

The Translation of **Shankaradeva's *Parijata Harana Nata***

William L. Smith

www.tributetosankaradeva.org feels proud to present before the readers Dr William L. Smith's complete translation of Shankaradeva's *Parijata Harana Nata*. This is extracted from *Krishna. A Source Book*, ed. Edwin Francis Bryant, Oxford University Press, 2007.

[About the Translator]

Dr. William L. Smith, distinguished Indologist and the 'Max Mueller of Sankaradeva studies' who passed away in December 2009, was one of those rare contributors to the field whose manifold contributions will prove to be of enduring value in appreciating not only the literature and the language of Sankaradeva but also most importantly the outlook of this great Saint.

Dr Smith devoted his life to the study of the medieval religious traditions of India, particularly Eastern India and his monumental *Patterns in Indian Hagiography* (Indian Edition, Sri Krishna Prakashan, Guwahati. 2003) reveals his deep understanding of Indian hagiography or the lives of the Saints. One recalls with a feeling of deep gratitude how for the first time the Assamese *carita puthis* (biographies of the Vaisnava Saints) had been brought within the ambit of such a study. He was certainly the first Western scholar to make a conscious effort to ensure that the life of Sankaradeva got the attention it deserves. He is also to be saluted for his neutrality, for his writings on Sankaradeva are absolutely free from any kind of 'scholarly bias' - a malaise that has affected (afflicted rather) the field perhaps more than anything else.

Some of the major works of Dr Smith are *The Wrath of Sita: Sankaradeva's Uttarakanda* (Journal of Vaishnava Studies. 1994), *Brajabuli, Vrajawali and Maithili* (1995), *The Language of Rukmini Harana Nata, Sankaradeva's Brajavali Vocabulary & Bargit Glossary* (1995) (two papers incorporated in a volume released on the occasion of the Stockholm Conference on the Maithili Language and Literature), *What is Vrajavali?* (1992), *Shankaradeva och Assams hinduisering, Patterns in Indian Hagiography* (Indian Edition, Sri Krishna Prakashan, Guwahati. 2003), *Shankaradeva's Parijata Harana Nata* (Oxford University Press. 2007), *Jagadguru Shankaradeva* (Journal of Vaishnava Studies). Besides these works, the *Ramayana* was one theme in which he had an abiding interest. Particularly his monographic work *Ramayana Traditions in Eastern India* (Stockholm, 1988, revised edition New Delhi, 1995) is a demonstration of his erudite scholarship.

It was in 1978 that this savant from Sweden visited Guwahati - for the first time - in connection with a research project on the *Ramayana*. And it was during this period that he had his first meeting with the genius of Srimanta Sankaradeva. His Department (at Stockholm University) since then had been the source of a steady stream of scholarly output. Even at Uppsala University which he joined in 2004, (as professor of South Asian languages and culture), he had

continued his researches. His research was based on careful reading of text resources and profound philological analysis.

During the last six years of his life, Dr. Smith's health had turned fragile, but even then this indefatigable titan had announced another project, this time on the *Mahabharata* traditions in Eastern India and we hear that he had even managed to finish this last assignment of his, a study of the epic in four vernacular versions. Assamese is certainly one of them and if this is so then maybe at last we will see the works of the famous Assamese writers of the epic like **Rama Saraswati** grabbing world attention.

[William Smith had come to Sweden after graduating at John Carroll University, University Heights (Ohio, USA) in 1965. At Stockholm University, he studied Sanskrit and new Indo-Aryan languages under Siegfried Lienhard, who supervised his MA thesis (licenciat, 1971) and doctorate (1976) as well. From the early 1970s onwards, he continually published scholarly articles and reviews and participated in international conferences in his field of studies. In 1981, he became "docent" at Stockholm University, "universitetslektor" in 1992 and "befordrad professor" in 2003. In 2004, he joined Uppsala University as professor of South Asian languages and culture, from which he retired in spring 2009.]

Shankaradeva's *Parijata Harana Nata*

Shankaradeva was a prolific author who wrote in several different languages. Most of his works are renderings of Sanskrit texts: he translated much of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Uttara-kanda* of the *Ramayana* into Assamese and wrote narrative poems such as *Rukmini Harana Kavya* and the *Harishcandra Upakhya* based on *puranic* themes. These are not translations in the modern sense of the word, since Shankaradeva condenses, adds color and new detail, and combines elements from different texts, thus in many cases transforming his translation into a new work. His language is colloquial rather than Sanskritized; his work is free-flowing and idiomatic, and he is not averse to humor.

Shankaradeva also wrote devotional lyrics, the best known of which are the *Bargit*, or Great Songs, and the *Kirtana-ghosha*, a collection of lyrics based on the *Bhagavata* and intended for congregational chanting. It is said that no Hindu home is without a copy of the *Kirtana-ghosha*. A doctrinal work, the *Bhaktiratnakara*, another of his treatises, consists of Sanskrit verses dealing with Vaishnava ideas.

Shankaradeva is also the author of six plays belonging to a genre of dramatic literature known as *ankiya nat*, a term first employed by the *charita* writers. Shankaradeva himself preferred the terms *nata* or *nataka* and *yatra*. The Sanskrit term *anka* denotes a one-act play, and though efforts have been made to establish the origins of *ankiya nat* in Sanskrit models, this has proven difficult, since Assamese dramas violate many of the rules of Sanskrit dramaturgy and differ in structure, subject, treatment, and language. Shankaradeva must have been influenced by Maithili drama, which was flourishing at the time *ankiya nat* first appeared, but his plays do not follow Maithili models either. Shankaradeva was an innovator rather than an imitator.

