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The Treasure of Bhakti

by His Divine Grace
Srila Bhakti Siddhanta Saraswati Goswami

Obeisance to the most Magnanimous, the Giver of the Love of Krishna, the Own Self of Krishna, the Lord bearing the Name Krishna-Chaitanya and possessed of the Form of golden hue! I submit myself to Sri Krishna-Chaitanya, that merciful Person of wonderful deeds Who by the nectar of the treasure of His Own Love intoxicated the world, delirious with ignorance, by freeing it from the malady of nescience.

Lord Sri Chaitanya said:

Listen, Rupa, to the characteristics of the rasa (matured mellowness) of Bhakti. I shall speak in a condensed form, for rasa is not susceptible of elaborate description since rasa can only be understood through insight and deep realisation. The ocean of the mellow of Bhakti is profound and devoid of bounding shores. I shall speak one particle of the same (Bhakti), in order to make you taste it.

In this world the number of jivas (souls) is infinite. They form the content of this world by their wanderings birth after birth through 8,400,000 different kinds of physical bodies (human bodies, animals, trees, etc.)

The specific nature of the jiva is infinitesimal in magnitude like the hundredth part of the tip of a hair. The jivas are divided into two distinct groups, viz., (1) stationary and (2) moving. The moving jivas are again divided into those who live on the land, in water and in the air.

Mankind is a very small part of the total number of jivas that live on the land. Among men are also to be found the Mlechchas (Europeans), Pulindas, Baudhas (Oriental people), Aboriginies, etc. Among those who practice the religion of the Veda (Hindus), one half profess to follow the Veda but in fact only follow with their lips. They commit many sins forbidden by the Veda and do not really care for that religion. Then again, among those who really act in accordance with that religion, most persons are addicted to fruitive activities. They do work (karma) to produce fruit that they can enjoy. It is hardly possible to find even a single seeker of knowledge (jnanin) among 100,000 people working to make good karma. Further, there is hardly even one person who is truly Mukta (liberated) amongst 100,000 people seeking liberation.

It is hardly possible to find a single Bhakta (devotee) of Krishna among 100,000 liberated persons. The Bhakta of Krishna is free from all selfish hankerings and is, therefore, of a really peaceful and equipoised disposition (shanta), while those

who desire to do work (karma) to create enjoyment, or who desire liberation or mystic powers through yoga, are all discontented (ashanta).

It is rarely that any fortunate jiva, in the course of his wanderings in this mundane world, may obtain a chance to come to know Bhakti. That is, it is rare for someone to obtain the seed of the creeper of Bhakti, which is only found by the favour of Guru and Krishna.

Bhakti grows like a creeper growing from a tiny seed. By becoming a gardener the jiva sows the seed and splashes the seed with nourishing water, in the form of hearing the Name of Krishna and chanting the Name. The creeper of Bhakti springs to shoot and grows, piercing through this mundane sphere. The growing creeper goes through the stream of Viraja (unmanifest formless state outside this universe), then goes through the illuminated plane of Brahma (white light of Spiritual bliss), until at last the creeper finally attains for herself a home in the soil of the infinite sphere called Paravyoma. The creeper continues to grow in that Paravyoma atmosphere and reaches the limits of the higher sphere of Goloka-Vrindaban where she climbs and clings to the Purpose-Tree at the Feet of Krishna.

Prema (Divine Love), the fruit of the creeper of Bhakti, grows on the creeper only when she attains to the Feet of Krishna. All this time the gardener continues to splash the creeper with the water of hearing and chanting the Holy Name of Krishna.

At this stage there is also a second function towards the creeper, besides watering it. As the creeper begins to grow after being watered for some time, hostile animals make their appearance and tear the leaves, or the tender leaves begin to dry up because of excessive heat, etc. In these circumstances offence against the Vaishnavas (real devotees) is the entity corresponding to the vicious animals. It is such offence against the Vaishnavas that causes all those various sorts of damage, or in other words it is the negligence of the gardener who has failed to erect fences or to devise other protective methods to protect the creeper, and who has not given special care so that there may be no possibility for the creeper to be trampled by the mad elephant of offence to the Vaishnavas. Offence against the Vaishnavas is identical with offence against the Holy Name - it is one of the ten categories of offences against the Holy Name.

