

The Nam-Ghosa and Its Place in Literature

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ATributeToSankaradeva.org presents one of the earliest attempts (in English) at a systematic review of this Venerable Text of Assam Vaisnavism.

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Vaisnava scholar Rameswar Barooah was also the Editor of *Nama Dharma*, the paper of the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha, in its initial years.

A critically compiled edition of the NG with the quoted Sanskrit slokas incorporated in the foot-notes (which also addresses some of the concerns raised by the author in the current piece) has been brought out by the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha. To read/download that edition, click below: -

www.tributetosankaradeva.org/Ghosh.pdf

For a list of the sources of the NG, see also: -

www.tributetosankaradeva.org/ghosa_sources.htm

Editing Notes: - The Ghosas given in Assamese in the original paper have been transliterated. Diacritics have been used sparingly.

Introduction

The Nam-Ghosa (*Nāma Ghosā*) is the Name of a Vaishnavite scripture written by Madhavdeva, the most devoted disciple of Sri Sankardeva who brought about reformation in religion in Assam and Koch Behar, organized society and gave a stamp to literature of which Assam is still proud. It was Madhavdeva who had been nominated by Sri Sankardeva to inherit him in the propagation of the cult preached by the latter and to be the leader of all the institutions founded by him. It was Madhavdeva who gave not only flesh and blood to the skeletons of everything started by Sri Sankardeva but life itself by organizing each of them on sound basis and preaching the gospels of love and self-sacrifice. It is, therefore, no wonder that such a devotee of his preceptor and a staunch believer in the One All-pervading Universal Soul should get inspiration from the Unknowable to write a scripture like the one under review. The scripture is held in high esteem by those who profess and practise the cult preached and shaped by Sri Sankardeva and even the possession of a copy of it is held by them to be a matter of luck and a

treasure store. The scripture is known by the name of *Hajari Ghosa* as well, as it contains one thousand verses in different meter and rime all told. It goes generally by the name of Ghosha Sastra among the Assamese people. The name Nam-Ghosa has recently been given to it.

Origin

It is said that one day Sri Sankardeva told Madhavdeva to write a scripture expressing the superiority of chanting the Name of the Unknowable over all other forms of worship in the Kaliyuga or the Iron Age. He further advised Madhavdeva to make the scripture as easy and sweet apparently as the soft flesh of a plum but to base it on the authoritative Sastras or scriptures and on their well established doctrines so that it might not be pierced through even by its worst critics and so in reality it might resemble the stone inside the fruit mentioned above. It is further said that Madhavdeva began the work with the third verse of the scripture as it stands at present and showed his composition to Sri Sankardeva to know whether the work had been begun as advised. Sri Sankardeva remarked that though the work had been well begun the head had been left out and so saying composed the first half of the first verse. Madhavdeva, realising the true import of Sri Sankardeva's words took upon himself the task of completing the work.

Date

It may be concluded from what has been said above that the work was begun during the life time of Sri Sankardeva but there are reasons to believe that it was not completed during his (Sri Sankardeva's) time. The reasons in brief are:-

1. No where in the lives of Sri Sankardeva written by his contemporaries or those who came just after him it is mentioned that verses from the Nam-Ghosa were chanted at prayer during his time as it is done at present. Madhavdeva probably did not like to introduce it in prayer partly out of regard for his preceptor and partly because it was his own composition. It is said that the present forms of Prasanga (chanting of hymns) was formulated by Purusottama Thakur, a grand son of Sri Sankardeva, and by his contemporaries in their own institutions according to their own ideas.

2. Had the scripture been completed and given out by that time there would have been several copies of it, as was the practice then, during a period of no less than 28 years for which Madhavdeva survived after Sri Sankardeva and Purusottama Thakur would not have found it difficult to procure a copy of it for himself. The story goes that after the demise of Madhavdeva, his disciple Mathuradasa Ata who was at the head of the institution at Barpeta got possession of the only copy of the Nam-Ghosa. Purusottama Thakur who was then at Pat Bausi, three miles off from Barpeta, sent word to Mathuradasa Ata to lend the scripture to him for some time but the latter refused to do it. Getting no other copy, it is said, Purusottama Thakur composed another book on similar line and named it *Na-Ghosa*. The imitation, however, was not as successful.

3. From the available biographies it can not be inferred that during the life time of his preceptor, Madhavdeva attained that stage of devotion which might enable him to get such inspiration as to lose himself in reverie and chant the Names of the Unknowable with the least care for rime and meter. It is palpably seen in the last part of the book under review that in chanting the Names of God, Madhavdeva was so inspired that he did not care for rimes but rimes, however, took care of themselves in whatever he chanted and wrote.

All these lead me to conclude that the book was completed and given out in the latter half of the 16th century probably between 1585 & 1595 A.D.

Contents

It is, in brief, the exposition of the cult of Vaisnavism as promulgated and preached by Sri Sankardeva, but its aim is to establish that no one can attain salvation without Bhakti¹ (devotion) and that in this Iron Age the one and the only form of religious observance² that is feasible and

1

devaro durlabha Isvara Krsnaka

Bhakatise kare basya

āgama nigama Gitā Bhāgavata

sāstrara ehi rahasya 221

kevala Bhakati purusaka tāre

sahāya kāko nacāve

jñāne karme tāve tārite napāre

Bhakati napāve yāve 200

Tinigunamaya yata jñāna karma

kevala bandha kārana

jāni tāka teji ekānta Bhakati

bhajiyo Krsna Carana 212

2

satyayuge dhyāna tretāyuge yajna

practicable for a worldly man is chanting repeatedly the Names of God, the Unknowable, as sanctioned by the Scriptures. The literal meaning of the title of the work under review is “Repetition of Names”.

The scripture under review begins with the mention of the main factors of the Vaisnava cult preached by Sri Sankardeva and their significance in the profession and practice of the cult. These factors are: -

1. The Preceptor or *Guru*
2. The Deity or *Deva*
3. The Name or *Nam*
4. The Devotee or *Bhakta*

The whole scripture is devoted in the discussion of them and on their utility in devotion.

