

Madhavadeva (1489-1596) was a saint, composer, poet, playwright and scholar. He was a religious reformer and the Mahapurusiya Vaisnavism in Assam owes a great deal to his organising ability, foresight and exemplary conduct.

The lyrics of Madhavadeva have become a part of the religious life of Assam and a source of solace to distressed hearts for over four centuries. His plays delight and instruct both the lay and the learned.

Satyendranath Sarma (b. 1917), distinguished scholar and literary historian is the author of fifteen books in Assamese and four in English. He has been associated with a number of literary and academic bodies, including the Sahitya Akademi. He presents this monograph on Madhavadeva mainly for the non-Assamese reader.

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MADHAVADEVA

SATYENDRANATH SARMA



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1

Early Life

Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva are the two outstanding persons of the sixteenth century whose versatile contributions ushered in a cultural revival in Assam. They are reverentially called *mahāpurusas* (noble souls) in the Vaiṣṇavite tradition. Śaṅkaradeva being the spiritual and religious guide, trained his most favourite disciple Mādhava in the Vaiṣṇavite tenets and ideals and on the eve of his death nominated him as his successor to head the Vaiṣṇavite community of Assam. Considering their close and intimate relationship, the Vaiṣṇavite works very often compare them with Kṛṣṇa and Uddhava of the *Bhāgavata-purāna*. When Rāmananda, the eldest son of Śaṅkaradeva approached his father on his death-bed with a request to instruct him in spiritual matters, the great saint is said to have directed his son to Mādhavadeva to whom he had transmitted all his spiritual strength and energy as his successor. These two initiators of the Vaiṣṇavite revivalism in Assam have been household names for the last four centuries and they are still regarded by the orthodox section as incarnations of divinity.

Unlike Śaṅkaradeva, Mādhavadeva was not born with a silver spoon in his mouth. His father Govindagiri, a kāyastha, who was originally an inhabitant of Bāṇḍukā, a place in the Raṅgpur district of present Bangla Desh, migrated to central Assam probably towards the second half of the

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fifteenth century and settled at Bardowā, a place in the modern district of Nowgong, where he married for the second time a girl of the Kāyastha community. The girl named Manoramā was distantly related to Śaṅkaradeva. The newly married couple had to leave Bardowā due to the Kachāri raid and they were taken to Letekupkhuri near modern Nārāyanapur, in the Lakhimpur district, by one Hari Simha Uzir, under whose shelter Govindagiri and his wife lived for a few years comfortably. Here Mādhavadeva was born in A.D. 1489. Medieval biographies of the religious saints of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries have not recorded the dates of birth of the two great Vaiṣṇavite reformers, but the respective years of their departure from the mundane world have been recorded. Only some of the later biographies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries considered it worthwhile to record the years of birth also. The Vaiṣṇavite traditions have uniformly maintained that Mādhavadeva lived for one hundred and seven years and that he breathed his last in the Śaka year 1518 (1596 A.D.). On the basis of these two premises probably the later biographies came to the conclusion that he was born in the Śaka year 1411 (1489 A.D)¹.

Mādhavadeva was a smart and healthy boy and took active and leading parts in all children's sports. He also helped Hari Simha Uzir in his work. Having failed to make his living independently, Govindagiri decided to seek his fortune elsewhere and accordingly set out with his family in search

¹In the *Guru-Carita* a biography of the two saints written towards the middle of the 17th century by Rāmānanda, it is recorded that Mādhavadeva, while introducing himself to King Lakṣminārāyaṇa (1585-1622) of Cooch Behar, said that he was seventyfive years old (*Sattari vatsara mor pañcama adhik*). If we take the approximate date of this meeting to be 1585, then in 1596, when Mādhavadeva died, he could not be more than 85 or 86. If it was so, the date of Mādhavadeva's birth cannot be placed earlier than A.D. 1510. But this version of Rāmānanda is not supported by the Vaiṣṇavite tradition and many of his activities as narrated in the biographies cannot be reconciled with those of Śaṅkaradeva, unless the date of birth of Śaṅkaradeva is advanced by at least twenty years. The Vaiṣṇavite community of Assam, however, have accepted unreservedly Saka years 1371 and 1411 as the birth-years of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva respec

of his old friends, but was sorely disappointed to find them callous and indifferent. Biographies record that the family had to live on one meal a day or without meals for days together in the absence of any means of livelihood during this period. Finally Govindagiri, with his wife and son, approached Ghāghari Māji, a man whom Govindagiri had helped considerably while he was in Bāṇḍukā. Māji recognised his old benefactor and gave him and his family food and shelter for a few years. Here, in the house of Ghāghari Māji at Rautā-Tembuwāni a daughter was born who was named Urvasī. But as the locality was not inhabited by any Kāyastha family Govindagiri for lack of social intercourse decided after a few years to migrate to Dhuāhāta Belaguri where many kāyastha families including Śaṅkaradeva and his kinsmen were living and where the great initiator of Vaiṣṇavism in Assam was propagating his faith. Here Urvasī was married to one Gayāpāṇi alias Rāmadāsa, a young Vaiṣṇavite devotee of Śaṅkaradeva.

Leaving his wife in the custody of his son-in-law, Govindagiri and his son, Mādhava now returned to Bāṇḍukā, the ancestral home in the Raṅgpur district, where they were cordially received by Dāmodara (according to some biographies Rūpacandragiri) the grown-up son of Govindagiri by his first wife. Here Mādhavadeva was admitted to a Sanskrit Ṭol (School for teaching Sanskrit) maintained by one Rājendra Ācārya, where he got a thorough grounding in ancient lore and scriptures as well as the professional knowledge of maintaining accounts (*Kāyasthikā vṛtti*). In the meantime Govindagiri died and Mādhavadeva, after completing his education, stayed at Bāṇḍukā a few years more sharing the ancestral property with his step brother. Later, due to some difference of opinion on matters relating to the ancestral property and as a consequence renouncing his claim to the paternal property, he decided to return to Dhuāhāta-Belaguri where his mother had been living with her daughter and son-in-law Gayāpāṇi. While returning to Eastern Assam by boat upstream along the Brahmaputra, Mādhavadeva received the news of his mother's serious illness. He took a vow of special worship to propitiate the goddess Durgā so that his mother might be cured of her illness. On reaching home he

found his mother gradually recovering and therefore decided to perform the worship in the autumn. He requested his brother-in-law Gayāpāṇi to procure a he-goat to be sacrificed at the image of the goddess. Gayāpāṇi, a staunch Vaiṣṇavite, tried to evade the responsibility by dilatory tactics until things came to such a pass that he had to confess that his religious creed would not permit him to procure a goat to be sacrificed before the goddess. He further told Mādhavadeva that the proper person to give persuasive replies to Mādhava's religious arguments would be Śaṅkaradeva, the propagator of the new Vaiṣṇavite faith. Mādhavadeva decided to settle the issue regarding the superiority of their respective religious creeds in an argumentative duel with Śaṅkaradeva.

Accompanied by Gayāpāṇi, Mādhava went to meet Śaṅkaradeva and after formal introductions they engaged in a religious debate, each claiming the superiority of his own creed. Śaṅkaradeva in support of his contention quoted from various Vaiṣṇavite scriptures, while Mādhavadeva, on the other hand, advanced his arguments on the basis of the Śākta literature. After the long drawn contest, Mādhavadeva being convinced by the superior arguments of Śaṅkaradeva, prostrated at his feet and formally accepted Vaiṣṇavism. This was the turning point of Mādhava's religious life. Henceforth he became an ardent Vaiṣṇava, a faithful disciple and a sincere propagator of Vaiṣṇavism.

2

Identification with the Master

Mādhavadeva became more or less the shadow of Śaṅkaradeva. The *Bhagavad-gītā* enjoins the seekers of knowledge to acquire it by propitiating the guru with humility, service and spirit of enquiry (*tadviddhi praṇipātena paripraśnena sevayā*). While serving his spiritual mentor Mādhavadeva scrupulously followed the instruction of the *Gītā*. He followed his guru wherever he went as a self-effacing personal attendant.

Before we proceed further to delineate Mādhavadeva's role in the Bhakti movement and his abiding contribution, it would be relevant to give a brief outline of the nature and characteristics of the Neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith propounded and preached by Śaṅkaradeva. Neo-Vaiṣṇavism as propounded by Śaṅkaradeva is a monotheistic cult enjoining the worship of Viṣṇu-kr̥ṣṇa alone on the basis of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* which is considered to be the most authoritative of the scriptures. The *Bhagavad-gītā* is held equally great in esteem by all sections of the Vaiṣṇavite community. Kṛṣṇa, the son of Daivakī, is considered the perfect incarnation or manifestation of God and it was laid down that no deity other than Kṛṣṇa should be adored or worshipped, because other deities are but offshoots of the Supreme Being in the shape of Kṛṣṇa. The devotees must surrender themselves absolutely at the feet of the Lord and it is a sacrilege to worship any other deity but

Viṣṇu or Kṛṣṇa. It is, therefore, called *Ekaśaraṇa Dharma*, or the religion of absolute self-surrender to God. Of the nine-fold process of devotion. Śaṅkaradeva specially recommends *Śravaṇa* and *Kīrtana* (acts of listening to and chanting of the glories of the lord) for the cultivation of devotion in the company of devotees. The deity should be served or worshipped in the mood of a faithful and devoted servant without expecting any reward for the service. Selflessly dedicated service (*niskāma karma*) is considered to be the best way of approaching God. The four fundamental principles on which Śaṅkaradeva developed his Neo-Vaiṣṇavite faith are : (i) *Nāma* (names of the adorable one), (ii) *Deva* (adorable deity), (iii) *Guru* (spiritual guide) and (iv) *Bhakta* (devotees or holy association). Chanting the names of the Lord, listening to recitals of his deeds and sport and meditating upon his beatific form in the company of holy persons as directed by the spiritual guide are the basic tenets of Śaṅkaradeva's faith. Ritualism of all sorts, Vedic, Tantrik or Purānic has been deprecated. God is described in both personal and impersonal aspects. In the latter aspect He is known as Brahman, while in the former aspect He is Nārāyaṇa-Viṣṇu. He is all-pervasive and at the same time beyond the world of creation. The world is real from the empirical point of view, but it is unreal or illusory from the ultimate point of view. The finite self is identical with the infinite self (*Paramātmān*), but appears distinct due to ignorance (*avidyā*) produced by *māyā* the illusory power of God.

Śaṅkaradeva, successfully implanted the above tenets in the hearts of the people through his writings, speeches, talks and sermons, though there was no dearth of opposition. After his initiation Mādhavadeva channelised all his energy and erudition towards furthering the cause of the new faith. Considering marriage to be an impediment in his path towards the realisation of the ideal, Mādhavadeva resolved not to marry and accordingly cancelled his settled marriage with a girl of his own choice. He remained a life long celibate to work for the spiritual development of the entire community. He was staying with his brother-in-law, but left every morning to attend the daily religious discussions and prayer-services conducted by his guru and returned home at night.

About this time, the kinsmen of Śaṅkaradeva were engaged by the contemporary Ahom King to help the royal contingents in catching wild elephants. As the Bhūyās, i.e. the kinsmen of Śaṅkaradeva, failed to satisfy the King, an order to arrest and present them before the court was passed whereupon the Bhūyās fled to the forest leaving their wives and children at home. The royal contingent captured Mādhavadeva and Śaṅkaradeva's son-in-law Hari Bhūyā, and put the latter to death. Mādhavadeva was released as there were no relatives to grieve over his death. This rude shock combined with a few other unpleasant incidents embittered Śaṅkaradeva and his associates and therefore they were looking for an opportunity to migrate from the Ahom kingdom. The invasion of the Ahom kingdom by the Koch army under the command of Prince Śukladhvaja in 1545 provided this opportunity which was promptly availed of. All the kinsmen of Śaṅkaradeva including his devoted followers headed by Mādhavadeva migrated to Western Assam and finally settled near Barpetā, now a sub-divisional town in the district of Kāmṛūpa. Mādhavadeva, with his brother-in-law Gayāpāni alias Rāmadāsa, first settled at Bārādi, but later shifted to Gaṇakuchi, a place not very far from Pātāusi where Śaṅkaradeva had set up his establishment. Mādhavadeva used to come regularly to serve his master as well as to listen to his religious discourses, punctuated by congregational prayer services. During this period of his life, he amply demonstrated his steadfast devotion to the sacred duties, his organizing ability, sharp wit and intellect, persuasive charm, indefatigable zeal for the expansion of his religious faith. He, thus, became the foremost among Śaṅkaradeva's devoted and accomplished disciples.

Mādhavadeva and a few other prominent disciples accompanied Śaṅkaradeva during the course of his second pilgrimage to Puri, Gayā, and a few holy places of northern India.³

³It may be mentioned that during the first course of pilgrimage undertaken by Śaṅkaradeva which lasted for twelve years, the saint practically covered entire India, from Kanyākumārī to the Himalayas and from Dwaraka to Puri. He undertook this pilgrimage towards the last quarter of the fifteenth century from Bardowā. Mādhavadeva was not born when Śaṅkara started from his native village during this sojourn.

They also visited the *matha* of Kabir in Balia of Behar where they were reverentially received by the grand-daughter of Kabir. Then Śaṅkaradeva expressed his desire to go to Bṛndāvana, but Mādhavadeva urged him against it. The ostensible reason was: let Bṛndāvana remain a 'yarrow unvisited' lest all the charms associated with the divine sport of Kṛṣṇa might vanish at the rude touch of reality. As a matter of fact, it was a ruse to make Śaṅkaradeva desist from his intended journey to Bṛndāvana. While setting out on the pilgrimage Mādhavadeva had assured the wife of his guru who expressed her apprehension, that her husband would not return from Bṛndāvana once he set foot on its sacred soil, that he would bring back her husband safely home without visiting Gokula and Bṛndāvana. During the long arduous journey done mostly on foot many interesting as well as fearful incidents took place. On many an occasion Mādhavadeva, who was in-charge of the travelling party, managed to avert with his tact and presence of mind, awkward or unpleasant situations to the relief of his guru and the accompanying devotees. An instance is noted below.

