

Introduction

I started this edition of the Gita in order to have the four related commentaries of Sridhar (*Subodhini*), Madhusudan Saraswati (*Gūḍhārtha-dīpikā*), Vishwanath (*Sārārtha-varṣiṇī*) and Baladeva (*Gītā-bhūṣaṇam*) in one place. Sadhale's edition has eleven full commentaries, but does not include any of these, which appear to form a kind of family with direct relationships between them.

Sridhar Swami's commentary was written in Orissa in the early 15th century. Madhusudana Saraswati was a contemporary of Jiva Goswami living in Benares in the latter half of the 16th century. Vishwanath Chakravarti lived in the latter part of the 17th century and Baladeva Vidyabhushan was his junior contemporary and student. The last two scholars belonged to the Chaitanya Vaishnava school, though they lived more than a century after the departure of Chaitanya Mahaprabhu himself. As such their commentaries are held in particularly great esteem by Gaudiya Vaishnavas and have been published many times by followers of that school.

Sridhar Swami, though an Advaitavadin, was held in great esteem by Chaitanya, especially for his commentary on the Bhagavata Purana. This respect for Sridhar arises out of his acknowledgement of the importance of bhakti and his sentimental feeling for Vishnu and his incarnations. His commentary, as its name indicates, is a simple gloss of the original text rather than a philosophical discourse based on the Gita, as is the case with Madhusudan.

Madhusudan Saraswati, a Bengali, lived in the post-Chaitanya period dominated by the Vaishnava bhakti movements. He also was an Advaita-vadin, renowned for numerous philosophical works, most notably *Advaita-siddhi* and *Bhakti-rasāyana*. Though in his introduction he gives prominence to Shankaracharya, it is clear that for his fundamental reading of the text, he owes as much, if not more, to Sridhar. He too shows a certain affection for Krishna and the bhakti tradition, quoting several times from the Bhāgavata-purāṇa, for instance, though his intellectual support for the Advaita doctrines is beyond any doubt. His most well-known verse comes at the conclusion of his commentary:

*vaṁśī-vibhūṣita-karān nava-nīradābhāt
pītāambarād aruṇa-bimba-phalādharoṣṭhāt |
pūrṇendu-sundara-mukhād aravinda-nābhāt
kṛṣṇāt param kim api tattvam aham na jāne ||*

It is clear that Vishwanath and Baladeva made use of these two commentaries above any other along with that of Ramanuja. However, Madhvacharya, the founder of the Dvaita school of Vedanta, as well as Jayatirtha, his disciple, who also commented on the Gita do not appear to have left any traces on either Gaudiya commentary. This is remarkable in view of the ostensible connection to the Madhva line latterly claimed by the Gaudiya school.

Vishwanath is generally concise and restricts his comments to elements that specifically distinguish the Gaudiya position, stressing the Bhagavatam as a source text. As usual, Vishwanath is occasionally highly original, though his inspiration comes from Rupa Goswami and Jiva Goswami, the theologians who established Gaudiya doctrine. Baladeva similarly stresses the Gaudiya understanding of theology, but gives a more detailed explanation of the verses, especially drawing on Vedanta to support his position.

I have also included a few excerpts from other Gaudiya sources, particularly Jiva Goswami's discussion of the concluding verses of the 18th chapter found in the *Kṛṣṇa-sandarbhā* and *Sarva-saṁvādinī*. It is my intention to compile an index of quoted verses as well as an index of Gita verses as found in Gaudiya texts, i.e., *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, the six *Sandarbhās*, etc.

By placing these commentaries in one place, facility is given to future scholars who wish to make an in-depth comparison of them.

Bibliography

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