The Preceptor

1. The function of the preceptor³ is to give counsel to man to realize the Deity. This preceptor may either be a man or a Sastra or a treatise. Mere literary learning, however vast it

dvāpara yugata puḷā

kalita Harira Kirttana bināi

āvara nāhike duḷā 399

kalita Harira Kirttana ediyā

anyatra dharma ācare

michāte kevale srama mātra pāve

ekove phala nadhare 400

3

moha māyā rāga mada mala kāma

dambha dvesa ādi bhāva

yi Gurujanata isava nathāke

pranāmo tāhāna pāva 193

sāstra Guru save sisyaka krpāye
suddha upadesa dība
sisyasave suddha- bhāve nadharile
tārāsava ki kariba 256

yeve sisyasave mahā suddhabhāve
upadesa ācaraya
sāstra Guru āpu- nāko sito sisye
tiniko raksā karaya 257

sabada brahmara pāra bhoila yito
Krsnata Bhakati nāi
tāra sāstrasrama srame mātra phala
yena rākhe bāji gāi 290

sāstramata eri yi kathā kahaya
kevale pāsanda naya
āchoka Krsnaka pāibe kadācita
nuguce samsāra bhaya 294

santa upadese Haricarane bhajiyo
Harināma niramala ānande majiyo 430

Krsnapada mātra sevā kare samaste kāmanā parihare
bedabyavahāra kadācito nalanghaya
Krsnapadasevā sukhamane kare anubhava sarbaksane

may be, cannot make a man fit to be a preceptor. He must have the qualification of having been a sincere devotee of the Supreme Deity. Such a preceptor can show the right way to his disciples. Madhavdeva in his work holds that **Sri Sankardeva**⁴ alone deserves the epithet of preceptor and his instructions are alone to be followed by those who profess his cult.

ihāka Mahanta buliya jānā niscaya 595

Hari yena āti krpāmaya Bhakta Gurujano sehinaya
duyojana eka sarirata mātra bhinna
krpārased yukta huyā citta lokara hitaka cinti nita
nija gune tusta duyo ahamkāre hina 681

4

Srimanta Sankara Hari Bhakatara
jānā yena kalpataru
tāhānta bināy nāi nāi nāi
āmāra Parama Guru 375

Sankare samsaya chedi sāstrara tattvaka bhedi
pracārilā Krsnara Bhakati
tānka eri ki kārane ānaka bolaya Guru
kino loka mahāmudhamati 54

Srimanta Sankare prakāsilā Govindara Gunanāma Yasa
jagatara loke parama ānande gāve
henaya Sankara Guru bine kamana kārane āna jane
lokara mājata āpuni Guru bolāve 625

The Deity

2. Madhavdeva in his Nam-Ghosa establishes on the authority of Vedas, Upanishads, the *Gita* and the *Bhagawata* that **Krishna**⁵, Who⁶ has been, being worshipped by Brahma and Siva,

5

Vede Rāmāyane Purāne Bhārate

ādi madhya avasāne

Harikese mātra kahave niscaya

jānā tattva ehimāne 203

6

Harira Carana sadā ārādhanta

brahmā hara purandara

hena Haripade Sarana nalave

kona buddhihina nara 279

huyā deva digambara bhasmabibhusita anga

sirata dhariyā jatābhāra

mahese sevanta yāka hena Krsna bine āna

kona srestha deva āche āra 16

brahmā ādi devagane nicala sampatti mane

laksmika sevanta tapa kari

laksmio sevanta yāka hena Mahesvara Visnu

āna kona deva Tānka sari 17

brahmā mahādeva laksmi devi kāyabākyamane thira kari

parama ānande Carana sevanta yāra

sadā janma jadā mrtyuhina srimanta sundara gunanidhi

Visnuta bināi kona deva āche āra 588

the Chief of the Devatas (gods) recognized in the Hindu Sastras, and by Laksmi, the goddess worshipped by all the gods, Who⁷ incarnated Himself in different forms in different ages to educate His creatures to realize their own self, Who⁸ is the Lord of time and illusion (*maya*), Who⁹ alone has self-consciousness, Who¹⁰ is omnipresent and omniscient, and has neither

yāra Pādodake devi gangā yāra Bākye huyā āche Beda
parama patito taraya yāhāra Nāme
srsti sthiti pralayara yito Parama Kārana Nārāyana
hena Isvaraka nabhajaya kona kāme 589

7

Matsya Kurma Narasimha Vāmana Parasurāma
Halirāma Varāha Srirāma
Buddha Kalki nāme dasa ākrti dharichā Krsna
Tayu Pāve karoho pranāma 3

parama durbodhya ātmatattva tāra jnāna arthe Hari yata
Lilā Avatāra dharā Tumi Kṛpāmaya
Tāhāna Caritra sudhāsindhu Tāta kridā kari Dinabandhu
cāri purusārtha tnara sama karaya 643

8

Krsna eka deva dukkhahāri kāla māyādiro adhikāri
Krsna bine srestha deva nāhi nāhi āra
srsti sthiti antakāri Deva Tānta bine āna nāhi keva
jānibā Visnuse samasta jagate sāra 586

9

māyā ādi kari samaste asanta
jānibā jada niscaya
Hari mātra Santa Caitanya Isvara
Parama Tattva nirnaya 205

beginning nor end, Who¹¹ is the soul of the universe and the dispenser of all individuals souls, is the only Divine Deity Whom a man ought to recognize, realize and worship. Madhavdeva devotes more than half of the scripture in the vindication of this statement.