While passing through a remote part of western Cooch Behar, the pilgrims one day failed to procure any food from the villagers, nor was there any shop or market nearby where from they could purchase any. Next day, Mādhavadeva, taking with him a few stalwart pilgrims, went to the house of the headman of the village and feigning to be an officer of the Cooch King ordered his companions to arrest the headman as he had failed to supply the father-in-law of the King with the necessary provisions. The gullible headman apologised for his negligence and promised to supply whatever was needed for the 'King's father-in-law'. The headman on being released, immediately collected rice, salt, oil, vegetables, etc. and presented them to Mādhavadeva. When Śaṅkaradeva came to know of the incident he laughed heartily.³

When Śaṅkaradeva, towards the end of his long and eventful life, came to the court of Naranārāyaṇa of Cooch Behar

³In fact Rām Rāya, a cousin of Śaṅkaradeva, who accompanied the party was the father-in-law of Prince Sukladhvaja.

on the invitation of the King, he left his religious establishment at Pāt̄bāusi (Barpeta) under the care of Mādhavadeva. Śaṅkaradeva, after nominating Mādhavadeva as his successor left his mortal body in 1568. Mādhavadeva lived for twenty-eight years after his guru and during his pontifical tenure he not only strengthened the faith but also systematized its organisational and procedural aspects. After the demise of the Master, he looked after the family of Śaṅkaradeva for a year or so, and then shifted to Sundaridiyā, a place adjacent to modern Barpeta town, from where he conducted the affairs of the new order. He selected a few leading disciples to carry on proselytizing activities in different parts of the country through religious initiation, discourses, congregational prayer services, dramatic performances and other media of propagation. Gopāladeva, generally known as Gopāla Ātā, Mathurādāsa, also known as Budhā Ātā, Viṣṇu Ātā,⁴ Padma Ātā, Keśavacaraṇa Ātā, Rāmacaraṇa, Śrīhari, Govinda Ātā, Lakṣmīkānta Ātai, Paḍhiyā Mādhava, Vaṃśīgopālodeva and Adhyaliyā Yadumaṇi were the twelve principal apostles sent out on this mission. These twelve apostles appointed by Mādhavadeva carried the torch of the Vaiṣṇava faith and movement to different parts of Assam. They established *sattras* (Vaiṣṇavite monastic and semi-monastic establishments) and propagated the teachings and ideals of the faith amongst all sections of people, irrespective of caste and social distinction. Mādhava, besides visiting the surrounding areas at the invitation of his disciples, where he personally witnessed the progress of Vaiṣṇavism, also visited the holy shrines of Hayagrīva-Mādhava at Hājo and Kāmākhya on the Nilācala hill, but at the latter shrine he refused to enter the sanctum sanctorum and "see the genital organ of the Mother Goddess."⁵

Immediately after the demise of the Master, Mādhavadeva had to face the problem of a division in the sect posed by Dāmodaradeva, an influential Brahmin adherent of the neo-

⁴Ātā < Sk. Ātman, is the epithet generally applied to the Vaiṣṇavite devotees who were specially empowered to ordain disciples.

⁵The main temple of Kāmākhya does not contain any image of the goddess, but a stone symbol of the genital organ (*yoni*) of the Devi is worshipped.

Vaiṣṇavite cult. The cause of this rift cannot be clearly established. While the biographies of Dāmodaradeva are uniformly silent about this rift, those of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva unconvincingly state that Dāmodaradeva refused the invitation extended by Mādhava to the *śrāddha* (death rites) ceremony of Śaṅkaradeva and finally when he was persuaded to come, he did not acknowledge any allegiance and obligation to Śaṅkaradeva. Dāmodaradeva also refused to disown the devotees sheltered by him who were originally expelled by Mādhavadeva from the sect for certain religious offences. So, the rift was complete and Dāmodaradeva henceforth began to preach his faith without owning any allegiance to the Mahāpuruṣiyā sect. We do not come across any evidence of dissension or rift in the sect while Śaṅkaradeva was alive. But after his death the Brahminical section headed by Dāmodara probably did not appreciate certain anti-ritualistic actions of Mādhavadeva and therefore availed themselves of the earliest opportunity to sever connections with the latter on some convenient plea. Biographers of Dāmodaradeva while acknowledging Dāmodara's indebtedness to Śaṅkaradeva have not recognised the latter as the guru of the former. Without going into the controversial question of guruship, it must be admitted that Dāmodara was shown the path of devotion by Śaṅkara at the initial stage.

Due to an unpleasant incident Mādhavadeva shifted his residence from Sundaridiyā to Barpetā. Here he reconstructed the *sattra* by building a beautiful shrine and formally inaugurated it with a dramatic performance in which some young boys dressed as gopīs of Bṛndāvana took part. This gave the opponents of the new faith a convenient handle to malign Mādhavadeva. They complained to Raghunārāyaṇa, the Koch king of Kāmarūpa, that the Vaiṣṇava saint had been corrupting the young girls of the surrounding localities by displaying their dance on the open stage. The king ordered an enquiry and found the allegation baseless. After some time, the opponents complained to the king against Mādhava again, alleging this time that he was preaching heretical doctrines, discarding the age old Vedic rites and

observances. The king sent a batch of soldiers who ransacked the monastery, arrested many Vaiṣṇava devotees and finally demanded one thousand rupees from Mādhavadeva as ransom. Mādhava pleaded his inability to pay, whereupon he, along with some of his followers, was taken to the capital Vijaynagar for interrogation by the king. But at the last moment, due to the intervention of the court pandit Siddhānta-Vāgīśh, Mādhavadeva and his followers were honourably released.

Mādhavadeva now had to pass his time in constant dread of royal persecution. A few months later the king exiled him from Barpetā and directed him to proceed to Hājo, the seat of Hayagrīva Mādhava. Here he used to draw a bigger crowd every day than the deity of the temple did. This naturally antagonised a section of people who were looking for an opportunity to report against him to the biased king. So, on the advice of his well wishers, Mādhavadeva decided to cross the border of the eastern Koch kingdom in search of a congenial atmosphere in the western Koch kingdom ruled by King Lakṣminārāyaṇa. The King and the royal household cordially welcomed him and helped him to settle at Bhelāduār, a place at a distance of a few miles from the capital. The King, convinced of the authenticity of Mādhavadeva's creed, gave him full freedom to propagate it in his kingdom and some of the members of the royal household also embraced Vaiṣṇavism. In spite of the patronage and support of the royal family, opposition to Mādhavadeva's creed did not altogether cease. Virocana Kāzi a high-ranking officer of the royal court, who was initially an admirer of the saint, adopted a hostile attitude subsequently as two of his relatives, who were followers of Mādhava, refused to take food cooked in his house. This highly enraged Virocana who in collusion with some local scholars succeeded in embroiling Mādhava in a religious dispute and finally dragged him to the royal court for the settlement of the scholastic issue. Mādhavadeva, however, acquitted himself creditably in the debate by his convincing arguments in favour of his own faith and creed. The king not only held him in great respect but also smoothed the path of his religious activities by declaring Vaiṣṇa-

vism as the state religion. The remaining two or three years of Mādhava's life were spent peacefully in literary and religious pursuits. He, however, did not cease to maintain close contact with the activities of his principal followers entrusted with the responsibility of propagating the new faith. He breathed his last with the sacred name of God in his lips in the month of Bhādra, 1518 Śaka.

3

A Religious Organiser

It has been stated by Daityāri Thākur, the most trustworthy biographer of the early seventeenth century, that it was Mādhavadeva who expanded the horizon of the Bhakti dharma initiated by his guru Śaṅkaradeva. He writes: 'Śaṅkara revealed the religion of devotion, Mādhava made it known to everybody.'

Apart from serving as the most trusted follower of Śaṅkaradeva for nearly forty years, Mādhavadeva was instrumental in popularizing and stabilising the new religious order by his organising power, literary and musical talent and above all his unbounded zeal. Although he was extremely sympathetic towards those who were spiritually weak, he was nevertheless a stern disciplinarian in maintaining and preserving the religious and ethical principles of the faith. He did not hesitate to expel those of his followers who expressly violated the religious and institutional discipline of the order. He did not spare even the wife of Śaṅkaradeva and divested her of the image of a deity other than Viṣṇu, which the lady used to worship privately in her kitchen.

The Sattra institution which served as the radiating centre of the Vaiṣṇavite teachings, ideals and practices owed a great deal for its development to the organizing ability of Mādhavadeva. Although the foundation of the Sattra institution was laid by Śaṅkaradeva, it did not develop into a full-fledged

institution during his life time. It was left to Mādhavadeva to complete the edifice of the Sattrā institution in its structural and institutional aspects. Under his inspiring guidance and supervision a new sattrā at Barpetā was planned and constructed. The prayer hall (*nāmghar*), and the gate (*Karāpāt* < *Kapāta*) were designed and beautified with various floral designs and decorative motifs. The pillars and walls were studded with mica tin-foils (*Bālicandā*). He also made provisions for erecting residential huts separately for married and celibate devotees around the central prayer hall. Separate bathing *ghāts* for householders and celibates were also constructed at the Barpetā lake. For the smooth maintenance of the Sattrā a common provision-store for supply of the essential daily needs of the institution was also started to which all devotees contributed their allotted quotas. Those who were not in a position to contribute in cash or kind gave their manual service. Different functionaries were appointed to discharge various responsibilities of the Sattrā.

The credit for instituting the practice of worshipping *Guru-āsana* (literally the seat of the guru), that is, worshipping one of the important devotional works of Śaṅkaradeva or Mādhavadeva in place of an image of the adorable deity goes to Mādhavadeva. Although Śaṅkaradeva did not totally discard the practice of image worship he did not encourage it. With a view to putting a stop to the practice of image worship, Mādhavadeva introduced the system of paying homage to *guru-āsana*. As the *guru-āsana* usually contains the Assamese rendering of the *Bhāgavata-purāna* by Śaṅkaradeva or *Nāmaghoṣā* or *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* by Mādhavadeva, it represents at the same time two gurus on the one hand and the adorable deity on the other. Mādhavadeva succeeded Śaṅkara as the spiritual head of the Vaiṣṇavite community, but when Mādhavadeva prepared to depart from the world he did not nominate anybody to succeed him, but directed his disciples to look for him in his *Nāmaghoṣā*. He said: "I pondered over this matter for three days but found nobody worthy of shouldering the burden of the religious headship. I, therefore, recommend my *Ghoṣā* (*Nāmaghoṣā*) in which everything that you may need has been said. My energy and my Intelligence are all transmitted to the *Ghoṣā*. Devotees will find me there

if they know how to seek."⁶ On another occasion he is said to have instructed his disciples in the following way: "The *Daśama* (*Daśmaskandhā* of the *Bhāgavata*) and the *Kīrtana* are the image of my guru (Śaṅkara) and the *Ghoṣā* (*Nāmaghoṣā*) and the *Ratnāvalī* (*Bhakti-ratnāvalī*) are my abode".⁷ Thus we find that Mādhava was principally responsible for elevating the status of the holy scriptures in preference to the idol or the image of the deity. The practice of worshipping or showing reverence to the holy scripture is prevalent among many religious orders including those of Jainism, Sikhism and Dādupanth. It is prescribed in some purānas also.⁸

Although Śaṅkaradeva did not advocate asceticism and celibacy, some of his disciples accepted celibacy to lead an unhindered religious life. This practice of adopting celibacy indirectly received an impetus during the pontifical tenure of Mādhavadeva who was a life long celibate. It may be noted in this connection that a considerable number of devotees solely devoted to the religious pursuit, generally known as *kewaliyā*, lead the celibate life of a monk within the Sattrā premises. In a monastic Sattrā all the residents of the campus are celibates and no woman is allowed to stay there at night. Thus the ascetic order of the Assam Vaiṣṇavism indirectly drew inspiration from the life of Mādhavadeva.

The daily religious service in Assam Vaiṣṇavism is called *prasaṅga* or more correctly *nāma-prasaṅga*. During the time of Śaṅkaradeva *prasaṅgas* were held, but they were not systematised and subdivided clearly into different units. According to the *Kathā-gurucarita*, Mādhavadeva while staying at Sundaridiyā, after the demise of his Master, systematised and divided the daily religious services of the morning, afternoon and evening into fourteen units. Except the sattras affiliated to Brahma *samhati*, (group) the sattras of the three other *samhatīs* of Assam Vaiṣṇavism still perform the fourteen units of daily religious service fixed by Mādhavadeva. After the demise of Mādhavadeva, Assam Vaiṣṇavism branched off into four groups or sections called *samhatīs*. Each *samhati*

⁶Daityāri Ṭhakur: *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva-caritra*, edited, R. M. Nath, pp. 381-82

⁷U. C. Lekharu (ed.), *Kathāguru carita*, p. 502

⁸*Kālikā-purāna*, 58/31, *Yagini-tantra*, 6/142-143

lays special emphasis on one of the four fundamental concepts of the faith; the Brahma saṁhati puts emphasis on *Deva* the kāla-saṁhati on *guru*, the Puruṣa-saṁhati on *nāma* and the Nikā-saṁhati on *Bhakta* or the holy association of devotees.

It has been stated above that Mādhavadeva was responsible for elevating the status of the holy Book embodying the holy name of the Lord in preference to the image of a deity. But unlike the *Granth-saheb* of the Sikhs the holy scripture placed on the pedestal is not formally worshipped. The principle underlying the reverence for the holy scripture is not far to seek. The Vaiṣṇavites consider the *nāma* and *nāmi* as identical, as such the Name (*nāma*) is not merely a group of sounds but a living entity as well.⁹ Therefore, the holy book embodying the Name of the Lord symbolizes the adorable deity as well as the Guru who revealed the mystery and glory of the Holy Names. Although Mādhavadeva did not nominate anybody to succeed him as the head of the religious community, the guruship did not cease to exist after him; rather, his refusal to nominate anybody contributed towards the growth of *saṁhatis* (sub-sects or groups) after him. The initiators of these branches being the foremost disciples of Mādhavadeva became heads of their respective sub-sects. But it should be noted that the tradition of the two gurus admitted and acknowledged by all the Vaiṣṇavites in Assam invariably refers to Śaṅkara and Mādhava and none else.

