

## **Androgyny in Worship: An Analysis of Jayānanda's *Caitanya-Maṅgal* in Bengal**

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This article deals with Jayānanda Goswami's sixteenth-century Bengali verse biography of Śrī Caitanya, a Vaiṣṇava saint who revolutionized the practice of religion by releasing it from its earlier upper-class, patriarchal monopoly to make it available to the masses. The resultant shift is from the Vaidhi Bhakti Sādhana of the pre-Caitanya era, the doctrinaire faith focused on scriptural reading and performance of Vedic rituals, to a form of mass participation through community singing of religious songs and ballads revolving around the life of Lord Kṛṣṇa and his divine amours with Rādhā and enactment of these myths of the Kṛṣṇa-līlā. It was popularized as the Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana. Caitanya and his followers in this form of supreme self-effacing devotion, became Rādhā to their Lord. There is therefore an androgynous form of worship that runs across the spectrum of this cult, the internalization of a female identity to a degree where these male bodies begin to acquire female functions. At the same time, to the female followers of this cult, the fair-skinned Caitanya is their Kṛṣṇa, and they his Rādhā and the *gopīs* (cowherdesses involved in Kṛṣṇa's divine amours). Caitanya therefore assumes multiple gender identities as highlighted in Jayānanda's text.

The Bhakti Movement in India was in the nature of a socio-religious revolution that swept across the country, originating among the ancient Tamils a little before the sixth century. It sought to free Hinduism from the shackles of orthodoxy, rigid ritualism, dogma, caste discrimination to make religion available to the masses irrespective of caste, class, gender or creed. Liberated from the Brahminic monopoly over Vedic ritualism, Sanskrit chanting and Upanishadic scholasticism, it was a manifestation of

devotion through an overwhelming love of one's own personalized God expressed in one's own mother tongue. It began among the Tamil Nayanmars and Alvars where devotion was centred on Śiva and Viṣṇu respectively. It began to spread to the north during the late Medieval period under Islamic rule, its focus here being on Rama and Kṛṣṇa. Teachers called *sants* travelled widely to spread their message of love and devotion, irrespective of the recipient's caste or creed. These preachers included women saints and Muslim ones, as well as those who worshipped a *nirguṇa* or formless god. In their search for the spiritual however, they did not denounce the body and its sensory experiences. As Nancy M. Martin tells us in her essay, 'Kabir and Mirabai in Folk Traditions of Western Rajasthan', "The body is a gift, crafted over time by a master artisan, though at the same time not something to take pride in. The body and the soul are to be kept clean, not weakened in senseless pursuits."<sup>1</sup> The essence of this movement was to discover the inner meaning of religion and to realize the indwelling God whose praises must be sung by the devotee.

The growth of the Bhakti Movement in Bengal was spurred on the one hand by the Vaiṣṇava<sup>2</sup> tradition influenced by the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, which glorified the life of Kṛṣṇa, and on the other from the non-Vaiṣṇava tradition derived from other Hindu sources and from Buddhism. In literature one of the earliest manifestations of the former was in Jayadeva's lyrical *Gītagovinda* and later in other Vaiṣṇava *padāvalis* (lyric and ballad sequences) of other poets like Vidyāpati and Caṇḍidāsa. The erotic and mystical theme of these lyrics described the love of Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā, idealizing the sensuous and the physical. Among its many exponents was Caitanya of Bengal (1486-1534), a celebrated Hindu saint of the Vaiṣṇava school of Bhakti Yoga that centred on the worship of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Various called Viśwambhara, Gauraṅga and Nimai in his pre-ascetic days, on renouncing the world and acquiring consciousness of Kṛṣṇa, he came to be known as Śrī Kṛṣṇa Caitanya, meaning consciousness of Kṛṣṇa. Regarded as an avatar of Kṛṣṇa by his

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<sup>1</sup> Martin, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> Vaiṣṇava--follower of Viṣṇu, one among the Hindu trinity of male gods. Vaiṣṇava faith is seen in the Purāṇas (a genre of Hindu and Jain religious texts containing stories about gods, kings and sages), like the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* cited in this essay.

followers the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, he became a great preacher who spread the doctrine of love of God, universal brotherhood and an egalitarian society, travelling along with his closest disciples across the country. The central focus of this theology was Kṛṣṇa, who was regarded as the highest aspect of the divine, and whose union with Rādhā was sublimated to an extent where the devotee's aim was to achieve the blissful state of union with Kṛṣṇa through emotional identification with Rādhā. This essay will attempt to analyse the shift of gender identity required by the male devotee for this form of worship. However it is first necessary to examine the nature of the movement in the context of the prevailing socio-religious atmosphere in Bengal before exploring the concept of the Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana which introduced androgyny as a mode of worship.