There is yet another possible disturbance at this stage. As the creeper of Bhakti begins to grow, if there is luxuriant growth of the secondary branches then such growth also does mischief. The secondary branches are desire for enjoyment, longing for liberation, addiction to forbidden conduct, over-attention to small points of conscience, cruelty or slaughter of living things, desire of pecuniary gain and a desire for one's own worldly honour or fame. If special care is not practiced these secondary branches are apt to grow vigorously to the detriment of the principal stem of the creeper, with the result that the main stem is stunted and cannot grow. Therefore, it is the duty of the gardener to prune these secondary branches from the moment of their appearance, while one is busy with the primary task of hearing and chanting. If this is done the principal stem, continuing to

grow, attains to Vrindaban the land of Krishna.

The fruit of Prema then ripens and drops on the ground. The gardener now tastes its mellow flavour. By the help of the creeper the gardener is also enabled to reach the Purpose-Tree. The gardener can now serve in Vrindaban at the foot of the Purpose-Tree and savour the taste of the luscious juice of the fruit of Love. This Prema is the supreme desideratum, the final fruit of all activity of the soul. The four-fold objects of human endeavour namely dharma (virtue), artha (worldly possession), kama (objects of worldly desire) and moksa (liberation) are as insignificant as a straw lying by the wayside in comparison with Krishna-Prema.

The realisation of coveted powers and excellences (siddhis), or of the equable state of overflowing oneness with the bliss of Brahma-realisation (on attainment of complete withdrawal of the mind from all external efforts, as a result of practicing pious activities enjoined in the scriptures), can dazzle the imagination of a man by their glaring features. But these dazzling realisations are only dazzling until the man has savoured the smallest portion of the fragrance of the medicine of Love. Pure Love can subdue even the Lord Himself, and He is the subduer of Madhu, the great demon who is at the core of the pattern of consciousness (yantra) we perceive as the mental state of "intoxication". A person must be free from mundane intoxications which lead him to try to enjoy as a master of siddhis (siddhi-yoga) or the bliss of oneness with unmanifest Brahma (liberation) before Love can appear on the pathways of the heart.

"Bhakti is declared to be service of the Lord of the senses (God) by means of one's senses. It is free from all physical and mental elements. It is absolutely free from all mundane dirt by reason of its being entirely directed to God" -- (Narada Pancharatra)

Lord Sri Chaitanya contined:

As soon as the tidings of My Excellences enter the listener's ear his mind exhibits a constant inseparability from Me which is comparable to the state of a body of pure water of the Ganges on its entry into the ocean. This is the only sure characteristic of devotion which is free from all mundane tendencies. The devoted soul is inseparable from Me.

The devotees never accept the gifts of residence in Vaikuntha (the unlimited realm), or the opulence and honour of a form resembling My Majestic Self, or proximity to My Presence, or complete merging in Me. All of these prospective attainments I offer to them, but they do not accept these attainments. They have no desire to have these attainments, and this is so because there is nothing covetable by them save and except My Transcendental Service.

This is Devotion that is Pure and Perfect. It is by means of such Devotion that the individual soul attains to unalloyed Love for Me, thereby transcending the limiting potency that is covering over the jiva (soul) with layers of mundane desires and feelings.

If the mind harbours the least desire either for mundane enjoyment, or for liberation from the desire for enjoyment, Love for Godhead is not aroused even by the most diligent pursuit of service according to the practices enjoined in the scriptures.

So long as the ugly spectre of desire for mundane enjoyment or mundane emancipation continues to haunt the chambers of the heart, how can the bliss of devotion arise therein?