⁹*Yeī nāma, sei hari jānā nisṭha kari ;
Kṛṣṇa-nāma caitanyasvarūpa (Nāmaghoṣā)*

4

Literary Works

Many of the medieval saints and religious leaders were accomplished musicians, composers and writers. Kabir, Mīrabāi, Tukāram, Nāmdev, Alwārs, and many others used to draw a large crowd by their melodious songs and rapturous delight in divine music. Both Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva were great musicians. It is narrated in the medieval biographies of the two saints that Śaṅkaradeva while enacting his first dramatic performance *Cihnayātrā*, sang a song in Meghamaṇḍala rāga which immediately brought rain. This might be an exaggeration, but it at least proves the mastery of Śaṅkaradeva in classical music. He composed a large number of devotional lyrics which were set to different rāgas. Mādhavadeva was also an expert musician and following the steps of his spiritual guide composed, according to tradition, one hundred ninety one devotional lyrics of which one hundred and fifty are still extant and widely in vogue in Vaiṣṇavite circles. All these devotional lyrics, traditionally known as *Bargīta* (noble songs), are tuned to different classical rāgas. Because of his musical attainments Mādhavadeva is described in some medieval biographies as an incarnation of a *gandharva*. His name as a composer of devotional songs became so famous and popular that many later anonymous poets ascribed the authorship of their songs and lyrics to Mādhavadeva with a view to gaining popularity for their compositions.

Mādhavadeva took keen interest in stage and drama. He is said to have composed six devotional plays and himself

directed a few performances. *Kathāguru-carita* records that Mādhavadeva himself directed the performances of his two plays, *Govardhana-yātrā*, and *Rāmayātrā* at the request of his disciples. On another occasion, at the request of one of his prominent disciples, Barviṣṇu Ātā, he staged a drama, *Nṛsimha-yātrā*, where he appeared in the role of Nṛsimha. The performance was so successful and engrossing that when the audience witnessed Nṛsimha tearing apart the entrails of Haranyakasipu, they ran away in confusion believing it to be real.¹⁰ The Vaiṣṇavite plays and their performances which served as a potent factor in the spreading of the Bhakti cult in Assam owed a great deal for its origin and development to the genius of Śaṅkaradeva whose dramatic tradition was ably carried forward by Mādhava to make it a living tradition till today.

As an artist Mādhavadeva left behind an undying and ever glowing impress of his creative faculty on the literature of Assam. His literary works may be classified into four categories. (a) Kāvya, (b) devotional compilations and translations, (c) plays and (d) devotional lyrics. *Ādikāṇḍa* (*Rāmāyana*) and *Rājasūya Kāvya* belong to the first category, *Bhakti-ratnāvalī*, *Nāma-mālikā*, *Nāmaghoṣā* and *Janma-rahasya* may be placed in the second category.

Although the name of Mādhava is noticed in as many as nine plays, all are not considered as products of his own pen. The Vaiṣṇavite tradition ascribes six plays to him without definitely naming all of them. There is unanimity among biographers in respect of five plays but opinions differ in respect of the other four plays. Even the tradition that he wrote only six plays is not free from doubt. If we take into account the two extinct plays which Mādhava, according to Daityāri, wrote and enacted then the total number of plays would be eleven. So, it is very difficult to point out the sixth genuine play of Mādhavadeva as the tradition itself is of doubtful authenticity. The following nine are the extant plays: (1) *Arjuna-bhañjana*, (2) *Corḍhā*, (3) *Pimparāguchuwā*, (4) *Bhumi-letowā*, (5) *Bhojana-vihāra*, (6) *Brahmā-mohana*, (7) *Bhuṣana-haraṇa*, (8) *Kotorā-khelā* and (9) *Rāsa-jhumurā*. The

first five are non-controversial. and the remaining four are controversial. *Rāma-Yātrā* and *Goverdhana-yātrā* are extinct or not yet available.

Although the orthodox Vaiṣṇavites and critics do not accept the last one viz., *Rāsa-jhumurā*, as a work of Mādhavadeva, the *Kathā-gurucarita* of the eighteenth century and *Gurucarita* by Daityāri Thākur of the seventeenth century accepted it as a genuine work of the Vaiṣṇava saint. The arguments for rejecting the four plays noted above are mainly the following:

1. Unlike the genuine plays of Mādhava, these plays do not contain the usual benedictory stanzas (*nāndi śloka*) and devotional prayer (*bhaṭimā*) glorifying the adorable deity.
2. Intermediary Sanskrit verses as connecting links of the plot which are usually noticed in the plays of Śaṅkaradeva and the genuine plays of Mādhavadeva are conspicuously absent in these plays.
3. The relation between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa depicted in the last three of the above-named plays is not in conformity with the fundamental tenets of Assam Vaiṣṇavism where *dāsya* and *vātsalya* relations between the deity and devotees reign supreme.
4. The language and the style of these plays are inferior to those of the undisputed genuine plays.

It is difficult to accept the tradition that he wrote six plays. With *Rāma-yātrā*, and *Govardhan-yātrā*, said to have been composed by him and enacted under his supervision, as narrated in some of the biographies, the number of genuine plays increases. In fact, the tradition of twelve plays, six by Śaṅkaradeva and six by Mādhavadeva cannot be accepted unreservedly. The plausible explanation for ascribing six plays to Mādhavadeva would be that although the exact number of plays by him could not be definitely established or ascertained the later Vaiṣṇava devotees created a myth of twelve plays on the analogy of the twelve Bhūyān families (*Bārabhūyā*) of Assam, twelve cantos of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, twelve principal devotees of Viṣṇu and twelve apostles nominated each by Mādhavadeva, Puruṣottama Thākur and Chaturbhuja Thākur to propagate Assam Vaiṣṇavism.

¹⁰ *Kathāguru-carita*, pp. 247, 409

The tradition has nowhere clearly named the twelve plays. While the six plays of Śaṅkaradeva have been preserved intact, those of Mādhavadeva have created a problem as some spurious works are ascribed to him. So, the exact number of plays has remained a mute point for the scholars. The number of non-controversial plays therefore, is five and the genuineness of the other four is questioned. But on a closer scrutiny of *Brahmā-mohana*, though devoid of a usual benedictory verse, appears to be a genuine work of Mādhavadeva.

It is very difficult to fix the chronology of Mādhavadeva's writings. The scattered references to his works in some of the medieval biographies of Vaiṣṇavite saints and preachers do not provide sufficient evidence or clues to determine the chronology. However, his earliest compositions must have been some of the devotional songs or lyrics commonly known as *Bargīta*. Although the chronology of his other works is very difficult to establish, it can be safely said that the translations of *Ādi-kāṇḍa* and *Janma-rahasya* are earlier works. From the evidence available in the medieval biographies of the Vaiṣṇavite saints, it is known that Mādhava composed at least one drama (*Arjuna-bhañjana*) during the life-time of Śaṅkaradeva, i.e., before 1568 A.D. It is narrated in the *Kathā-gurucarita* that Śaṅkara himself appeared in the role of Nanda in the performance of *Arjuna-bhañjana*. *Nāma-mālikā* was translated at the instance of Virupākṣa Kāji, a minister of the Koch King Lakṣminārāyaṇa when the saint was forced to reside in Cooch Behar. As Lakṣminārāyaṇa ascended the throne in 1584, the work must have been composed after that year. Mādhavadeva's last work and his *magnum opus*, *Nāma-ghoṣā* was given the final touch towards the end of his life. Some of the verses of this work were certainly composed earlier but the work as a whole received the final touch of his hand in the last decade of the sixteenth century.

Besides the above genuine works, a few more apocryphal works by later writers, viz., *Ādi-carita*, *Amulyaratna*, *Guptamaṇi*, and *Guptasār* are ascribed to Mādhavadeva. The language, style and contents of these works clearly expose the spuriousness of these works. A large number of songs of esoteric and *tāntrik* significance known as *Dehvicār-gītā* also spuriously contain the *bhañitā* (colophon) of Mādhava.

5

Verse Compositions

The translation of the *Ādikāṇḍa Rāmāyaṇa* is one of Mādhavadeva's earliest works. This was composed while Śaṅkaradeva was staying at Pātbaūsi. The approximate date of this work can be placed in the sixth decade of the sixteenth century. An anecdote is found in the *Kathā-gurucarita*, a voluminous prose work of the eighteenth century, containing biographical accounts of Vaiṣṇavite saints wherein it is stated that Mādhava Kandali, a literary predecessor of Śaṅkaradeva, requested the latter in a dream to restore and preserve his *Rāmāyaṇa* of which the first and the last books were lost or destroyed. Śaṅkaradeva, so the story goes, undertook the task of restoring the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Mādhava Kandali to its pristine glory by composing the lost last book himself and getting the first book done by Mādhavadeva. The story is probably a latter day concoction to justify the part played by the two Vaiṣṇavite stalwarts in completing the incomplete or mutilated work of Mādhava Kandali. So, the existing version of Madhava Kandali's *Rāmāyaṇa* is prefixed and suffixed by the *Ādikāṇḍa* of Mādhavadeva and the *Uttara-kāṇḍa* of Śaṅkaradeva respectively. Mādhavadeva did his job most competently. Instead of translating all the cantos of the *Ādikāṇḍa* he picked up only those cantos which are related to or have a bearing on Rāma's life and personality :

of the remaining cantos, some have been totally omitted, and others are rapidly passed over. Stories relating to Sagara, Mādhātṛ, Bhagīratha, Dilipa and other ancestors of Rāma are briefly outlined, but the conflict between Vaśiṣṭha and Viśvāmitra and the episodes concerning Triśanku, Ambarīsa, Śunahśepha, etc., have been totally left out because they are extraneous to the story of Rāma. On the other hand, the poet has eloquently and elaborately narrated the story of Rāma's birth, his journey to Siddhāśrama with Viśvāmitra and the marriage with Sītā. There is, however, a few episodes which deserve a closer scrutiny for they raise questions about the sources from which Mādhavadeva rendered them into Assamese. The story of the violation of Ahalyā by Indra, the curse of Gautama and Ahalyā's final redemption by the touch of Rāma's feet, does not form a part of Vālmīki's *Bālākanda*. How could this episode being twisted find a place in Mādhavadeva's translation remains a mystery. Indra is shown here to have been redeemed of Gautama's curse by propitiating the goddess Durgā. In the original episode which is recorded in the *Bālākanda* we do not find Indra being cured of the malady by such propitiation of Devi. In Vālmīki's version Indra became impotent and he was divested of his scrotum by the curse of sage of Gautama for the former's adultery with Ahalayā. Ahalayā was also cursed to remain invisible and live by breathing air only in the deserted hermitage. She was not reduced to the state of a stone as depicted in some later versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Later *Rāmāyaṇas* and some *Purāṇas* further say that Indra was not only shorn of his testicles, he was also cursed to suffer from indignity of having a thousand female genital organs all over his body. Through the intervention of the gods and by the grace of Bṛhaspati, their spiritual guide, Indra regained his potency and the marks of the *yonī* were changed to eyes. Thus he became *Sahasra cakṣu*. Mādhava's work also contains the above changes. Further he states that Indra became a thousand eyed god by worshipping and propitiating the goddess Durgā which is also not supported by Valmīki. This story of the propitiation of Devi, however, occurs in the *Bṛhadharma-purāṇa* an *upapurāṇa* written in Eastern India towards the close of the

thirteenth century. If this story was not at all a part of the original epic, why should Mādhavadeva, an uncompromising devout Vaiṣṇava import or introduce this un-vaiṣṇavite tale? This episode might be a later interpolation in Mādhavadeva's work, or the recension of the original epic wherefrom the Vaiṣṇavite poet translated this canto might have contained this version of the story, which the poet probably could not ignore.

Another important deviation from the original version is noticed in relation to the time of composition of the epic by Vālmīki. According to the available versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the major part of the work was composed when Rāma was reigning in Ayodhyā. Only the *Uttarakāṇḍa* was composed before the actual happening of the events narrated in that canto. This is indicated by the following lines of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.

anāgatanca yatkincaid rāmasya vasudhātale |
taccakārottare kāvyē Vālmīkirbhagavanāṅsih ||

Whatever Rama would do in this world in future, the great sage Vālmīki recorded them all in the later part (*uttarakāṇḍa*) of the epic.

Like Kṛttivāsa of Bengal, Mādhavadeva states that Nārada narrated the gist of the entire *Rāmāyaṇa* to Vālmīki before Rāma was born. This is probably due to the influence of the later *purāṇas* which popularised the misconception that the *Rāmāyaṇa* was composed before the birth of Rāma (*Rām nau opajote Rāmāyaṇ*).

In respect of a few other minor episodes also, Mādhavadeva appears to have taken help from sources other than any recensions of Vālmīki's work. The marriage descriptions of Daśaratha with his three principal queens, the evil influence of Saturn on the kingdom of Daśaratha, the story of the birth of Gaṇeśa, the birth of Lakṣmi as Sītā, the conflict of Daśaratha with Guha and the latter's friendship with Rāma, the conflict of Rāma with the kings in his *swayamvara* of Sītā—all these episodes are not derived from Valmīki's version. These were probably introduced from some other sources with a view to enhancing the appeal of his narratives. It may be mentioned that some of these episodes are also found in the Bengali version of Kṛttivāsa. (15th century)

Mādhavadeva's translation of *Balakānda* (Ādikāṇḍa) identifies Rāma with Viṣṇu and therefore endows the hero with all the adorable qualities of the loving deity. The work, though a translation, reads like an original composition on account of the clarity of exposition, and lucidity of style, and embellished descriptions.

