, to the Yamuna and to the eventful Kadamba tree. They took him to the place in the river where Krishna had subdued the might serpent, and of course to the Gobardhana peak. They told him of the incessant rain for long seven days and how Krishna at last had come to the rescue. The revisitings of course were causes of yet more pain in their hearts, in way of recapitulating the experiences they once had in Krishna's company. Uddhava then revealed that they had a letter from Krishna and as it was passed on to their hands. They had almost ecstatic outbursts of joy from the very touch of it. They were all impatient to know the contents of the letter. One of them who knew how to read, read it aloud to the satiation of all of them. Bhakta Charana ends the longest chhanda of *Mathura Mangala* again by bowing down at the feet of the gopis.

The letter is addressed to Radha, assuring her that he would return before long and hence she should not worry any more. Krishna frankly confesses that jealous Cupid has got the better of him and the resultant torture is indeed unbearable. The entire text of the letter is eloquently replete with the most beautifully worded compliments with the metaphors gathered from the sanctioning reeti scriptures. One wonders if Krishna was really in a predicament as that and if the omnipotent Lord could really be so helplessly a victim of such a miserable state. Bhakta Charana has devoted a whole chhanda to describe the purport of the letter, redounding with relentless repetitions smacking of an anticlimax especially as it follows the previous one where bhakti has won its victory over jnana. The letter's effect upon the gopis is near-feverish with the arrows of Cupid piercing them from all possible sides and hitting at them in all possible ways. A cathartic process
brings about a pacification and the gopis begin to leave for their homes. Uddhava too goes back to king Nanda's house, takes his bath followed by a sumptuous meal and then of course is ready for a siesta. A befitting bed has been prepared for the guest and he is soon asleep after he gets into that bed remembering the name of the Lord. Bhakta Charana wants us to note that he too was round about somewhere there, slipped into the room while Uddhava was sleeping, sat down on the floor by the side of the raised bed and delightedly began to press his feet. He perorates saying that it is only the very rare fortunate ones that get this opportunity to attend upon and serve the worthy good people dedicated to god.

Before Uddhava left for Mathura, Radha also wrote a letter to Krishna in reply. She wrote a letter on behalf of all the gopis. It seems no other gopi but she knew how to write a letter, at least write it in the proper way. The letter started, as tradition would have it, with the usual compliments. It stated then the gopis' miserable life without Krishna. In their deep sense of remorse, they had given up all their pleasure, stopped going to the Yamuna river or to the Kadamba tree. They did not paint their eyes because of the tears coming out all the time. They were so happy like the frolicking small fish in the assuring expanse of the ocean that his affection had been, but alas, the cruel Akrura came as Agastya, the sage of the legends and sipped away the water, leaving the fish in utter distress. The letter, at one place, also bore the taunt that now that the women of Mathura had become his substitute playthings and above all, Kubuja had been chosen as the right medicine, Krishna had a reason to forget the gopis. They entreated him to return as soon as possible or if he really could not, he should do well to depute another messenger of his with a bowl of poison which they would take and put an end to their lives. Then of course, Krishna could live his amorous life with Kubuja at Mathura entirely unencumbered. After the letter was complete, it was put into a casket made of flowers and was then handed over to Uddhava. There was a last warning that the letter should be delivered to Krishna only when he would be alone, but never if the women of Mathura would be present with him. Because, as our poet
rightly concludes, if the letter is delivered to Krishna in their presence, they would come to know of it and that would put Krishna to difficulties.

This brings us to the last chhanda of Mathura Mangala, the thirtieth chhanda. A converted Uddhava goes back to Mathura and hands over the gopis' letter to Krishna. And as Krishna asks him about the people and affairs at his native place, Uddhava as the very first thing narrates about his own conversion in a vein as if he has had a complete disillusionment. The disillusionment has been, as he starts narrating, due to his encounter with the gopis. He begins by making a conclusion that, in terms of god-givenness and attainment, the milkmaids stand much above all the aspirants and realized souls in the world, including the gods and even Shiva. It is indeed his unique fortune that he could see these with his eyes and had personal conversations with them. Hence, the entire credit for this great experience ought to go to none other than Krishna, Uddhava submits, because it was Krishna who took mercy upon him and deputed him on an errand. He has no other aspiration now except to go back to Brundabana and make it his permanent abode, doing the gopis' work, following their precepts and shedding tears just as the gopis did. He says that now he has resolved to clothe himself as the gopis and utter Krishna's name without ceasement while living at Gokul. Tears begin to overpower Uddhava as he is expressing these desires of his. But Krishna wants to hear in detail about how the gopis are. Uddhava replies that the entire place has now a sullen look. Even the trees there are shedding tears, the cows would not give milk, the clouds have stopped giving rain and there is not a single ear of corn in the fields. Wells have dried up, the trees do not bring forth fruits, nor the wind blows with fragrance from the flowers. And all that has been due to the Lord's absence from there. Of course, the gopies are the worst victims. They have given up their usual food, do not use the ornaments, do not try to beautify their body and loudly lament their plight because of the separation. They have the look of a hill without vegetation, live like fish thrown out of water, like the lotus flower without the sun, and like a woman without her husband beside her. The birds do not chirp and
the flowers blossom only to drop down on the ground because the gopis do not use them any more. And to give it all the intensity of a climax, Uddhava says how the river Yamuna is in high spate. Its water does never recede because the torrents of tears from the eyes of the gopis add always to its usual volume of water.

Krishna, as he listens to these descriptions about the gopis' great devotion to him, is stunned in admiration of the women who are so much his very own. He bids Uddhava to take leave of him and lay immersed in deep contemplation of the beloved ones. Bhakta Charana concludes the book with a full page of words in adulation of Krishna, the great lover and Lord and declares that one who can love Krishna with single hearted devotion will surely get quick redemption from this world of the many frailties.

Then, the final aim of all this love and infatuation is redemption from the world. Bhakta Charana has some personal advice to the readers even to the extent of sounding didactic. He advises us to give up worshipping other gods and goddesses and have our heart always given to Him only, Hari, Krishna or Gobinda, as one may call Him. And the reasons are the following: this body of us is a fragile one and will not remain with us for all time to come. The wealth that people amass as theirs, their own people including their fathers and mothers are all as temporary and as fleeting as a flash of lightning and will never remain with one for ever. Hence the only remedy is to take refuge in Gobinda so that one may be spared from the tortures inflicted by Yama, the king of death. Singing of His name has of course to be tempered by kindness to all living beings and getting over the negative propensities as lust, anger, avarice, conceit and infatuation, the six arch enemies as the good men have enlisted them. The only way to get rid of these enemies is of course taking refuge in Him and singing His name always. All else is only false and hence cannot be depended upon as givers of real happiness and release. Because Death the ultimate leveller does never show any mercy or favour to anyone, and as it has been proclaimed in the sacred Puranas, people who did not accept Gobinda as the ultimate refuge, have all been condemned to hell. With the
fear of that hell at least, one must desist from all pursuits of impermanence and give oneself to singing the praise of Radhagobinda. Bhakta Charana ends the book with a few words of humility about how he has debarred himself of the right path and hence remained condemned to this world of attachments, spelling disaster as far as the soul is concerned.

MANASHIKSHA

Manashiksha is the only book, besides Mathura Mangala, written by Bhakta Charana and available in print. The other two chautishas, already discussed, are not really books, though they are in no way inferior to the two so-called books in terms of popularity. Manashiksha deals with the theological and catechismic side of Gaudiya Vaishnavism and hence is naturally held more in honour by the official initiates, people who have renounced the world, either physically or mentally and are more concerned about their denominational identity. It is interesting to know that Manashiksha was only very recently traced out and brought to light, though Mathura Mangala was a work which was copied again and again and appreciated by all shades of people from almost the days of the poet himself. Was the former held by the initiates to be more sacred and esoteric in its treatment of themes which is why it was not allowed to come down to lay readers and remained confined with the selected few?

For more than one reasons, we may infer that Bhakta Charana wrote this book of his many years after he had written Mathura Mangala. We know already that the poet lived to a ripe old age and Manashiksha was a product when he had outgrown his creative phase or was too detached to dabble in kavyas and chhandas and hence wrote a treatise on the theological tenets of his own denominational order in simple nine-lettered lines so popular with the laity after Jagannatha Das's Oriya Bhagabata. The inference can be corroborated also by the type of language Bhakta Charana has used in Manashiksha. It is simple, without any desire for ornamentation and does not suggest any intention to adopt the reeti style, with its characteristic voracity for saying things in
a round about way, with word-puns, allegories and epithets. That of course is an indication of maturity as far as one's personal realization is concerned. Maturity may of course sometimes mean a sense of having arrived at certainty, a certainty which feels one has found the only way and is therefore not willing to digress into anything else. One's only business then is to enunciate the bare formulae, even if one has to do it through the medium of poetry.

It is in the mouth of no other person than Shri Chaitanya that Bhakta Charana chose to say in this book whatever he had to say in way of the injunctions. The greatest emphasis here is on the guru, not so much on the final point of destination to which a guru is meant to lead the novice. Bhakta Charana wants us to see all the Avatars of God in the guru. In the poet's words, a guru is the Supreme Lord; one must not say that he is a mere human being and thus demean his stature. Of course one has to be very cautious in choosing one's guru and ought not to be deluded into the trap of the lesser ones. The pursuers of the Vedic as well as the Tantric paths should not be accepted as gurus, our poet does not forget to caution us. Such gurus, he says, advise us to ferry across a river with a boat made of stone as it were. The real guru is one who has chosen the path of love, who has renounced the world to sing the praise of Gobinda with a complete conviction. In one place, Bhakta Charana categorically declares that only a Vaishnava devoted to Krishna is entitled to be a guru.

The guru is not one who looks upon all the castes as equal, according to Bhakta Charana. It is interesting to note that the Gaudiya Vaishnavas at Puri during Chaitanya's time did respect the traditional caste discriminations and Bhakta Charana seems to remain faithful to that tradition. All beings are in no way equal though they have all their origin in the Brahma. Even the deities and the entities, recognized and worshipped as gods, Shiva and the sun included, are nevertheless not representatives of the Brahma in the latter's totality. The only god to be adored and worshipped is without doubt Krishna, Hari or Gobinda, in whatever synonym one may
address him. Therefore one should not utter the mantras of any other deity because they are of no avail, because only Krishna is the Avatari, the dispenser of all the other Avatars. Once you declare yourself to belong to one denomination only and decide to follow only one set of denominational imperatives, one is compelled to be exclusive in one's orientations as well as approaches. Bhakta Charana, the poet of Mathura Mangala, reduces himself to the role of the spokesman of a particular label and hence wears an altogether different persona to do his job as faithfully as possible. There is no doubt that as a piece of literature, Manashiksha is only an inferior sequel to Mathura Mangala.

At one place, Bhakta Charana equates the guru, a Vaishnava and God as equal to one another, in a self-regarding zeal. The zeal in its wake also proclaims that even the brahmarshins would be only a very poor match for the women of Nadiya, the birth-place of Shri Chaitanya, in terms of spiritual attainment. Nadiya, the poet asserts, should be regarded as no other place than a veritable Brundabana, in Gaudadesha and the people who dwell there, men and women, were all Brajabasins in the days of Krishna. There in that very sacred place one is entitled to a life in bliss which is much more than that available in a million Baikunthas. A brahmarshin will never experience love to that magnitude as granted to and expressed by the people who are residents of Nadiya. Bhakta Charana explains by saying that the great sages and hermits always contemplate on the one Brahma and are not capable of that love, that is a special treasure of the Vaishnava. They are so much given to their monistic thoughts and philosophizations that they debar themselves from the bliss that the path of love could bring them. Some shades of bhaktas in India, in their fervour to prove the path of bhakti as having an edge over the other paths, have taken to the technique of exaggeration, to show that their way to spiritual realization is the most spacious and most efficacious. We may do well to grant them this privilege of exaggerations and excesses.