This form of Bhakti is fit to be cultured. Being duly cultured it gives rise to Rati (the natural tendency of the soul towards Krishna, or the basic principal of Love). Condensed Rati is Prema. By the process of gradual augmentation Prema becomes Sneha, Maana, Pranaya, Anuraga, Bhava and Mahabhava. A good analogy is furnished by the series of processes in the refining of raw juice of sugarcane. First there is juice, then mollasses, raw sugar, residual sugar, refined sugar, white sugar and icing sugar. These are varieties of the basic principle (Sthayibhava) in the operations of the mellow liquid (Rasa) of the Service of Krishna. If the basic principle is conjoined with higher principles known as Vaibhava, Anubhava, Satvika and Vyabhachari then the operations of the liquid mellow of the service of Krishna exhibits the most exquisite nectarean taste. Just as the treatment of curd with sugar, ghee, pepper and camphor produces a most tasty composition.

There are five varieties of Rasa corresponding to the different types of devotees. The five varieties of Rasa are Shanta (feeling of peacefulness), Dasya (feeling that "I am a servitor of Krishna"), Sakhya (feeling that "I am a friend of Krishna"), Vatsalya (feeling that "Krishna is a child and I am Krishna's parental guardian") and Madhura (mood that "Krishna is my beloved"). There are also seven secondary types of Rasa known as Hasya (humorous mood), Adbhuta (astonishment), Veera (chivalrous mood), Karuna (compassionate mood), Raudra (angry mood), Bhayanaka (mood of awe and dread) and Vibhasta (ghastliness). The five principal kinds of Rasa are permanent and constantly permeate the mind of the devotee, whereas the seven secondary moods are not constantly present within the mind of the devotee.

Shanta-rasa is exemplified by the conduct of the nine yogis called the Yogendras, and also in the case of the yogi Sanaka and his young brothers. Dasya-rasa, the mood of a servitor of Krishna, is seen everywhere in the case of numberless devotees of Krishna. Among the Sakhya-rasa group are the young cowherd boys who are associates of Krishna such as Sridam, as well as Krishna's cousins Bhim, Arjuna, etc. The devotees in the mood of Vatsalya-rasa includes the parents and all the older relatives of Krishna. In Madhura-rasa the principal Bhaktas (devotees) are the Milk-Maids in Vraja and also the Royal Consorts and Lakshmis whose great number baffles all calculation.

Then again Krishna-Rati is twofold, viz., (1) adulterated with the perception of His Majesty and (2) unalloyed. In the two royal cities of Mathura and Dvaraka and in the Vaikuntha worlds the mood of Divine Majesty predominates. In Gokula-Rati,

love for Krishna is in a mood devoid of the consciousness of His Divine Majesty. Love exhibits shyness if the sense of Majesty becomes prominent. It is the distinctive characteristic of unalloyed Gokula-Rati that the Goddess of Devotion directing service in that realm does not pay any mind to the Majesty of Godhead, even if Majesty is manifested to Her. In Shanta-Rasa and Dasya-Rasa the realisation of Divine Majesty on rare occasions serves as a helpful excitant. In Sakhya-rasa and Madhura-Rasa it always acts as a deterrant. Krishna acted in a formal role when he met his parents Vasudeb and Devaki and he bowed down and greeted their feet. The realisation of Divine Majesty filled the minds of both His parents with astonishment (one of the secondary Rasas - Adbhuta). Arjuna was terrified on beholding the Cosmic Form of Krishna. He craved His forgiveness for his arrogance in behaving as His chum. Rukmini was overwhelmed with fear when Krishna told her jokingly that He would leave her.

But the Source of Unalloyed Love knows nothing of Divine Majesty. If She meets with any exhibition of Majesty, She simply ignores all relationship on Her part with such Entity.

