

A Parade of Kali's Tricks

A brief explanation of the *apa-sampradāyas* Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura mentions in the concluding poem of his *Anuvṛtti* commentary on *Śrī Upadeśāmṛta*.¹

(1) Gaurāṅga-nāgarīs

Unlike other *apa-sampradāyas*, *gaurāṅga-nāgarīs*, also known as *nadiyā-nāgarīs* or *gauranāgarīs*, identified themselves solely as Vaiṣṇava adherents of Gaura, free from degraded tantric or other influences. Most of them strictly abstained from flesh and fish and wore Vaiṣṇava *tilaka* and *tulasī* neckbeads, and many were reputed as expert *kīrtana* performers. But they were rejected by bona fide devotees for the offense of portraying Gaurāṅga as the *nāgara* of the young women of Nadia, thus disturbing His role in taking the position of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī to taste the sweetness of Kṛṣṇa.

In the transcendental amour of Śrī Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa, Śrī Kṛṣṇa is *nāgara*, the predominating hero and enjoyer, and Śrī Rādhā and Her expansions the *sakhīs* are *nāgarīs*, the predominated heroines to be enjoyed. Although Śrī Gaura is Kṛṣṇa Himself, He adopts the *bhāva* of the *nāgarī* Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī to experience the nature of Her love for Kṛṣṇa. Therefore Śrī Gaurāṅga is not in the *bhāva* of a *nāgara*. The *gaura-nāgarīs* conceived of Śrīman Mahāprabhu as *nāgara* and themselves as *nāgarīs*.

Gaurāṅga-nāgarīs claimed to be followers of Viṣṇupriyā-devī, who they purported to be Rādhā. They asserted that there is no need to worship Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa—since Lord Caitanya is Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa combined, worship of Him alone is sufficient. But Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī cited the *Gaura-gaṇoddeśa-dīpikā* description of Viṣṇupriyā-devī as *bhū-śakti*, who being an expansion and maidservant of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī would never attempt to usurp Her position. He further pointed out that no recognized discipular descendant of Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had worshiped Śrī Gaura-Viṣṇupriyā in *madhura-rasa*, and that in contrast to Kṛṣṇa, Lord Caitanya did not have more than one concurrent wife and never entered into conjugal enjoyment with either. Nonetheless, *gaura-nāgarīs* promulgated seamy myths about Lord Caitanya's alleged romances with various fictional girlfriends of whom no mention exists in standard biographies.

The Primary Deviations of the *Gaurāṅga-nāgarīs*. They are:

- 1) *pauttalika*—idol worshipers, for imagining a form and personality of Gaura that is wholly inconsistent with His actual reality;
- 2) *gaura-bhogī*—desirous to illicitly enjoy Gaura rather than serve Him;
- 3) *bheda-vādī*—not appreciating how Kṛṣṇa and Gaura are *acintya-bhedābheda*, thinking that Gaura cannot be Kṛṣṇa unless He also enjoys damsels; hence the *gaurāṅga-nāgarī* differentiation between Kṛṣṇa and Gaura is necessarily mundane;

¹ Please see verses 6, 10, 12, 13, 15, 19 in particular

- 4) *lilā-vināśī*—spoilors of His pastimes by attempting to force Kṛṣṇa’s mood as the supreme enjoyer onto Gaura, who deliberately takes a different form to experience a different *bhāva*;
- 5) *gurvaparādhī*—offenders of gurus, for not recognizing the standard explanations of *gaura-lilā* given by Śrīla Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja in *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, thus propagating teachings different from those given by genuine gurus;
- 6) *rasa-tattvāndha*—blind to accurate *śāstrīya* ascertainment of the intricacies of *rasa*.
- 7) *nirviśeṣa-vādīs*—by proposing to annul the differing *viśeṣas* (specialties) of *kṛṣṇa-lilā* and *gaura-lilā*, *gaurāṅga-nāgarīs* became *nirviśeṣa-vādīs* (voidists, akin to Buddhists).

(2) Bāulas and Related Groups

Āulas, *bāulas*, *daraveśas*, and *sānis* were closely related—all adhered to similar mixes of tantrism, Māyāvāda, and supposed *bhakti*, with mystical Sufi influences.