One of the most distinctive features of Shankaradeva's plays is their language. Sanskrit plays were written in a mixture of Sanskrit and various Prakrits, and in contemporary Maithili dramas, while dialogue is in Sanskrit and Prakrit, songs are in Maithili. In Shankaradeva's dramas, aside from a sprinkling of Sanskrit couplets, the prose dialogue and the songs are written in a language scholars call **Vrajavali**, or Assamese Brajabuli. It is also the language in which the *Bar git* are written. It is usually described as a mixture of Maithili, Assamese, Braj Bhasha, and sometimes other languages. A Bengali counterpart, Brajabuli, was used for Vaishnava lyrics in Bengal. Recent research, however, suggests that both these Vaishnava literary idioms are little more than varieties of Early Maithili. In the sixteenth century, Maithili was the oldest and the most highly developed vernacular in eastern India and was used in highly regarded lyrical and dramatic literature. As it was closely related to Assamese, it could be understood without much difficulty, so it is not difficult to understand why Shankaradeva decided to use it. An Assamese verse commenting on the mixture of languages in the *ankiya nat* says: "Sanskrit verses are composed as there will be scholars to grasp their meaning. The brahmins in the assembly will comprehend the meaning of the songs. The village folk will understand the Brajabuli words. The ignorant people will witness the masks and effigies."

Ankiya nat are usually performed at night, during the winter when agricultural laborers have less work to do, religious occasions such as *Janmashtami*, or on full-moon nights and the like. The performance is usually held in a village **nam ghar**, and the villagers serve as the actors. Female roles are played by young men. All actors are amateurs and are not looked down on.

The audience sits on mats or on the bare floor. Costumes, masks, and other props are used. Shankaradeva's dramas begin and end with a benediction (*bhatima*). They are not divided into acts, and they have no *vidushaka*, or jester, unlike Sanskrit drama. On the other hand, they do have a *sutradhara*, or director; but in the Assamese plays, the *sutradhara* not only introduces the play and the characters as in classical drama but also continues in this role throughout its course, introducing each scene and explaining the action. The *sutradhara* also sings, dances, and delivers brief discourses. Sanskrit verses (*shlokas*) follow each change of scene, reiterating what the *sutradhara* has already said in Maithili (Vrajavali).

Most of these verses were composed by Shankaradeva. The prose dialogue alternates with songs (*gitas*) sung in appropriate melodies (*ragas*), along with interludes of dancing; this gives the *ankiya nat* a certain similarity with modern Western musicals. They have also been called "lyrico-dramatic spectacles."

The *Parijata Harana* was written toward the end of Shankaradeva's life. The eminent Assamese scholar Maheshvar Neog describes it as "Shankaradeva's masterpiece with its well-developed dialogue, bold and almost realistic characterization, finely developed plot and humour." The *Parijata Harana* retells two stories from the *Bhagavata* (10.59.1–45) and the *Vishnu Puranas* (5.29–31), especially the version in the latter. There we are told how Indra, ejected from heaven by the terrible demon Naraka or Narakasura, appealed to **Krishna** for aid. In response, Krishna, accompanied by his wife Satyabhama, flew on Garuda's back to Pragyotishapura and slew the demon and his generals after a fierce battle. On the way back to Dvaraka, Krishna stole the

divine *parijata* tree from Indra, whose enemy he had defeated in battle, and planted the tree by Satyabhama's door.

The story perhaps was especially attractive because of its connection with Assamese history. The demon Naraka, the son of the demon Hiranyaksha and the earth goddess, was the first ruler of Pragjyotishapura, ancient Assam. His son Bhagadatta, whom the Mahabharata refers to as a king of the Mlecchas, was killed by Arjuna. In Assam and Bengal there is a tradition that Duryodhana married Bhagadatta's daughter, Bhanumati. In the following translation, the prose dialogue has been included in its entirety, as are the remarks of the *sutradhara* (abbreviated as *SUTRA*). Most of the songs have been condensed to save space. The translation is based on the editions of Birinchi Kumar Barua and Kaliram Medhi.

The *Parijata Harana Yatra* of Shankaradeva

Hail Krishna, Vishnu Achyuta, the Supreme Lord.
Mounted on the shoulders of Garuda, he struck down his
enemy.

In his joyful *lila* the son of Devaki
carried off the *parijata* flower for the sake of his beloved.

Victory to Krishna.

SUTRA Render obeisance to Krishna, summon the audience and say:

Victory to Krishna, destroyer of Kamsa and his family.
His delightful form pervades the minds of his devotees,
like a hundred thousand wishing trees, he fulfills all their
desires.

Concentrate your thoughts on his feet.
As death draws ever closer with a growl,
abandon all else and take refuge with Hari.
He is the subject of this play, its name is the *Parijata Harana*.

Listen, everyone, with devotion,
you have no other friend except **Hari**.
So says Shankara, the servant of Krishna.
Let everyone repeat the name of Rama!

SUTRA Good people! He who is the Supreme Guru of the world, the Supreme Person, is entering the assembly along with his wives Rukmini and Satyabhama. He will perform the *Parijata Harana Yatra*. Watch, and listen carefully. Never stop repeating the name of Hari.

COMPANION What is that music being played?
COMPANION It is the instruments of the gods you hear.

SUTRA Good people! As I said, the Supreme Lord Krishna is coming here with his wives for the sake of the *yatra*. Listen with great care.

He enters, mounted on the mighty bird Garuda.
A mere shard of his beauty eclipses that of the Love God.
His dark body glistens, his yellow robe shines,
he wears a gem-studded crown above his jewel-like face.
Bracelets dangle on his arms
and anklets jingle on his feet.
His splendid figure puts a hundred million Cupids to shame.
The radiance of his body fills all the directions.
With him are Rukmini and Satyabhama, the best of women.
So says Shankara, the slave of the slave of Hari.