The next work, revealing the creative as well as the descriptive capacity of Mādhavadeva, is *Rūjasūyakāvya* which was composed about 1570 A.D. Here the poet eulogises the Koch King Naranārāyaṇa (1540-1584) and his celebrated brother Śukladhvaja. Probably the inspiration to compose this work came from the royal brothers and that is why the poet praises them for their love of learning and reverence for the devotees of God. The outline of the kāvya has been taken from the 10th book of the *Bhāgavata* and the *Sabhāparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, and it is clothed and ornamented by the poet to make it an enjoyable kāvya. The main purpose of the work is to establish the godhood of Kṛṣṇa, the adorable deity of the Vaiṣṇavas of Assam. The work elaborately depicts the preparation for the Rājasūya sacrifice by the Pāṇḍavas, the duel between Bhīma and Jarāsandha, the release of the captive kings from the dungeon of Jarāsandha, and the celebration of the Rājasūya sacrifice. Śiśupāla's vehement objection to the selection of Kṛṣṇa as the foremost homage-worthy personality in the assembly of kings, the killing of Śiśupāla and the concluding ceremony and the discomfiture of Duryodhana are also tellingly narrated. The *kāvya* takes us through a series of dramatic events and varied scenes commencing with the spectacular long march of the entire Yādava tribe headed by Kṛṣṇa from Dvāraka to Indraprastha through many countries, deserts and forests. The graphic description of the mortal combat between Bhīma and Jarāsandha, the vituperation hurled against Kṛṣṇa by Śiśupāla in the open assembly and his wordy duels with Bhīma, Sahadeva and, finally with Kṛṣṇa, bespeaking his courage, royal pride and inborn animosity towards Vāsudeva Kṛṣṇa, illustrates the narrative power of the poet. Similarly, the narration of the grand, awe-inspiring and brilliant arrangement and celebration of the Rājasūya sacrifice, the description of the *avabhṛitha* bath (ceremonial bath after a sacrifice)

after the ceremony and, finally, the depiction of the ludicrous behaviour and discomfiture of jealous Duryodhana in the newly constructed gorgeous court hall of the Pāṇḍavas—are some of the best specimens of the narrative power of the poet. The influence of Māgha's *Sisupāla-vadha* is discernible in some of the passages. Although the poet does not seem to have paid special attention to characterisation, the salient features of the important characters have not been left out of focus. What, however, is unmistakable is the poet's constant awareness of his principal objective which is to emphasise the divine qualities of Kṛṣṇa without neglecting the human aspects of his life. Kṛṣṇa has been portrayed as an ideal householder, a loving husband, a wise counsellor of his friends, and a perfect incarnation of Nārāyaṇa. In spite of the beautiful descriptions and impressive presentation of situations the *kāvya* suffers from a lack of a well-knit structure. The poet has successfully blended the elements of his narratives derived from the *sabhāparvan* of the great epic and the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (Book, X). In addition to the derived materials he has embellished the *kāvya* with his own materials. For instance, the procession of the Yadava army and its long march from Dwārakā to Indraprastha and the detailed description of the duel between Bhīma and Jarāsandha bespeak of the creative faculty of the poet. But in spite of the poetic merit revealed in many passages, the poet, occasionally brings into focus incidents which are not connected with the main theme of the *Kāvya*. The discomfiture of Duryodhana after the *Rājasūya* sacrifice and the daily routine of Kṛṣṇa as a house holder, for instance, are not integral part of the central theme.

Of the devotional compilations and translations, *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* seems to be Mādhavadeva's second work, the first being *Janma-rahasya*. The translation was undertaken after the demise of the Master when Mādhavadeva was staying in Sundarīdiyā near Barpetā in the seventies of the sixteenth century and was completed before his migration to Cooch Behar. The *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* is a compilation of devotional verses by Viṣṇupuri a sanyasī of the Advaita school with a devotional bias. This work is regarded as one of the four principal sacred books of the Mahāpurusiyā sect of Assam,

the other three being *Kīrtana-ghoṣā* and *Daśama-skandha* of Śaṅkaradeva and *Nāma-ghoṣā* of Mādhavadeva. Mādhavadeva's *Nāma-ghoṣā* begins with a translation of the benedictory verse of *Kāntimālā*, the commentary on *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* by the compiler Viṣṇupuri himself. It may be interesting to refer here to the circumstance in which Śaṅkaradeva obtained a copy of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* which he assigned to Mādhavadeva for rendering into Assamese. It is related in the different medieval biographies of the two Vaiṣṇava saints with slight variations in detail that Kanṭhabhūṣaṇa, a Brahmin of Kāmarūpa, while studying in Banaras under the guidance of one Brahmānanda, a teacher of the Advaita School, helped the latter in explaining a knotty verse of the eleventh canto of *Bhāgavata* by quoting the Assamese rendering from Śaṅkaradeva's translation. Having heard the lucid rendering of Śaṅkaradeva, so the story goes, Brahmānanda brought a manuscript copy of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* including the *Kāntimālā* commentary and handed it over to his pupil from Assam to be delivered to Śaṅkaradeva. The manuscript was originally left by Viṣṇupuri in Brahmānanda's custody with the instruction that the same should be passed on to Śaṅkaradeva at a suitable opportunity. According to the biographies, Kanṭhabhūṣaṇa on his return to his native place duly handed over the manuscript to the great Vaiṣṇava saint of Assam, who in stead of translating it himself assigned it to his most trusted and worthy disciple Mādhavadeva. The story may be a fictitious one, but the fact that Śaṅkaradeva received it from Kanṭhabhūṣaṇa who had brought it from Banaras cannot be doubted.

Some of the biographies state that Śaṅkaradeva on receiving the copy of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* did not at first show any great enthusiasm for translating it as it was the work of a *jñānamārgī* sanyāsī (Viṣṇupuri), but when he casually went through the titles of the different chapters (*viracana*) he was surprised to find detailed discussions of all the important elements of the Bhakti cult including the imperativeness of absolute self-surrender, *ekaśaraṇa*, at the feet of the Lord. Śaṅkaradeva, who had compiled *Bhakti-ratnākara* before, is said to have remarked: "If I had got this copy earlier I would not have laboured so much to compile *Bhakti-*

ratnākara." Mādhavadeva was entrusted with the work of rendering it into Assamese.

The original compiler of *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* is Viṣṇupuri, a sanyāsī of the Śaṅkarite order of the Advaita school of Philosophy. In spite of being a sanyāsī of the Advaita school he was a devout Vaiṣṇava who believed in the efficacy of the devotional faith. *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* is a compilation of devotional verses culled from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* on different aspects of Bhakti. Mādhava translated the entire work containing thirteen chapters into Assamese verse. The work is not important from the literary point of view, but it is considered as one of the fundamental works on Assam Vaiṣṇavism, because the work, besides expounding the nine ways of devotion, lays special emphasis on *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* which Śaṅkaradeva recommended. The work further lays stress on *ekaśaraṇa*, i.e. complete self-surrender to the adorable deity. The Vaiṣṇava faith in Assam also admits the indispensability of *ekaśaraṇa* (complete self-surrender) for the development and fruition of the devotional process. Naturally, therefore, *Bhakti-ratnāvalī* attained an enviable status in the Vaiṣṇavite literature of Assam. In translating the work Mādhava utilized the commentary *Kāntimālā* written by Viṣṇupuri himself.

Janma-rahasya, a small work containing approximately three hundred verses, was translated in deference to the wishes of Princess Bhubaneśvarī alias Kamalāpriyā, wife of Prince Śukladhvaja, Minister and Commander-in-chief of the Koch King Narnārāyaṇa (1540-1584). According to the *kathā-gurucarita*, Śaṅkaradeva was requested to translate the work into Assamese by Śukladhvaja, but the Master assigned the work to Mādhavadeva. The work pays an eloquent tribute to Śaṅkaradeva whom the poet describes as an incarnation of God. The original work in Sanskrit cannot be traced now, but it is known from the concluding remarks of the translator that the original material was blended with some descriptions from the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* to make it acceptable to the Vaiṣṇavas. The work deals with the creation and dissolution of the world and gives an account of Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa's activities along with those of ten other principal incarnations of Nārāyaṇa. The main tenets and ideals of the Assam school of Vaiṣṇavism have also been set forth in it.

Nāma-mālikā was composed while Mādhava was spending the last few years of his life at Cooch Behar. This work was originally compiled by the Brahmins at the court of King Pouroṣottama Gajapati of Orissa in the fifteenth century. The original compilation in Sanskrit is comprised of verses collected from the *Bhārata* (*Mahābhārata*), *Purāṇas*, *Smṛtis* and *Āgamas* to show the glory and efficacy of the Name of Kṛṣṇa in the Kali era. But the original compilation, as known from Mādhava's own statement, was diffused and unsystematic. The work in Assamese translation contains six hundred verses. It elaborately narrates and extols the merit of the Holy Name. While glorifying and extolling the Holy Name of Kṛṣṇa Mādhavadeva has not failed to draw attention to the other essential requisities for realisation of God. The work of translation was undertaken at the behest of Birupākṣa Kāzi, a minister of King Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa (1584-1622), but it seems Madhava was not very happy at the assignment as he could not appreciate the exaggerated inducement for singing the Holy Names by giving a long merit-list of results accruing from it. According to him the singing or remembering the Names of the Lord is an end in itself and one should not aspire after results to be enjoyed afterwards. Probably because of this, *Nāma-mālikā*, in spite of being the product of Mādhavadeva's pen, did not gain much popularity in the Vaiṣṇavite circle.

The most outstanding devotional work of Mādhavadeva is *Nāmaghoṣā* which is not only the *magnum opus* of the great saint, but may be considered as one of the most sublime works of Indian literature. Held in the highest esteem by the Assamese people it is widely read, memorised and quoted as a scriptural text. As it contains one thousand hymns it is also known as *Hāzāri-ghoṣā*. Out of the one thousand verses, approximately half are translations from various Sanskrit sources, including the *Gītā* and the *Bhāgavata-Purāṇa*, but the translated verses are couched in such perfect rhythm and form that it would be more appropriate to call them recreations rather than translation. Through the mellifluous flow of the thousand verses the image of a genuinely devoted soul passionately striving for spiritual realisation is reflected. The book is the expression of the religious experiences,

philosophical beliefs and devotional urge of a god-intoxicated saint. When his followers on the eve of his death approached Mādhava to name somebody to whom they could look upto for guidance after his departure from the mundane world, the saint asked them to read and re-read *Nāmaghoṣā* in these words:

“Look, I have composed the *Ghoṣā* (*Nāmaghoṣā*) where I have recorded everything that I have got to say. Whoever reads and understands the *Ghoṣā* will verily find me there. I have repositied all my energy and knowledge in the *Ghoṣā* and those who konw how to seek me will certainly find me there.”¹¹

Though *Nāmaghoṣā* is primarily devoted to the exposition of the Holy Name of the Supreme Being, it has not failed to focus attention on other relevant elements of Bhakti. Vaiṣṇavism preached by Śaṅkaradeva lays stress on four fundamental elements of devotion, viz., *Nāma* (Holy Name), *Deva* (Deity), *Guru* (spiritual guide) and *Bhakti* (devotee or holy association). While extolling the Holy Name, *Nāmaghoṣā* equally lays stress on the other three mutually related concepts. Though the work is subdivided into many minor sections, basically there are three sections. The first section deals with the doctrinal or fundamental aspects of *Nāmadharma*. The second section is a collection of lyrical stanzas of self-effacing devotion and passionate self surrender at the feet of the adorable deity. The last section is a series of well-arranged rhythmical lines containing glorification of the names and attributes of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa meant for singing. Dr. B. Kakati, a discerning critic of the Vaiṣṇava literature of Assam, detects three currents of thought running through the entire gamut of verses. The first is Mādhavadeva's self-effacing humility born out of deep devotion to the spiritual guide and the deity. The sense of ego is submerged under the surging waves of devotional ecstasy and it is no where allowed to come to the surface. The second noticeable feature is the undiluted eulogy and homage paid to Śaṅkaradeva, the spiritual guide of Mādhavadeva. This sentiment of gratitude

¹¹ Dityāri Thākur : *Śaṅkaradeva-Mādhavadeva Caritra*, Chap. 73, v. 49-50

is echoed and reechoed off and on throughout *Nāmaghoṣā* and these two sub-currents have ultimately merged in the overflowing current of the self-effacing ecstatic devotion to the adorable deity. The opening verse of *Nāmaghoṣā* suggests the above three trends of thought.

“I bow down to that devotee who is indifferent to liberation and I beseech that type of devotion which is full of loving passion and ardour. I take refuge under the feet of that deity who is the Lord of the Yādavas, crest jewel of the world, but subservient to his devotees”.

In this verse Mādhavadeva bows to devotees like his guru Śaṅkaradeva who, being indifferent to the question of liberation, takes delight in serving God for its own sake, solicits blissful loving devotion (*rasamayibhakti*) through the process of chanting and singing the Holy Names of the Lord and chooses Kṛṣṇa as the only adorable deity by completely surrendering himself at his feet. The verse practically announces the four fundamental elements, viz. *Nāma*, *Deva*, *Guru* and *Bhakta*, of Assam Vaiṣṇavism.

The cardinal religious principles of *Nāmaghoṣā* may be summed up as follows :

1. It reiterates again and again the monotheistic doctrine of one and only Lord of the creation in the person of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa who being the creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world is the only deity capable of redeeming the soul. No god other than Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa, therefore, should be worshipped, for he lords over time and illusion (*Kāla* and *Māyā*).
2. The Name (*Nāma*) and the adorable deity (*Namī*) are identical and hence *Nāmā* is a living entity. The chanting or muttering *Nāma* leads one to salvation.
3. The cultivation of *Bhakti* is an end in itself; it is *nirapekṣā* (unrelated to desire). A true devotee never hankers after liberation, but finds unalloyed bliss in the process of devotion. Knowledge (*Jñāna*) and ritualistic action (*karma*) devoid of devotion cannot lead one to liberation. Liberation is the concomitant fruit of *niṣkāma* (desireless) *Bhakti*: no separate effort is needed for it.
4. *Śravaṇa* and *kīrtana* are considered as the most

effective modes of worshipping God and the attitude of a devoted servant to the master is extolled as the best mode of approaching God.