Already in the fourth chapter of the book, Bhakta Charana loudly confesses that Shri Chaitanya is irrefutably
the one whom he has accepted as his Lord and takes no time to tell us that the Supreme Lord has assumed this Avatara to show the way to liberation in the Kali era. Shri Chaitanya is the purna Avatara, as he says it. This Avatara has been necessitated in order to do away with the egoists and asuras, who go around with their logic and scholarship, misleading the people. The worshippers of Shakti, Shiva, of the Sun and the Ganapati, declares our poet with a near-sure conviction, are demons, the nishacharas, as he has actually said it. The arch-physician for all these diseases and deviations is of course Shri Chaitanya whom Bhakta Charana applauds as Dhanwantari. His words are verily Ayurveda, seeking to take away all the world's ailments. The poet uses his good knowledge in Indian traditional medicine to pick up his appropriate epithets and assures us that the physician has curing medicines for every sort of contemporary aberrations. As he almost realistically describes it, many sins and wrong doings had taken hold of the people of this world as formidable diseases and the physicians here were incapable to grapple with them. The quacks were more busy in earning a livelihood than actuating a real cure. God in His heaven saw this condition of helplessness of the mortals and took mercy. He decided to do something about it. As Bhakta Charana says it, there was no better Vaidya than Himself who was adequate to the challenges. Thus He, the Eternal Healer and Physician, decided upon a descent, took an Avatara and was born as Shri Chaitanya. The afflicted people were of many varieties, the jnanis, the yogis, the shaivas and the ganapatyas, the learned men with the pride of their erudition and the worldly enmeshed, all these were diagnosed and treated appropriately. It was Shri Chaitanya, the son of Sachi who could unfetter their shackles. To end this chapter, Bhakta Charana invokes the master physician to take possession of his heart also and cure him of his ignorance, the disease of diseases.

If you decide to be exclusive and one-sided, there is often almost no limit to the extent to which you can go, even deriding the others who do not exactly subscribe to your point of view and want to seek out one for themselves. This self-righteous enthusiasm at times lands one in rigidities con-
demning with a sort of unbending perspicacity all others who are different from you. The entire thing is allowed to be done with a vigour that is garbed with a religious temper. Bhakta Charana, in the flare of this temper, takes recourse to swear words and allows himself to say that those who do not follow the son of Sachi as the only object of worship are destined to become ghosts and goblins after their death and will have no better chances. He says only Shri Chaitanya has brought liberation to the most sinful of sinners belonging to all the four castes of people in society in all the bygone ages. It was in his incarnation as Rama, Bhakta Charana's great faith in Shri Chaitanya makes him say, that the latter had killed the mighty Asuras, Ravana and Kumbhakarna but the demon brothers could not get redemption even after that act of the God's. had to be born again in Nabadvipa to get the final redemption in Chaitanya's hands. Hence, Shri Chaitanya is the source Avatara, the godliness of which all others have come; he is the original tree, the poet declares, while the other many incarnations are only the shades of that tree.

In the seventh chapter, Bhakta Charana has quite some lines to establish the greatness of Radha, the consort of Krishna. She is the Prakriti who has been born upon this earth as Lakshmi, Sita and Savitri and the like and has followed Lord Krishna in the latter's many incarnations. She is the storehouse as well as the acme of all beauty and all beautiful things, she has given birth to whatever is, including the sun, the moon and the firmament. Nobody will ever be able to fathom or charter the extent of Radha's power and capabilities, not even Krishna, because he is lost in his love for her. According to the poet, Radha has cast her spell upon Krishna and hence the latter has voluntarily given himself in totally in his love towards her. Krishna, the mightiest of all gods, becomes powerless when he has a look at Radha and is soon beyond his wits. Krishna, who is credited with all his ten incarnations, has virtually been taken a prisoner by Radha who has made him sit on the pedestal of her heart. Krishna has been addressed by many names in course of the ages and the chanting of these names serve as sure gateways to the heaven of liberation. One has to take Krishna's name again
and again, without cease, a hundred thousand times. Bhakta Charana then works out a simple arithmetic to say that one is blessed with the same result if one takes the name of the pair together, Radha-Krishna, only for one time. It is only by his love for Radha that Krishna, traditionally of a dark complexion has been transformed into a fair colour when he was born again as Shri Chaitanya. Radha has been born again as Gadadhara and she becomes Chaitanya's close associate by virtue of the same predilection. Like Krishna, Radha has also her thousand names in which she can be adored and worshipped. Bhakta Charana ends the chapter with the counsel that we must recognize Gadadhara and Shri Chaitanya as verily no other than Radha and Krishna.

In order to prove that one's own path or own sect is the best and the surest one, some people over-enthusiastically think it necessary to declare that the other paths and sects are insufficient. That must have its intrinsic reasons. Bhakta Charana's Manashiksha has done it in profusion in spite of the repetitions. This exclusiveness in attitude perhaps gives a false consolation and induces one to believe that it is enough if one's is the best. That becomes instrumental in giving sectarian consciousness a sure edge over spiritual consciousness. And when this happens, religious literature tends to become sectarian literature and hence loses much of its religious value though it gives the members of the particular religious sect much reason to be happy about the oversayings. After everything has been sung and said, the truth remains that the world will be spiritually very poor and unattractive if sectarian zeal begins to take the upper hand and enthusiasts fight with one another over the efficacy of a sect and only as a secondary requirement think of actually treading a path, even their own respective paths.

Bhakta Charana devotes two full chapters to describe the daily chores performed for Radha and Krishna and urges upon every initiate never to deviate from the routine. And whenever he can find an occasion, he never forgets to hail the bhakti path of his own particular variety as being more efficacious than the other paths of knowledge and action. In
this context, he mentions the twelve rasas of which five are the major ones. shanta, dasya, sakhya, batsalya and the madhura and elaborates them with illustrations. Rishis like Sanaka had followed the first, Hanumana, Arjuna, Akrura and Uddhava the second, the playmates of Krishna and Balarama the third. Krishna's parents, Nanda and Yashoda, the third and of course the gopis also the third. There are again the subdivisions with their respective special nuances and examples. The madhura, from amongst them, has its three varieties, associated with the three places, Dwaraka, Mathura and Brundabana, involving the three categories of bhaktas who practised them, the queens of Krishna at Dwaraka, Kubuja at Mathura and Radha at Brundabana. The underlying purpose behind all these classifications is only to demonstrate that only the followers of Chaitanya and Nityananda are the best and are always assured of the highest realizations. The followers of the path of action and knowledge including the many yogis and sannyasins are like the poor owl, who cannot see anything in daytime and hence can never perceive the presence of the sun in the sky. They are all deprived because they have not chosen the path of love, the right path. The right path is of course always one's own path.

The fifteenth chapter begins with elated invocations of the guru and suggests how indispensable he is for the willing aspirant on the path. The guru has been hailed as a necessary intermediary in every spiritual tradition all over the world, but with the Vaishnavas of India, he has been shown to be much more than that, and in the lores of Gaudiya Vaishnavism, he is often praised with higher attributes than even the goal, for the attainment of which one needs a guru. Guru is the highest of all gods, claims the author of Manashiksha. He who drinks the water which has washed the sacred feet of the guru has all his sins of all births washed away by that very act. And of course, liberation from this world becomes a certainty for him. He who takes the dust from the guru's feet and puts it on his own forehead has rewards which can never be described in words. Bhakta Charana defines the ideal devotee as one who renounces his wealth, family and everything else, lives with the guru serving him all the time, brooks
all his reproaches and words uttered in anger and says such a devotee he should always be able to emulate. Krishna is verily present in the body of the guru and hence only a redoubtable chandala or a rakshasa can underestimate the worth of a guru and say that the latter is an ordinary person. Hence one must have a guru and serve him with all his attention if one is to realize god Krishna. Only the guru's kindness opens up our way to that blissful realization. To say it straight, the right path is to follow Shri Chaitanya and contemplate upon Krishna with the attitude of the gopis. To be devoted to him as a wife is to her husband, yet without lust, is the surest way. And side by side, one must renounce the company of people which only leads to deflections. One should not feel any attachment or attraction for this world as its ignorant people are often the cause of much sorrow and distraction for the Vaishnava, given to God. Beware of the householders, warns Bhakta Charana; because keeping company with them is as fraught with serious consequences as keeping company with a public woman, a prostitute.

Bhakta Charana borrows a legend from the bhakti lore of India and describes how the gopis who gave company to Krishna in Brundabana were actually rishis in their previous birth. These rishis followed the path of action in their aspiration to realize God. But all their austerities and endeavours were in vain and they were indeed far from their goal. Only when they could eschew that way, the false one, and chose for themselves the path of desireless love and took Krishna's name, could they be granted their aspired-for bliss. This Krishna is not the abstract God, says the poet. He is a person, the son of Nanda and Yashoda and the playmate of all the milkman-boys and the paramours of the milkmaids. One must forget oneself in one's love for Krishna. Even goddess Lakshmi though she was the Supreme Lord's consort in all His Avatars, could not attain His love because she had always a conceit within that she was Lakshmi, her own identity. That was not the way, of course. One must give up the paths of knowledge, of action and of the traditional rites if one has to choose the path of love. The path of love is a difficult one and there is no doubt about it. But, as Krishna
himself has assumed an Avatara in the person of Shri Chaitanya, to make the path easy to the aspirants, one has reasons to be hopeful of realization. Hence, the poet says while concluding a chapter, the right way is to reduce oneself to the status of his servant, and not be tempted by the umpteen so-called alternative ones.

The path of love stressing upon one's self-giving and laughing away the hierarchies of status in society according to birth and the like, still insisted to believe in the Indian caste system. Though seemingly a contradiction in terms, the Gaudiya Vaishnavas strictly adhered to the injunction of caste, especially when they settled down at Puri and established their monastic centres in various places in Orissa. Was it because they had to cope with the existing arrangements in society in order to survive in that society? Bhakta Charana in Manashiksha is very cautious and careful about caste considerations. He speaks with a sense of conspicuous horror how in the Kali era people have in their ignorance forgotten the caste distinctions and unscrupulously thought it proper to cast away all the barriers even to the extent of dining together. Like chandalas, they disobeyed the words of the great teachers and hence brought about their own ruin. No doubt they have been condemned to hell, because of these transgressions. Manashiksha has frequent mentions about how people who follow the other and wrong paths do not go by the restrictions prescribed by the traditional institution of caste, not caring to distinguish between the brahmin and the chandala. On any account, Gaudiya Vaishnavism has not been a part of the protest movement in Orissa. The Panchasakha, Chaitanya's contemporaries in Orissa, were instrumental in bringing about that protest movement and hence were persona non grata in the eyes of the powers that be of that time, the kings and the court brahmins. Shri Chaitanya and his camp followers got some moving space and hence would never do anything which smelt of incurring the ill-will of the king and his protagonists, the brahminas. At Puri, the Gaudiya camp talked about unqualified love for Krishna no doubt, but never wanted to disturb the existing establishment by saying that love for God also meant acceptance of all men in society as equals in the
eyes of God. That is of course a different story; but the two traditions have continued separately, pointing to a difference in attitude.

The cult of love, at least the Gaudiya variety of it, had its own theology assigning three different roles of Krishna, their corresponding statuses, giving each of them its comparative height and stature in the hierarchy. According to this, there are, in order of merit and efficacy as it were, a complete, a completer as well as the completest manifestation of Krishna in the world. He is the complete (Purna) Avatar at Dwarka, the completer (Purnatara) at Mathura and the completest (Purnatama) at Gokul. The latter is the original or source one, the mother tree, of which the others, their number is legion and includes the two mentioned above, are like the leaves and the branches. Krishna, in his completest manifestation is, according to the denominational order to which Bhakta Charana belongs, is the son of the milkman king Nanda and also Radha's paramour. The poet, in the very fitness of things, concludes a chapter by saying that every moment of his life he must have his mind given to the contemplation of his feet, the feet of Nandanandana and repeat the name of Radhikaramana. Bhakta Charana gives quite some lines to compare a real devotee's devotion for Radha and Krishna with the love between a man and a woman out of wedlock. This mode of love, defying all social injunctions, is the best of all in that it demands utmost fidelity and also a courage to withstand all traditional binding. The real love and devotion for Radha and Krishna also demands such a fidelity and one-pointedness and only very few people are capable of that, the poet says. Such a bhakta throws away all routine and all prescribed tradition to the air and does not know anything but Krishna. Even there, there are again subtle subdivisions in the attitude. The descriptions that Bhakta Charana gives of the better and yet better modes, smack more of rejections than affirmations. Our poet belonged to a time when there were divisions and subdivisions among the cults and every cult wanted to prove that its was the best and the highest. Hence people who belonged to these cults were for utilitarian reasons more conscious about their differences.
from others than the affirmations by which they swore and lived. And, to think of the similarities that one could find in the various cults in spite of the so-called variations, was out of question.