SUTRA After he dances with all his wives, Krishna is staying in a palace with Rukmini. Satyabhama is staying in her own palace. At that time god Indra arrived in the company of the celestial sage Narada. He bowed to Krishna and informed him about the depredations of the demon Narakasura. Then Narada gave obeisance to Krishna. Watch and listen with the greatest attention!

The god Indra comes astride his elephant Airavata,
a royal parasol above his head, thunderbolt in hand.
Before him is Narada, singing of the virtues of Hari.
Indra's lovely wife Shachi at one side,
walking with a graceful gait, arching her eyes.
So sings Shankara: the Lord of the Gopinis is the way.

SUTRA When Krishna saw Narada, he and his wives stood up and greeted him.

NARADA (*Raising his hand*) May you live long!

SUTRA After pronouncing his blessing, Narada places the *parijata* flower in the hand of **Krishna** and tells him about its wondrous qualities.

NARADA Krishna, the perfume of the *parijata* can be sensed six kilometers away. Wealth, family, and glory never leave the home of a person who possesses a *parijata* flower. Because of the power of this blossom, the woman who wears it is exceptionally fortunate. Her husband will never leave her. What else can I say about this marvelous flower? (*He then sits in silence.*)

SUTRA When Rukmini hears what the sage said about the qualities of the *parijata*, she clasps Krishna's feet with delight and says:

RUKMINI (*her hands clasped*) My dear husband! Since I am your senior wife, O Lord of Life, please present me with that rare blossom!

SUTRA Now listen to what happens when Rukmini asks for the flower.

Filled with delight, Rukmini bowed down to her husband's feet,
her hands joined together in supplication.

“Please Lord, let this *parijata* flower be given to me.

I learned of its qualities from the lips of the sage,
appease my pride.

You who are merciful to your devotees, I am begging you,
make me a present of the flower.

I am your foremost wife.

Please let my hopes be realized.”

The lover Krishna smiled at his wife's words,
says Shankara, the slave of Krishna.

SUTRA When he hears Rukmini's request, Krishna, laughing, lifts her up and proudly seats her on his lap. The Lord of the World then fixes the *parijata* flower in her hair. Her wish has been granted. Then, sitting together with his wife, Krishna affectionately asks Narada for news.

KRISHNA Sage, are you faring well? Our city of Dvaraka has been sanctified by your coming. I am thankful for having been graced with the sight of you.

NARADA Lord Krishna, your human deeds have enchanted the entire world. It does not know you as the Lord. I know all about devotion. You wish to enchant me? Listen Lord:

Parameshvara, Lord of the World,

I, Narada, am a slave at your feet.

I wander through all ten directions singing of your virtues.

You are the Guru of the World, the God of the gods.

May I serve your feet forever!

May my lips sing your praises forever!

I ask this boon of you.

NARADA Krishna, you are the Supreme Person, you are **Narayana**. You have descended to earth to remove its burden of evil. The demon Naraka is causing the gods much grief at the moment. This is the reason why Indra and his wife Shachi have come to take refuge at your feet. Look, Krishna, look!

SUTRA With those words, Narada is silent. Indra falls at Krishna's feet, and he and his wife praise him.

Victory to the Yadava Lord

in whose name are the four *rasas*.

Slayer of Agha, Baka, Dhenuka, and Kamsa,

you eased the earth of its burden of evil

and became an *avatara* for the sake of your devotees.

Now the sinful Naraka is committing great outrages.

He attacked heaven and carried off its riches.
I am pleading at your feet.

INDRA Lord Krishna, is there any evil deed the demon Naraka hasn't done? He has stolen the umbrella of Varuna and carried off all the jewel mountain. O Krishna, what can I say, even the earrings of Mother Aditi are not safe from him. What other recourse have I? O Krishna, there is nowhere else for me to go save the refuge of your feet. Please save me, Lord Jagannath, save me!

SUTRA Once he has said this, Indra falls down before Krishna and bursts into tears.

SHRI KRISHNA Indra, cease your lamenting! Your enemy's final hour has come! I will kill Narakasura right away for the sake of the gods. You can be absolutely certain of this. Now go on ahead to Amaravati. I will slay Narakasura today and follow you there.

NARADA Indra, when Krishna makes a promise like this, your enemy has as good as forfeited his head. Don't be afraid, go on ahead. **Shri Krishna** has felt pity for you, so you don't need to worry. We will come along later.

SUTRA When he hears this promise of relief, Indra circumambulates Narada and Krishna and then bows down to them. Taking leave, he mounts his elephant Airavata and goes his way.

NARADA Krishna, get ready to depart at once, as soon as I've seen the fun in Dvaraka, I'll follow you.

SUTRA When he says this, Narada departs. See what happened then!

Narada left, singing the praises of **Hari**,
and wandered to Dvaraka and gazed on its magnificence with awe.
All of Hari's houses were encrusted with jewels
making them resemble celestial mansions.
Then the sage spied a fabulous dwelling
within which Satyabhama sat,
her face gleaming like the moon waxed full.
Narada greeted her with a smile
and when the lady saw the sage,
she bowed down before him
and said Narada, "May you live a long life!"

SUTRA As she fans him with a cowry, the sage takes a seat.

NARADA Queen Satyabhama, I have witnessed the dire deeds of your Krishna. Mother, you are indeed unfortunate. I have just found that out today.

SATYABHAMA Muniraj, what are you talking about? I don't understand you at all.

NARADA O dear, fate certainly has not been kind to you! Mother, what can I say, it pains me to have to tell you this.

SUTRA Once he says this, the sage turns his head away and is silent.

Satyabhama becomes nervous and asks:

SATYABHAMA Muni, I know that there is no other woman as fortunate as I am. Krishna will never go off and leave me. What did you hear or see? Promise to tell me the truth right away. Muni, I'm very upset. Don't sit there and say nothing!