Particularly among the lower strata of Bengali society, Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu’s unprecedented transcendental madness was widely considered a prototype for the apparently psychotic derangement of holy men and women, which was highly respected as an exalted state of religious absorption. Such madness, or imitation of it, prevailed not only among Vaiṣṇavas and adherents of Vaiṣṇava offshoot cults, but also among *śāktas* and others. However, Mahāprabhu’s ecstasies were not only unparalleled, but inimitable. This the imitators such as *bāulas* did not understand. *Bāulas* claimed that Śrī Caitanya Mahāprabhu had been one of them, but their origin was obscure and probably predated His advent.

Bāulas’ specialty was deliberate cultivation of madness. Some practiced *tantra* and exercised occult powers. Not surprisingly, they were often viewed as hostile and irrational. Traditionally, *bāulas* lived as wandering minstrels and beggars with “only the wind as home,” although a few stayed in a fixed place with a wife or somewhat steady mistress. A typical *bāula* would dress garishly, and his trademark *ākhāliā* (a nearly ankle-length tunic), usually patchwork and often sadhu-red, revealed Islamic influence. He might bunch his hair in a topknot or keep straggly tresses and a beard, mark his forehead with something resembling Vaiṣṇava *tilaka* (perhaps together with non-Vaiṣṇava *tilaka*), adorn his neck, chest, and arms with assorted beads and amulets, including the *tulasī-mālā* of Vaiṣṇavas and the *rudrākṣa* of Śaivas, and carry the *tulasī japa* beads of Vaiṣṇavas along with the Muslim rosary.

Numerous, but committedly unorganized, sworn to nonconformity yet identifiable as a distinct sect, *bāulas* emphasized freedom from doctrine and organized religion and from caste and other social norms. As did many tantrics, *śāktas*, and others, *bāulas* took pride in being *aśāstrīya* — considering scriptural directives as restrictive to the immediate experience of *bhāva* (which they sought to invoke). Most *bāulas* saw themselves not as Hindus or Muslims or in between, but simply as *bāulas*, practitioners of *bāula-dharma*. All *bāulas* shared only one belief in common—that God is hidden within the heart of man and neither priest, prophet, nor the ritual of any organized religion will help one to find Him there. They felt that both temple and

mosque block the path to truth; the search for God must be carried out individually and independently. Although outwardly flamboyant, *bāulas* were secretive about their esoteric doctrines and practices, which were based on a complex mysticism ultimately meant to awaken a hypothetical inner ecstasy called *jīyante maraṇa* (living death)—a state they described as complete cessation of all physical and mental activity, which they equated with the topmost divinity.

Notwithstanding such high-sounding aspirations, *bāula* practices were wholly *tāmasic*—for instance, their *pañca-makāra-sādhana*² and use of *gāñjā*. At any of their many *mahotsavas* held in various locations of Bengal, a *bāula* might unite with a *sādhikā* yet release her at the next *mahotsava* and connect with another *sādhikā*,³ leaving the former to be picked up by some other *bāula*.

(3) *Neḍās*

Neḍā means “shaven-headed.” Originally *neḍās* comprised a debased Buddhist sect that had remained intact after other Bengali Buddhists had been reincorporated into Hinduism. According to hearsay, *neḍās* had remained casteless and socially stranded until Śrīla Vīrabhadra Prabhu, the son of Lord Nityānanda, accepted twelve hundred *neḍās* and thirteen hundred *neḍīs* (female *neḍās*) into His fold. Śrīla Bhaktivinoda Ṭhākura stated that Śrīla Vīrabhadra Prabhu had allowed the *neḍās* to earn a living by *kīrtana* performances but later they retrograded and remained incorrigibly degenerate.

(4) *Prākṛta-sahajiyās*

Prākṛta-sahajiyās were conspicuous among the groups of deviant Vaiṣṇavas. *Prākṛta* means “material” and *sahajiyā* means “follower of the easy or instinctive way.” Thus *prākṛta-sahajiyā* means both one who takes everything easily, by ignoring the scripturally prescribed regulations of *sādhana-bhakti*, and one who follows his instinct for unrestricted sexual indulgence. Considering freedom from material desires to be too demanding a prerequisite for spiritual perfection, *prākṛta-sahajiyās* conveniently dispensed with it.