Harise Caitanya ātmā jnānamaya

āvāra samaste jada

Veda Vedāntara samaste sāstrara ehise bicāra bada 220

brahmā ādi kari jiva yata Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma

māyāsayyā māje āchaya ghumati yāi

Tumise Caitanya Sanātana Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma

āmi acetana niyoka Nātha jagāi 659

10

Tumi sarva sāksi ātmā Hrsikesa

jānāhā mora cittaka

saranāgataka mai āturaka

upeksā karā kisaka 303

Parama Purusa Parama Ānanda Parama Guru Murāri

Anādi Ananta Acyuta Govinda Bhakatara bhayahāri 855

11

prakṛti purusa duiro niyantā Mādhava

samastare ātmā Hari Parama Bāndhava 405

namo namo Nitya Niranjana Nārāyana Siva Sanātana

Anādi Ananta Nirguna gunaniyantā

Parama Purusa Bhagavanta nāhi purbāpara ādi anta

Tumise Caitanya samaste bhavabhāvantā 587

Name

3. The third factor is Name or Nām. Madhavdeva in his Nam-Ghosa establishes the importance of chanting the Name of the Supreme Deity in devotion. He has based his argument on the following:-

(a) The only religion prescribed for man in this Iron Age is chanting the Name of the Deity¹².

Acintya Ananta Sakatira Pati Hari Hari Hari Hari e
Tumi Kṛpāmaya Deva agatira gati
Tumi Satya Sanātana Sadāsiva Hari Hari Hari Hari e
Tomāra Carane māgoho nirmala rati 815

12

satyayuge dhyāna tretāyuge yajna
dvāpara yugata puṣṭi
kalita Harira Kirttana bināi
āvāra nāhike duṣṭi 399

dosara sāgara kali tāko Parikṣita Rajā
guna dekhi karilā raksan
mahāpāpi antyajāti taraya kalita sukhe
mukhe kari Harira Kirttana 121

dusta kali sarpe savāko damsile
harāila cetana jnāna
ihāra ousadhi sudhā Rāma Nāma
bine nāhi nāhi āna 201

kalira lokara bhāgyara mahimā
kone kahi pāve pāra
Hari Guna Nāma Kalira Svadharmā

(b)¹³ Rules and formalities are to be followed in the observance of other forms of rituals and different classes of persons are permitted by Sastras to perform different rituals but the Name

samasta sāstrara sāra 369

satyādira loke kalita janama

bāncā kare nirantara

Hari guna gāyā niscaya kalita

hoibe Nārāyana para 383

13

candāla paryyanta kari jagatara upakāri

nāhi Nāma Guna bine āna

sehise kārane Hari nija Yasa priya bhoila

Bhagavanta Bhakatara prāna 21

barnāsrāma dharma yata yāra yena bidhi āche

tārese kevala adhikāra

Hari Nāma Kirttanata nāhike niyama eko

etekese dharma māje sāra 119

parama nirmala dharma Hari Nāma Kirttanata

samasta prānira adhikāra

etekese Hari Nāma samasta dharmara rājā

ehi sāra sāstrara bicāra 118

yi hetu Govinda nija Yasa priya

Bhakata batsala Hari

si hetu sadāye Nāma Guna suni

thākanta ānanda kari 391

of God can be sung by all classes of people and no rules and formalities are to be observed in doing so. So God Who is benevolent and Who is equal to all, became a special lover of His Names.

(c) His Names are all descriptive and they indicate his different attributes or aspects¹⁴. If their significance is properly understood they can give a real sight into the greatness of God and

samastare ātmā Nārāyana ātma sukhe rati sarbaksana
ehi hetu Hari samasta prānita sama
Tānka yito bhaje sukhe tare nabhaji samsāre maji mare
Krsnaka bisama bolaya kona adhama 632

14

Krsa hena sabda ito prthibi bācaka bhoila
Na ānandata prabarttaya
duiro eka pada bhoila Parambrahma rupa Krsna
nāma ānandaka mātra kaya 140

Isvarara Pada Sevā karante jivara yata
krsatā guchaya nirantara
ehi hetutese jānā Isvaraka buli Krsna
prasiddha anvaya manohara 141

Caitanya Saktira bale ito jada jagataka
ramāvanta karma anurupe
etekese Isvarara parama prasiddha Rāma
nāma āka jānibā svarupe 153

smarana mātrake yihetu durghora
samsāra duhkha haranta
sehi hetutese Isvaraka Hari

His workings. As His attributes or aspects are innumerable or infinite so are His Names inexhaustible.

(d)¹⁵ God, the Deity, cannot be dissociated from His Name. God exists where His Name exists. In order words a mental image of the form or the attribute of the Deity is formed as soon

bolaya yata Mahanta 155

adhama puruso hovaya uttama

bhajiyā yāra Carana

Purusottama nāmaka dhariyā

āchanta ehi kārana 170

Isvaraka jāni nare bhajiyā māyāka tare

simha yena bhramaya nirbhaya

etekese Isvarara nāma Narasimha bhoila

Mahājana sakale kahaya 146

15

ekānta Bhakata sabe Nirguna Krsnara Guna

gāve sadā basiyā yathāta

Vaikunthako parihari yogiro hridaya eri

thākā Hari sāksāte tathāta 4

Mādhavara Nāma batsa prāya bhoila

Bhakte Tānka loiyā yānta

Vedara Isvara Hari dhenu bhoila

tarā pāche pāche dhānta 364

yei Nāma sei Hari jānā nista kari

Āpona Nāmara sanga nacāranta Hari 514

as the Name associated with that image or attribute is conceived or pronounced. It helps in the realization of the soul.

(e)¹⁶ There is a belief that the Feet of the Deity are impressed in the heart of every being and there is a covering of illusion or *maya* over it. The only means to see the Feet of the Deity is chanting of His Name. It acts like a lamp and breaks through the illusion.

(f) It is always seen that at the time of death highest consideration in expectation of salvation is given to the utterance of the Name of the Deity¹⁷.

Krsna kathā sune gāve yito sraddhā kari
alpa kāle hiyāta prabesa honta Hari 440

16

Hari Pada mahā thāli Rāma Nāma
amrte āche bhariyā
kapata dhākana bhāngi āve bhāi
santosa huyoka piyā 237

Mahanta savara sange Rāma Nāma
loiyo anjaniyā kari
kapata duvāra curiyā hrdaya
bhāndāre dekhiyo Hari 238

ajnāna āndhāre pariyā jivara
jnāna patha bhoila nāsa
Nāma Anjaniyā bine āna mate
napāve Harira pāsa 235

Tomāra māyāye mana muhi āche Hari e ...
ajnāna āndhāre pariyā pāra nāpāo Rāma Rāma
abhaya Carane Sarana pasilo Hari e ...