SUTRA Seeing how determined the queen was, the sage says:

NARADA Mother, O Mother! What can I tell you? It's wrong to speak about all these things. I brought down a precious *parijata* flower from heaven and put it in Krishna's hand. The wonderful qualities of the *parijata* flower make the woman who wears it very fortunate. I knew this when I told him that Satyabhama is worthy of the *parijata* flower. But then what did Krishna go and do? As he watched you out of the corner of his eye, he fastened the divine *parijata* in Rukmini's hair with his own hand with great affection. Oh, yours is an unlucky life! How can you endure witnessing the favor your co-wife enjoys? Mother, you're numbered among the dead though living. Oh, what more can I say?

SUTRA When Satyabhama has heard about the great good fortune of her co-wife from Narada's lips, she becomes both enraged and overwhelmed with a feeling of humiliation and faints dead away. With her hair spread out, she looks like a clove tree uprooted by the wind. No breath stirs in her nostrils.

When Satyabhama's friend Indumati sees what happened, she shouts, "She's dead!" and holds her in her arms and sprinkles her head with water. Then she wipes her face with the hem of her *sari* and tries to comfort her as she weeps herself.

INDUMATI My dearest friend, are you going to die of humiliation because of your co-wife? Is this any way to react? Won't your husband Krishna try to make it up to you? Mother, stop thinking these gloomy thoughts!

SUTRA When Satyabhama has recovered to some extent, she sighs deeply as if she were in agony.

Tears poured from the lotus-like eyes of the lovely lady
as her body grew exhausted from sobbing.
All seemed to be darkness to her.
Her heart burned because of the success of her rival
and the pain welled up in her heart.
"Hari, my dear Hari, you have become like an enemy

since you slighted me so.’’
She rolled round on the floor groaning.

SUTRA Satyabhama complains about her humiliation in this piteous way. Then the trouble-loving Narada returns to Krishna. Listen to what he told him!

NARADA Shri Krishna, how can you be happy here? Satyabhama has stopped eating and drinking because of the insult of the *parijata* flower. She’s dying of grief. Go to her quickly and see for yourself.

SUTRA When he hears from the sage about his wife’s grief, Shri Krishna is upset because of his deep affection for her. He asks the sage what has happened and then goes to see her.

Tell me sage, straight out, with no tricks,
is the love of my life alive?
That proud lady cannot bear the most trivial slight,
how can she survive my crime?
The suffering of my beloved sears me with pain.
By not giving her the flower, I caused her death.

SUTRA Overwhelmed by affection, Krishna goes to his beloved. Her face is pale from weeping. She is heaving deep sighs and lying on the floor. Holding her in his arms, Krishna asks her what has happened. As tears stream from his eyes, he consoles her.

SHRI KRISHNA Darling, I only gave a single flower to Rukmini; if this is the reason you feel slighted, then get up off the floor! I’ll give you a hundred *parijata* flowers. My love, Rukmini and Jambuvati are not as favored as you are. You are as precious to me as my very life. Now you know this, so stop grieving. It breaks my heart to see you suffering in this way. Beloved, I swear it to you, get up, get up!

SUTRA When she hears her husband’s words, Satyabhama turns her back to him, sinks her head, and begins to sob in a heart-rending manner.

SATYABHAMA My husband, why are you trying to bamboozle a miserable woman like me with your clever talk? Go to your beloved Rukmini instead! What’s the point of your staying here?

SUTRA Once she says this to Krishna, she laments. Listen and see!

“Keshava, now I have understood you.
Now I see how you behave.
Forget your tricks and go back to your dear wife.
Krishna, I didn’t understand your wiles,
There’s no woman as miserable as I.
I’m now aware of your lover’s tricks,

now I know your mind.
Oh, I'll not outlive this insult,
I've left all hope of life.''
The lady fell at her lover's feet moaning,
says Shankara the servant of Hari.

SATYABHAMA Oh miserable me! I take second place to my co-wife! You have humiliated me so terribly, how can I stay alive? My life is ruined!

SUTRA Having said this, the queen faints and falls to the floor, tears gushing from her eyes. When he sees that, Krishna cries out and takes her in his arms, and his heart fills with tenderness. Tears run from her doe-like eyes. He holds his beloved tight in his arms and comforts her with the following words:

Dear, I see that your frail frame cannot bear your grief.
Tears are flowing from your lotus eyes.
My love, listen to what I have to say,
I did not give you a *parijata* flower
and I cannot get over that.
There is no one else as fortunate as you,
I gave Rukmini just one flower,
does that upset you so?
I'll pull up the *parijata* tree by the roots
and plant it by your door.
Listen my dear, I've told you the truth,
you must believe my words.
So stop crying princess,
my heart cannot bear to see your sorrow.
I swear I will do it,
get up, get up!

SUTRA When he said this, Krishna held Satyabhama's hand.

INDUMATI My dearest friend! Your husband is the Supreme God. He's very upset and begging you to forgive him. What else can he do to satisfy you? Forget your grief, get up, get up!

SUTRA When Satyabhama hears her husband's pleas, her heart is somewhat calmed. Seeing that, Krishna lifts her up, sits her on his thigh, and wipes away the dust with his yellow robe and binds up her hair. He puts betel and camphor into her mouth with his own hand.

Having gotten her way with her husband, Satyabhama bows to Krishna with a satisfied smile on her face and says:

SATYABHAMA My dear husband, you promised to get a *parijata* tree for me. So fetch it right away and don't dawdle. I will not set foot into my home unless I see a *parijata* tree before it. I swear it!

SHRI KRISHNA My dear, the evil demon Naraka has defeated the gods and carried everything they owned. So first I have to kill him and help them. Then I can get you your *parijata* tree.

SATYABHAMA You're right. First do the work of the gods, then fetch the *parijata* tree on the way. I'll go with you.