The ideal bhakta is one who conducts himself as a gopi. Bhakta Charana affirms. He only is worthy of the genuine relationships with the adorable one, Lord Krishna, and is among the most blessed and fortunate among men. Yet, there are qualifications even at this level. The initiate must believe in the Vaishnava way of approaching and worshipping. He must show the utmost reverence for his guru, live with him and obey his behests. He must never find fault with a Vaishnava, never utter a word of derogation about the guru and should not equate him with an ordinary human being either. And above all, his initiation in the mantra and into the cult should on no account be from a householder. This means, only a guru who has renounced the world will be entitled to initiate others. The real mantra, according to Bhakta Charana, is the Kamabija and the real gayatri is the Kamagayatri. After this, of course, the poet allows himself a digression to talk about the very high status of Brunda in the realm of Krishna-realization. Brunda or Brundavati in Orissa means also the place in the courtyard of almost every household where the tulsi plant is kept installed in a mound and worshipped. Bhakta Charana says that the great gopi Brunda has manifested herself as the tulsi plant for the good of the people and worshipping her through the plant is a sure way to the summum bonum, i.e. Krishna-realization. Tulsi leaves have to be offered everyday at the feet of the god’s idol and that brings us liberation and the rare privilege of living with Radha and Krishna in their heavenly abode, Baikuntha. The descriptions in praise of tulsi seem to go on ad infinitum and Bhakta Charana even warns us that one should not look at the face of one in the morning who has not put on a string of tulsi beads round his neck, prescribes a rite in way of an atonement for the sin of having come across such an obdurate person. And only Vishnu, and of course Krishna if you want to be more precise, of all the gods including Shiva and the sun, is entitled to be worshipped with the tulsi and one may trans-
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progress in this respect only at one's own peril.

It is very strange, and yet interesting that after we have been told about God as the supreme love and about the way of complete love and surrender to realize him, the whole challenge and the aspiration has been brought down to the performance of a few rites and an anticlimax has been reached by telling us that the tulsi leaf was the surest gateway and the best clue to that attainment. Was it all due to the eagerness that our great spiritual leaders had in order to popularize the way and get their recipes accepted by the layest in society? Yet, whatever the motivations, it is a fact that most of the essence of religion and of spiritual aspiration has been lost by their degeneration into symbols and thus actual challenges and chances for elevation have ended with poor surrogates like cult worship and a cultish worship. Bhakta Charana, in a mood of poetic extravagance spending itself at the doors of a cult as it were, says that Krishna is sure to be enticed and become yours if you worship him with the tulsi leaf. The power of such a worship will render him unable to even run away from you even if he would otherwise want it. The poet has made it said in the mouth of Krishna himself that when one worships him with such a treasure as the tulsi leaf, he has indeed no way to escape and must grant the worshipper all that is due to him. Worship of him with the tulsi involves him in great indebtedness and he has no other go except to pay off the debt by submitting to the desires of the worshipper. Thus Krishna himself, Bhakta Charana says, is moved and becomes your servant willing to fulfil all what you have asked for. Do cults really owe their existence and popularity to such externalizations, one begins to wonder.

Meditating on the Lord's name will not follow the way of the goldsmith or the unfaithful woman. The goldsmith has always his mind set upon bringing to his own possession all the gold he has come to know to be with others. An unfaithful woman also has her attention somewhere else even when she feigns to give the impression to her lover that she is wholly his very own. One must take his name and tread his path with all one's heart, always see Krishna in the guru and obey the
latter's instructions. In order to bring home to the readers the unique efficacies of worshipping with the leaf of the tulsi, Bhakta Charana borrows or himself fabricates a story from the massive treasury of the Puranas. He says that when the gods and the demons were churning the ocean and among the many precious findings, the pot of nectar came up, the great Lord cast a look at it. He was so much delighted to look at the nectar as it appeared that a drip of tear fell down from his eye in boundless joy and from that teardrop sprang up a plant, now we know eventually as the tulsi. Hence tulsi is verily the body of the Lord and should never be subject to any derogation. After tulsi, Bhakta Charana gives a whole chapter for ekadashi, the eleventh day of every lunar fortnight and sings about the boons obtained from observing fast on that day and conducting oneself according to the prescribed injunctions. He has also a few stories for us in support of the observance. Dhruatarstra of the Mahabharata fame had his hundred sons killed in the war in the hands of the Pandavas because he and his wife had not observed the ekadasi in the prescribed manner. To have another example, Sita of the Ramayana had to suffer an exile while she was pregnant because of having observed the fast in the wrong way. One ought to have got to the very kernel of all cultishness by now and realized how profanely it seeks to have its way with people.

Manashiksha brings to the reader's mind another feature of Bhakta Charana's attitudinal inclinations which again refers very much to an episode of his life as a guru. It is said that he had formally initiated a certain person to the Vaishnava path and for some reason the disciple left him, left the path and took to the worship of Ganapati and got himself formally initiated into the latter cult. It is said again that the guru had not taken any notice of the incident. But as ill luck would have it, the person who had defected contacted Hansen's disease and as his physical affliction increased, his life became miserable. Popular beliefs however associated this suffering of his to the sin he had committed by deserting his guru and changing over to another denomination. In the scriptures too there are injunctions in way of a serious warning that he who
deserts his guru and is tempted into a second initiation does commit an unpardonable transgression and the sin thus committed brings about many kinds of sufferings in his life in way of retribution. There is little doubt about the fact that the suffering and the afflictions also led the deserter disciple to believe in the people's associating the one event with the other and consequently he became very penitent about the great sin he had committed. There was no other way out except to come back to his earlier guru, Bhakta Charana, and pray for his condonation. It is said that the guru had long forgotten the event, yet he took pity on the penitent poor one, and in his munificence did grant him the necessary pardon.

The anecdote also adds that the pardon did act and the prodigal son who had come back was cured of the affliction. It has not been however possible to trace out the present descendants of the disciple's family, though according to the story, the disciple belonged to the same village where Bhakta Charana lived in his monastic centre. Nevertheless, whatever the truth might be, Bhakta Charana shows traces in Manashiksha that he did remember the disciple and that the latter's desertion kept tormenting him all the time. In this book he has repeatedly expressed his condemnation of those who become initiates and later desert their gurus to join another fold or order. The condemnations do suggest a very personal bruise caused in his sentiments because of an incident which had once really happened. It may be very true that he had pardoned a penitent disciple who had deserted him and had accepted him back, but the memory of the painful incident came back to him again and again and he could not get rid of his wounded feelings. In the fifteenth chapter of the book under review, he says it categorically and with an air of deep disapproval that we should turn our face from those persons who ever desert their guru, that as many as thirty-two generations of the deserter's family are condemned to hell because of his act of desertion. Even the land in which such a person happens to live is visited by many a catastrophe because of that act of one of its inhabitants. The land ceases to have timely rain and the ruler of that land becomes incapable of
ruling with discrimination. The subjects of that land become prone to deviations from the path of right and wrong. They become subject to physical deprivations and become famished and distressed. The deserter becomes also subjected to the severest punishments after his death and is condemned to hell with his parents for all time to come.

It has already been said that the Gaudiyā vaishnavas in Orissa did recognize the caste distinctions existing in society. Bhakta Charana of course should have been no exception to this practice. In Manushiksha he margins out five castes as very low and advises the people given to Lord Krishna not to keep company with them. These five castes are the goldsmith, the oilman, the quack soothsayers, the potmaker and the astrologer. Whether the poet ostracizes them because of their castes or because of the special nature of their avowed professions which he condemns is however not very clear. He describes them as the crow among the birds, not worthy of any approbation at all. But there is also a significant qualification to it which the poet clearly mentions in another place.

Every person when he is born in the world is of course born of a parentage, and the parents do have a caste and that caste has a high or a low status according to the usages of a society. Thus everyman is said to be born into a particular caste. But, of these, he who has spiritual inclinations, recognizes that as his predominant inclination and even takes that for a predilection, renounces the world, takes initiation that is hailed in the monastic canons as a second birth. The latter demands that one should forget everything linking him to his first birth in order to be rightly eligible for this second birth. He, in most cases, takes a new name after his initiation, a name given to him by his guru. He also is said to no longer belong to the caste into which he was born originally. Bhakta Charana, in the very fitness of things, warns that a disciple should not be fussy about knowing his guru's original caste. More serious it becomes when he, because his guru had belonged to a particular caste previously, begins to think of him as an inferior guru. He fancies in his ignorance that a guru who had been born into a superior caste must be thus

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superior as a guru than another born otherwise. The tradition of India has also adhered always to the same point of view. A caste has been recognized as a necessary appendage to a person's identity as long as he is, he moves and he has his being in a society following a particular tradition and code. But when one has left his society on a quest much broader and higher than the societal limitations, when he has by virtue of his austerities and practices qualified himself and has been accordingly initiated, it is vile to know him with the tinge of his caste, and more so when the initiate has been elevated to the status of a guru and can eligibly give initiation to others. He is now much above the traditional discriminations and hence has gone beyond all caste consideration.
Bhakta Charana, a Critical Estimate

After a detailed discussion on the two major works of Bhakta Charana, namely Mathura Mangala and Manashiksha, we are now in a position to critically assess him in respect of his contribution to Oriya literature of his days. It will not be possible to exactly ascertain what his contributions to the propagation of Gaudiya Vaishnavism in Orissa were. He was a follower of that particular denomination and quite understandably whatever he wrote definitely bore a relevance to what he professed by denominationally. It is difficult to say what contribution his two above-mentioned works have made to popularising that denomination and its stances in Orissa, and if his books have been accepted and entertained by the clerics of that camp who must have always been more concerned about their religion than about Oriya literature. In fact, all what the stalwarts of the Gaudiya variety of Vaishnavism have written and sung in order to spread their faith, then as well as now, has followed the medium of Shri Chaitanys's own native tongue and not the language of the people of Orissa they wanted to convince and convert. Manashiksha may perhaps have had some utility in this respect: in more than one sense we can categorize it as a work specially written to expound a way and make people conversant with that way. But Mathura Mangala will never fall into that category. And less so his Manabodha Chautisha. Even Kalakalebara Kanhai, though it depicts the events of the Krishna legend in a very popular and folklorish song form cannot be labelled as anything written with only some people of a particular sect in view. The way the latter has been accepted by all people irrespective of the religious alignments only disproves it.

Bhakta Charana was primarily a poet. He was also a sincere devotee of Shri Chaitanya of the Gaudiya way and led a monastic life. Yet, we must remember that the greatest thing about a poet is not to what denominational faith or sect he
had belonged, but the most essential for us is to know whether
the faith he professed did inspire the poet in him and was
instrumental in bringing out his potentials for poetic creativ-
ity. The legend of Krishna and a devotion for Krishna
inspired Bhakta Charana and he gave us a poetic work of the
calibre of Mathura Mangala, that is the most essential fact
we shall remember. Because of his creative excellences and
expressions he easily transcends the delimiting lines of a sect,
an order or a variety of symbols for that matter. By so
transcending, he also transcends himself. But he does not
have to go away from his accepted ways of a certain denom-
ination, on the contrary he remains very much in it and
perhaps helps us all realize as a higher insight that there is
always something metasectarian in all sects and only the few
who have not chosen to remain closed and cabined within the
officially prescribed lines have the ability to grow up to that.

The reeti or the ornamental style of poetry-writing was
very much in vogue in Orissa when Bhakta Charana made his
dent into Oriya literature. This ornamental style flourished
mainly in the king's courts and it was the local kings of Orissa
who mainly encouraged the propagation of the Gaudiya faith.
The trend-setter was, to start with, the Gajapati kings to
following the line of Prataparudra Dev in the sixteenth centu-
ry, and after the dismemberment of the Gajapati kingdom
because of the advent of the mughals. Orissa also was in no
time dismembered into very small pricipalities with very
petty local chiefs pointing their genealogy to some royal
line. Gaudiya Vaishnavism as well as the reeti style poetry
got the patronage of these chiefs and local kings who had
otherwise very little to show in proof that they were kings. By
a strange coincidence, we had a trend in Oriya poetry at a time
like this which took up the Krishna legend with the particular
emphases and intonations that Gaudiya Vaishnavism was
giving it and provided it with an outer grab in the reeti style.
The very nature of the Krishna legend was mighty conducive
to poetry-making in the ornate emphasis and a rich literature,
nay, a whole tradition of poetic literature around that legend
came to proliferate. The three most valuable products of this
proliferation are Rasakallola by Dinakrushna Das, Bidadhara
Chintamani by Abhimanyu Samantasimhara and Mathura Mangala by Bhakta Charana Das. All of them though unique in their own way, belong to a class as such. Research has revealed that Bhakta Charana has profusely borrowed from Rasakallola, not only the tenets of the Krishna episode, but even the very metaphors and allegories. About a century and a half prior to Bhakta Charana, Jagannatha Das had already brought out his Oriya Bhugahata, which had been since then the base material for almost all bhakti literature in Orissa.