Tuvā Guna Nāma Bhakati pradipa cāo Rāma Rāma 791

(g) There are parables in Hindu Sastras that persons with despicable character attained salvation by uttering the Name of the Deity¹⁸.

Madhavdeva summarizes the effect of chanting the Name of the Deity saying that it can give everything to a devotee and make the Deity subordinate to him and comes to the conclusion that God being omnipresent cannot be called in or requested to depart, being above all forms cannot be imagined in mind, being beyond the reach of language used by men, cannot be worshipped. Consequently the only thing that a man can do to purify himself is to chant His Name¹⁹.

17

tapa japa tirtha brata yāga yoga yaṅna dāna
kāko nusumare mrtyu belā
marantā janaka bedhi bole sabe Rāma bolā
hena Nāme etiksane helā 48

mrtyu taribāra yata āchaya upāya āna
bighini dusita nirantare
bighini rahita yata Mādhavara Guna Nāma
Kirttana kariyā sukhe tare 21

18

bhubana mohana Rāma bhajilo Tomāra pāy
mahā mahā pāpi yāra Nāma japi Uttama Padaka pāy 698

Mādhave bolanta Moka Krsna Krsna Krsna buli
sadāye sumare yito jane
jala hante yena padma narakara parā tāka
āpuni uddhāro ranga mane 86

19

āna dharmā yata Harira Nāmara
renuko nohe samāna
hena Hari Nāma amrta sāgara

santose kario pāna 248

Harira Nāmara ananta mahimā
jāni Mahājane gānta
āpona Nāmara mahimāka Hari
āpuni anta nāpānta 339

Nārada Sanata Kumāra Ananta
Suka Muni ādi kari
mukuti sukhaka theli Rāma Nāma
sadāye phure sumari 353

Vyāsa nigadati lubdha mati suniyo ānande karna pāti
deo upadesa urddha bāhu ucca kari
ehi māne mātra Mahā Mantra samsāra durghora bisahāri
Namo Nārāyana buliyoka mukha bhari 599

jānā Srirāma nāma nija samaste mantrara mula bija
sanjivaniprāy yāra mane pravesaya
yadi halāhala pāna kare pralaya bahnita yadi pare
mrtiyura mukhata pravesile nāhi bhaya 621

mora istadeva Yādava Rāy
sevā karibāra Nāme upāy 893

Rāma Nāma dharmate uttama Hari Hari
nāhi Bhakti Rāma Nāma sama Rāma Rāma 953

mukuti sukhaka basya kari Hari Nāme ānandata nāce
puruse sahite sakhitva kariyā calaya Harira kāche
āpona Nāmara mahimā dekhiyā Harira ānanda cade
yito Nāma lay Hari tāra hay ipunu rahasya bare 996

yito Deva Bhagavanta Vede yāka najānanta
Tente nija Kirttanata basya
jāni Mādhavara Nāma Kirttana kariyo sadā
ito sabe sāstrara rahasya 83

samaste tirthata snāna karileka sarba yajne
dikṣita bhoileka yito jana
samaste dānara phala si si jane pāile āti
yito kare Nāmara Kirttana 85

Rāma jaya Hari jaya Rāma Kṛsna Rāma Hari jaya
Rāma Kṛsna yito satate sumare Tāra āra kāka bhaya
sakalo dharmara opare basiyā Rāma Nāma prakāsaya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma Kirttana bināi kṛtyasesa nāthākaya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma Kirttane Kṛsnara kṛpāra mandira haya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma Kirttana prabhāve samsāra sukhe taraya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma Kirttane samaste bighini nāsa karaya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma rasaka labhiyā mukutiko naganaya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma parama ānanda samudre maji thākaya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma Kirttana prasāde Harira ballabha haya
Rāma Kṛsna Nāma Kirttana kariyā Hariko basya karaya 972

abyakta Isvara Hari kimate pujibā Tānka

The Devotee

4. The last but not the least factor is His Devotee. God manifests Himself through His Devotees and they are all to Him and He is all to them²⁰.

Practice Advocated

So the form of religious practice²¹ advocated by Madhavdeva in his Nam-Ghosa is that a man ought to take instruction from a Preceptor or Sastra, concentrate his mind to think of God in

byāpakata kibā bisarjana

etāvanta murti sunya kena mate cintibāhā

Rāma buli suddha karā mana 5

cārio Vedara cāri aksara brahmādeve sāra kādhi āni

bekata kariyā thoilā Nārāyana bāni

sehi Nārāyana Nāma loiyā suddha karo āmi citta kāyā

Hari santosara kārana āna nājāni 664

20

Harira parama priyatama nāi

Hari Bhakatata pare

hena Bhakataka yi jane nindaya

Harikese nindā kare 276

21

Sāstra Guru upa- dese sisya sabe

Isvaraka nedekhaya

buddhika sattvastha kariyā āpona

ātmāka dekhe niscaya 253

Sāstra Guru upa- desa krama Rāma

byavasthā mātra pālana

kevala sisya suddha buddhi mātra

jnānara hove kārana 254

hrdaya stambhata Krsna Caranaka

prema jari diyā cāndā

parama suhrda Rāma Krsna Nāma

kavaca galata bāndhā 258

parama Isvara Deva Krsnaka nāpāy lāga

tapa japa yāga yoga dāne

Ekānta Bhaktara pada renu suddha citte mātthe

abhiseka nakaraya māne 38

krpāra sāgara Doivaki Nandana

puriyo manara kāma

Bhakatara sanga sadā nugucoka

mukhe Tuvā Guna Nāma 316

eke khāni mātra sāstra nistha Doivaki Nandane koilā yāka

devo eka mātra Doivaki Devira Suta

Doivaki Putrara Pada Sevā karmo jānā ehi māne mātra

mantra eka Tāna Nāma mātra adabhuta 665

Mahanta sabara sanga loiyā Harita ekānta citta diyā

parama ānande gāyo Hari Guna Nāma

sahaje krpālu Deva Hari loiba āponāra dāsa kari

Hari dāsa bhoile hoibā bhāi purna kāma 676

Tomāra Carana Hari hrdaya pankaje dhari

his heart, chant His Names and dedicate himself in the service of His Devotees. It is said that God cannot leave the company of His devotees.