SHRI KRISHNA My dear, you're a woman. It's not proper for you to go where fighting will be taking place.

SATYABHAMA My husband, you have many other wives. It's not certain which one you will give the *parijata* flower to. There's no way I'll let you out of my sight.

SHRI KRISHNA Dearest, if you're going with me, then get ready quickly.

NARADA (*with irritation*) Krishna, I see that you're abandoning the work of the gods because of a woman. You've spent the whole day making up to her.

SHRI KRISHNA Sage, what does a woman understand about fighting? I cannot get away from her. I'm on my way right now. Don't be angry.

SUTRA With these words, Shri Krishna quickly sets off with his wife. He twangs his bowstring and the sound reverberates in all ten directions.

Narada then comes up and says:

The Lord of the Yadus has departed,
saranga bow in hand, his wife at his side.
He wears a yellow robe on his dark blue body
which glistens like a new rain cloud.
Jeweled anklets resound on his feet.
Shankara says, "Immerse your mind in this!"

NARADA I have not seen many men so far under their wife's thumbs as you. You can't even leave your wife when you go into battle. You are the Guru of the World. I wander through the three worlds singing of your glory. Oh, I feel ashamed!

SHRI KRISHNA Listen, *muni*, what am I supposed to do? Satyabhama was on the brink of death because of the *parijata*. How much more of that could I take?

NARADA Krishna, This is the way a man gets when he's lovesick. He has to do whatever his wife orders. So what! The demon Naraka is in Kamrup and this is Dvaraka, a four-month

journey away. If you take a woman along, the journey will take two or three years. Is this doing the work of the gods? Do one thing. Summon Garuda, the king of the birds, your vehicle. Climb up on his shoulders and go kill Naraka.

SUTRA When he had heard Narada's words, Krishna says to his wife:

SHRI KRISHNA Dear, Narada is right.

SATYABHAMA Husband, I can't go all the way by foot.

SHRI KRISHNA (*summoning Garuda*) King of Birds: come quickly, come quickly!

GARUDA My Lord, while I am here, there's no need to walk. Climb on my back and slay the evil Naraka.

SUTRA Then Shri Krishna mounts on Garuda and flies off to perform his *lila*. Shri Krishna flies to Kamrup on Garuda with the speed of the wind. He sounds his conch Panchajanya, and when Naraka hears it, he comes running. Watch and hear how Krishna slew him.

Govinda flew on the back of Garuda,
eager to slay Naraka.
The King of Birds went with the speed of the wind
and reached Kamrup in the blink of an eye.
Hari sounded his conch time and again,
and the demons' hearts shook to hear it.
They knew that Madhava was on his way
and went off roaring to fight.
Kettledrums announced the battle
and cries of "kill, kill!" and "Hold, hold!" filled the air.
Enraged, Naraka charged,
intending to cleave Krishna with his sword.
Hari twanged the string of his bow
and plagued the demons with a flurry of missiles,
slaughtering the demon warriors,
slicing off arms, shoulders, and heads.
Seeing this, the other demons fled
as arrows struck and felled them.
The angry Jagannath hurled his discus
and cut off the evil Naraka's head.
The delighted gods
beat the victory drums and tossed down flowers,
shouting "Jaya, jaya Yadava."
Let everyone repeat the name of Hari!

SUTRA Once Shri Krishna has killed Naraka, the gods celebrate the glorious deed, beating kettledrums and shouting “**Jaya Krishna, jaya Krishna**” and showering down flowers upon his head. Shri Krishna and Satyabhama are filled with joy. When Vasumati learns that her son Naraka has been slain, filled with grief, she takes her grandchild Bhagadatta to an audience with Shri Krishna. See what happened!

Come the beloved mother, come for *darshan* of Hari.
Holding the child, Vasumati approaches with a graceful gait,
her body pale from suffering at the sufferings of her son.
Sighing, she wipes the tears from her eyes
and bows to the feet of the Lord.
Says Shankara, “Rama is my heart and my goal.”

SUTRA Holding her child, Vasumati prostrates herself before Shri Krishna. She then joins her hands together and says:

VASUMATI Lord Krishna, you are the Guru of the World, the Supreme Person in endless eons. My son Naraka was destroyed for the sin of opposing you. I place my grandson, Naraka’s child Bhagadatta, at your feet. Please watch over him. I plead for peace at your lotus feet.

SUTRA Hearing her sad words, Shri Krishna consoles her, saying:

SHRI KRISHNA Vasumati, weep no more. Your son Naraka became a burden to the earth, and for that reason I slew him and removed it. I will do as you ask and install Bhagadatta as ruler of Kamrupa. You need worry no more.

SUTRA Shri Krishna then embraces Vasumati, and, after speaking some comforting words, he enters the demon’s harem. He sends the sixteen thousand captive women he finds there to Dvaraka. After he takes the earrings of Aditi, the umbrella of Varuna, and the mountain of jewels, he and Satyabhama mount Garuda and fly off to heaven.

Having slain the demon Naraka, Shri Krishna goes to heaven and joyfully sounds his conch. When all the gods hear the sound, they recognize it.

THE GODS Shri Krishna has come to heaven!

SUTRA The gods applaud Shri Krishna and beat the celestial kettledrums and shower him with flowers. When Satyabhama sees this, she asks her beloved:

SATYABHAMA My dear husband, what place have we come to where kettledrums are sounding and flowers raining down? Introduce me to all of these people.

SHRI KRISHNA Devi, don’t you know that this is Amaravati and that these are the gods who have come to see me? Look, there’s the god Indra sitting on the back of his elephant Airavata. There’s his queen Shachi, over there are the guardians of the directions, and there are the *siddhas* and the *vidyadharas*.

SATYABHAMA My husband, what is that tree there shining on top of a celestial mansion?