Sanskrit literature of India of the centuries just preceding provided the framework of a media. Biswanatha Mahapatra's Sahitya Darpana in a very big way provided all potential poets in Orissa with a matrix and an appropriate mooring. Orissa had quite a number of poets who wrote in Sanskrit. But almost parallel to that, beginning from Sarala Das, the writer of the Oriya Mahabharata to the Panchasakha in the beginning of the sixteenth century there was a movement almost in protest, for writing in vernacular Oriya. The latter was as if destined to stay. Especially with the Panchasakha the spoken language came to be used as a media in literature, much in defiance of the Sanskrit protagonists. After the Panchasakha, Oriya poetry, with exceptions of course, largely followed two trends: the one though writing in Oriya for all intents and purposes, yet adhered to use of Sanskrit words, in as ceremonious a manner as possible and would not mind if the whole product was totally unintelligible to common people and hence was accessible principally to the elite: the other, though faithful to the ornate style in poetry, took to the spoken medium and wrote in a diction understood by the common people. The themes, very much belonging to the Indian religious tradition, were such with which even the illiterate were so well acquainted that word meanings did not very much matter. Added to that, the poetry could also be sung. Bhakta Charana belonged to the second class of poets. He wrote in the ornate style, used the very colloquial words so that communication was not hindered because of any show of erudition and scholarship and used almost all the melodies that were then in vogue in the folklore of Orissa. All the three came to their best in Bhakta Charana's Mathura Mangala and
thus catered to all the aptitudes and tastes. The signs of this
craftsmanship can already be deciphered in his earlier work,
*Manabodha Chautisha*, which Bhakta Charana must have
written when he was just starting with his tryst as a prospec-
tive poetry-maker. Neither was he then acquainted with the
ornamental style of poetry so much acclaimed by the pundits
and in the courts, nor had he embraced the order of Gaudiya
Vaishnavism, causing somewhat a limitation in the scope of
his themes. *Manabodha* is a creation singing of detachment,
a detachment that takes you away from all this temporariness
of things and temptations that we adhere to as our lives,
giving to us thereby a glimpse of the greater promises for
which our lives are intended and persuading us to seek for
those real attachments.

In the sixth chapter of *Manashiksha*, Bhakta Charana
gives a list of all the fallen and the chandalas who could get
their redemption from their sin and from the world after they
came in contact with, or even had a mere look at Shri
Chaitanya. The chandala, according to the definition of the
poet, is of course one who does not take the name of Krishna.
This definition, we can affirm, is much better than saying that
somebody is a chandala because he has been born in a
chandala family. The responsibility has been in the former
case shifted to the quality of one's own deeds from the
accident or the event of birth. Bhakta Charana submits that
all sorts of chandalas were blessed with liberation and at-
tained divine bliss because of Shri Chaitanya. In this catego-
ry of the liberated, the poet also includes those who were
poets but exhausted their poetic talents in describing beauti-
ful women in a deridingly profane way with all sorts of
literary embellishments prescribed in the kavyashastras. Here
he surely speaks of those poets who took to the ornate style in
literature, the reeti, and used it on depicting women in their
secular themes. They were sinners also, because they em-
ployed their craft not for describing the leela of God, but the
transitory beauties of this world. Bhakta Charana condemns
these poets by saying that theirs could be compared only to
the despicable voice produced by a crow.
This may give us a clue to Bhakta Charana's attitude to the kavya tradition then very powerfully in vogue in Orissa, specially with the court poets. That tradition believed in the ornamentation aspect of poetry-making and it had its learned protagonists in Sanskrit poetics. Some of the poets belonging to this tradition also took up secular themes to demonstrate their talents. Several contemporaries of Bhakta Charana have used such secular themes. Bhakta Charana was not against the ornate style as such. nor did he oppose the erotic descriptions which were taken recourse to for the purpose of creating the right mood while enjoying the written word called literature. Our poet was against the practice of using secular themes only and he thought the ornate erotic style should be used in only depicting religious themes, bringing in only episodes from the lives of gods. Literature, and a kavya for that matter which described the erotic among humans was notorious and immoral. But when you make use of the same excesses and glib exaggerations in stories told about the exploits of gods and their incarnations upon earth, it makes your literature a sacred and sanctified one, giving you real liberation. Bhakta Charana says that the poets who had sinned by bringing in erotics into profane themes, who do deserve to be called chandalas, obtained their liberation after they had encountered Shri Chaitanya.

A hypothesis may be drawn that erotics had their way into Indian literature by agreeing to deal with only sacred themes. The process was one of sublimation and gave a vicarious satisfaction to people, writers and readers included, who would otherwise shudder at even a hint that they were nourishing voluptuous impulses in their subconscious. Voluptuousness and anything of the like, even the most lustful was allowed when it was expressed using the gods as a medium and a vehicle. The device did have a cathartic effect undoubtedly, whether people given to religious pursuits wanted a release form their oppressive unconscious by bringing in voluptuousness into literary creations singing of the gods, or whether poets who really wanted voluptuousness to be a desirable theme in literature to give it a special palatability.
and hence took to religious themes using the gods as scapegoats and thereby obtained a way out must still remain a debatable point. Yet, this can explain a lot about incorporating sensuousness into literature during at least the medieval times. Thanks to Lord Krishna and his other compatriots, and thanks to our innovative poets of the bhakti school, such themes could find their place in literature in a society and a time which were more inhibition-oriented than otherwise.

Bhakta Charana does give a hint that things would have been definitely in line with propriety had erotics and the like would have given themselves completely to describe the playful episodes of Lord Gobinda. The poets who did not do that and spent all their enthusiasm for erotics on describing the provoking beautiful bodies of women were really chandalas and called for condemnation. They were liberated from their heinous state when they came in contact with Chaitanya. Has the statement an autobiographical slant in it, one is tempted to ask. Mathura Mangala is full of esoteric descriptions and one wonders, if its author has taken fullest liberty for his desire for all that because with all humility he had chosen the story of Krishna as his theme and hence there was no question of any inpropriety in the endeavour. We may also infer that, to start with, Bhakta Charana had a full schooling in the recti stylistics in literature advocating esoteric treatments: and then came his conversion to Vaishnavism and to the monastic life. This was enough to change his attitude and he decided upon using his skill by taking up the Krishna legend as an appropriate theme. Eroticism was no longer to be objected, when one used it for depicting the indulgence of legendary figures raised to the status of gods. Of course the humans got the full mirth of the treatments, all the same.

Bhakti has sumptuously contributed to literatures in the medieval period and Indian literature is evidently no exception to it. Bhakti more often than not engenders a self-forgetfulness in the bhakta, a quality most conducive to the creative propensities in man. Of course not all bhaktas become poets and there are other equally important factors to the total ecosphere that produces our poets. Bhaktai has a trait of catholicity in it which also acts very positively
towards bringing out the creativity potentials inherent in a person. Vaishnavism in India which has principally bhakti as its content, has therefore been instrumental for a rich heritage of poetry all over India during the middle ages. The heritage has a range beginning from the Tamil Nairas down to the poets of Gaudiya Vaishnavism even up to our own times. A Vaishnava can of course belong to a particular denomination and if he has poetic talents, can always use those for propagating the tenets of this denomination through the medium of poetry. Does a poet lose anything about his poetic talents by using it intentionally for a denomination and does a denomination really gain by one of its poets becoming exclusively didactic? Bhakta Charana was a poet as well as a convert to a particular Vaishnava order of worship. His god-intoxicated life must have richly subscribed to the flowering up of his talents as a poet. We can even say that so fertile a theme as the Krishna legend must have provided ever new vistas before him in his efforts in poetic expression. Yet, did the denomination ever get the better of the poet in him?

One seems very much to have a stumbling experience as one comes to go through Bhakta Charana’s Manashiksha after one has gone through his Mathura Mangala. And unfortunately, if Manashiksha is the first book of his you have come across and read, you seem to have lost all appetite and would not even ask if the poet has written anything else. If we assume that Mathura Mangala has really preceded Manashiksha, then one asks if due to some personal or circumstantial reason, Bhakta Charana became more and more rigid about his terms of faith and hence the poetic penchant began to take leave of him. Even if the reader is not a Gaudiya Vaishnava himself, even if he has no religious inclinations and still knows how to discern between literature and literature, Mathura Mangala will in all probability hold him captive and the poetic excellences will surely fascinate him. He will have great admiration for the poet even if he does not believe in the message intended in the book. On the other hand, he may feel a sort of repulsiveness if he takes up Manashiksha first and the repulsions may so preponderate that he may even skip over some rare places of real poetic imaginativeness in his haste to get away from the book.
The very first thing that strikes one as an excellence in *Mathura Mangala* is the poet's capacity for identification. Philosophy, especially religious philosophy of the rigorous variety, including even some bhakti schools have warned us about keeping a distance, remaining detached, and that is, it says, the way to quicker god-realization. Bhakta Charana defies all such canons and makes no secret of having taken sides as he describes his themes. When he described Akrura coming to king Nanda's village with the errand from the Asura king, the poet himself instantly becomes Akrura, and he is more so in this act of identification when Akrura drives back to Mathura with the two adorable ones on the chariot. It has of course to be remembered that Akrura was a devotee of Krishna though he belonged to the Asura clan and was serving under Kamsa. He was doing his duty as a sincere royal servant, but in his heart where he essentially lived, moved and had his being he had dedicated himself to Krishna. As far as Bhakta Charana's portrait of Akrura gives us an impression, it seems the latter is more happy about his errand because he will thereby have a real contact with Krishna than because he was serving his king. In fact he was first a servant of Krishna, and then only of Kamsa. Hence it becomes clear why Bhakta Charana can so easily identify himself with Akrura, even to the extent that he says he was present helping Akrura getting his chariot ready to leave on the errand.

Next comes Jashoda, the mother of Krishna. The bereaved mother, because her son was being taken away to Mathura with summons from the Asura king, takes about a whole chhanda from Bhakta Charana to give vent to her feelings in poetry. Bhakta Charana gives another whole chhanda for Yashoda when Uddhaba has come to Gokul with news from Krishna. She remembers many occasions of the child's life with his mother, nay, the mother's life with the child. The relationship of Yashoda with Lord Krishna was a very mother and her child relation; she adored him not so much because he was the Lord, but because he was her child, whom she had conceived and given birth to. Yashoda would not have any metaphysics from Uddhaba, because that would never console the mother. She repeatedly says that
Krishna is her adorable one, whether he is or is not the Brahma or the Lord of the world. Bhakta Charana's depiction of Yashoda's feelings have been done so unassumingly that we feel this would not have become possible without a real identification. Tears begin to run down from the bereaved mother's eyes and Bhakta Das, as he concludes the chhanda, does not try to make a secret of the fact that his eyes too are full of tears and that he too has a share in the mother's woe. The learned formulaters of the bhakti way have, in all scholarly seriousness, distinguished between various attitudes, depending upon the respective relationships. In keeping with that formula, adoring the cherished Lord as a mother has to be differentiated from adoring Him from one's station as a servant. Akrura's bhakti was dasya while the mother's Vatsalya. Bhakta Charana, though he must have undoubtedly studied the distinctions from the books during his apprenticeship for the monastic life, seems to fling them into the air and becomes one with the mother while describing her predicaments exactly as he had become one with Akrura. Genuine identification, genuine everything for that matter, seems to baffle all attempts at classification. It happens more so in matters of the heart than in the so-called matters of the head.