Names and their Significance

Probably in anticipation of an objection that if God is without form and beyond the reach of language how He can have Names, Madhavdeva devotes a portion of his scripture in explaining the significance of some of the Names of God used in Sastras. He says that the Names²² indicate the capacity of God in influencing life and soul of man. As for instance, the

mukhe loibo Tuvā Guna Nāma e Yadumani e 839

ekānta Bhakata sabe Nirguna Krsnara Guna
gāve sadā basiyā yathāta
Vaikunthako parihari yogiro hrdaya eri
thākā Hari sāksāte tathāta 4

22

Krsa hena sabda ito prthibi bācaka bhoila
Na ānandata prabarttaya
duiro eka pada bhoila Parambrahma rupa Krsna
nāma ānandaka mātra kaya 140

Isvarara Pada Sevā karante jivara yata
krsatā guchaya nirantara
ehi hetutese jānā Isvaraka buli Krsna
prasiddha anvaya manohara 141

Caitanya Saktira bale ito jada jagataka
ramāvanta karma anurupe
etekese Isvarara parama prasiddha Rāma
nāma āka jānibā svarupe 153

name ‘**Krishna**’ indicates that, which can give bliss to man and remove narrowness from mind; ‘**Rama**’ indicates that, which can make the world pleasant; Hari indicates that, which can steal all suffering; ‘**Purusottama**’ indicates that which can elevate a heinous person to the highest level; ‘**Narasimha**’ indicates that, which can enable a person to move in the world like a lion and so on and so forth. He argues that these are possible to be effected only by the Supreme Deity and so these are considered to be His *Names*.

Krishna the Embodiment of the Deity

Another point is that though Madhavdeva has described the Deity as having no form it is found in His scripture that he has taken **Krishna**, the son of Devaki, to be the embodiment of the Deity Himself. His assumption as given in his scripture is that knowledge about the soul being too difficult to acquire and to realize, God incarnates Himself to spread knowledge in that regard among mankind. **Krishna** as described in the *Bhagawata* exhibited in Himself in concrete form whatever had been told of the soul in the Vedas in abstract and enabled Arjuna and a few others to realize them. Besides, Krishna is not considered to be an incarnation of God but as the primary cause of all incarnations. So Madhavdeva in his Nam-Ghosa advocates that Krishna²³, the son of Devaki, should alone be taken to be the Deity personified.

smarana mātrake yihetu durghora

samsāra dukkha haranta

sehi hetutese Isvaraka Hari

bolaya yata Mahanta 155

adhama puruso hovaya uttama

bhajiyā yāra Carana

Purusottama nāmaka dhariyā

āchanta ehi kārana 170

Isvaraka jāni nare bhajiyā māyāka tare

simha yena bhramaya nirbhaya

etekese Isvarara nāma Narasimha bhoila

Mahājana sakale kahaya 146

23

parama durbodhya ātmatattva tāra jnāna arthe Hari yata

Lilā Avatāra dharā Tumi Kṛpāmaya

Tāhāna Caritra sudhāsindhu Tāta kridā kari Dinabandhu
cāri purusārtha trnara sama karaya 643

eke khāni mātra sāstra nistha Doivaki Nandane koilā yāka
devo eka mātra Doivaki Devira Suta
Doivaki Putrara Pada Sevā karmo jānā ehi māne mātra
mantra eka Tāna Nāma mātra adabhuta 665

Vedara guputa bitta Nārāyana e
Doivakita hante sāksāte bhoilā bidita
jivara tarana hetu Nārāyana e
pracārilā nija Yasa Dharma bipolarita 805

sakalo Upanishada dhenu dogdhā bhoila tāra Nandasuta
tāra batsa bhoilā Kuntisuta Dhananjaya
dugdha bhoila mahā Gitāmṛta Kṛsnara Carane diyā citta
subuddhi sakale santose pāna karaya 667

Mādhave bolanta Arjunata sunā ito Paramārtha Tattva
Bhakatese Mora mahimā jāne nihsesa
tattva rupe sakhi jānā Moka tariyā durghora dukkha soka
antakāle goiyā Āmāta hoibā prabesa 615

Isvara Kṛsnaka yito anya devatāra sama
bolaya adhama mudha mati
courāsi naraka bhunji pāpara yonita sito
avasye huibeka utapati 46

General Reflections

I present here only a gist of the scripture under review. I have advisedly used the word scripture in describing the work since it is called a Sastra and not a *puthi* or a book. It is not possible to give a summary of the whole book in a short essay. It contains one thousand verses and each verse is complete in itself and contains matter for a thesis. Another significant point is that the scripture admits of translation into no other language unless it is done by a master mind. It is always sung in a tune whenever it is read. The tune is purely Assamese and it appeals to the heart. The scripture can better be styled as a philosophy of the cult of Vaisnavism as preached by Sri Sankardeva. The cult itself differs from those under the same name as preached by other reformers elsewhere in India. Unfortunately for Assam the majority of our educated people do not pay proper attention to such scriptures in Assamese as the one under review. They have been left to the illiterate villagers who, being innocent of other Sastras on which they are based, interpret them in their own way. The Nam-Ghosa, I am sure, was meant for the educated people of Assam and even as a literary piece it will interest them especially when it is read with the tune peculiar to it. The prayers²⁴ that are incorporated in the scripture are of universal nature and can be sung, I believe, even by those who profess other creeds. The advice²⁵ which the writer has addressed to the different organs and senses may be repeated by every human being with a religious turn of mind.