As Gautam Niyogi<sup>3</sup> tells us in his essay, 'The Caitanya of the Bhakti cult in a Historical Perspective', from the twelfth century onwards there was a decline in moral values in Gauḍ (approximately what is now Bengal); casteism was rife, the control the Brahmins exerted over religion and culture and their alienation of other castes led to a social polarization that had far-reaching consequences including mass-scale conversion to Islam among the lower castes. It also led to the birth of many cultic practices, including Tantrism<sup>4</sup> and goddess worship, in which the lower castes could also find their niche. In Navadvīpa, later the birthplace of the Caitanya movement, the atmosphere had been vitiated by intellectual arrogance, greed and avarice for material luxury among the Brahmins. This inner crisis within the Hindu faith, along with the religious persecution of the Islamic rulers discussed later in this essay, made the time ripe for a religious revolution and a social awakening. Into this festering mēlée, the advent of Caitanya became a relentless battle against social orthodoxy and religious dogma. In him the love of Lord Kṛṣṇa was inextricably linked to his love for humanity. Though a Brahmin himself, he spread the message of a classless, genderless society where religion would be

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<sup>3</sup> Niyogi, p. 99.

<sup>4</sup> *Tantra* is the name given to a style of religious ritual and meditation within Hinduism and Buddhism combining magical and mystical elements and with sacred writings of its own.

shorn of its Vedic ritualism and Sanskritic incantations and love of God expressed through the popular medium of community singing. Nimaśadhan Basu<sup>5</sup> in his essay ‘Nimaścarita’ says that Caitanya’s historic contribution was that he was the first to introduce *kīrtana*-singing (singing in praise of the Lord) in Bengal. He used song not only as a mode of worship but also as the weapon of a social revolution leading hundreds of *kīrtana* singers accompanied by musical instruments to protest against a religious ban against such singing. The influence of Caitanya’s mode of worship upon Bengali literature of the Vaiṣṇava era will be analysed in the next part of this essay in order to gauge the importance of the literary genre of Caitanya’s verse biography by Jayānanda, the text under consideration in this essay.

The work of the great Vaiṣṇava poets like Jayadeva, Caṇḍidāsa and Vidyāpati deeply influenced the life and literature of Bengal from the twelfth century onwards. The advent of Sri Caitanya in the late fifteenth century precipitated what literary historian Asit Kumar Bandopadhyay calls a veritable Renaissance<sup>6</sup> in both religion and its impact upon Bengali literature. While the pre-Caitanya era celebrated the divine love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in the *padāvalis*, the lyric and ballad sequences of earlier Vaiṣṇava literature, the appearance of this great prophet during the Bhakti cult (revered in Bengal as a *Mahāprabhu* and almost comparable to an incarnation of the Lord Viṣṇu), brought about a spate of hagiographies of Caitanya in verse. I am using the word ‘hagiography’ instead of ‘biography’ following Bandopadhyay’s differentiation between two Bengali terms. The first is *carita*, meaning the biographies of kings and seers, and the second *caritāmṛta*, which he defines as a hagiography because it is a narrative of the life of a saint and contains elements of the miraculous and supernatural in it. Besides Jayānanda’s *Caitanya Maṅgal* which is our main source, these include Vṛndāvanadāsa’s *Śrīśrīcaitanyaabhāgavata*, Murāri Gupta’s *Śrīśrīkṛṣṇacaitanyacaritāmṛta*, Kavikarṇapura’s *Caitanyacaritāmṛta-mahākāvya*, and Locanadāsa’s *Caitanya Maṅgal*. Unlike most of these other life stories of Caitanya composed both in Sanskrit and Bengali, Jayānanda, a Bengali poet and a younger contemporary of Caitanya, used the genre of the Maṅgal Kāvya, like Locanadāsa,

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<sup>5</sup> Basu, p. 22.

<sup>6</sup> Bandopadhyay, p. 77.

for the purpose of popularizing the new form of Vaiṣṇava faith propagated by the great saint. Jayānanda's *Caitanya Maṅgal* was said to have been composed around 1560 A.D. He expanded the scope of this verse hagiography to make his text a social document chronicling the age, its religious practices and social customs as well as the impact of Caitanya upon contemporary society.