SHRI KRISHNA Don't you know, dear? That's the reason you were angry with me, that is the *parijata* tree.

SATYABHAMA Why, I have obtained my heart's desire. I'll dress in *parijata* blossoms and put on a show in front of my cowives. Dear husband, do it right away!

SUTRA Then Indra appears and receives them with pride. Shachi embraces Satyabhama and welcomes her.

INDRA Krishna, we are grateful to you for killing the evil Narakasura. You have saved us once again. There's no way for us to repay that debt.

SUTRA When Indra spoke these words, tears of affection welled up in his eyes. He then stood in silence. **Shri Krishna** and Indra bowed to Mother Aditi. Shachi fell on her knees before her mother-in-law.

SUTRA Aditi begins to praise **Shri Krishna** as supreme among the gods.

“*Jaya, jaya* to the abode of the world.
Jaya, jaya to the bane of demons.
Jaya, jaya to the savior of his servants.
Jaya, jaya to Lord Murari.
King of the Yadus, show mercy to me.
I have sought the refuge of your feet.
Supreme Person, save me!
There is no recourse save you.
I have abandoned the things of the world
and am praising you with palms joined.”
She then made a deep bow.
Everyone, repeat the name of Rama!

SUTRA Then, Krishna shows Aditi his knowledge and fills her heart with the spirit of Vaisnavism. He bows to her and says:

SHRI KRISHNA Mother, you are the supremely merciful deity. Always give me your blessings.

SUTRA Aditi hears this, embraces Shri Krishna, and says:

ADITI My son, may you live long. Because of my boon, neither god nor demon can overcome you.

SUTRA Then Shri Krishna takes leave of the goddess. He puts Varuna's umbrella and the jewel mountain in Indra's hand. Then, together with Satyabhama and Narada, he bids farewell to the gods and returns home.

The handsome Murari, enchanter of the world,
continues his *lila*,
walking gracefully with the best of women.
There is a gentle smile on his lips,
his body glistens like a new rain cloud,
cloaked in a yellow robe.
Anklets jingle on his delicate feet
resembling the fresh shoots.
He has descended to earth, bestowing devotion
and salvation,
says the servant of Krishna.

SUTRA The charming figure of Shri Krishna enchants them with his supreme *lila*. Now watch and see what happens next. Satyabhama becomes angry, grips Shri Krishna's yellow robe, and says:

SATYABHAMA My dear husband, you've really kept your promise well, haven't you! You haven't brought me a *parijata* flower. I don't understand your heart at all.

SHRI KRISHNA I forgot, dear. It's not my fault. (*Speaking to Narada*) Rishi, go quickly. Go find Indra's *parijata* tree and bring it here right away.

SUTRA When he hears Shri Krishna's command, Narada goes to Indra and says:

NARADA Oh Devaraja, Shri Krishna wants the *parijata* for his wife Satyabhama. Have it sent to him immediately!

SUTRA When she hears Narada's command, Shachi, full of rage, retorts,

SHACHI What bad luck! Does that petty mortal Satyabhama hope to wear the *parijata* flower of Indra's consort Shachi? Divine *rishi*, tell her that only a woman who has accumulated innumerable merits, one who is a resident of the Amaravati, the city of the gods, can wear that flower. Indra cannot give my *parijata* to her!

INDRA Rishi, how can I give away a *parijata*? It is the possession of goddesses. Doesn't Krishna know anything about women? Go tell him, Narada!

SUTRA Narada goes back and tells Krishna and Satyabhama what Shachi has said.

NARADA Krishna, you sent me for the *parijata* flower. I am very ashamed. All that happened was that she heaped insults on Satyabhama. When Shachi heard me mention the *parijata*, she threw a fit and asked how a woman like Satyabhama could want to wear a *parijata*

flower. She was in a rage; she said she had meditated and prayed in birth after birth for endless ages in order to become the mistress of Amaravati and earn the right to wear the *parijata* flower. Why, Krishna, when I heard the goddess's curses, my heart burned. How miserable I felt!

SUTRA When Satyabhama hears that, shaking with rage, she says:

SATYABHAMA My husband, why did you bring me here? Shall Shachi, that daughter of a *danava*, speak harsh words to me and keep the *parijata*? Oh Lord, what are you afraid of? Go and get the *parijata* right away!

NARADA Well spoken, your majesty! Krishna should fetch the *parijata* right away.

SUTRA Then, when Shri Krishna hears his wife's words, he goes up to the *parijata* tree and pulls it up by the roots. When the guards see that, they begin shouting,

GUARDS Krishna, what are you doing taking Shachi's *parijata* tree?

SATYABHAMA Guards, listen to me: Go and tell Shachi that I, Satyabhama, am taking her *parijata* tree. Now do your best to try and stop us!

GUARDS [When the guards heard that, they went to Indra and Shachi, prostrated themselves before her, and said:] Mother Shachi, Satyabhama had her husband Krishna carry off your *parijata* tree. Do what is proper!

SUTRA When she hears about the theft of the celestial tree, Shachi bursts into a rage and says to Indra:

SHACHI Husband, is a mortal being taking away the *parijata* tree in your very presence? What are you good for? What's the use of your thunderbolt?

SUTRA Once she has said this, she begins to weep before him.

INDRA Darling, don't be upset! What is Krishna compared to me? I'll defeat him and bring back the *parijata* at once. Don't worry!

SUTRA Indra then begins to make preparations for battle. He picks up his bow and arrows and rides off mounted on the back of his elephant Airavata. Shachi and the gods accompany him.

SHACHI Daughter of Satrajit, are you, a mortal, stealing my *parijata* flower? Now your luck has run out. If you don't want me to wipe you out along with the rest of your family with a thunderbolt, give it back at once!

SUTRA She roars out these words. Listen!