Then of course is the case of Uddhaba with whom Bhakta Charana also so effortlessly can identify. Scholars of bhakti have claimed that Uddhaba's was predominantly the path of knowledge. He adored the Lord because he had been convinced about the omnipotence of the Lord. The Lord was Brahma, the all-doing and all-ordaining one and the scholars had convinced him about it. He had first made a decision whom to adore as the highest and then only was drawn towards Him with all his soul and what not. Yashoda, of course, had not gone to school to learn of these serious theories about bhakti and had learned to love Krishna because the latter was a very part of her existence, having been born of her. That was enough and did not require any other justification. One may even say it verged on infatuation and not pure divine love, smacked very much worldly because of the nature of the relationship. One wonders, if stereotypes
would at all explain a whole thing. They are necessary when we want to know which particular feeling predominates in an adoration. Bhakta Charana does not think very much to maintain the purity of the type and identifies himself with Yashoda the mother as easily as he does the same with Uddhava. Real adoration is always that, and eludes the scholars. The poet is a different substance than the scholar. It is genuineness that matters and not so much the particular path on which one has traversed his way to that genuineness. Viewed with that criterion, one has acquired more of the desired bliss when one has thus confused himself and followed all possible paths with equal reverence and spontaneity. Moreover, the very nature of the adoration by bhakti can always afford such a blending up, without any regret.

The gopis' triumph over Uddhaba in respect of the efficacy of the bhakti path is seemingly the principal theme of Mathura Mangala. Thus they do have the pride of place in whatever has been described in the book, and therefore it is natural that Bhakta Charana, first and foremost, should have identified himself with the gopis. He himself is the gopi, and the identification is complete when he describes the favoured ladies who had so much adored Krishna in also a very worldly way. This worldly way was also the divine way, as it was without any expectation in return, selfless and egoless. That sounds all right when we do an overall analysis of their attitude in general, but is not so, when the entire episode has to be delivered in a way to the lay readers and bhaktas, which they can understand and hence which ought to resemble their ways. The gopis's love for Krishna includes anger, envy, suspicion, irony and sarcasm. At times it exhausts itself in becoming glibly demonstrative, and egolessness is not that. Only a poet can enjoy the freedom of reducing heavenly sentiments to this very worldly outbursts of emotions. When we go through what Bhakta Charana has put into the mouth of the gopis, we wonder if they are in any way different from their ordinary worldly counterparts. Every act of identification has to run this risk also, the risk of dragging one, with whom we, with all we have, want to identify, down to our own level and to our own size. That is a curious chapter in the history of bhakti and this is not the place to dwell upon it.
Official Gaudiya Vaishnavism is so much occupied with Shri Radha that it gives only a secondary treatment to the other gopis. Radha is the centre round which and for the sake of which the gopis have to revolve. They do not seem to have any raison d'être of their own. Bhakta Charana, though officially an adherent of Shri Chaitanya and the order that especially professes by him, gives, in Mathura Mangala, the proudest place to the gopis and only a secondary treatment to Radha. Radha is almost absent from the significant descriptions in the book. When Krishna had accomplished his mission at Mathura and was staying there for some more days, his happy days at his native place with the gopis began once to haunt his thoughts and he looked back in way of a recapitulation. Among other things even including the affectionate care of his mother and the company of his gang of boys, he recollected having sat on a game of dice with Radha and having had great fun. When he decided to depute Uddhaba to Gokul, he asks him to enquire about the gopis and his boy-mates. Krishna names only Brunda while referring to the gopis, but does not even mention Shri Radha. Yet, the letter which he has written to be delivered at Gokul is addressed exclusively to Radha.

And it is Radha again who writes back to Krishna. The letter is brought by the messenger Uddhaba. It seems, only Radha among the lot knew how to read and write. But was it the only reason why Krishna's letter was addressed only to Radha and why only Radha also wrote back in reply? Of course, there is a difference between the two cases. Whatever Krishna says in his letter is addressed to Radha only. It was from start to finish in the second person singular. But Radha's letter to Krishna was in the first person plural, a letter written by her on behalf of the gopis. As Bhakta Charana's treatment of it denotes, the gopis took the initiative to write a reply to Krishna and what Radha wrote was a representative letter, not exactly in reply to Krishna's. Shri Radha is the main theme in all Gaudiya Vaishnavism and one can even mark that, in comparison to her, Krishna is allowed to fade into a minor role. Is it a distant influence from Tantra, specially in medieval Bengal, where the concept of Purusha
is assigned only a second place after Prakriti. the dynamics which moves the Purusha? This brings us to cast a comparative look at the two schools of Vaishnavism that flourished in Orissa after Shri Chaitanya came to stay at Puri and especially after the latter's passing away. The Gaudiya Vaishnavas point out to Brundabana as their holiest place. Thirdly, the bhakti as enunciated and interpreted by the pundits of this school is called shuddhabhakti or bhakti (unalloyed and pure) and does not allow a place in it to jnana and karma, the paths of knowledge and action. On the other side the Orissan Vaishnava school acknowledges Lord Jagannatha as the Supreme Deity, the source from which all the avatars, including Shri Chaitanya, have their origin. Therefore, not Brundabana, but Nilachala or Puri is their holiest place, being the seat of the Lord. Thirdly, the bhakti expounded by these Vaishnavas has been called contrastingly as jnanamishra bhakti, bhakti tempered with jnana or knowledge. There are also a few other points of difference like the key mantras the two have to chant at the time of their worship and also the tilak marks they ought to do on their foreheads to let others know that they belong to a particular denomination.

It is curious to mark that Bhakta Charana has not used the name of Lord Jagannatha in any of his two major works, neither in the invocations nor in the colophons. Neither has he mentioned Puri as a sacred place in his books. Nadiya and Brundabana have been acknowledged by him as the two places of any significance. Only as we have mentioned previously there are two occasions in his Manabodha Chautisha where he entreats us to repeat the name of Lord Jagannatha, the Residing Deity at Nilagiri or Puri so that our redemption from the sufferings of this world may be assured for us. At another place, in the same chautisha, Bhakta Charana describes the Supreme Spirit as the Shunya devata, the Great Void, an epithet which reminds us so much about later Buddhism and which has frequently been used by the other Orissan school of Vaishnavism. Even Achyutananda Das, one of the five Sakhas avowing Oriya Vaishnavism about a century before Bhakta Charana, has named one of his major books as Shunya Samhita.
Another enigma about the whole problem about the two parallel brands of Vaishnavism in Orissa is the fact that while most of the Oriya Vaishnavas have accepted Shri Chaitanya as their great guru and while the very celebrated among them, the Panchasakha, have spoke with great religious esteem about their initiation from Shri Chaitanya, the Gaudiya Vaishnavas have as a rule not even mentioned the existence of the Oriya Vaishnavas. Shri Chaitanya lived about fifteen years at Puri, lived there for quite some years even after his followers from Gaudadesha left him because they wanted to settle down at Brundaban and make the latter the real seat of their worship. Shri Chaitanya was very much at Puri till his passing away in 1524. The Charitamritas, written in Bengali depicting his life and doings by some of his nearest associates from Bengal, have devoted a whole section of their biographies to describe Chaitanya's days during the last phase of his life at Puri. The section has so aptly been called the Utkala Khanda. In this section even the authors have not made any mention of the names of the Oriya Vaishnavas including the Panchasakha, who have in their turn, sung so elaborately of Shri Chaitanya and proclaimed the latter as their guru. All this could not be merely accidental. In one's wonderment, could one draw a hypothesis out of it suggesting that the Panchasakha and the other followers of their camp had to do this to serve an expedient purpose, namely, the purpose of not incurring the displeasure of the king of Orissa who had already declared himself to be totally on the side of the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, patronising them and as a supplementary measure, putting the other camp to various tests and trials so that the latter's inferiority as a way could be demonstrated? There are actual stories which testify that the Oriya Vaishnavas, including the Panchasakha, had been put to all sorts of trials to prove their genuineness and at times even persecuted. The king as well as the priests were against them, for obvious reasons.

Some of the Oriya converts to Gaudiya Vaishnavism were also poets and writers. A few of them were Shri Chaitanya's contemporaries and lived very close to him during his stay at Puri; others came after the teacher's demise.
Whatever they wrote and have left as Gaudiya Vaishnava literature in Orissa was written not in the Oriya medium but in Bengali. The texts of the kirtans, a way of remembering the Lord’s name by singing his leela loudly in unison in a group, were since that time only in the Bengali language and continue to remain so even today. Ramanada Pattanayak, Madhab Dasi and the many others who belonged to the official Gaudiya order and wrote, have written in the Bengali medium. The Gaudiyas never allowed or encouraged the local language in which the people of Orissa spoke and wrote to be accepted as a medium. Why this happened continues to intrigue all who are curious to decipher a reason for it. The tradition of Shri Chaitanya, a great saint of the medieval times who contributed so richly to the spiritual upheavals of the period, is so different from other stalwarts of his near contemporary legion of saints, Kabir, Nanak and others included. The latter did recognise the importance of preaching and addressing to people in the language of the people concerned. Even the Christian missionaries who came to India about two centuries later, did not impose their own languages along with the Holy Bible on the people they could convert. Instead, they themselves learnt the language of the converts and before long became instrumental to translate the Bible into the respective tongues. In this way, they were pioneers in a process of regeneration as far as the Indian vernaculars were concerned. It seems the Gaudiya Vaishnavas were the unique exceptions.

When one comes to Bhakta Charana with this context in mind, one bows down his head, without reservation, before his feet. Bhakta Charana was an initiate to Gaudiya Vaishnavism and lived and functioned in a Gaudiya monastic centre, not very far from the central headquarters of the denomination situated at Puri. The works of Bhakta Charana, all his works, were written in Oriya, and not in Bengali. The decision ought surely to have been a bold one. After the Gaudiya Vaishnavas had set a vogue establishing Bengali as a right medium for religious purposes, the vogue became a fashion and even writers and men of religion of as high a calibre as Bhima Bhoi in the nineteenth century had fallen into the temptation of writing at least some of their works in
Bengali. The *Mahima Binode* is such a work written by him. Bhima Bhoi thought of writing at least one book of his in so-called Bengali perhaps to prove that he was no inferior to any other of his contemporary authors in Orissa who wrote in Bengali and belonged to the Gaudiya school. Bhakta Charana has not succumbed to such a temptation. It may also be one of the reasons why while much of the Bengali writings written by the Oriya adherents of the Gaudiya camp has been lost in the oblivion or at best remained confined to strictly their own denomination. Bhakta Charana's three literary works, *Kalakalebara*, *Manabodha* and to crown all *Mathura Mangala*, have been appreciated and accepted by all people irrespective of denominations and also have secured their rightful places in the total gamut of Oriya literature.

The last but not the least remarkable thing to be said about Bhakta Charana is this choice of words used by him in his works. Most of his contemporaries, specially those who flourished in the courts, believed in using high-sounding Sanskrit words in their writings. Most what the latter produced was architectural poetry. Though Oriya as a language has its principal linguistic modes from Sanskrit, the mother language of most north Indian languages, it had also its rich store of deshaja words, mostly derived from Austro and Dravidian tongues which in their own times had been instrumental in developing a common medium of communication in this part of the country. Sanskrit poetry written in Oriya before Oriya came to be accepted as a literary medium had no need to care about the spoken words. It was Sarala Dasa, the creator of the Oriya *Mahabharata* along with a few other pioneers almost preceding him, Bachha Dasa for example, boldly turned the wheel and brought about the change. The Panchasakha followed the trend and contributed most to establishing Oriya as an adequate literary medium. Since then down right to the present century, there have been two trends about word-use in Oriya literature. The one has stuck to the style of using tatsama words yet trying its best to retain a semblance of Oriya in what they wrote. The other has continued believing in incorporating the indigenous words into their range, resembling very much the manipravalam
style which so much influenced the Malayalam literature in one of its periods. Bhakta Charana falls into the later category and is one of its very powerful representatives. There are equally powerful writers who have adhered to this trend even after Bhakta Charana, the most important and most accepted being Badajena, Gopala Krushna, Bhima Bhoi, Gangadhara Meher and Gopabandhu Das in the beginning of this century. The former trend also had its faithful protagonists, its line ending with Radhanatha and Madhusudan and even including a few of the living poets writing on modern themes, yet sticking to a Sanskritized style in the area of diction. And it is remarkable to also note that, at least in the medieval period, those poets who by chance or by choice were out of the courts of kings and had almost a mission to take religion and literature to the people, chose the simpler words than the others who happened to be in the courts and wrote for a selected audience only. This view has of course to be taken with a grain of salt, because there were definitely exceptions who did not belong to exclusively one of these trends. Even Radhanatha Ray, who belonged as a rule to the Sanskritized court style though he did not belong to any court, wrote at least one book towards the last phase of his poetic career, namely Darabara, which definitely took due account of the other trend and followed it.