The Maṅgal Kāvya was a literary genre particular to Bengal between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries, mostly dedicated to female deities, promoting the cult of goddess worship among the masses. By exploiting a literary form traditionally devoted to the propagation of goddess cults,<sup>7</sup> for the exposition of an androcentric religious philosophy in the worship of Kṛṣṇa, Jayānanda was achieving a significant breakaway from traditional Vaiṣṇava literature. His was a text intended to be sung, its various cantos set to stipulated rāgas, to a rural audience by performers with bells on their feet, waving *cāmars* (yak's tail fly-whisks) in their hands. Like other Maṅgal Kāvya, it was a multi-media performance rather than a scholarly one. It will be the purpose of the first section of this paper to analyse the impact of the choice of this genre on the concept of androgyny in worship.

The Maṅgal Kāvya gained their popularity among the rural masses as a result of the social, cultural and religious turmoil brought about by the Turkish invasion of Bengal in 1203 AD. To appreciate Jayānanda's choice of this genre it is necessary to understand the new dimension that Caitanya lent to the worship of the Lord Kṛṣṇa, an incarnation of Viṣṇu. Deeply influenced by the work of the Vaiṣṇava poets Jayadeva, Vidyāpati and Caṇḍidāsa who immortalized the divine love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa from the twelfth century onwards, Caitanya used these ballads and lyrics for public performances to initiate a new form of worship that was more readily available and acceptable to the masses as earlier mentioned in this essay. He used the poetic celebration of the love and

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<sup>7</sup> The genre of the Maṅgal Kāvya in Bengali literature derives its name from the word *Maṅgala* which means 'auspicious' or 'beneficent' and indicates both a benign version of the Hindu goddess Caṇḍī and the belief that those who listened to these verses were spiritually benefited. Maṅgal Kāvya are normally devoted to goddesses, though there is also the *Dharma Maṅgal* devoted to a folk version of Śiva.

desire of these archetypal lovers, the associated anguish of separation (*viraha*) and ecstasy of culmination (*milana*) as a metaphor for profound, self-effacing devotion to the Lord. In using *ādirasa* and *ṣṛṅgārarasa* (erotic emotion) as a symbol for *bhakti* (devotion), this cult of Vaiṣṇava faith requires complete submergence of the *bhakta* or devotee into the object of his devotion through the medium of love. The path of realization of this form of worship is through the re-enactment of the myths connected to the life of Kṛṣṇa by the devotee through the recitation, singing and performance of texts that narrate these myths.

The shift from the Vaidhi Bhakti Sādhana of the pre-Caitanya era, the doctrinaire faith focused on Scriptural reading and performance of Vedic rituals, to this form of mass participation, popularized as the Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana, broke the upper-class, patriarchal monopoly on the practice of religion. It was necessary at a time when the Hindu religion itself was under threat from the Muslim invaders, its temples and icons desecrated and the kings who patronized them at the mercy of foreign rule. As David L. Haberman<sup>8</sup> points out, the authority of the kings having been threatened and demolished by the Muslim invasion in India, there was a corresponding erosion in the image of Viṣṇu as an omnipotent destroyer of evil in his many avatars and the propagation of the Kṛṣṇa image as lord of the cowherds in Vrajabhūmi, playful child of Yaśodā and erotic lover of the *gopīs* (cowherdresses) and of Rādhā. In Vaidhi Bhakti Sādhana, the *bhakta* or follower is motivated by his fear of sin and performs various acts of penance and servitude to Lord Kṛṣṇa following strict scriptural injunctions. Surrendering self and identity, the servitor initiates worship through listening to stories and songs about the life of Kṛṣṇa, his *līlā* or divine play, his amours with Rādhā his consort and the *gopīs* in Vrajabhūmi, his divine playground. Haberman notes that at a higher stage of Vaidhi comes the eligibility for Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana, where the devotee enacts the emotional roles in the script of the Vraja-līlā, thereby participating in these cosmic events and imitating the *anubhavas*, the emotional states of these characters. He quotes Rūpa Goswami, Caitanya's disciple who had codified the Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana to say that the Rāgātmika Bhaktas (followers of Rāgānuga) embodied the exemplary models of Rāgānuga, the central

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<sup>8</sup> Haberman, p. 43.