5. *Nāmaghoṣā* declares Śaṅkaradeva as the best of the gurus, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* as the supreme scripture and India (*Bhāratabhūmi*) as the choicest country of the world.
6. *Nāmadherma* is open to all irrespective of caste, creed and sex. This universal religion, formerly kept hidden from the people was made available to all by Śaṅkaradeva out of compassion for all.

Nāmaghoṣā's religious teachings have been admirably blended with its philosophical views. The philosophical base is supplied by Vedānta tempered by the devotional interpretation of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* by Śrīdharaswamī. Although Assam Vaiṣṇavism has recognised both the *nirguṇa* (attributeless) and the *saguṇa* (having attributes, personal) aspects of the absolute reality, *Nāmaghoṣā* lays especial emphasis on the *saguṇa* aspect, because the indeterminate and attributeless Brahman cannot be comprehended by ordinary people. God as described in *Nāmaghoṣā* is both immanent and transcendent. He is the only reality (*sat*), all bliss and consciousness. He is eternal, infinite, all-pervading, one without second and beyond all change. He is both cause and effect of the creation. Behind the apparent multiplicity of form and name which are subject to change, decay and death, there is only one reality and that is known as Brahman, Paramātmān, Bhāgavat and so on according to the view-point of the seeker. God is all pervasive and resides in all hearts as the controller of the inner self. Mādhavadeva says, “I know the path of righteousness, yet my mind does not have the propensity to follow it, nor does it desist from the path of vice. Oh, Lord, the dweller of my heart, whatever you bid me to do as the controller of my self I shall do.”¹² Mādhavadeva has recognised the illusive power of *Māyā*, the divine creative energy of God with her twofold function, viz. *āvaraṇa* and *vikṣepana*. The former envelops the true knowledge of things and the latter distorts our view. *Māyā* has, therefore, been repeatedly called *avidyā* by

¹²*Nāmaghoṣā*, v. 81

Mādhavadeva and he exhorts all to rise above her influence so that identity with the Supreme Soul may be realised. Although the individual self, in the ultimate analysis, is a part of God, but due to ignorance or illusion produced by *Māyā* it suffers from repeated births and deaths and miseries of the world. But God is the controller of both *puruṣa* (individual self) and *prakṛti* or *Māyā*. One can release himself from the bondage of *Māyā* by the grace of God if one completely surrenders oneself at the feet of Lord. God is merciful and full of love for his devotees. The following lines translated from *Nāmaghoṣā* will give an idea of the sense of supplication and complete dedication to the Lord urged by Mādhavadeva,

“There is no greater sinner in the three worlds than I and no redeemer of sin equal to Thee. Oh Lord, Govind, I fall at Thy feet, and supplicate Thee to treat me as Thou would deem fit to treat one in my condition.”

“I am committing thousands of offences daily, ignorant and foolish as I am. Knowing me as your servant, O all-pervasive Madhusūdana, forgive me.”

“O Hari, the ocean of mercy, I pray, have compassion on me. I regard you as my very self, friend and loving guru: so do not forsake me.”

“I clasp your feet in supplication, do not forsake me this time. Oh my God Narayana, none can equal you as a saviour of sinners.”¹³

Mādhavadeva was against ritualism and sacerdotalism because devotion has little part to play in ritual-ridden observances. That does not mean that he encouraged indiscipline and license in religious matters. In several verses of *Nāmaghoṣā* he categorically says that devotees having attachment to the world must not transgress the Vedic injunctions. He therefore, decried those pseudo-Vaiṣṇavites who declaring themselves as Vaiṣṇavas and raising the banner of *Harināna* followed the path of licentiousness and ran after sensual pleasures.

The last part of *Nāmaghoṣā* covering 150 verses entitled *Nāma-chanda* is simply repetition of the names of the adorable

¹³ Op. cit, vv. 78-80, 309, 312

deity. In contrast to the preceding 850 verses there is neither poetry nor theology in these verses. T. N. Sarma aptly remarks: “Theology in the *Nāmaghoṣā* is turned into elegant poetry by the magic touch of Mādhavadeva, the poet. Towards the end of the book, however, the theologian is no more: the poet too shrinks to the background and it is the mystic alone who shines. Mādhavadeva began as a scholastic theologian, turned a poet and ended as a mystic.”¹⁴

¹⁴ B. Kakati (ed.) *Aspects of Early Assamese Literature*: the article on Mādhavadeva, pp. 189-208.

According to some biographies, Mādhava composed two other plays, viz. *Rāmāyātrā* and *Govardhana-yātrā* which are irrecoverably lost to posterity. While narrating the enactment of *Govardhana-yātrā*, Daityāri Thākur, one of the earliest Vaiṣṇavite biographers of the seventeenth century, casually describes an interesting incident. In arranging the performance of the above play Mādhavadeva erected an artificial hill of plantain ribs on the arena to indicate Govardhana-giri, to the top of which he sent up a Brahmin in the costume of the personified hill by means of a ladder. The Brahmin went up in great solemnity and took his seat on the top of the artificial hill. The ladder was removed and the show started. While the show was in progress a heavy down-pour came and all the people ran for shelter, completely forgetting the plight of the poor Brahmin on the top of the hill. The poor man was completely drenched by the heavy rain. When the rain ceased Mādhavadeva, on remembering the plight of the Brahmin, went back to the arena and helped the man to climb down.

As regards *Rāma-yātrā* it is narrated in one of the biographies that Mādhavadeva himself staged it on two different occasions, but later it was destroyed because of its inordinate length. It is ascertained from the evidence furnished by the Vaiṣṇavite biographies that *Rāma-yātrā* dealt with the entire story of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and took five days to enact it completely. *Govardhana-yātrā* depicted the holding of Govardhana peak by Kṛṣṇa to protect the inhabitants of Gokula from the heavy down-pour caused by the fury of Indra. As written specimens of the above two plays are not available now, it is not possible to determine their nature and literary quality.

Before we discuss the plays of Mādhavadeva it would be worth-while to say a few words regarding the general nature and characteristics of the early Assamese Vaiṣṇavite plays introduced by Śaṅkaradeva. These plays have been called *nāṭa*, *nāṭaka*, and *yātrā* by the dramatists themselves in the body of their works, *aṅka* and *jhumurā* in some biographies and *aṅkiyā-nāṭa* by the people. *Nāṭa* and *Nāṭaka* are familiar terms in the ancient dramaturgy. The word *yātrā*, though originally meant some sort of religious procession, later on

6

Plays of Madhavadeva

According to the Vaiṣṇavite tradition Mādhava wrote six one-act plays, but nine plays are now available in his name. Some of them are considered apocryphal by modern scholars. The late K.R. Medhi who for the first time collected, edited and published 21 plays of the Vaiṣṇavite period with a learned introduction had nine plays of Mādhava in his collection. He doubted the genuineness of some of these plays and came to the conclusion that some later writers ascribed their works to Mādhavadeva in order to popularise them. The proofs of spuriousness have already been noted.¹⁵ Of the four doubtful works, viz., *Bhūṣaṇa-haraṇa*, *Rāsa-jhumurā*, *Koṭorā-khelā* and *Brahmā-mohana* the least controversial seems to be the last one, because it is a complementary part of *Bhojana-vihāra* which is considered to be a genuine product of Mādhavadeva's pen. The plot of the latter play appears incomplete without the sequence depicted in *Brahmā-mohana*. Moreover, the play also carries the stamp of Mādhavadeva's dignified style of writing. So, there is a possibility of *Brahmā-mohana* being a genuine work of Mādhava. Doubt, however, persists in the case of the other three plays, though one or two biographies have referred to *Rāsa-jhumurā* as a work of Mādhava.

¹⁵ Supra, pp. 21-22, See also K. R. Medhi's 'Introduction to Ankāwali', pp. LXXXIV-LXXXV.

acquired the meaning of religious festival marked by dancing, singing and dramatic performance. The existing festivals like *Ratha-yātrā*, *Jhulana-yātrā*. and *Rāsa-yātrā* point to the semantic change of the original word. As dance and dramatic performance became a part of such festivals, the meaning of the word underwent a further change to denote a popular type of dramatic show.¹⁶ Probably during the times of Śaṅkara-deva, such a type of popular dramatic performance having religious overtones generally known as *yātrā* did exist in India and that is why Śaṅkaradeva himself designated it as *yātrā*. The nomenclature *aṅka* or *aṅkiyā-nāṭa* is applied to that type of literature where the story is expressed within the framework of an *aṅka* or dramatic division. In fact there is no division of acts in any of these plays nor the word *aṅka* occurs anywhere in them. As no division of acts or scenes marks such a play, the entire drama is considered to have only one act and that is why it is called *aṅka* or *aṅkiyā*. The language of these plays is Brajabuli, an artificial literary language based on Maithili, but reinforced by admixture of regional expressions. Although the outline of the play's structure is derived from the Sanskrit drama, it has characteristics of its own and it clearly deviates in some respects from the Sanskrit drama. The *sūtradhāra* who initiates the drama remains on the stage throughout the performance. He performs the preliminaries, introduces the characters to the audience, supplies missing links of the plot by his prose narratives and entertains the audience in collaboration with musical party (*gāyana-bāyana*) with songs and lyrics. Another characteristic of this type of play is its lyrical appeal and preponderance of dance and songs, though the dramatic elements including prose dialogues are not lacking. On the whole, the Vaiṣṇavite plays of the sixteenth century of Assam constitute a distinct genre of the medieval dramatic literature of India. Introduction of a whole-time *sūtradhāra* naturally makes the division of a plot into acts unnecessary because such a *sūtradhāra* can fill up the gaps of time and place.

Mādhavadeva's plays, with the single exception of *Arjuna-*

¹⁶Bhavabhūti's *Mālatī-Mādhava* and *Uttara-Rāmacarita* were staged on the occasion of the festival of *Kālapriya-nāṭha* (कालप्रियनाभस्य यात्रायाम्) ।

bhānjana, are known as *jhumurā*. Mādhavadeva has not used this term in any of his plays; the later biographies and copyists are responsible for popularising it to denote the playlets of Mādhava. *Jhumurā* probably carries an extended meaning of the word *jhumur* which is applicable to a class of erotic songs sung in chorus to a short *tāla*. (beat) often accompanied by dance. It is generally sung by tribal women of Chotanagpur and Santalpargana to the accompaniment of rhythmic beats of drums. In Bengal there is a quasi-dramatic performance called *Jhumur-gān* where two parties of boys in the garb of cowered boys of Br̥ndāvana engage in musical repartee through improvised songs and dance having erotic or even obscene suggestions. Although the central theme deals with the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, it rarely rises above the rustic level. *Sangīta-Dāmodara* refers to a kind of erotic song called *jhumuri* which is as sweet and intoxicating as honied wine (*mādhvi*) and does not strictly follow metrical rules.

prāyah sṅgāra-vahulā mādhyika-madhurā mṛdhuh |
ekaiva jhumurī loke varṇādi-niyamojjhitā ||

(*jhumurī* is a kind of erotic song; it is as sweet and mild as wine prepared from honey, there is no hard and fast rule regarding its metrical composition)

From the above instances, it may be reasonably inferred that *jhumur* or *jhumurī* is a kind of song having a predominance of erotic sentiment. Two of the plays spuriously ascribed to Mādhava, but actually composed by later dramatists, deal with the erotic love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa. Probably these plays were responsible for importing the name *jhumurā* to denote playlets of erotic nature. Once these plays with the new nomenclature became popular in the name of Mādhavadeva, his genuine playlets also came to be known as *jhumurā*. Another explanation is suggested for the use of the term *jhumurā* to denote the shorter plays of Mādhavadeva, Except *Arjuna-bhānjana* which is based on the story of *Bhāgavata-purāna* the playlets of Mādhavadeva do not project a full-fledged story: they are rather based on single episodes or situations. In these plays, depicting the childish pranks of Kṛṣṇa, the other dramatis personae are gopīs and Yaśodā. There is no male character other than Kṛṣṇa in these plays. It is not unlikely, therefore, that these plays in order to be

distinguished from the more elaborate plays of Śaṅkaradeva and *Arjuna-bhañjana* of Madhava were called *jhumurā*. While *Arjuna-bhañjana* has a full-fledged plot based on a story in the *Bhāgavata-Purāna*, all other plays of Mādhavadeva are developed around some funny situations created by the cunning Kṛṣṇa.

Of the genuine plays of Mādhava about which there is no controversy, *Arjuna-bhañjana* is the earliest composition. It was probably written about A.D. 1555 while Mādhavadeva was staying at Gaṇak-kuchi. When it was first staged Śaṅkaradeva appeared in the role of Nanda and Mādhava appeared as Upānanda. The next play *Cordharā* (Catching the Thief) was composed about 1570 when he was living in the estate of Kṣīra Maral at Sundarīdiyā, near Barpetā. *Bhojana-vihāra* was composed at Barpetā round about 1585. The other plays were composed probably between 1575 and 1585 when Mādhava was staying at Sundarīdiyā where according to one biography he lived for 12 years. According to *Kathā-gurucarita*, a voluminous prose biography of the eighteenth century, Mādhava wrote *Rāsa-jhumurā* and *Kotorā-khelā* at Sundarīdiyā, but the statement cannot be accepted unreservedly as the authenticity of these works is highly doubtful. *Rāma-yātrā* or *Rāma-bhāṇā* was composed during the later part of his stay at Barpetā, i.e., between 1585-1590; but it was destroyed subsequently on account of its unstageable length. *Govardhana-yātrā* was also composed round about 1575 while he lived at Sundarīdiyā, but this play is not available now.