In Shanta-Rasa there is found exclusive attachment to Krishna due to the realisation of one's spiritual nature. Krishna Himself says, "Equanimity (Sama) results from the inclination of constant attachment to Me". The specific effect of Shanta-Rasa is noticeable in this, that the Shanta-devotee discards every other longing except for Krishna. Hence no one can have real equanimity of disposition except the devotee of Krishna. The devotee of Krishna regards paradise and liberation as hell. The two characteristics of the Shanta-devotee are constant attachment to Krishna and renunciation of all other longing. These two characteristics permeate all the devotes of Krishna just as sound permeates and penetrates all mundane elements.

It is the nature of the Shanta-devotee to be devoid of any personal tie of love with Krishna. In the heart of the peaceful Shanta-devotee, the realisation of Krishna as the Supremely Great Being (Para-Brahma) and the Supreme Soul (Paramaatman) is strong. In Shanta-Rasa there is only the realisation of the spiritual nature of one's relationship with Krishna; whereas in Dasya-Rasa there is the greater realisation of the Nature of Krishna as the Master possessing Full Divine Majesty. In Dasya (service of the Master) mood there is exuberance of the realisation of God as the Possessor of controlling power and great dignity. The servitor by his humble ministrations gives constant pleasure to Krishna.

In Dasya (servitor mood) there are the two characteristics of Shanta with the further addition of the specific activity of servitude. Therefore, Dasya possesses this two-fold quality. In Sakhya (friendship) there are the qualities of both Santa and Dasya, but whereas in the Dasya mood the servitude is full of the sense of inferiority and high respect for Krishna, in Sakhya (friendship) it is characterised by full confidence. The chums of Krishna climb to His shoulders, make Him climb theirs, engage in the sport of wrestling with Him, serve Krishna and make Krishna serve them in His turn. Sakhya is marked by the predominance of confidential relations devoid of the sense of respect and of one's inferiority to Him. Hence

Sakhya-Rasa possesses the three-fold quality. There is a greater measure of the personal sentiment, a sense of regarding Krishna as one's own. It is this last trait that makes Godhead submit to Sakhya-Rasa, as for instance when Krishna agreed to drive the chariot of His cousin Arjuna when Arjuna was fighting on the battlefield at Kurukshetra.

In Vatsalya-Rasa (Parental mood of Devotion) there are the qualities of Shanta and the ministrations of Dasya. There are also the qualities of Sakhya consisting of the absence of restraint, and of awe and respect, as well as an absence of fear of punishment and scolding -- which is due to the sentiment of kinship. Additionally, there are the activities bearing the designation of "tending" (palana). There is the sentiment of regarding oneself as the guardian of Krishna, Who is regarded as the Ward. By this fourfold characteristic Vatsalya-Rasa is as delicious as nectar. Krishna Himself is immersed in that nectarean bliss in the company of His devotee. Those jnanins (meditators) such as Suka, Sanaka and Sanatan who are aware of the Nature of Krishna as Divinity possessed of controlling Power, declare that Krishna also possesses the quality of subservience to His devotee.

In Madhura-Rasa there is constant attachment to Krishna, extreme servitude, the absence of diffidence of the chum, the increased sentiment for Krishna that is felt when one is tending one's Child, and finally serving Krishna by means of one's own body as Consort. Hence Madhura-Rasa exhibits five distinct qualities. An analogy is supplied by the case of the five mundane elements (space, air, fire, water, earth). The quality of each element commencing with space (akasha) is carried to the next in the series and added to its own distinctive quality till the last of the elements, viz., the earth, is generated and seen to be possessing the distinctive qualities of the preceding four elements in addition to its own specific qualities. In the same manner, all the Bhavas combine in Madhura. For this reason, Madhura-Rasa has greater tastefulness which makes it so exquisitely delicious.

The Lord said to Sri Rupa Goswami that He had given him the mere outline of Bhakti-Rasa. Sri Chaitanya advised Sri Rupa Goswami to ponder this and to amplify and expand upon it in his writings. It is by the practice of constant meditation that Krishna manifests Himself to the heart. By the Grace of Krishna even an ignorant person is enabled to realise the nature of the Ocean of Rasa.