Prākṛta-sahajiyās measured *bhakti* by external symptoms—sweetness of voice, ability to recite scripture in entertaining style, emotive mannerisms, and tawdry displays of rapture. These pseudo-devotees were practiced at imitating the ecstatic symptoms of exalted Vaiṣṇavas, such as trembling, weeping, faltering speech, and fainting. But since the imitators believed that any source of pleasure is desirable and could be classified as spiritual, many were addicted to intoxicants, flesh-eating, and illicit sex.

Ignorant of the legitimate process of *hari-bhakti*, *prākṛta-sahajiyās* resembled Māyāvādīs in so far as both indiscriminately merged material with spiritual. On the

² A particularly lurid tantric *sādhana* was *pañca-makāra* (the five *m*'s)—sex with *mahilā* (woman), and ingestion of *māmsa* (meat), *matsya* (fish), *mada* (wine), and *mala-mūtra* (excrement and urine)—all accompanied by fiendish rituals, with the stated objective to control and sublimate *kāma* (material desire).

³ A cheap woman who supposedly followed the *bāula* cult was called a *sādhikā* by male members.

basis that Vaiṣṇavas should not be regarded as greater or lesser according to their caste, *prākṛta-sahajiyās* extrapolated that not even spiritually based distinctions should be made between them. Citing the inapt metaphor of a small *tulasī* leaf being as divine as a big one, they ignored and obfuscated scriptural gradation of devotees, claiming all as *uttama*, and deemed it offensive to differentiate between even genuinely elevated devotees and gross sensualists in Vaiṣṇava attire. Yet Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī warned that to regard a *sādhaka* as a *siddha* would cause destruction of *bhakti*.

Prākṛta-sahajiyās were similarly unable or unwilling to discriminate between material and transcendental enjoyment, worldly and spiritual fame, false and factual renunciation, affected and authentic devotion, worldly and devotional service, lust and love, bluffers and bona fide gurus, the scripturally authorized acts and the unauthorized, or proper conclusions and travesties of scriptural understanding.

To illustrate the artificial *prema* that was representative of *prākṛta-sahajiyās*, Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura would cite an incident that he called “four-anna *bhāva*,” as was related to him in 1919 when he visited Kushtia:

A *hari-sabhā* (regular gathering for *hari-kathā* and *kīrtana*) had split into two discordant groups. A *kīrtanīyā* who had been hired by one of the factions for a festival caused a sensation by feigning an ecstatic swoon and holding it for nearly an hour, thus earning from the approving onlookers the plaudit of being a *parama bhakta*. Not to be outdone, the organizers of the rival party pledged to bring a performer capable of exhibiting even greater *bhāva*. Finding another entrepreneur *kīrtanīyā*, they struck a deal that if he could outstrip the former entertainer he would earn four *annas* worth of *gāñjā* and possibly additional perks. Starting off with some lively whooping and jiggling, this showman soon fell to the ground, rolled in the dust for some time, and then became limp in mock trance. Yet unable to bear for long the summer heat, after half an hour he arose and requested payment. When the leader of the *hari-sabhā* protested that the contract had not been fulfilled, the charlatan snapped back, “How much *bhāva* do you expect for four *annas*?”⁴

(5) Kartābhajās

The founder of the *kartābhajā* sect, the *daraveśa* Ālacānda (c. 1686– 1779), had promulgated worship of Kṛṣṇa, rejecting demigod worship and taking of flesh food, yet his teachings incorporated Āla heresies and strongly veered toward the mystical, and especially toward impersonalism, as evidenced by the defining principle of his sect: equating the guru with God.

After Ālacānda’s death most *kartābhajās* accepted the pontiffship of Kartā Rāma Śaraṇa Pāl, a leading disciple who stressed even more fanatical *bhajā* (worship) of the *kartā* (incumbent master), acclaiming him as God incarnate, whose every word and act was to be lauded as divine and blindly obeyed.

⁴ This anecdote appears in Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura’s *Upākhyāne Upadeśa*.