24

Tumi citta brtti mora prabarttaka Nārāyana
Tumi nātha mai nāthavanta
Carana catrara chāyā diyā dura karā māyā
karā dayā moka Bhagavanta 229

25

sunio hrdaya hera brahmānda bhitare yata
bastu āche toka nojoraya
tāka teji Krsna Nāma aksaya amrta piyā
santosaka labhiyo hrdaya 93

bhaja bhāi Mādhavaka smara bhāi Mādhavaka
gāva bhāi Mādhavara Guna
nicinta āpona māra sukhe āponāka tāra
hoiyo bhāi parama nipuna 112

His self-censure²⁶ in confounding the body with the soul and in not dedicating himself to the service of God and man are pathetic and impressive. The zeal with which he argues his case to arrive at his aim is inspiring and inimitable. His aim is to establish that God is one and everybody else²⁷ emanates from Him; He is to be adored; nobody can have a comprehensive idea of Him; performance of rites and ceremonies cannot enable the subject to reach Him; devotion is the right path to salvation; the only form of devotion that a man can practise in this age is to have implicit faith in Him and to sing His Names alone and in company of such other Devotees. He has based his arguments mainly on the *Gita* and the **Upanishads** and alluded to the parables described in the *Bhagawata* and other religious scriptures. Every one going through the Nam-Ghosa will probably have to admit that Madhavdeva was successful in his attempt to achieve his aim.

Rites and Ceremonies²⁸

26

kāla grasta huyā bhoilo acetana
 bayasa govāilo hele
 Bāndhava Krsnara Nāmaka naloilo
 Hari Bhakatara mele 272

Tumi prāna priyatama suhrda Bāndhava Deva Tumise kevale ātmā mora
 Hari Hari ! Tumise kevale ātmā mora
 Tomāka najāni jada michā sariraka mai Prāna Prabhu Pitāmbara e
 ātmā buli bhoilo sevā cora
 Prāna Prabhu kino mai ajnāni durghora Hari e 752

27

cārio jātira nija pitr Krsna
 jāniyā yito nabhaje
 ehi pāpe nija dharma bhrasta huyā
 ghora narakata maje 298

28

Tinigunamaya yata jnāna karma
 kevala bandha kārana

jāni tāka teji ekānta Bhakati

bhajiyo Krsna Carana 212

yāra putra save aita Harita Sarana loiyā

Hari Guna gāve suddha bhāve

dadhi dugdha ghrta madhu nadira jalaka piyā

pitṛ gane tṛpitika pāve 10

yi jane ekānta cite Mādhavaka bhaji nite

phure Mādhavara Guna gāi

durlabha amṛta yena karile yi jane pāna

madhura pibāka āra nāi 111

abirakta bhakatara Veda langhibāra dosa

jānibāhā ihāka niscaya

parama birakta yito Krsnara Bhakata bhoila

tāra eko nāhike nirnaya 598

tāvata Krsnara Bhakta nare bhakti abirodhi karma kare

Krsnara Kathāta rati yāve nopajaya

yeve bhoila Krsna Kathā rata nitya naimittika ādi yata

Kathāra birodhi jāniyā save tejaya 597

karmata bisvāsa yāra hiyāta thākanto Hari

atisaya dura honta tāra

durato bidura honta tāra

ahamkāra thākanteo sāksāte Krsnaka pāve

Sravana Kirttana dharma yāra 6

Madhavdeva in his Nam-Ghosa has not given much importance to the observance of rites and ceremonies associated with religion. He says that they are necessary for those only whose minds have not been imbued in the Glory of God. He illustrates his remarks with an analogy that a man who gets nectar to drink does not hanker after any other beverage.

Criticisms against It

Some critics say that Madhavdeva in Nam-Ghosa has spoken too highly of Sri Sankardeva and censured other preachers of his age. If the text is read between the lines the charge is without foundation. He asserts repeatedly that it was Sri Sankardeva²⁹ who after investigating into all the Sastras propounded the cult and those who profess it should regard Him as their real Preceptor. He did not denounce other preceptors by name but warned people against falling into the clutches of persons³⁰ who declare themselves as such to earn their livelihood but

29

Srimanta Sankara Hari Bhakatara
jānā yena kalpataru
tāhānta bināy nāi nāi nāi
āmāra Parama Guru 375

Sankare samsaya chedi sāstrara tattvaka bhedi
pracārilā Krsnara Bhakati
tānka eri ki kārane ānaka bolaya Guru
kino loka mahāmudhamati 54

30

nājāne sāstrara naya yehi āse tāke kaya
chedibāka napāre samsaya
guru bolāi tathāpito phuriyā lokara māje
mānya satakāra khuji laya 55

sāstrara bicāra najāne Bhakati

really know nothing of the Sastras to solve the doubts and difficulties of their disciples. As Madhavdeva was initiated into Vaisnavism by Sri Sankardeva it is natural for him to regard the latter as a part and parcel of the Deity as enjoined by Sastras³¹.

Is it a Translation?

Another thing said of the scripture is that it is not an original one but a translation from Sanskrit. It is admitted by one and all that in the sphere of religion the only scripture that can be called original is what has been revealed by God to saints and sages. Everything else is either commentaries on It or corollaries deduced from the truths or principles laid down in It. Among the Hindu Sastras, Vedas are considered to be revealed by God but even in their case everything that we find now in them was not probably revealed. There is repetition of the same thing in the different Vedas and God probably did not make the mistake of revealing the same thing over and over again. There is a story with regard to the *Bhagawata* to corroborate what has been said above. It is said that God revealed the *Bhagawata* to Brahma in one verse [four slokas]. Brahma told it to Narada in four verses and Narada told it to Vyasa in eight verses and so on. At present it is a very voluminous scripture completed in 12 parts and some of the parts contain several thousand verses.