“You're brave for a mere mortal.
You stole our *parijata*.”

My husband Indra, who wields a thunderbolt,
the annihilator of demons, is on his way.
Give me back my *parijata* tree
and save your life, princess.
Your husband, the mortal Madhava
was quite presumptuous to take it
in the very presence of Indra. What is he?’
Such was the blustering of Shachi.

SHACHI Satyabhama, I know all about your husband Madhava, the cowherd who ran after *gopis*. No woman in Gokula was safe from him. Why even Kamsa’s humpbacked servant girl Kubji couldn’t escape his clutches. What else can I say about him? Is this profligate puffed-up Krishna going to steal my *parijata*? He and his family are doomed!

SATYABHAMA Listen, Indrani, my husband is the Supreme Guru of the World. Merely by repeating his name, the world is saved from all sin. And you’re insulting him! Why don’t you drop dead, you shameless hussy! I feel disgust just saying the name of your husband Indra. You can’t count all the dancing girls your Indra keeps here in Amaravati. What sort of things does he do? He seduced Ahalya, the wife of the sage Gautama, and made her lose caste. That’s why his whole body was covered with vaginas. You wretch, is this the Indra you’re boasting to me about?

“You wretched woman, are you insulting him
the dust of whose lotus feet you have taken?
The Guru of the World before whom
Brahma and Shiva fall.
How can a slave like Shachi
look him in the face and scold him?
If you sing his name, you are cleansed from sin
and gain both devotion and heaven.
Are you insulting Govinda, you hussy?’
Says Shankara at the feet of Hari.

SATYABHAMA Shachi, you daughter of a *danava*, what have you to brag about? We showed the greatest heroism by carrying off the *parijata*. Look at your husband Indra, let’s see how capable he is of fighting and retrieving the *parijata* from Krishna’s hands. Then we’ll see what your boasts are worth.

SUTRA When Shachi hears these harsh words from Satyabhama, stung by the insult, she angrily says to her husband:

SHACHI My husband, King of the Gods, what good are you? You just stand there listening to the insults of a mortal woman! You’re not a hero at all! It’s a mockery to call you Indra, the god Indra.

SUTRA Then, wounded by the arrow-like insults of his wife Shachi, Indra flies into a rage, picks up his bow, and goes up to offer Krishna battle. Seeing him, Krishna twangs the string of his bow, climbs on Garuda's back, and goes to face Indra. Indra looks at him and says arrogantly:

INDRA O Yadava, why did you steal Shachi's *parijata*? I will put an end to your life with my razor-sharp arrows. How can you withstand me?

SUTRA Indra says much in this vein. Now hear and see how the two fired their divine missiles and clashed in battle.

With a shout Indra fired his arrows.
"Today I'll take your life," he cried.
Holding his *saranga* bow, Hari looked at him
and fired off arrows,
shattering all Indra's shafts,
and piercing his breast pierced with bolts.

SUTRA Struck by Krishna's arrow, Indra falls unconscious. He recovers, gets up and says:

INDRA O Shri Krishna, if you are going to give back the *parijata*, give it back. Otherwise, I'll finish you off with my thunderbolt.

KRISHNA You evil king of the gods! Are you trying to frighten me? Let me see just how mighty you are.

His strength restored,
the Smasher of Cities held his thunderbolt aloft
and aimed it.
"I'll take your life," he cried.
"Stay! stay!" retorted the Yadu king.

SUTRA Not being able to overcome Krishna with his arrows, Indra, swollen with pride and rage, hurls his thunderbolt. Hari laughs, leaps into the air, and grabs it.

SHRI KRISHNA You scoundrel king of the gods, you can see how I can withstand your blows. Now withstand mine!

SUTRA With these words, Krishna raises up his discus. When Indra sees it, his heart shakes. Unable to keep his arms and legs from shaking, he flees on the back of his elephant, terrified. When he sees that, Krishna runs after him, laughing.

In fear of his life Indra fled,
right behind him ran Madhava grinning.
"Hey Purandara!" shouted Murari,

“Stop, where are you running to, thunderbolt-wielder?”
Indra fled, not looking back,
so sings Shankara, servant of Krishna.

SUTRA Shouting at Indra to stop, Krishna pursues him. Finally Indra is unable to flee further. When Satyabhama sees that, she laughs and ridicules him.

SATYABHAMA Purandara, why are you running? Why, it’s not proper for you, the king of the gods, to flee in fear after being bested by the mortal Krishna. Shachi struts about before you decked out in her finery with a garland of *parijata* flowers in her hair. You’re the hero who bears the thunderbolt. Why are you fleeing? Are you turning your back to shame? Oh poor Shachi! Look how brave your Indra is! Why don’t you turn your husband around to face the other way? I, a mortal, am taking your *parijata* flowers. How can you stand that?

SUTRA Then, when he hears his wife being insulted in that way, Indra turns around and says:

INDRA Satyabhama, I am well aware that you are the fiercest and most headstrong of all Krishna’s wives. Why are you making fun of me in this way? Look, I have been defeated by the Supreme Guru of the World, Krishna **Narayana**, whose lotus feet have been worshiped for endless eons by Brahma and Shiva. Is that anything for me to be ashamed of? Women can’t understand anything! There’s no reason for you to mock me.

SUTRA Once he said this, Indra begins to lament, sobbing, “Oh, I am a sinner who was so blinded by *maya* that I did battle with the Supreme Lord. Miserable me! His body trembling with terror, Indra joins his hands together, prostrates himself on the ground before Krishna, and says, “Save me! Save me”!

Jaya, jaya Murari, crusher of Keshi and Kamsa,
Jaya, jaya to the bearer of Govardhan,
to him who eases the fears of the faithful,
Jaya, jaya to the crusher of the poisonous Kali,
to the dwarf who bettered Bali.
Made blind by your *maya*, I did a great wrong in
fighting you.
Forgive this crime of mine, I fall at your feet.
Purge me of my evil-mindedness,
I will follow the path of devotion to you.