The entire theme of Mathura Mangala can be split up into three clusters of events centering round three significant letters. The first of these three letters was Kamsa’s orders to king Nanda summoning the latter to the capital, Mathura and sending the two nephews, Krishna and Balaram in advance, making use of the chariot the Asura had sent with Akrura. The other two letters are towards the fag end of the book, the first of these written by Krishna from Mathura and addressed to the gopis. This letter was sent with a devotee and a deputy of Krishna, Uddhaba. And the last letter was the one written in reply to Krishna which Shri Radha wrote as the scribe on behalf of all the gopis. The first letter unleashed the many events which take us right up to the death and end of Kamsa which again resulted in ending up the Asura king’s oppressive sway over the people of Mathura, thus bringing in happiness.
and bliss to the people of the kingdom. Logically, the book should have come to a close here as its very name apparently suggests as regards the range of its narrative. But Bhakta Charana had another purpose behind writing this book; he had to prove a philosophy and that too not so much in the style of a philosophical treatise, but with the help of Uddhaba as the instrument coming face to face with the gopis. We do not know if Lord Krishna had given him the necessary briefs to plead his points with the gopis or if Krishna had himself intended a confrontation like this and desired a defeat so that the path of love and bhakti could be established as a superior and more efficacious one than the path of knowledge. Of course, as the events of the book show us, though Uddhaba was deputed to convince the gopis with his philosophy and wisdom, he was himself convinced, by those whom he had come to convince.

That the book on the restoration of relief in Mathura, as its very title indicates should end with a sort of trial of strength between the two paths of god-realization as enunciated in the Shastras, was of course the poet Bhakta Charana's own intention. The same theme was already in the Bhagabata and our poet got the principal tips from there. In borrowing the theme, Bhakta Charana however added to it his own original slants, as every creative writer usually does and made the treatment entirely his own. Yet, there is a marked difference in the points of emphasis as they are presented to the readers. Though Uddhaba had come to the gopis carefully armed with his metaphysical rationalization to plead from the Master's side, yet the letter the Master had himself written to Radha and which had been brought by Uddhaba to Gokul did not have any metaphysics in it. It was an awfully scintillating personal letter, full of intimate recollections and confessions. As one goes through the contents of the letter written in a superbly ornate style, one forgets that the letter was written by one who was the Lord of the Universe, it was on the contrary from a very this worldly lover, sensuous to the first water, who was pining on account of separation from the beloved. And what is more, it was written to narrate one's own sufferings because of the separation instead of trying to
bring solace to the other side. These sufferings and wretched longings have been written in a style which so much magnifies their intensity, at times almost verging on an overdoing of it and the flattering flatulent reeti way of doing it has given the necessary grist. One wonders and fancies if with this twenty-eighth chhanda of the book, Bhakta Charana wanted to exhaust all his artfulness about making use of the ornamental style to prove to us that he too had successfully gone to school to learn the reeti tradition in literature and knew how to show his full competence about it.

Is it really possible to bring relief and consolation to a person suffering because of a separation by describing how miserable one himself feels because of the same separation? Yes or no, Bhakta Charana has done the same thing with Krishna as he had made the latter express himself through the media of his letter. Krishna addressed the letter to Radha, the jewel among the women of his native place, as the poet has adorned her with an epithet. She is verily the indwelling deity of Krishna's heart. The latter begins his note with an assurance that he would of course go back to her as quickly as possible and hence there ought to be no room for misgivings. That she is pining for him due to the separation is not the only fact; he too is pining and longing back to be united with her and is being tortured by the atrocities of Cupid who had got the better of him. Pouring on Shri Radha all sorts of attributes to admire the beauty of her body, the quality of the clothes she wears and the sweetness of the words that always come from her mouth, Krishna in all intents and purposes the helpless one, admits that he has been so cruelly deprived of the love union with her and is so hungry because of the deprivation. A union with her in love is the only food that can assuage his hunger. Cupid, like a huge giant, has swallowed him up. Whenever he had been faced with a predicament like that, he had always run to seek her love and had thus rescued himself from the clutches of the monster; but this time, she being so far away, he is utterly undone and has to suffer miserably. This ill luck of separation has converted his days into spells of dark nights, even nectar has started giving him the taste of vitriol. Krishna
entreats with all his might of epithet-making proficiency that Radha should always have mercy on him and a kind heart for him because all what life connotes for him is verily her company only.

Was the Lord of the universe, the source-avatara of all avatars really so helpless and miserable because of a separation of a few days, or a particular slant prescribed by a philosophy of bliss-attainment richly appended with the grandeur of a reeti style of poetic manipulation, in its zeal of presenting itself at its best forgets the cautioning lines of proportion and propriety and gives itself a full vent? Lord Krishna continues further and says, without any fear of losing his point by an exaggeration, that his greatest desire is to kiss her lotus face and thus bring an end to all the languish that is tormenting him. Bhakta Charana does not exercise any miserliness in borrowing all the synonyms for Cupid from the Sanskrit *Amarakosa* to give all concerned an exact idea of Krishna's pitiable state of a mind. He describes the various limbs and parts of Radha's body, from the locks of beautiful hair on her head down to her thighs and her toes, brings in all the classical comparisons to do justice to the description and at the end of each round of descriptions says how Cupid's arrows are tormenting him. Repetitions ought not to bother anybody when one has surrendered himself so willingly to his enthusiasm to describe things to the superlative utmost. Krishna's recollections include even actual episodes of love-making with his beloved, Radha, and the many amorous provocations that always accompanied the climaxes. The kisses, the embraces and the many erotic advances so meticulously enlisted in the lexicography of love-making according to the reeti canons have been taken recourse to and presented in the unique, folk-cum-classical style so characteristic of the poet of *Mathura Mangala*.

As the letter draws to a close, Krishna relieves himself of the entire load of feelings in a sort of adumbration by saying that she, Radha, is the only boat to ferry him across the river of his separation. Nobody else but she. Then formally, knowing for sure that the other gopis will be also present when the letter will be delivered to her, Krishna culls the
names of quite a platoon of them and asks Radha to tell them
that they should not be sad because of the separation and that
he would come back, be in their jocund company and never
again will part away from them. The reading aloud of the
letter ended with, of course, an orgy of mutual embraces. The
bereaved gopis embrace one another and experienced some
relief by thus sharing and feeling into one another’s woes.
Then the assembly disperse.

But when they assembled again to write a reply and
entrusted Radha with the task of writing it, what Bhakta
Charana has given us in the form of this third letter is a very
different one in spirit than the second. Shri Radha does not
in this case write a personal letter trying to match with her
lover’s infatuations. She writes on behalf of all the gopis, in
the form of a first person plural. The entire letter has been
written with full sobriety, recollecting many extraordinary
deeds of Krishna to save his native people on many an
occasion. There is of course a description of their own woes
because of the Lord’s absence but it has no tendency for
showing off. It narrates, in full humility, the intimacy and the
liberty that Krishna had granted them when he was with them
and now the painful betrayal because of the separation from
him. Of course, there are signs of an ambivalence, at times
praying that he ought to come back before long and at other
times, advising him in an admonishing vein to stay forever at
Mathura and have a happy time with the beautiful women
there. Ambivalence is of course a part of all worldly love-
relationship and the gopis, philosophy apart, were no excep-
tion to it. Nevertheless Bhakta Charana makes this third
letter a very sober one. Moreover as he was coming down
now, to the end of his book, he thought it more appropriate not
to repeat his bounteousness in the use of words and perhaps
decided to mellow down. Just imagine if this third letter were
as robust and loud in its descriptions as the second! Bhakta
Charana did well to dispense with that temptation.
Bhakta Charana and His Times

Vaishnavism as a denominational movement had found way into Orissa since the days of the Tamil Vaishnavas. It was many centuries before Shri Chaitanya came to Puri and his disciples from Bengal preached what they called Gaudiyā Vaishnavism. It is difficult to say whether Jagannatha Das had completed his Oriya Bhagabata before his contact and acquaintance with Shri Chaitanya or he did it while Chaitanya was living at Puri. Whatever that might be, there is absolutely nothing in the Oriya Bhagabata which may even faintly suggest that the Gaudiyā brand of Vaishnavism had in any way influenced its writing. Jagannatha Das belonged to the group of the five writer-saints of his time, very familiarly known as the Panchasakha. The Panchasakha were not only sadhakas and spiritual leaders, they were also writers and their contribution to the literature of Orissa has been so significant that they have been lauded by critics as representatives of a special phase in the history of Oriya literature, called the Panchasakha period. These celebrated five were Shri Chaitanya’s contemporaries. They had their first initiation into Vaishnavism by the inspiration they had got from Shri Chaitanya, the great master. Yet they did never belong to the Gaudiyā camp and had always maintained a distinction. They were very much rooted in the age-long spiritual tradition of Orissa, and hence, though they acknowledged Shri Chaitanya as their great guru, there was always a parting of the ways. Even today the two orders function as different orders.

Orissa, and especially Puri for that matter, had been the place where all the religious and spiritual movements of India had rubbed shoulders and in a spontaneous process of give and take, there had been always a synthesis among these various trends. Orissa’s geographical situation gave the land the unique advantage of serving as a bridge for this give and take. Not only the various movements of Hinduism, but also Jainism and Buddhism had had their impacts on Orissa and in
the long run the land came to develop a religious tradition of its own which was very receptive and very capable for assimilations. The institution of Lord Jagannatha at Puri has been the symbol of this syncretic trend. All the religious leaders of India had Puri in the itinerary of their pilgrimage in India and hence had left a few features of their ways of worship which were blended together and formed what may be called the cult of Jagannatha. Most of the poets of medieval Orissa, including Sarala Das and the Panchasakha have described Lord Jagannatha as the Buddha, again eulogized as the ninth avatar of Lord Vishnu. Orissa Vaishnavism was faithfully rooted in this synthesis and always acknowledged Jagannatha as the Highest Lord, the Avatari, the Supreme, source of all avatars. And the comparatively more nirguna of them even went beyond Jagannatha and described him as nothing more than a representative idol, the real object of adoration being the Supreme Brahma or Shunya Purusha.

This was the soil on which the Gaudiya movement of Vaishnavism came as a superstructure. It was an exclusive movement and acknowledged Shri Chaitanya as the Avatari and the Supreme Lord. Chaitanya’s disciples had deified him even when he had not left his mortal body. This was clearly incompatible with a tradition which had centred itself round the institution of Lord Jagannatha and at times aspired to go even beyond that. Among the very discriminating in the Chaitanya fold, among those who had come to Puri with him were also the very enthusiastic followers who wanted to believe that Shri Chaitanya was even greater than Lord Jagannatha. There were attempts to prepare books to establish this belief in a scholarly sort of way. The Gaudiyas spoke and sung in their own language. They had their separate symbols. But to their advantage, they had the king of Orissa on their side. In the history of the world religions, those who have won over the state as their patronizer and protagonist have had a greater spread and popularity as cults than the others who have kept themselves cautiously away from the courts. Shri Ramananda Pattanayak who was serving the king of Orissa in one of the court’s highest
echelons, gave up his official job and came to join Shri Chaitanya as a devotee and a worshipper. There must have been several lesser ones too doing the same thing. Naturally there were quite a number of Oriya converts to the fold of the Gaudiyas and they soon came to be established well enough to provide an alternative. The titular lesser kings in various principalities of coastal Orissa also became protagonists of the Gaudiya cult, very much emulating the way of the king of Orissa. With their approval and help, monasteries were founded in different places with landgrants and other patronizations from these kings. The Gaudiya math where Bhakta Charana Das lived belonged to this category.