Besides, the cult promulgated and preached by Sri Sankardeva was entirely *Sastric* that is, sanctioned by the Hindu scriptures. It is said to be the essence of all cults prescribed therein. Madhavdeva who followed the footstep of his preceptor, Sri Sankardeva, cannot be expected to go astray from it to be original in thought and ideas.

Such being the case Madhavdeva must take ideas from the Sanskrit scriptures suitable for his theme and quote here and there verses from them by translating them into Assamese. He has however made use of the quotations in his scripture in such a way that it is difficult to distinguish the quotations from his own reflections on them. He appears to have had such an insight into the Sastras as could enable him to use whatever he wanted from them and to blend them with his own. In other words he liquefied quotations in his own compositions.

paramārtha mati mudha

Hari Kathā chale karnata kumantra

kahaya kariyā gudha 297

31

Hari yena āti krpāmaya Bhakta Gurujano sehinaya

duyojana eka sarirata mātra bhinna

krpārased yukta huyā citta lokara hitaka cinti nita

nija gune tusta duyo ahamkāre hina 681

It is certain that Nam-Ghosa is not the translation of a particular scripture in Sanskrit. Late Srijut Amrit Bhushan Adhikary in his commentary of the Nam-Ghosa attempted to trace the origin of the verses and succeeded in tracing the origin of some of them. Though he has not mentioned in his book the names of the Sanskrit scriptures where those verses are to be found, it is apparent from the verses quoted by him that they occur not in one scripture but in a number of them.

These simply show how deep was the study of Madhavdeva in Sanskrit scriptures, how he assimilated them and how successfully he made use of them in his scripture under review.

I cannot however resist the temptation of requesting the members of the Kamarupa Anusandhana Samiti to trace, if possible, the Sanskrit scripture of which Madhavdeva's Nam-Ghosa is an exact translation and if it is not so, to find out the original verses in Sanskrit (quoting the scriptures where they occur) the help of which Madhavdeva had to seek to write his Nam-Ghosa. It is especially necessary in the present time. Some people in Assam are found to speak lightly of Sri Sankardeva and especially of Madhavdeva and of the religion promulgated and preached by them. These people probably do not believe in the assertions made in their scriptures (especially because they are written in Assamese) that the religion or cult preached by them is the essence of all cults to be found in Hindu Sastras and is the only form of religion meant for this age. I believe if the origin of their assertions can be traced and brought to their notice such people will not hesitate to accept the truth.

[The sources of the NG have since been unearthed. For a list of the sources, see: -

www.tributetosankaradeva.org/ghosa_sources.htm

A critically compiled edition of the NG with the quoted Sanskrit slokas given in the foot-notes has been brought out by the Srimanta Sankaradeva Sangha: -

www.tributetosankaradeva.org/Ghoshha.pdf

editor@tributetosankaradeva.org]

Place in Literature (General reflection)

It is very difficult to determine the place of the work in literature. Literature does not consist simply in the arrangement of words, in composition and in style of a language but mainly in the thought which the language expresses. In order therefore to determine the position of the Nam-Ghosa in the Assamese literature we are to consider not only its language but also the thought which the language has expressed. To me it appears that thought plays the main part in literature and opinions of individual persons as regards the place of a certain work in literature differ simply on this account. If the thought expressed in a work agrees with my views it will appeal to my heart and my heart will supply all embellishments to the language of the work and supplement its defects; but to a man holding the contrary view, the thought will be trash, the language, obscure and the style defective. To judge the merit of a work and to assign it a place in

literature a man must possess superior talents and his mind should be free from all sorts of contaminations.

Assam being a peculiar province having in her all the races and sects professing probably all forms of religious cults to be found in the world it can not be expected that the Nam-Ghosa will appeal equally to the heart of all even of the indigenous Assamese people to assign it a unique place in literature which it may really deserve in consideration of its sublime thought, its dignified yet simple and sonorous language. I shall therefore try to point out here, what literary merits the scripture has so far as language and style are concerned. As regards thought it has already been pointed out in the short review of it given above. I leave to the general public to make their own conclusion with regard to its position in literature.

The scripture is written in verse. Madhavdeva has made use of all the forms of meter and rime named and described in the up-to-date Assamese grammars. Some of the verses used in the last portion of his scripture have not yet been classified and named in grammar. Probably they have been written after the Sanskrit verses and it is for the Anusandhana Samiti to investigate into them and to give them their proper names. I quote some such verses³² in the foot-note. I am

32

1. Yādava Yadunandana Mādhava Madhusudana
Tumi Nitya Niranjana Nārāyana Tomāta loilo Sarana 685

2. Bhubana Mohana Rāma bhajilo Tomāra pāy
mahā mahā pāpi yāra Nāma japi Uttama Padaka pāy 698

3. Dina Bandhu Rāma Dayāsila Deva
Tuvā Pada Kamale sadāi karo seva 705

4. Mādhava Mukunda Murāri ki gati hoibe hāmāra
māyāra rachanā āsānadi māje majiyā napāilo pāra 760

5. bicāri dekhasa pāmara manāi e
iha paraloke Harise Suhrda Bandhu Rāma Rāma 718

6. mora Prabhu Nārāyana e
Hari Hari Tomāra Carana mane bhajo

Tomāka najāni bhava sindhu māje majo 697

7. more Jivadhana Gopinātha
Prāna Gopinātha pasilo Sarane
mora prāna mana majiyā rahoka Tomāra Carane 765

8. Rāma Krsna Rāma Krsna bola bhāi e
sakala nigame ohi sāra
sumarite Hari basya hove bhāi e
sukhe pāy bhava nadi pāra 705

9. Harita sarana loiyā yito jane e
Harira Caritra Sravana Kirttana kare
durghora apāra samsāra sāgara e
sito Mahājane ati aprayāse tare 716

10. Rāma Krsna Rāma Krsna bolare pāmaru mana
bhuliyā kamane pāpi mara
yāra māyā pāse bandi huyācha pāmaru mana
Tāna dui Caranata dharare pāmaru mana bhuliyā kamane pāpi mara 721

11. he Krsna Tumi nija Ātmā priyatama Guru
mora Prabhu Nārāyana e Parama Isvara bhaya hāri
Hari Hari Tumi Istadeva bhayahāri
eteka jāniyā Tayu Carane Sarana loilo
mora Prabhu Nārāyana e nacāribā ibāra Murāri
Hari Hari loiyō moka māyāka nibāri Hari e 757

sure a critical grammarian will not fail to find any flaw in the meter and rime of the verses contained in the Nam-Ghosa.