The plot of *Arjuna-bhañjana*, popularly known as *Dadhimathana* (Churning of Curd), is taken from the *Bhāgavata-purāna* (X, 9-11). The play incorporates a few verses from *Kṛṣṇa-karnāmṛta* of Līlāsuka (Vilvamangala). The story, in brief, is as follows:

One day Yaśodā was churning milk with the help of other *gopis* when Kṛṣṇa approached her for a suck of milk. Unable to resist the entreaty of her child, Yaśodā, leaving the work of churning to others, embraced Kṛṣṇa and started giving him a suck. While doing so, she noticed boiling milk overflowing the pot on the oven. She hastily put down Kṛṣṇa and ran to the oven to remove the pot. At this, Kṛṣṇa, being a

pampered child, became furious, broke the churning pot and rod and stealthily entered the pantry and began eating fresh butter and threw chunks of it to the monkeys. In the mean time Yaśodā returned and to her great annoyance saw the mischief done by Kṛṣṇa. After a hot chase she caught hold of her child and attempted to tie him to a mortar, but to her utter dismay all the ropes she could collect fell short of the required length to bind the child. Eventually she succeeded in tying Kṛṣṇa to a mortar and then left for her household duties. Kṛṣṇa dragged the mortar across the courtyard to the two Arjuna trees standing on the edge of the yard. He tied to drag the mortar across the trees. The trees fell to the ground with a tremendous noise. On hearing this all the cowherds and milk-maids including Yaśodā ran to the spot and released Kṛṣṇa from the mortar. The play ends on a comic note with a rustic quarrel between Yaśodā and Nanda on account of Kṛṣṇa. The character of Yaśodā as the mother of an only child and overbearing mistress of a rich household is finely drawn. Kṛṣṇa, though behaving like a naughty child, is nevertheless conscious of his supernatural role.

The next play *Cordharā* (Catching the Thief) depicts a funny incident in which Kṛṣṇa and a *gopi* are involved. It has for its *nāndī śloka* a verse from *Kṛṣṇakarnāmṛta* of Vilvamangala and incorporates another verse by the same poet which marks the conclusion of the play. The early part of the play is an invention by Mādhavadeva. A milkmaid found Kṛṣṇa inside her house stealing butter. Having shut the door, she called some *gopis*, her neighbours, to help her in catching the boy in the act of stealing. Sensing danger, Kṛṣṇa immediately called out his cowherd companions to come to his rescue. Strengthened by their presence, Kṛṣṇa smeared the face of the woman with butter and dragged the cowherdess by the hem of her garment to the street shouting all the while that it was not he but the milkmaid herself who was the thief. The milkmaid and her companions, being outwitted and cowed down by Kṛṣṇa's manoeuvring, withdrew their charge and asked him to go home. But the naughty boy would not oblige her until she placated him with some butter. The cowherdess agreed to fulfil his demand provided he danced to their rhythmic clapping. Kṛṣṇa started dancing.

In the mean time Yaśodā was frantically searching the banks of the Yamunā for her missing son when from a passing wayfarer she came to know of Kṛṣṇa's intrusion into the milkmaid's house and his subsequent acts. Yaśodā found Kṛṣṇa surrounded by the *gopīs*. On seeing his mother, Kṛṣṇa feigning innocence, complained to her against the *gopīs* accusing them of unjustly involving him in the butter-theft case. Yaśodā, thanks to her blind maternal fondness, without going into the real situation found fault with the milk-maids and immediately drove the poor girls away after giving them a sound scolding and finally brought her son home.

The third play, *Pimparāgucuwā*, (Removing of Ants) also deals with a similar incident of stealing butter by Kṛṣṇa, who when caught red-handed riggles himself out by clever devices. Like the previous one, it is based on a verse by Līlāsuka-Vilvamangala which is used as the benedictory verse (*nāndi-sloka*) of the playlet¹⁷. The incident narrated in verse is developed into a playlet by introducing dialogue, songs, and lively situations.

The fourth play *Bhumi-letowā* (Rolling on the Ground) depicts the child Kṛṣṇa stealthily drinking milk and eating fresh butter. On seeing his mother approaching him he hastily began crying rolling on the ground, after concealing his flute. With feigned tears rolling down his cheeks, he complained that somebody had stolen his flute: his milk and butter, too, were gone. To pacify him the mother promised to give him milk and butter afresh and also a new flute. He was not content till he got the promised things. Then he began to dance to the delight of his mother. The play is based on a verse of Līlāsuka-Vilvamangala¹⁸.

The fifth noncontroversial playlet is *Bhojana-vihāra* (Picnic). The plot is based on an episode in the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* (X. 12). The dramatist has however, introduced a few modifications on the original.

¹⁷See the translation of the playlet in the appendix.

¹⁸*nītam nava navaṅītom kena ca pītam payah kva me muralī. samudrīya luṅṅītantam bhūmau bālam namāmi gopālam.*

(who has taken away newly churned butter and who drank my milk? where is my flute? I bow down at the feet of child, Gopala who was wailing thus rolling on the ground)

Kṛṣṇa accompanied by other cowherd boy one fine morning went to Brāṇḍāvana, as usual, driving their herds of cattle. After reaching the bank of the Yamunā Kṛṣṇa decided to have a picnic on the sandy bed of the river. While they were sitting in a circle with Kṛṣṇa at the centre, ready to take their mid-day meal, their cattle strayed away. Kṛṣṇa went out in search of them but could not find them anywhere. He returned to the place of the picnic but his companions had also in the meantime vanished. The cattle and the boys were stolen by Brahmā. The play abruptly ends here, but the sequel is continued in another playlet, *Brahmā-mohana*, ascribed to Mādhavadeva. This playlet has no benedictory verse and it repeats some of the songs of *Bhojana-vihāra*. The playlet depicts how Kṛṣṇa recovered the cattle and cowherd boys by bewitching and perplexing Brahmā who had stolen the cows and cowherd boys taking advantage of Kṛṣṇa's temporary absence from the scene of occurrence. The absence of Sanskrit verses, repetition of songs used in the previous playlet and lack of the masterly touch of Mādhava leave room for doubt about its authorship. Similarly, *Bhuṣaṇa-haraṇa* (Stealing of ornaments). *Rāsa-jhumurā* and *Kotorākhelā* (Playing at Kotorā) where Rādhā plays a major role, either as a beloved of Kṛṣṇa or as a grown-up milkmaid, are not considered by some critics as genuine products of Mādhavadeva's dramatic genius, because Rādhā has no place in the religious set-up of Mahāpuruṣīyā Vaiṣṇavism and nowhere in the genuine writings of Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, Rādhā appears either as a beloved of Kṛṣṇa or as an embodiment of Kṛṣṇa's energy. Moreover, the general tenor of these plays is not in conformity with the genuine plays of Mādhava.¹⁹

As a dramatist, Mādhavadeva has some characteristics of his own which make him a distinct personality in the realm of the early Assamese dramatic literature. Although he generally followed the architectonic pattern of Śaṅkaradeva, he deviated considerably in the choice of theme and treatment. His plots are mostly incidental or situational and the hero is the

¹⁹Brief summaries of these questionable plays are given as an appendix.

frollicsome, clever, naughty and lovable boy Kṛṣṇa. Playlets are marked by a light comic touch, interspersed by a sense of wonder stirred up by the intensely human behaviour of the Lord of three worlds.

Mādhavadeva is considerably indebted to Lilāśuka-Vilvaṅgala for supplying germinal elements of his playlets. In his five plays he has utilised as many as ten verses from Vilvaṅgala as basis of his dramatic themes. Mādhava, a life-long celibate, must have been subconsciously yearning for filial love which being sublimated found expression in the depiction of the filial relation between Kṛṣṇa and Yaśodā. It may be mentioned in this connection that the Vaiṣṇavite plays of the sixteenth century are not only rich in lyrical appeal, but equally noteworthy for the use of prose dialogues. Mādhavadeva's plays, though short in compass, retain the lyrical quality of Śaṅkaradeva's plays and depict the principal character, Kṛṣṇa, as a lively child without detracting from the divine aspects of his character.

7

Lyrical Affusion

Mādhavadeva lyrics are held in great regard not only in orthodox Vaiṣṇavite circle but have a strong sway over the entire Assamese society. According to the Vaiṣṇavite tradition Mādhavadeva, following his Master Śaṅkaradeva, composed 191 devotional lyrics attuned to classical melodies (rāgas), of which about 150 are now available to us. If the lyrics of his plays are added to the above figure the total lyrics (*gītas*) would come to one hundred and eighty. It has been stated earlier that the devotional lyrics composed by Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva, because of their lyrical beauty, sublimity of thought and devotional sincerity are called *Bargītas* i.e., noble or sublime songs²⁰. The language of the lyrics, like that of the dramas, is Brajabuli, commonly used by the Vaiṣṇavite poets of Eastern India in their devotional lyrics by blending Maithilī forms and expression with those of their own languages. Sprinkling of Bhojpuri, Brajabhākhā and Avadhī forms is also occasionally noticed. Śaṅkaradeva and Mādhavadeva utilised Brajabuli in their *Bargītas* and *Bhaṭimās* (eulogical verses in praise of gods and respected personages) as well as in the devotional plays. The *Bargītas* are free from the erotic sentiment (*śṅgāra rasa*) which is one of the domi-

²⁰*Srī Srī Mādhavadevar Vākyāmṛta*, edited by P.C. Goswami and published by Jyoti Prakash, Gauhati, 1959, records 181 lyrics by Mādhavadeva. The work includes the lyrics of the plays also.

nant themes of the Vaiṣṇavite lyricists of the Gauḍīya School and the famous lyrical poet Vidyāpati of Mithila. It has already been stated that Rādhā, either as consort of Kṛṣṇa or as the embodiment of his blissful energy (*Hlāḍini śakti*) has no place in Assamese Vaiṣṇavite literature. Naturally, therefore, the erotic relation (*madhura bhāva*) between Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa enthusiastically depicted by Vidyāpati and the Vaiṣṇavite poets of Bengal, did not receive much attention from the Vaiṣṇavite poets of Assam. It is true, that some *Bargītas* were composed depicting the pangs of separation (*vipralambha*) between milkmaids and Kṛṣṇa when the latter went to Mathurā, leaving Bṛndāvana for good. Assamese Vaiṣṇava lyricists headed by Śaṅkara and Mādhava took delight to expressing their sense of the devotion and nearness to God through *dāsya* (sense of servitude) and *vātsalya bhāva* (filial emotion). While Śaṅkara excelled in expressing his sense of servitude to God, Mādhava preferred to depict childish and juvenile sports of Kṛṣṇa and his filial relation with Nanda and Yaśodā. Vaiṣṇavas of Assam hold that *Bargītas* have in them six *rasas* : (1) *līlā* (divine sports of Viṣṇu and his incarnations, mainly those of Kṛṣṇa), (2) *viraha* (pangs of separation from Kṛṣṇa in the heart of Yaśodā and gopīs), (3) *virakti* (apathy or unattachment to worldly pursuits) (4) *caura* (acts of stealing milk and butter by Kṛṣṇa) (5) *cātutri* (cleverness and naughty behaviour of Kṛṣṇa) and (6) *paramārtha* (supreme knowledge). The songs of *līlā* have again been subdivided into four categories : *jāgana* (waking from sleep in the morning), *calana* (movement to Bṛndāvana with cows and cowherds), *khelana* (pastoral sports) and *nṛtya* (dancing).

Now let us discuss the different types of songs noted above in the light of Mādhavadeva's compositions. The songs dealing with sports and activities of the Supreme Lord in the shape of a child are best illustrated in the *jāgana*, *calana*, *khelana* and *nṛtya* types of lyrics. They begin with Yaśodā cajoling Kṛṣṇa to wake him from his slumber in the early morning. Yaśodā entreats Kṛṣṇa in the following way in one of the songs of awakening.²¹

²¹The original versions of the lyrics translated in this work, marked by Roman numerals are reproduced in the Roman script in the appendix.

Oh consort of Kamalā, give up your morning sleep ; let me see your moon-like face, Oh Govinda. The night vanished, the quarters are clear and the sun's rays have come out tearing asunder the darkness. Hundred-petalled lotuses are in full bloom with black bees hovering over them. The milkmaids of Braja are churning milk singing your glory. Dāma and Sudāma are calling you and behold! Balarāma has also come out of the sleeping chamber. Nanda has left for the cattle-pen and the milkmen have gone to herds ; arise, therefore, O Gopāla, to go for tending cows. Taking pails of milk and butter as well as your horn, stick and the flute, release the calves early and the lowing cows. Mādhava says. "Oh mother, what panance did you practise as to get the Lord of the three worlds as your cow-boy? (I)

The morning scene in a dairy farm, the cajoling by a mother and the feigned obduracy of the pampered boy have been graphically portrayed in this type of lyrics of Mādhavadeva.

Kṛṣṇa goes out early in the morning to the green fields of Bṛndāvana on the banks of the Kālīndī driving herds of cattle along with other cowherd-companions. They carry cooked rice, milk, curd, butter and other eatables in bundles on their shoulders dancing and singing all the way. The burden of the lyrics describing the preparation and daily movement to Bṛndāvana (*calana*) is beautifully expressed by Mādhavadeva in a song which may be rendered thus :

Accompanied by herds of cattle and playing on his flute Shāyama Kānu (Kṛṣṇa) goes to Bṛndāvana in the morning. Attired in the costume of a cowherd boy Hari, the Guru of the world, moves on being escorted by cowherd boys in the rear and the front. Carrying loads of cooked rice, curd, and milk, suspended from a pole on his shoulder and tying a head-scarf on his head the Lord of the world is ready for his daily journey. From his left side hangs the silken wrapper and are also seen the horn and the rod. He moves gracefully indulging in various amusements and frolics. The sky resounds with the combined sounds of horns, conches and flutes played by hundreds of cowherd boys driving their herds of

cows and calves. They move on, playing various kinds of games in diverse ways. Their various amusements and pastimes charm the world. The lord of Vaikuntha, the Master of the world, tends cows in the forest. Mādhava says the particles of dust of Kānu's feet are his ultimate resort. (II)

The poet seems to be never tired of, rather takes ever-increasing delight in, describing the enhancing beauty of boy Kṛṣṇa in different situations and moods. The songs of *khelana* and *nṛtya* portray in vivid detail the pastoral games and amusements of Kṛṣṇa in the company of cowherd boys on the sandy bed of the Yamunā and in the adjoining forests. He very often finds Kṛṣṇa dancing to gopī's clapping of hands for a mouthful of butter or a few pieces of sweets. A free translation of a song given below will give an idea of the type of these composition.