An anecdote says that though Shri Chaitanya stayed in Orissa till his death, his followers who had accompanied him to Puri from Gaudadesha and formed so much of his flank chose to leave for Brundabana, leaving the master alone. The reason ascribed to this incident is said to be some subtle differences between the master and his followers. Perhaps the master did not want to be as exclusive in his outlook as his disciples wanted him to be. But inevitably there was a parting of the ways. The Gaudiya Vaishnavas, including the Oriya converts, continued as a separate group, lived separately in their monastic centres more often than not with patronization from the kings and local rulers. Their deities were Radha and Krishna, the former being always ascribed a comparatively more distinguished position. Idols of Shri Chaitanya were inevitably there, though as secondary deities. The cult adhered to the tradition of Bengali kirtans and produced books written in Bengali. The hundreds of bhajans written by the other flank, the Oriya Vaishnavas, did not have any access to these monasteries.

The Oriya Vaishnava tradition continued also, in spite of the royal wraths and disparagements. It continued as a movement of dissent. The Panchasakha had their individual centres, mainly in the countryside, apparently away from the royal seats and spheres of influence. Everything they wrote as a media to propagate their faith was written in Oriya. They also sang highly of Lord Krishna, but had no place for Shri Radha. They had no objection against the worship of idols,
but always took care to emphasize that the idols were symbols and no more than that. symbols representing the Supreme Lord who could not be reduced exclusively to any image or figure. They wanted to stress the essence behind the representations devised for the convenience of worship. After the Panchasakha of course, we do not come across saints and writers within this order who were as powerful as the five forerunners. Royal disfavour towards it was also another reason why the movement seemed to gradually withdraw to the side leaving the entire platform to the other monastic order. Nevertheless it was never wiped out completely and it seems it was passing through a period of waiting, biding its time to come back. It did indicate a return later with Arakshita Das in the eighteenth and Bhima Bhoi in the nineteenth century. of course, marked by substantial alterations answering to the particular needs of the time in which these appeared.

Bhakta Charana belongs to exactly this time when the two ways were continuing side by side as parallel trends. As regards worshipping a cult and following a definite order, he belonged to the Gaudiya way and did not want to hide his allegiance. One may surmise of course that when he wrote the Manabodha or even the Kalakalebara, he had not formally belonged to any denomination. And when he wrote Manashiksha after Mathura Mangala, he was out and out a spokesman of an avowed monastic order. In literature, Bhakta Charana ought to have got the requisite tips not only from the Gaudiya stalwarts, but also from Jayadeva, the renowned poet of the Gitagovinda, who came quite a few centuries before him. That style of bringing down the deity to flesh and blood and to describe his exploits in the most sensuous manner excusing yourself all the time that you are singing of a god and not of a mortal was very much in the air of the literary climate to which Bhakta Charana belonged. To serve as a booster it seems there was also the architectural tradition of the reeti style in literature, a style which believed very ardently in decorating the body of literature as elaborately and flatulently as possible, according to a code of aesthetic calculus which was already there. There seems to be
a reeti period in each of the vernacular literatures of India. Each of them had their key inspirations from Sanskrit no doubt, yet they had each a story about their development and flourish. The background climate of Orissa in those centuries seemed to be specially congenial for the flowering up of Oriya reeti literature, as a result of which the latter could eventually claim to have reached a very high degree of excellence in this regard. Upendra Bhanja, popularly called the Kabisamrat by his admirers in Orissa, and several others of his variety were the very great names who could bring the style to this level of excellence through their efforts.

Bhakta Charana was at once a representative of reeti phase as well as the Vaishnava phase of Oriya literature. He seemed to differ from the diehard representatives of the reeti style in that he used the style only in writing about gods and the cult. He never used it for secular purposes. The rich heritage of the Oriya chhandas provided him the music for his poetry. The representatives of the pure reeti, especially those who flourished in the courts and wrote mainly for the kings and chiefs adorning the courts, took to erotic poetry, pure and simple, very understandably. The legends about the deified ones, especially about Krishna were conducive stuff for the use of the erotic modes. The introduction of the Radha theme into the larger Krishna lores must have provided extra grist to take to that style with full vigour. But as the chief aim of the religious writers then was to popularize the Krishna theme, the language they used as a medium was also to be the language easily understood by the people. This helped in bringing about a break in the tendency to Sanskritize Oriya poetry. Bhakta Charana writes in a very simple language, so that the lay people can broadly understand and appreciate what he intends to say. The themes about a familiar deity, Krishna, easily understandable allegories anointed with erotic versification and capable of being sung in the well-known melodies, all these in a happy combination have made Mathura Mangala what it is, rightly a masterpiece of Oriya kavya literature. Bhakta Charana’s genius at using the appropriate comparisons taken from almost everyday experiences has made him accepted by people with great love. And what is
more, the poet in Bhakta Charana, as a rule, seems all through to dominate so much the cult-expounder in him that even people who are not interested in being sermonized about a cult but do evidently appreciate good poetry and good music hold him in high esteem. After the Oriya Bhagabata, Mahabharata and Ramayana, Bhakta Charana’s Mathura Mangala is perhaps the most popular book belonging to the kavya era in medieval Oriya literature.

The two parallel trends in Vaishnavism, the traditional Oriya Vaishnavism and Gaudiya vaishnavism have flourished and functioned side by side, almost agreeing to differ. As cults and ways of worship, each has tried to retain its distinction with the belief that it itself is the more correct one. Yet, in literature, the poets who have sung about these two ways have not been able to retain the required rigidity and have been drawn towards each other in spite of the parting of the ways. Dinakrushna Das’s Rasakalolola was for more than one reason the first attempt at a synthesis between the two divisions in Oriya Vaishnavism. And without doubt, Bhakta Charana was very much inspired by Dinakrushna and Rasakalolola and hence nourished almost the same attitude of a synthesis. It has been suggested by students of Oriya literature that even the very title of Bhakta Charana’s Mathura Mangala was inspired by Dinakrushna’s Madhu Mangala. Mathura has since long been known as Madhupuri and hence Madhu Mangala deals with much the same episodes the Mathura Mangala has also used as its story. The Gaudiya school of Vaishnavism no doubt had made a positive contribution to the total gamut of religious movements in Orissa in that it brought religious aspirations to the level of the common people. It emphasized the love of God, spoke of a god who really loved so much and drew near all the people who intensively sought him. It also did adopt the popular methods of samkirtana, group singing, group playing of musical instruments at times allowing themselves to even go up to dancing in groups, chanting the name of gods and causing an elevation by that act of self-ecstasizing. That really brought a new dimension to worship and was to a great extent instrumental in breaking up intergroup rigidities. The
other Vaishnavism wanted to take people back to the essentials of all religious adoration and worship. It emphasized equally upon knowledge and devotion.

Knowledge without stressing equally upon the other human propensity of bhakti always runs the risk of making one often cruelly withdrawn and indifferent. Most people who followed this path in India were sometimes very conspicuous about their attitude of indifference. The saints, most of all Shri Chaitanya, wanted to draw people away from this indifference and so much emphasized upon love and devotion. Love of god has always an inherent propensity of drawing people to one another, and hence could serve as an antidote to the indifference and callousness of the so-called jnani, the man of knowledge. It was mainly this element in what Shri Chaitanya preached that gave him quick response wherever he went during his sojourns. But, as soon as bhakti begins to be encrusted into a cult. it also runs the risk of becoming exclusive and has a tendency to give undue importance on externalities. The Panchasakha of Orissa had raised their voice against these externalities. They believed an attitude was more important than an external routine. The saints of the medieval centuries all over India really stressed upon cultivating an attitude, upon the need for going within and going beyond the mere representations of a cult. The Panchasakha and the upholders of their legacy advocated the same and hence stood for a call-back to essentials, if one was really serious about a spiritual life and did not wish to exhaust himself in following a cult and its prescriptions.

But it did not speak of worship and adoration in terms of groups and appealed mainly to the individual in every person. Gaudiya Vaishnavism came in to fill up the desideratum. Though it did not ignore the individual aspirant, it also invoked the groups. Every individual also has an element of the group in him as far as he is a representative of it. He cannot dispense with his group as a rule, and all what he does and becomes does have a relevance also as far as the group is concerned. Islam and Christianity had rightly emphasized upon this point in a person's spiritual development and hence had given to its rightful place in their formu-
lations. Indian religions more often than not have thought it proper to give it only a secondary importance. It was Gaudiya Vaishnavism that took it up and raised it to the status of one of its main tenets. It was an aspect almost never taken up in Indian religious legacy. The medieval saints had however introduced bhajans meant to be sung collectively and congregationally. yet only Shri Chaitanya and his order gave it a major place and very rightly did so. The great master's coming to Orissa and spending the prime of his life at Puri was a great event in Orissa's history which did have a significant impact upon so many areas of its life in so many days. It was unfortunate that the two schools, the Gaudiya and the indigenous schools, could not occasion a reconciliation and hence a rapprochement could not take place. After all, all genuine jnana does have a room for bhakti in its programmes of attainment and all bhakti, right devotion, has to be equally tended appropriately with jnana, right knowledge, if it is not to end up as sentimentality and voluptuousness.

Every cult builds itself up over a spiritual and religious content. But often the followers of a cult become so enthusiastic about their separate identity as a cult that they in their haste and zeal go away from the contents and get stuck with the cultishness of their cult. Only points of difference with other cults are then overplayed and people persuade themselves to forget that there are similarities too and that a unity can be always worked up if the goals and fundamentals are given due priority. This of course means adequate leadership and the appropriate insights. In all intents and purposes, the Panchasakha and their successors were more receptive than the Gaudiya Vaishnavas, especially after the demise of Shri Chaitanya. Each of the Panchasakha has sung highly in praise of the great master from whom they admit without any reservation to have had their first initiation. There are suggestions to believe that the master also was in no way averse to the Panchasakha; in fact he drew himself very close to at least one of them, to Jagannatha Das and spoke highly of him for having written the Oriya Bhagabata. The Gaudiya texts of the time, in their descriptions of Shri Chaitanya's
leela at Puri, do not even mention their names, not to speak of their referring to the contact they had with Shri Chaitanya. The schisms have widened in course of years and they continue even today. Only some of the poets have been an exception as far as the distances are concerned, poets who belonged to the Gaudiya camp but had taken to the Oriya medium. They have not by doing that let their loyalties to Shri Chaitanya and to Gaudiya Vaishnavism be affected in any way, but nevertheless have looked at the schisms as minor events. The Oriya Gaudiya Vaishnava writers who have written in the Bengali medium to remain more authentic as if, also do not mention the Panchasakha in their works and have not shown any inclination to bridge over the schisms. We must remember here that Bhakta Charana did not write in Bengali, but in Oriya.

In the very beginning of Mathura Mangala, when the poet devotes a few lines in invocation of Krishna to grant him the necessary talents so that he could write the book, he does not keep himself confined to the Krishna of the puranic pantheon only. He, of course, does not forget to refer to the various avatars Lord Krishna had assumed for the good of the world. Yet, he takes a couple of lines to say that He is essentially formless but assumes forms when He desires so. He takes forms and comes down when necessary, yet he is essentially without forms, or to be more correct, beyond all the conceivable forms and hence we should not see him only as a form, but try to look beyond and perceive the One even in the form. That is what the Panchasakha and their followers have always emphasized upon. Oriya Vaishnavism has never derided the mode of worshipping God through the forms, but has always warned us against being caught in the form and remain oblivious of the Essence and the Beyond of which any form is only a representation. To take the representation for the whole essence should be idolatry and all idolatry has always to be eschewed. Bhakta Charana also says that He who was the most cherished treasure of Gokul, the younger brother of Balaram, did away with the Asura king Kamsa and assumed the many avatars for the good of the world is also resplendently present in all beings as their soul. The Creator
and Dispenser of the whole universe. He is also the best we, each of us, carry within us.