Verse exercises through meter and rime its power in moving human emotions and in giving impetus to work according to its sentiment or Rasa. Madhavdeva's Nam-Ghosa contains the sentiments of peace (*santa*)³³ and pathos (*karuna*)³⁴ and none of the seven other sentiments described in the rhetoric of language. It is difficult to give to those who are not versed in Assamese, an idea how far Madhavdeva was successful in preserving the sentiments mentioned above in his whole scripture. It can simply be said that they are the suitable Rasas (sentiments) for a religious scripture and the verses can give peace to a departing soul and bring tears in the eyes of the reciter and the hearer when they are properly chanted. As regards figures of speech (*alamkara*) in composition there are almost all the figures³⁵ in the verses of the Nam-Ghosa.

33

Tumi Bhakta Kalpataru bāhire bhitare Guru
Tumi bine nāhi mora āra
krpā karā he Hari Caranata raksā kari
diyā moka sevā rasa sāra 131

namo Krsna Deva pāpi buli keva
moka mora nobolaya
Patita Pāvana jāniyā Tomāka
āpuni goilo bikraya 191

34

Bali nigadati Yadupati Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma
kino krpā moka karilāhā Nārāyana
devaro durlabha ātisaya Rāma
Rāma Rāma Rāma Rāma
grhate thākiyā dekhilo Tayu Carana 655

He Prāna Bandhu Krsna Krpāra Thākura
anu eka karā dāyā māyā houka dura 533

35

1. karna pathe Bhakatara hiyāta prabesi Hari
durbāsanā hare samastaya
jalara yateka mala yehena sarata kāle
svabhāvate nirmala karaya 15
(Simile)

2. Visnu pādodaki gangā mahese sahite ito
jagatake pavitra karaya
hena Krsna bine kona Bhagavanta hena ito
sabadara svarupa āchaya 24
(Allusion and Interrogation)

3. punya aranyara māje Mādhavara Nāma Simha
prakāsa karaya ati bare
yāra dhvani suni bhaye mahāpāpa hasti caya
palāy āti trāsata lavare 25
(Metaphor)

4. he karna sadā tora sabadese mātra priya
tai sabda madhura jānasa
koti amrtatodhika parama madhura sabda
suna sadā Krsna Nāma Yasa 91
(Apostrophe)

5. Hari Nāma eri mana ki kāma karasa
māyā moha jāle pari michāte marasa 523
(Interrogation, Metaphor, Apostrophe, Exclamation)

Madhavdeva made use of them to make the thought and language readily intelligible, more touching and capable of rousing the reader to action. There are to be found in it simile, metaphor, apostrophe, interrogation, exclamation, allusion, etc. They are impressive and appropriate. The allusions are not confined to one scripture but are from almost all the scriptures, epics and Puranas. Consequently to have a thorough grasp of the Nam-Ghosa one should not only know the scriptures but their significance as well. It, therefore, occupies the position of a philosophy of the cult of Vaisnavism as stated above.

As regards style of the scripture under review, it is simple, at the same time expressive, sonorous but not tame. It is full of varieties in meter and rime, and in thought and diction. It contains nothing superficial and trivial. It may be said that the style, as sublime as the conception which is grand, so far as the cult is concerned, has been expressed in a language which is terse, simple and forceful and has been illuminated by striking figures of speech.

In short, considering all the points, it can, in my estimation, be safely said that Madhavdeva's Nam-Ghosa is an artistic composition in words as well as in thought artistically expressed. So far as the language is concerned, I have not seen another book in the Assamese language that can bear any comparison with It. As regards the theme, the scripture under review, I believe, will not fail to secure a high position in the world literature. The main drawback why the scripture has not yet drawn the attention of the people outside Assam is that it cannot be translated into other languages in toto. The only so-called translation of it into English was

6. ātura bhoiloho Hari bisaya bikale

kariyo uddhāra moka Carana Kamale 538

(Exclamation)

7. prakrti purusa duiro niyantā Mādhava

samastare ātmā Hari Parama Bāndhava 405

(Assertion)

8. Yādava Yadunandana Mādhava Madhusudana

Tumi Nitya Niranjana Nārāyana Tomāta loilo Sarana 685

e bhāvaka bhāi bhaja Bhagavanta Bhakti bhāve 998

(Alliteration)

attempted by Srijut Benudhar Rajkhowa, BA, retired EAC³⁶. The attempt was no doubt laudable but the translation can be styled more as transliteration as the spirit is wanting in it. Further it is a matter of doubt whether any other province of India can boast of having such a scripture or a book in its vernacular at the age when this scripture was written and given out. This sheds light as to the growth and development of the Assamese language in the 16th century AD.

In conclusion, I beg to admit that I have failed to do justice to the subject. My aim in selecting the subject is to bring it to the notice of persons who are competent to deal justly with it. I have taken special care to confine my comments to what the scripture contains and to refer to no other book or scripture written even in Assamese or by the author Himself. My contention is that the Scripture under review is self-contained and it proves independent of other scriptures written by the religious reformers of Assam and their contemporaries, what the cult that had been promulgated and preached by Sri Sankardeva in Assam and Koch Behar was, and what sanction the cult is said to have from other scriptures on Hinduism.

āmi yata jiva tomāra pālana Hari Hari Hari Hari e
Tumise pāliyā phurā huyā Antaryyāmi
āve yeve nija bhrtya buli pālā Hari Hari Hari Hari e
tevese krpāla krta krtya hao āmi 809

³⁶ A number of translations of the NG in English have since been brought out.