The dark-complexioned Kānu is playing gracefully; his charming play enchants the world. He moves his crimson feet rhythmically in dance and the bells of his anklets tinkle as he moves. To the rhythmic clapping of the cowherd boys around him, Kānu dances whirling round and round. Gopāla swings and waves his sandal-pasted body; the garland of Kadamba flowers glistens on his breast. A necklace of pearls is dangling from his neck and a yellow silk *dhoti* encircles his waist. He holds the golden flute in one hand; a peacock's feather adorns his crest. The loose end of his silken garment flutters in the air. He smiles again and again looking at his cowherd friends. His pair of teeth surpasses the glitter of ruby and the brilliance of his dark complexion sheds lustre on the surrounding regions. He showers ambrosia by his side-long glance. Let the mind of Mādhava remain ever engrossed in such a happy form of Gopāla. (III)

Bāla Gopāla of Mādhavadeva is a precocious boy who knows how to take advantage of being the only child of a doting mother by resorting to various devices. He is sometimes sulky, sullen or angry with his mother for not complying with his whims and sometimes sheds tears like any child to gain his object. He frequently enters the houses of milkmaids

unobserved to steal sweets and butter and when caught red-handed he is clever enough to extricate himself from the awkward situation. But occasionally he cannot escape chastisement by his mother for his naughtiness. The following song bring out his naughtiness in spite of his being repeatedly called a divine child by the poet.

"Listen, oh milkmaid," says Gopāla "Your son has thrown dust on my body. I have not said any word at any time to harm anybody. Whenever I get something to eat I share it with all my friends. I bring curd and milk by entreaty and begging and your son takes a share of it. In spite of that, your son has thrown dust on my body. I shall take your son to my mother. Why should I be beaten for other's fault? You know my mother's temper well." Having heard this, the milkmaid was filled with sympathy for Kṛṣṇa; she removed the dust from his body and consoled him with kind words. Milk, curd and butter were offered to him and he ate them in large quantities to his heart's content. Mādhava says—this is how the cleverness of Hari is displayed. (IV)

Exasperated by repeated allegations of mischief brought by neighbouring milkmaids against Kṛṣṇa, Yaśodā sometimes threatens him with chastisement. Kṛṣṇa then silences his poor mother by the counter-threat that he would go to Mathurā and never come back. Occasionally he would complain to his mother about the hardship of tending cows in the forests of Bṛndāvana and his mother would try to soothe him with sweet words

Hari complains to Yaśodā, "I shall not take my bath today. Sharp blades of grass have scratched my entire body while I was roaming through the forest searching for cows. If I take my bath the scratches will burn. Listen, mother, I shall go to bed and sleep without eating anything tonight." The good lady was so much touched by these words that tears began to flow down her cheeks. She said, "Oh my son of a wretched woman, Do not cry, take your bath. I shall rub fresh butter on your body and bathe you in cool water which will not hurt you. After your bath you will take your food as tasty

as nectar." Mādhava says, O Hari, this is what intrigues me, how can the incarante Brahman be scratched?

(V)

In another song Kṛṣṇa complains :

"O my mother Yaśodā, I am very hungry today. Whatever butter you gave I did not take; that is why I am so weak and emaciated. I have been playing since morning and have not eaten anything. O mother, you did not call me, I am feeling weak due to hunger." So saying, Hari places his hands on his stomach. On seeing her son in distress, tears flowed down the cheeks of the mother. Repeatedly uttering "O my dear son." Yaśodā wiped away dust from Kṛṣṇa's dark body with the hem of her garment. Fondly taking him on her lap, she made him drink milk. He, who is self-content and all bliss and happiness, takes pleasure as a child by feeding at the breasts of Yaśodā—so sings poor Mādhava.

(VI)

The songs of *viraha* (separation) mainly depict the pangs and agony of separation suffered by the Gopīs when Kṛṣṇa left Bṛndāvana for Mathurā. The milkmaids to whom Kṛṣṇa was dearer than their own relatives are seen giving vent to their intense feeling of separation from Kṛṣṇa when his messenger Uddhava visits Bṛndāvana at the bidding of his master. Mādhava has to his credit five such songs depicting the sorrowing gopīs. This is the content of one such song :

"Gokula has become dark without Gopāla; its sun, Murāri, has gone afar. Govinda, our life, has gone away, we shall not see his lotus feet again. Like days without the sun or fish without water, the life of the gopīs without Kṛṣṇa has become feeble," thus lamented the gopīs as they rolled on the ground. Says Mādhava, 'the son of Nanda is my ultimate resort.'

(VII)

The transitoriness of human life, the futility of our desires, the illusory nature of the world, the desirability of cultivating the sense of apathy to worldly objects and the supreme bliss of complete dedication to the feet of the Lord and other such ideas permeate some of the songs of Mādhava. These are termed songs of *paramārtha* and *virakti* in the traditional Vaiṣṇavite circle. *Dāśya* (sense of attachment of a servant

to the master) is the permanent *bhāva* in these lyrics, but those dealing with Kṛṣṇa's childish sports and frolicsome behaviour are dominated by the filial sentiment (*vātsalya bhāva*). These songs can be compared with some lyrics of Surdas. Another noteworthy feature of these lyrics is the sense of wonder at the Supreme Being assuaging the form of turning a cowherd to favour the devotees. Two songs illustrating the transient and illusory nature of the world and the sense of apathy or indifference to worldly pursuits are reproduced below :

O Hari, how can I be saved, sinful as I am, unless you shower your mercy on me? The sinful mind does not forsake worldly desires : I am deeply plunged in the dreadful world.

The eyes do not turn away from woman's beauty, nor the tongue is averse to tasting the six flavours (*rasa*). The ears never avoid the sweet sound of music and the skin the pleasing touch. The nose does not refuse the fragrance and the mind is ever after gold and a beautiful woman. Avarice, desire, anger, pride, conceit these never leave me at all. Jealousy, malice, etc., are not away even for a moment. The python-like time (*Kāla*) has grabbed me in its coil and is devouring the body inch by inch. I am almost benumbed, O God, there is no other escape than taking shelter at your feet. I seek the refuge of your cool feet. So cries ignorant Mādhava.

(VIII)

How can I get the refuge of your feet, O Hari? Please save me from this ocean of distress.

In this deep forest of the world, time in the shape of a hunter prepares to kill the deer-like individual souls. I am an animal trapped in the net cast by *māyā*. I do not find any way of escape from it. Desire and anger in the form of hounds are biting me every moment and my life is about to depart due to the intense pain caused by the poison of worldliness. The five objects of sense are,

like five arrows, piercing my heart. Sin and merit (*pāpa-punya*) are like two halters or nooses round my neck. Time like a hunter is dragging me on. O Sāranga-pāni, do please save me. You are the dispenser and master of Kāla (time); there is none equal to you in glory. Knowing this, I take shelter at your feet—thus poor Mādhava sings. (IX)

Mādhavadeva has not only employed exhaustively all the conventional imageries in conjuring up the picture of the world and the beauty of Kṛṣṇa, but also left some striking examples of his own power of imagination. The world is sometimes compared with a turbulent ocean infested by ferocious sea-animals like alligators and sharks and some times it is compared with a wild forest infected by savage hunters accompanied by hungry hounds, and sometimes it is compared into a flowing river where the *jiva* moves like a raft. The name of Kṛṣṇa is the favourable breeze and the spiritual guide (*guru*) is the helmsman of the raft steering it to the safe haven. The beauty and charm of the boy Kṛṣṇa has been described in innumerable passages with a variety of imagery, both conventional and original. In one passage he writes, "Who is capable of giving a simile apt enough to describe the beauty of Kānāi, a condensed embodiment of the love of all milk-maids? Everybody says Kānāi is dark, but it is ambrosia that has taken a dark hue. The creator failed to locate a model equal to Kānu in beauty; Kānu is a model of himself."

Mādhavadeva sometimes exploited analogies from agriculture, trade or commerce to illustrate his ideas in his lyrics. The lyrics of Mādhavadeva have thus become a part of the religious life of Assam and a source of solace to distressed hearts for more than four hundred years with their lofty ideas, literary beauty and heart-rendering music. The lyrics not only became the source of solace to spiritually distressed hearts, but they also came to be a potent factor in attracting people towards Vaiṣṇavism.

8

Concluding Remarks

Besides being a religious reformer, a devoted saint and a poet and scholar of extraordinary calibre, Mādhavadeva was a man of deep human sympathy and remarkable for his humility. Unlike many of his contemporaries who very often took delight in tracing their ancestry and proudly announced their high birth or caste, Mādhava has not given any inkling of his lineage. He is always content to call himself 'poor Madhava' (*dīna Mādhava*) or 'ignorant Mādhava' (*mārukha Mādhava*). He did not marry lest family life should become a hindrance to serving his spiritual guide (*guru*) or an obstacle to the pursuit of his spiritual ideal. It is stated in the mediaeval biographies that he was always at the side of Śaṅkaradeva and never visited his home unless the *guru* bade him do so. It was his usual practice to massage his master's feet till he was sure that his *guru* had fallen asleep. Biographical works record how on certain occasions Mādhava came forward to nurse ailing devotees who were shunned by others. The medieval biographies, specially *Kathā-gurucarita* contains several instances of Mādhavadeva looking after the day-to-day comfort of his *guru* and there are instances when he went to the extent of risking dangerous situation in order to fulfil the desire of his spiritual mentor.

Many instances of Mādhavadeva's humility and equal treatment of all his followers are narrated in the biographies

of the saint. One such instance of his considering himself the humblest of the humble is cited. One day in order to test Mādhava, Śaṅkaradeva asked him to bring one human brute (*nara-paśu*) next day. Mādhava could not sleep that night thinking over the purport of his guru's behest. In the morning he approached his Master as usual with due humility and then offered himself as the *narapaśu* and said. "I pondered over the matter all night as to who might be the human animal your holiness asked for. After deep deliberation I found that there is none as sinful as myself. I consider myself that human animal you told me to bring". Śaṅkara was pleased with Mādhava's humility. On another occasion the queen mother of the Koch King Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa sent some presents to the followers of Mādhava making discrimination among them on the basis of status. Mādhava returned all the presents. He considered all his followers as of equal status, none higher or lower in rank among the devotees. Another glaring instance of his sacrifice for fellow devotees is recorded in biographical works. During the migration of Śaṅkaradeva from the Ahom territory with his kith and kin and followers to the Koch Kingdom, Mādhavadeva threw away all his belongings from the boat in order to accommodate two more devotees who would have been left stranded for want of conveyance. He lived the life of a poor man in spite of being the head of a religious community for 28 years. He avoided unnecessary show and did not believe in ostentation and a life of luxury and comfort and advised his followers to eschew them.

Mahāpuruṣīyā Vaisnavism is still a major living sect in Assam. Its vitality owes a great deal to the organising ability, foresight, and exemplary conduct of Mādhavadeva. Although he left this mortal world nearly four hundred years ago, he is still alive in the hearts of millions of Assamese men and women.

Appendix I

The original versions of the lyrics cited on pp 45-49 are given below in the Roman script.

I

Rāga-Shyām

tejare kamalāpati parabhāta ninda	/
teri cānda mukha pekho uṭhare Govinda	// Dhrum /
rajanī vidūra diśa dbavali varaṇa	/
timira pheriyā bāja ravira kiraṇa	//
śatapatra vikaśita bhramar uḍai	/
brajavadhū dadhi maṭhe tuvā guṇa gāi	//
Dāma, Sudāma ḍāke teri laiṃ nām	/
hera dekha uṭhiyā āsila Balarāma	//
Nanda gailā bāthāne goāla gailā pāl	/
surabhi cṛāite lāge uṭhare Gopāl	//
Kṣīra lavanu laiyo śiṅgā beṭa veṇu	/
sakāle meliyo vatsa hāmbālāwe dhenu	//
kahaya Mādhava - māi, kinu tapasāili	/
trijagatapati Hari rākhawal pāili	//

II

Rāga-Shyam

parabhāt a Śhāma Kānu dhenu laiya saṅge /	
vamśīr nihsreane Bṛndāvane cale raṅge // Dhrum /	
jagatara guru Hari kāchi gopa kāche /	
ābhīra bālak beḍhi cale āge pāche //	
śikā bāndhi chāndi kāndhe laiya dadhi bhāt /	
māthāye chāndani jaḍi sāje Jagannāth //	
vāma kāṣe śingā beta netakara celi /	
bahu rase lāse veṣe kari cale keli //	
asamkhya-sahasra śīśu dhenu vatsagaṅ /	
śingā-samkha-veṅurave pūraya gagan //	
nānān khelan khele bahu bhāve gāwe /	
vaikunṭhara pati prabhu vane cāre dhenu /	
kahaya Mādhava gati kānu padareṅu //	

III

Rāga-Bhātīyali

Bhāl kaliyā kānu khelanā khelāya /	
khelār mādhuri Hari ! bhuvana bhulāya //	
layalāse raṅge dui caraṇa calāi //	
ruṅu-junu kariyā nūpura bāje pāy //	
ābhīra bālaka beḍhi cāpari bajāy /	
pāka phiri phiriyā nācaya yadurāy //	
candane lepita aṅga dolāye Gopāla /	
ure jhalmala keli-kadambaka māl //	
gaja-mukutār hār gānthi gale lole /	
pindhana netera dhoti kati beḍhi dole //	
mohan kanaka venu uriyā dhare hāte /	
mayūrera cūdā jhalmala kare māthe //	

netera aṅcal khāni hālaya vātāse /	
suhṛida gopera mukha cāya cāya hāse //	
māṅika jiniyā javale dui danta bhānti /	
diśa pāsa śobhe syāma śarīrara kānti //	
bamkima nayane cāyā amiyā varīṣe /	
Mādhavara mana rahu erūpa hariṣe //	