Although *kartābhajās* claimed that Āulacānda was a reemerged form of Lord Caitanya, and many of their practices resembled those of Vaiṣṇavas, their rituals barely mentioned either Caitanya or Kṛṣṇa, and they also chanted the various names of Kālī and Khodā (Allāh), considering all equal epithets of the *kartā*. Their main pilgrimage site was Ghoshpara, Nadia District, where was preserved the residence of Rāma Śaraṇa and his wife Satī, who were identified respectively as the *ādi-puruṣa* (original enjoyer; original male principle) and *ādyasakti* (original energy; original female principle; Durgā). Hordes of *bāulas* would congregate at Ghoshpara for an annual three-day festival, and accordingly, *kartābhajās* were often mistaken to be a sect of *bāulas*. Like the *bāulas*, *kartābhajās* were anti-establishment, given to crypticism, secretive regarding esoterica, and adherent to the doctrine of *jīyante maraṇa*⁵ as the highest goal. Yet the two were significantly dissimilar in that *kartābhajās* observed certain moral principles—for example, they were enjoined to marry and be true to their partners and to be vegetarian at least on Fridays, on which day sex was proscribed even within wedlock.

Kartābhajās also differed from *bāulas*, and indeed from all other *apa-sampradāyas*, in being well organized and spiritedly proselytical. Becoming a powerful revolt against the doctrinaire caste Goswamis and *smārtas*, *kartābhajās* converted thousands of the downtrodden—landless laborers, peasants, and traditional craftsmen disadvantaged both by colonial economic controls and the exclusivism of The Company (their derogatory term for the orthodox clergy and their clientele), which *kartābhajās* declared bankrupt and from whose ruins had arisen the new *kartābhajā* corporation, which “did not transact business in the name of religion.” In time, *kartābhajā* appeal diminished due to factionalism caused by succession disputes, stinging critiques of their declined moral standards, and disillusionment that the *kartās* themselves had become like Company gentry, living well from coerced donations. Śrīla Sarasvatī Thākura commented:

From *Gaura-bhajā* (worship of Gaura), one faction has screwed out *guru-bhajā* or *kartābhajā*. Their idea is that the guru is Kṛṣṇa, so no need to otherwise worship Kṛṣṇa. All followers of these independent mundane intellectuals who adhere to atheistic doctrines claim that their sensuously mad so-called gurus, who resemble worn-out cows that cannot give anything, are Kṛṣṇa. Such followers are themselves attached to sense gratification and mislead many similarly demented people into such offensive activities.⁶

(6) *Sakhī-bhekīs*

Men of the *sakhī-bhekī* sect dressed and behaved as women, as a concocted *sādhana* meant to erase the sense of maleness and foster the *bhāva* of *vraja-gopīs*. Gauḍīya theology describes the *gopīs* as maidservants of Śrīmatī Rādhārāṇī in Her pastimes with Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead, and attainment of a spiritual form as a *gopī* as the topmost spiritual goal. Yet that position is highly esoteric and not

⁵ A hypothetical inner ecstasy called *jīyante maraṇa* (living death)—a state they described as complete cessation of all physical and mental activity, which they equated with the topmost divinity.

⁶ Śrīla Prabhupādera *Hari-kathāmṛta* 1.39

easily achieved, and imitation by change of outward dress, as advocated by *sakhī-bhekīs*, was not only ludicrous but outright deviant and misleading. Some *gaurāṅga-nāgarīs* also adopted such pseudo-religious transvestism.

Sakhī-bhekīs attempted to justify themselves on the basis of standard descriptions of Śrīla Gadādhara dāsa Prabhu, an associate of Caitanya Mahāprabhu and Nityānanda Prabhu who would sometimes lose himself in *gopī-bhāva* and call out loudly like a girl of Vraja selling yogurt. But Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura pointed out that such rationalization was invalid, for there was no record of Śrīla Gadādhara dāsa ever dressing as a woman or adopting similar forms of affected femininity. Śrīla Sarasvatī Ṭhākura also noted that Lord Caitanya externally maintained a male role while internally cultivating a transcendental female identity, whereas false devotees in male bodies who externally appear as women, nevertheless internally maintain a masculine mindset.

How to Best Deal with Kali's Tricks?!

Śrīla Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī Ṭhākura sums it up in a nutshell in his poem. He says,

*kalira vañcanā yata, tāhe bhakta nahe rata,
prākṛta kariyā tāhe māne,
rūpa-śikṣāmṛta yei, gaura-śikṣāmṛta sei
anya śikṣā nā śunaye kāne*

However many deceptive tricks of Kali there may be, devotees don't become enamored by them because they regard them as mundane. The nectarean teachings of Śrī Rūpa are the nectarean teachings of Śrī Gaurāṅga. Devotees do not hear any other teachings.

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