SUTRA After praising Krishna in this way, he lies with the greatest humility before Krishna and begins to wail. Seeing that he is overcome with terror, Krishna smiles, takes him by the hand, raises him up, and comforts him, saying:

SHRI KRISHNA Purandara, you are my elder brother. I do not hold you at fault. You have nothing to be afraid of. Here, take your thunderbolt. I find no joy in the *parijata*, take it back.

SUTRA When Satyabhama hears him say this, she scowls at her husband and says, chewing her lips in irritation:

SATYABHAMA My dear husband, what in the world has come over you! You heard those wheedling words from Indra. Once again, he begged us to do battle with the demon Naraka and accomplish the work of the gods. You can have confidence in what he says. What right do you have to give away my *parijata*?

INDRA Lord Krishna, take the *parijata*. I will send it to Dvaraka along with the divine assembly and all my wealth. As long as you remain on the earth, you can have use of it.

SUTRA Accepting his offer, Krishna bids a respectful farewell to Indra, takes the *parijata* flower with his permission, and happily leaves with his wife.

Taking the *parijata*, they graciously left.
That gem of a woman smiled with pleasure
and walked with the stately gait of the elephant.
The dark-hued Krishna walked in delight with his wife
who was like a elephant cow
and he like a mighty elephant bull at play.
The servant of Krishna sings,
I bow at the feet of Hari.

SUTRA Then Krishna and Satyabhama enter Dvaraka delighted by their adventure. When everyone learns of Krishna's arrival, a great celebration is held. Everywhere victory drums are sounded. When Rukmini learns that her husband has triumphed in battle, she goes to him with her ladies-in-waiting and bows down before him. Krishna embraces her and comforts her. Then Rukmini stands to one side with her ladies-in-waiting. Puffed up with pride, Satyabhama says to her:

SATYABHAMA Oh princess of Vidarbha; your lord gave you a single *parijata* flower. Look, look here, he uprooted the entire *parijata* tree and brought it for me! Look at the great honor he rendered me!

SUTRA When she hears Satyabhama's boastful words, Rukmini smiles and replies:

RUKMINI My dear sister Satyabhama, what are you talking about? My husband Krishna is the Supreme Guru of the World. When one worships his lotus feet, can anything else in the universe seem precious in comparison? Then *dharma*, *artha*, *kama*, and *moksha* can be obtained with the greatest of ease. What is a *parijata* compared to that?

SUTRA As she spoke of the greatness of devotion, love touches Rukmini. Hear how she describes service to the feet of Hari:

What are you saying to me?
With Hari as a husband, what do I lack?

Meditating on his vermilion feet,
I obtain the four *rasas*.
Singing the virtues of his Name,
I am saved from sin.
So says Shankara, there is no way but that of Hari.

SATYABHAMA My lord Krishna, why are you neglecting me? Plant the *parijata* tree at once before my door.

SUTRA When Krishna hears the words of his beloved, he plants the tree by his door with his own hands. The queen then says:

SATYABHAMA My dear husband, what have you done? I have many cowives. Think of all the problems there will be with people stealing *parijata* flowers! Don't put it there, plant it at my door!

SUTRA Krishna, filled with thoughts of his wife, uproots the *parijata* again and plants by the door of her dwelling. Her wish fulfilled, Satyabhama bows to her husband, and she and her ladies-in-waiting praise him.

Krishna slew Narakasura, accomplishing the work of the gods, he defeated Indra, brought the *parijata* tree, and planted it at the door of his beloved. In this way Krishna performed his *lila* together with his wife.

Acting out his *lila* in this way, Krishna fulfilled the desires of his devout wives and remained in the city of Dvaraka. The devotion of those who listen to and repeat the story of Hari's theft of the *parijata* flower with faith will greatly increase. Knowing this, repeat the name of Hari!

Victory to Murari, the Life of the World.
Slayer of Kamsa, Keshi, Baka, and Agha.
He is the ruler of the vast cosmos,
ever granting salvation and devotion.
Victory to Yadava, the slayer of Danuja,
who punishes evildoers and rescues the faithful.
Victory to the Supreme Person, the God of the gods
whose feet are worshiped by Brahma and Shiva.
This play has been composed with great care
in various meters in order to spread devotion to Hari.
Parijata Harana is its name.
Listen, good folk, to the unparalleled virtues of Hari.
This is the essence of religion in the Kali age,
there is not, is not, any other path.
See how Kali has leveled everything,
making no distinction between virtue and vice.
Foul-minded folk never understand
that there is no other way but that of the Bearer of the

Saranga Bow.
Concentrate your mind on Hari, leave all other hopes.
Put firm faith in the name of Hari.
It is the name of the King of Dharma.
So says Shankara, the servant of Krishna:
repeat the name of Rama!

Notes

1. S. N. Sarma, *The Neo-Vaisnavite Movement and the Satra Institution in Assam* (1966; reprint, Guwahati: Lawyer's Book Stall, 1999).
2. W. L. Smith, *Dr. W. L. Smith on Sankaradeva*, compiled by Prabhat Ch. Das (Guwahati: Oriental Institute for Sankaradeva Studies, 2001), and W. L. Smith, "Inventing Brajabuli," *Archiv Orientalni* (Prague) 68, no. 3 (2000).
3. Mahesvar Neog, *Early History of the Vaisnava Faith and Movement in Assam: Sankaradeva and His Times* (1965; reprint, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1983), 267.
4. *Ankiya Nat*, edited by Birinci Kumar Baruva (1940), 3rd ed. (Guwahati: Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies in Assam, 1983).
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