In the twentieth chhanda of the same book, when the poet lavishly describes the craze of the women of Mathura to have a real look at Krishna as he walks down the streets of the Asura's capital with his group of friends, we have various kinds of reactions coming out of the mouths of those women, expressing a variety of moods, desires and aspirations also. The majority of course is moved sensuously and give vent to reactions which are appropriately sensuous. That is the style that the poets of reeti have always followed, and the poets of the Gaudiya school have also made full use of it. Bhakta Charana as a rule is no exception to it, but there are meaningful variations also. He may have done it quite unconsciously, but it is often the unconscious that proves more authentically that we are more than what we consciously vouchsafe ourselves to be. It so happens that one of the ladies compares Krishna with Cupid, the god who is responsible for why people fall in love. It is Cupid who keeps tempting people and making people vulnerable for that fall. According to the legendary lore woven round Cupid in India, the latter had also once dared tempt no less than the great yogi Shiva. Shiva became furious at the attempt and by the force of his wrath, reduced Cupid to ashes. Here, of course, the legend ends. Bhakta Charana weaves out a supplementary story as he begins to describe the reaction of one of the belles of Mathura as she has a view of Krishna passing by on the street before her eyes. She fabricates that by some good fortune, cupid again got back his life and had run away immediately to evade the wrath of Shiva again. Just to hide himself, he took the body of Shri Krishna and took birth upon earth to lure young ladies into the snares of powerful passion. The lady standing beside her however could not appreciate the idea of identifying Krishna with so small an entity. She submitted that even millions of such Cupids put together would not be equal to even the lower surface of Krishna's feet. Cupid is not all powerful; he can entice people who are laden with a passion that has overpowered them. Even yogis who have a hidden sympathetic corner in them for passion are afraid of Cupid.
Cupid is a bad fellow for that matter, out to deviate people and having no respect for anything, ranging from the lowest worm to the highest Brahma. But Krishna, the son of the milkman king, she seems to try to assess him by his real stature, is verily the jewel of jewels; he is the incomparable one if one really knows him. And what is more, he reveals himself to persons according as each one of them is moved to have an image of him. He is the bounteous one who fulfils everyone’s desires. And hence, to equate him with Cupid is a very bad comparison, she concludes.

Most of the reactions, as far as the ladies of Mathura were concerned, were erotically inspired and have been expressed by the poet in faithful accordance with the instructions of the classical reeti scriptures. One of the ladies would still like to equate Krishna with Cupid and imagined to see all the latter’s weapons installed with the various limbs of Krishna’s body. Yet another lady came out to protest against what she characterized as a shameless observation. She refuted by saying—it is like making unnecessary enquiries about food when the plate of food is already put before you on the table, like desiring a sexual intercourse with the husband before you have really met him, like fancying that you are in a place of pilgrimage before you have actually undertaken a pilgrimage to such a place, like collecting books before you have actually gone through them, or digging a well before you have the money to afford such an undertaking, like imagining yourself to be a mother of children though you have remained childless and sterile, like going out to fetch water without the waterpot in which you can really fetch it, and what is perhaps the worst, it is like a maidservant calumniating the lady of the household as an adulterate woman. Hence, she advises rather to keep away from all that dirty polemics and have a real look at Krishna. This probably indicates that poets who took the help of erotics to embellish their descriptions also felt a repulsion about it all the same, at least at times. Bhakta Charana lets the bhakta in him get the upper hand over the lover of the erotic reeti style, whenever he seems thus to recoil.
The comparisons of Bhakta Charana are as a rule uniquely his own and excellently fit into the dominating temper of the lore he has taken up as a theme. Some of them of course have been borrowed from the classical reeti manuals and in this process of borrowing, the poet has very successfully learnt to mint his own original ones too. In the dialogues with which the entire treatise is replete, the major part of the conversations comprises of the brilliant comparisons. The woes of mother Yashoda as well as of the gopis are expressed principally through the medium of comparisons. The awe-inspiring experiences of the women of Mathura when they are seeing Krishna for the first time are expressed so brilliantly through comparisons. Akrura, the messenger with the chariot and for that matter Uddhaba the devotee who was deputed by Krishna from Mathura on a very special errand, have deemed it most appropriate to speak in the language of comparisons. These comparisons make the theme movements so visual and hence real. Even the short dialogue Krishna has with the royal wrestler at the entrance to Kamsa's palace is mostly thudded with comparisons, from both sides. And to crown it all, the letter that Krishna writes to the gopis and the one Shri Radha writes to him in reply are written with the help of appropriate comparisons. Bhakta Charana will be most remembered in Oriya literature for having said things with myriads of these comparisons. It was most probably a much-used feature in folk narratives everywhere at the time and people believed that what you cannot so well say straight can be better expressed through a comparision. Bhakta Charana has adopted the device in a masterly way and therefore, whatever he says to express the intimate sentiments of his characters or to describe a situation strikes deep into the receptiveness of his readers and appreciators. And with the command the poet had both in the area of classical as well as spoken language, he creates an effect that is so originally his own. The readers are indeed familiar from everyday life with most of those comparisons; yet Bhakta Charana uses them adroitly without making any ceremony of them. He uses them with so much ease that they are deluded to believe that they are encountering these comparisons for
the first time. And of course, they feel happy to have been so deluded. That is the real triumph of a successful poet who by temperament is sincere and honest.

It is true Bhakta Charana belonged to a particular monastic order and through whatever he wrote, his chief motive was to propagate that order and popularize the beliefs of that order. In this respect, every word he took pains to write did have an immense value and has greatly benefitted all the people belonging to and swearing by that order. There are many others, everywhere, who have thus written for a particular religious order and have definitely benefitted the members of that order. But all who have written thus are not always remembered. What is more, all who have written thus are rarely read and appreciated outside the periphery of the order. We have legions of such sacred books written by honest authors, including books of poetry. Bhakta Charana would not have written a word if it was not to sing the glories of god or to persuade the people of this world not to remain so much engrossed with the world and plead with them to turn back to what he thought were essential real pursuits of a life. *Manabodha Chautisha* and *Mathura Mangala* are masterly creations of a poet who is committed not merely to a particular order but to poetry and to a cluster of eternal values. Poetry does not in any way affect the particular commitments of a real poet, it only helps him to transcend the narrowness that may intervene in the name of being loyal to a code of beliefs. Only a real poet does forget the rigid boundaries of that code and becomes instrumental to cause an elevation both in himself and in his readers, as he gives expression to his loves and innermost loyalties through poetry or any other creative medium. To read and appreciate Bhakta Charana is to be deeply aware of that transcendence and that elevation. And that always is the real success of an author, of a poet for that matter. Bhakta Charana, through his works, takes us beyond Bhakta Charana, takes us beyond to the realm of the spirit through what he has apparently written on behalf of his own denomination. We begin to love Krishna, we too fall in love with the gopis because of their innocence about their love for
Krishna, we feel we would not grudge becoming a Vaishnava ourselves. That is the secret alchemy of all real poetry and the strength of all poets. Bhakta Charana endears all his readers who over read his *Mathura Mangala* or sing his *Manabodha*. That is the reason why even though he belonged to the medieval centuries and sang in a style that was chiefly medieval, he remains a living inspiration in Oriya literature even today and is held with great warmth and admiration even by poets and writers of our own times.
Appendix

SOME EXCERPTS WITH ENGLISH RENDERINGS

Una heuchhi dinu dinu ayusa
Au eniki aechhi kete bayasa re
Chitrarpatima praye disu sundara
Chiri bhitara dekha ki narakhara re
Charma bedhichhi sina chaurasiki
Chitta tu dia nilagiribasinki re.

You are fast growing old and losing years. From outside, you
do look like a beautifully painted comely doll: but if you tear
it and look inside, how ugly you verily are! The elements of
your body are so ingeniously covered with a coat of skin: be
thou mindful and beseeching of the Lord, the Dweller at the
Blue Mountain.

Manabodha Chautisa.

Sisunku disanti sisu paraye
Narinka drustiki madanarac
Bruddhanku balaka- swabhaha mati
Jnaninki nirguna rupa sripati.
Bhaktanku. Nandanandana para.
Nana rupa dhare mandaradhara.
Dustanku jama parae disanti.
dekhi darila kamsa narapati

To children he looks like a child; to women as nothing less
than Cupid, the king. To old people, he bears the appearance
of a boy who plays freaks. And for the jnanins, he is the
embodied Nirguna. For the bhaktas, he is the son of Nanda.
thus, the one who had lifted up the Mount Mandara. appears
in many guises. He is verily death to the wicked, and hence
it was appropriate that the asura king Kamsa became scared
about him when he had a look at him.

Mathura Mangala, Ch. 21
Durjana jananku sujana naruche
Murkhanku naruchai beda.
Bitapi narinki pati naruchai
Kola najane rambha swada.
Kukkura, jagnasale thile jemanta.
Darpsiña Durmila nandanaku
Madhukataka disai temanta.

A man of evil intentions does not relish a man of noble intentions. The unlettered and the vulgar cannot relish the Vedas. Adulterous women do not relish having a husband. The pig will not relish the taste of a banana. How ill-fitting is a dog at a place of sacrifice! In the same way did Madhupura bear a disquieting appearance to the son of Durmila.

Mathura Mangala. Ch. 13

Dhain Pitabasa bama kare kesa
Dhaile hoi kopamurti.
Daita daitarinukha anai
Jeebana chhadila tadati.
Nirbana, mukti pathare pasila.
Asesa janmara kalamasa jeteka gobindadarsane nasila.

Krishna, attired in yellow, became furious with anger, rushed at Kamsa and had a grip of the hair of the giant's head with his left hand. The daitya in no time breathed his last with his eyes set on Daityari's countenance. The fire was extinguished and he entered the stated liberation. The accumulated pile of sins committed during endless lives was washed away by this encounter with Gobinda.

Mathura Mangala. Ch. 22
Emanta bhalante nisi hoila prabhata
Dakile charanayudha kahe parabhruta.
Ghanaghana samkhaswana subhe debalaye
Bayasa kapota nada kale kolahale.
Kulabatimane uthi karanti kirati
Rupajibapurun jarapuruse palanti.
Choramane nibartile chakrabake sukhi
Drona dare uluka manduka bile luchi.
Purbadige udaya hoile dinakara
Phutile pankaja kumudini lajabhara.

Night began to draw away making room for dawn. The birds started chirping and the wasp came droning. One could hear the sound of conches from the places of worship. Housewives became busy with their daily chores. The visitors for the night hastened to leave the prostitutes’ chambers. The thieves withdrew; the chakrabaka couple became happy, but the owls and the toads ran to their hiding places in fear of the falcon. The sun came out of the eastern horizon: the lotus flowers opened and the water-lilies blushed pale and closed their petals.

_Mathura Mangala. Ch. 22_
Karmakanda je jnanakanda
Sastre bolanti bisabhanda.
Taha je kare aswadana
semane jajnapasu sama.
Ihajanmare bhrami mare
ante se pasurupa dhare.
Je karmajnani jogi nyasi
Se ethi naparanti pasi.
Najane ehu brajarasa.
tankara janma karya kisa.
Radhagobinda lila chhadi.
Je anyapathe janti hudi.
Tahanku boli abibeka.
Nuhanti premara nayaka.
Tankara sukha lesa nahin
Ante aneka klesa pai.
Chaitanya Nityananda pade
Je bhaje manu mahaswade.
Sehi se madhurya janai
Anare gochara nuhai....
E rasa tanku hue drusya
Karmi jnaninku je adrusya.

The karmakanda and the jnanakanada have been described in the scripturers as containers of poison: and the persons who taste of them are like the pasus (animals) meant for the sacrifice. They wander about in vain all their life in this world and at the end, degenerate themselves into animals only. The karmajnans, the yogis and the world-renouncers have no access to the right path. Of what avail is their birth in the world if they stray away unacquainted with the brajarasa, stray into other paths leaving the path of Radha and Gobinda! They are the wrong choosers. They do not partake of the path of love: they are debarred from all happiness and condemned to sufferings without end. On the other side, the person who adores and follows Chaitanya and Nityananda, only he comes to know madhurya: the others are left in deprivation. The karmin and the jnanin are incapable of realization.

Manashiksha. Ch 14
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Bhakta Charana Das did not write pretty much but whatever has been discovered till date has earned him a distinguished place in medieval Oriya literature. Mathura Mangal, his magnum opus, is the best known and most appreciated among his works. Besides this, there are Manabodha Chautisha, Kalakalebara Kanhai and Manashiksha. Bhakta Charana’s works including even the catechismic Manashiksha are unique in their appeal and mark the various stages in his religious and spiritual development. They also suggest his attitude toward himself as a bhakta, toward the world as a place of God’s leela, and also toward God as the master of that leela.

Chitta Ranjan Das (b.1923), the author of this monograph, studied at the Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan and University of Copenhagen, Denmark. Formerly a teacher by profession, he has published more than fifty books in Oriya and translated extensively from different Indian and foreign languages into Oriya. He was honoured with the Sarala Literary Award in 1989.

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