IV

Rāga-Bhātīyall

ālo sunā gowāler jāyā, bhodaya Gopāle /	
hāmār gāwe dhūla dila tomār chawāle //	
kono kāle kono hāni bolo nāhi tai /	
ekakhāni vastu pāile bhāntiyā khāō mai //	
māgiya āno dadhi-dugdha tāro bantā khāy /	
tathāpi tomār chawāle dhūla dilā gāy //	
tomār chawāl laiya āmi māwar āge yāibo /	
parar doḷe kene āmiāpuni māraṅ khāibo //	
tumi sava bhāle jānā āmār māyer kathā /	
śuniyā gopīr bar lāgi gāila bethā //	
dhūla jhāri jhuriyā bulilā priya vāñī /	
dadhi-dugdha lavanu khāibāra dilā āni //	
bundā kari ānande bhūñjilā peta bhari /	
kahaya Mādhava - ohi Harira cāturi //	

V

Rāga-Badārī

Yaśowāku āgu bolata Hari bhāya /	
āju chinān karaba nāhi māwa // Dhrum /	
phiralō vane vane dhenu vicāri /	
tṛṇe kāṭala sava śarīra hāmāri //	
snāna karite lāgiye tathi nīra /	
poraba hāmākeri sakala śarīra //	
kāku kariye boloho, śunā māi /	
śutiye rahaba āju kichuwe nakhāi //	

tanayaku vāṇī 'suniye varanāri	/
prema paraśi nayane jhure vāri	//
karataha snāna, śunaha meri bāp	/
dukhinika putra karabi nāhi tāp	//
komala lavanu mākhabo gāve āni	/
karāboho snāna-susītala pāni	//
poraba nāhi jurāwaba sava gāwa	/
snāna kariyā, amṛta anna khāwa	//
Mādhava kaha Hari ! gocara hāmāri	/
kātala kati Brahma-śarīra tohāri	//

VI

Rāga-Māhur

Mere Māi, ohe Yaśowā :	
āju hāmo barahi bhukhāri	/
Yo kichu lavanu hāmāku delaha	
nāhi khāwalo, sohi rukhāri	// Dhrum /
hāmu vihānata kheḍi khelāwata	
āju kichuwe nāhi khāwatari	/
tumahi hāmāku nāhi ḍakalā māi	
bhukhahi vara dukkha pāwatari	//
khali udare Hari hāta niveśiye	
dekhata bolata vāṇī	/
āpona tanayakaho dukkha dekhiye māi	
nayane jurāwata pāni	//
putra putra buli āñcore mocala	
śyāma sarīrarka dhūli	/
merā bāpa buli kṣīra piyāwata	
bāhu meli kole tuli	//
ohi nijānanda sukhahi sampanna	
so Hari mānuṣa bhāvatari	/
Yaśowāku snāna-pānahi santōṣa	
dīna Mādhava gāwatari	//

VII

Rāga-Śrī

Gokula āju Gopāla vine bhayao andhiyāri	/
Ugata sūra, dūra gayore murāri	//
hāmāri jīvana dūra gayore govinda	/
nayane nā dekho āra pada-aravinda	//
ravi vine dina nohe, jala vine mīna	/
Hari vine gopīra jīvana bhaila kṣīra	//
dharāṇī lutiya gopī phukāre saghan	/
kahaya Mādhava, gati Nandera-nandan	//

VIII

Rāga-Śrī

mai pāpī kemane taribo Hari e,	
tumi karuṇā karā more	/
pāpamati mana vāsanā nachāḍe.	
majilo saṁsāra ghore	// Dhrum /
nayana kāmīnī-rūpa nachāḍaya,	
rasanā e ṣaḍa-rasa	/
gīta-madhura dhvani śravane nachāḍaya	
caramē sukha paraśa	//
sugandha śītala nāsāye na-chāḍaya	
kanaka kāmīnī mane	/
lobha-moha-kāma-krodha-madamān	
nachāḍe e sarva kṣaṇe	//
īriṣā-asūya-himsā-paiśunya	
naguce e tile tile	/
tanuka beḍhi tile tile dhari	
kāla ajagare gile	//
bhailo acetan, tomāra caraṇ	
vine nāhi āna gati	/
śītala caraṇe paśilo śaraṇe	
Mādhava mūrukh mati	//

IX

Rāga-Tur-Bhātiyali

kemane pāibo Hari caraṇa tore	/
e dukha sāgare uddhārā more	// Dhrum/
a bhava-ātoba araṇya māje	/
kālavayādhe mṛga mārīte sāje	//
hāmu paśu māyā-jālata bandī	/
nahi dekho hāmu palāite sandhi	//
kāma-krodha kuttā kāmuri khāi	/
viṣaya-viṣa lāgi e jīva yāi	//
rūpa-rasa ādi e pañca vāṇe	/
hṛdaya māje hāmu phutalo tāne	//
pāpa-puṇya bhailā a vara dora	/
galar māje chāndi bāndhila mora	//
kāla-vyādhe dhari lai yāi tāni	/
rākha rākha more śāraṅgapāṇi	//
kālaro kāl tumi chāheb Hari	/
nāhi nāhi āra tomāra sari	//
jāniyā śaraṇa tomāra pāy	/
dīna Mādhava dāse e rasa gāy	//

Appendix II

Plots of Spurious Plays

Gists of plots of the plays traditionally prevalent in the Vaiṣṇavite circles but spuriously ascribed to Mādhavadeva are noted below :

1. Bhuṣaṇa-haraṇa (Theft of Ornaments)

One day when Rādhā was going to the Yamunā to draw water she found Kṛṣṇa fast asleep under a kadamba tree. She took the ornaments off the sleeping Kṛṣṇa and then woke him up. Then she asked him about his ornaments; he could say nothing. Rādhā returned home and handed the ornaments to Yaśodā. She explained that had she not removed the ornaments some thieves could have stolen them from the sleeping boy. After this Kṛṣṇa came home and asked for his ornaments. He said that a milkmaid had given him some sweets after eating which his head began to reel and he became almost unconscious. He accused Rādhā of the theft. Radha tried to explain the circumstance under which she took off the ornaments, but the clever boy outwitted her by his repartee. Finally, it was Rādhā who got the lashing of Yaśodā's tongue.

2. Rāsa-jhumurā

The plot is taken from the *Rāsa-kriḍā* episode of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*. Śaṅkaradava's play on the same episode

seems to be the immediate source of the play. Although *Bhāgavata-purāna* does not mention Rādhā, she has been depicted in the play as the favourite of Kṛṣṇa. Considering herself to be Kṛṣṇa's favourite she began to give herself to airs. Kṛṣṇa decided to teach her a lesson. He paid no heed to her advances and told her that because he had once taken her alone as his special favourite leaving the other milkmaids behind in the forest, she should not think that she could ride on his shoulders. Rādhā realising her folly fell at his feet and asked forgiveness for her misdemeanour. They were united in love again.

3. *Kotorā-khelā* (The Playing of Kotorā):

The source of the plot is unknown, but similar incidents are narrated in the *Kṛṣṇa-kirtan* of Buḍo Candidās of Bengal. Two genuine *Bargītas* of Mādhavadeva have been incorporated in this play.

One day while Kṛṣṇa was playing with his companions on the bank of the Yamunā, Rādhā accompanied by some milkmaids happened to come towards the Yamuna market (*hāt*). Kṛṣṇa, assisted by his companions, intercepted them and attempted to snatch away their pots of curd, milk and butter. They demanded ferry-toll from the milk-maids saying Kṛṣṇa was the toll-collector appointed by the King. Hearing this the milk-maids turned back and tried to cross the river by boat at another point of the ferry-ghat. There also Kṛṣṇa and his companions made the same demand. Finding no avenue of escape Rādhā and her companions consented to give them milk, butter and sweets on condition that they would dance. Thereupon the boys began to dance and received sweets as reward. The title is a misnomer, because there is no reference to any playing of *Kotorā* (a kind of ball).

None of these three plays bears the masterly stamp of a play by Mādhava. Their language is rough, occasionally lapsing into crudeness. They are devoid of benedictory verses (*nāndī-śloka*) and intermediary Sanskrit verses usually found in Mādhava's plays.

Appendix III

Pimparā Gucuwa (Removal of Ants)

A complete translation of the above named play, minus its verse portions which are meant to be sung in appropriate *rāgas*, is given below. The verse portions are metrical renderings of the prose dialogue and Sūtradhāra's commentaries.

The play commences with the entry of Sūtradhāra who, after his usual dance, recites the *nāndī-ślokas*. The verses are taken from *Kṛṣṇa-karṇāmṛita* of Līlāśuka-Vilvamangala. The verses are quoted in original.

- (a) Kastvambāla Balānujastvamiha kim
manmandirāsankayā,
buddham, tannavanīta Kumbhavivare
hastam kimartham nyasah /
Kartum tatra pipilikāpanayanam suptāh
Kimudbodhitāh /
bālā vatsagatim vivektum iti
sanjalpan harih pātu vah //

Who are you, boy?—The younger brother of Balarāma. Why are you here? Mistaking it to be my house. That is all right but why have you thrust your hand into the butter-pot? To remove the ants there. But why have you awakened my sleeping child? To enquire about the movement of my calf. Let that feigning Hari protect us.

- (b) Vadane navanītagandhavāham
vacane taskaracāturiḍhurīṇam

nayane kuhakāśrunāśrito

yaścaraṇe komalatāṇḍavam kumāram //

He who bears the smell of butter in his mouth and in speech the cleverness of roguish sallies and sheds false tears in his eyes and whose feet are rhythmic with graceful dance — let that boy be the refuge.

[There are slight difference in the reading of the northern and the southern recensions of these verses]

(On entering her house a gopi finds Kṛṣṇa inside it)

- Gopi Who are you in my house, O boy ?
 Kṛṣṇa You do not know me ? I am the younger brother of the redoubtable Balarama.
 Gopi I see, you are the younger brother of Balarama; I have now realised. But why have you come here ?
 Kṛṣṇa O my lady, I have come here mistaking it to be my home; I have lost my way.
 Gopi O Kṛṣṇa, you have come here by mistake, there is nothing wrong in it. But why are you putting your hand into the pot of butter ?
 Kṛṣṇa You have found a great fault indeed : Ants are eating up the butter in the pot. I am trying to remove them.
 Gopi You have done me a great service, O Kānāi, but may I know why have you awakened my sleeping child ?
 Kṛṣṇa Oh milkmaid, I herded cows with your son today. I have not been able to trace one of my calves. I woke up your son to enquire about the calf.
 Gopi O Kānāi, you are a very clever boy. Having eaten my butter you are now telling all sorts of lies. If you had not taken butter, then how is it that your mouth smells of butter ?
 Kṛṣṇa O milkmaid, you are indeed a very hard-hearted woman. Unable to check your tongue you ate butter; now out of fear of your husband you are shifting the blame to me. Who cares for butter in your house ? As if never having tasted butter, I have stealthily come into your

house to eat butter ! Listen, O hard-hearted woman, you are the real thief, because the smell of butter comes from your mouth.

(Here the poet comments through the Sūtradhāra : 'Oh Narayana, being the Guru (guide) of all arts, why have you cheated a poor woman by recourse to lies ?')

- Sūtradhāra O sympathetic audience, having heard the above remark of Kṛṣṇa, the gopi found she had no ready reply to make. Being very much ashamed of the accusation, she at last said :
 Gopi O Kānāi, I cannot cope with you in verbal duel. I shall do whatever possible by narrating everything to your mother.
 Sūtra So saying she called all the milk maids of the place and lodged her complaint against Kṛṣṇa with Yaśodā.
 One gopi O mother Yaśodā, please listen to the tale of misdeeds of your son Kānāi at our houses. Curd, milk and butter nothing is safe in our houses on account of your son. Kṛṣṇa, who with his companions, loots them.
 Second gopi O Yaśodā, I cannot exhaust telling the misdeeds of your son. Having stealthily eaten all my butter Kṛṣṇa broke the container. I have also
 Third gopi O mother Yaśodā, I caught Kṛṣṇa also stealing butter, but Kṛṣṇa red-handed clever deceptive one silenced me by his utter those witty repartee. I feel ashamed to end to the things which he said. There is no bearing his misdeeds. Your son's deeds are beyond our endurance.
 Yaśodā O son, henceforth you must never go to the houses of the gopis. I am fed up with these accusations of your misdeeds. Your father Nanda is the king of all the cowherds and I am his wife. Born of such illustrious parents you have become such a naughty boy : What is there that does not exist in our house ? Milk, curd, butter, sweets or anything else ? Have I deprived you of these things ? Have you not ever tasted these things ? Like the son of a

beggar you move about in the hamlet in search of food : I shall teach you such a lesson today that you will not venture any more to go to the hamlet of the cowherds.

Sūtra

O mother Yaśodā, whom you are chiding ? He is the soul of the world. You want to control Him whose orders are humbly carried out by Brahma, Rudra and other gods : This is not proper.

Kṛṣṇa

O mother, you must not rebuke me. I have tolerated enough of insults and accusations. Now, listen to my words ; what grievous offence did I commit by breaking a worthless pot, a matter of insignificant monetary value ? When you could not tolerate that much loss, could you tolerate any really important loss on my account ? You behave in such a way as if you are the daughter of a great noble. O mother, you had been a childless woman till your old age, and I removed your disgrace of being called a barren woman by becoming your son. Knowing your hard-heartedness I did not take my birth during your youth. Even an ordinary woman understands the feeling of her son, but you, in spite of being an old woman, failed to realise the feelings of your son. You have branded me as a butter-thief throughout the world. What more harm is left to be done ? Being the son of the King of cowherds I am eking my livelihood by tending cows through deep and thorny forests. I could not endear myself to my mother even by undergoing such hardship. Although I have been calmly tolerating all these insults and infamy, I am considered a naughty boy ! I shall no longer tolerate insults at your hands. I shall go to Mathura of king Kṛṣṇa. Then all your pride and vanity will be gone and you will cry over my absence.

(Mādhava says—“O my Lord, do not say any more harsh words, your mother will be very grieved. Not to speak of ordinary mortals, the gods know not the bounds of your inscrutable power. O Lord of lords, I bow down crores of times at your feet.”)

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