characters in the life of Kṛṣṇa, his mother Yaśodā, his lover Rādhā, his friend Subala. “Salvation in Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism then, can be seen as the shift of identity from the external illusory body to the true body (*siddha rūpa/siddha deha*) which is similar to the bodies of the exemplary models of Vrajaloka.”<sup>9</sup> Jayānanda’s use of the Maṅgal Kāvya genre to propagate to the masses this new religious creed of Rāgānuga, was particularly significant because this multi-media genre in a sense de-mythologized the life and exploits of the particular deity or prophet it was devoted to and brought the miraculous down to the human in terms readily comprehensible to the rural masses. This is achieved through the text operating on two levels; on the first by deifying the subject to whom the text is devoted as also elsewhere in the case of the goddesses Caṇḍī and Manasā and on the second by the divine/ semi divine subject being shown as manifesting entirely human reactions in circumstances comprehensible to the rural audience for whom the Maṅgal Kāvya was being performed. At the same time, the Maṅgal Kāvya tell us, listening to the singing/recitation of the texts or performing them in public has a spiritually beneficent effect: it has the redemptive potential of a hundred dips in the holy Ganges or of the severest form of asceticism and penance.

This need for simplification of Vedic rituals and for making salvation more readily available to the sinner may be explained in the context of the Yuga theory of Hindu philosophy or the concept of world ages, the flow of which follows the pattern of creation, evolution, transgression and dissolution as gauged by the emergence and following of the Vedic concept of Dharma, both individual and collective. Of the four cosmic ages outlined in Hindu philosophy, Satya, Treta, Dvāpara and Kali, mankind is now said to be in the last and most disastrous cycle of Kali. It is an age in which Dharma is at its lowest ebb, overwhelmed by materialism, greed, lust, reversal of the assigned duties of caste hierarchy and the breakdown of the ethical codes of a patriarchal society. Jayānanda’s *Caitanya Maṅgal* shows how chaos and anarchy prevail upon the earth in the Kali Yuga; the earth does not yield, water dries up, āsuric (demonic) tendencies prevail in every household. Von Stietencron,<sup>10</sup> in an essay on the Kali Yuga in India, speaks of texts

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<sup>9</sup> Haberman, p.73.

<sup>10</sup> Stietencron, p. 39.

like the *Harivaṃśa* which state that it was possible for the sons of whores, the products of vice and themselves steeped in all the vices, to actually become kings and practise the *aśvamedha yajña* (the horse sacrifice), the highest pronouncement of supremacy of a king over his peers. He notes how, according to such texts, Brahmins behave like Śūdras in their avarice for power and possessions, and Śūdras take on the onerous duties of the highest caste. However, in this interpretation of the evolution of humanity from pristine purity in the Satya Yuga to sinful transgression in the Kali, the Yuga theory also marks a parallel simplification and reduction in the formulaic process of salvation through severe asceticism and penance available only to the spiritual elite to the practice and propagation of divine love. These two aspects of Kali run contrapuntally to each other. Von Stietencron<sup>11</sup> further notes that this new form of religious exercise requires little in the way of previous training; it is open to all social classes—including women, and Śūdras, the lowest category—and extends the promise of liberation to each and every one, even to the most miserable sinner. He calls it the most radical transformation in the history of Indian religion that is fraught with the potential of redeeming perfectibility. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* notes:

*kalim sabhājayanty āryā guṇajñāḥ sārabhāginah*

*yatra saṃkīrtanēnaiva sarvaḥ svārtho 'bhilabhyate*

(XI.5.36)

(Wise men extol the age of Kali as one in which singing and chanting can attain the desired salvation)

In this cosmic age *śraddhāturme kathāḥ śṛṇvan* (hearing with reverence the stories of the Lord), *gāyann anusmaran* (recalling them when alone) (*Bhāgavata Purāṇa* XI.11.23), chanting them in company, arranging dramatic representations of the stories connected with Him, conducting festivals particular to His advent on earth in His temples with vocal and instrumental music, dance and Puranic discourses, *gītatāṇḍavāditragostībhir madgrhōtsavaḥ* (XI. 11. 36) can be taken as the ideal path to salvation. Talking of the

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

collective singing of *kīrtanas* (hymns) taken from the lyrical collection *Gītagovinda* of Jayadeva or the ballads and song sequences of Vidyapati and Caṇḍidāsa, which was introduced into worship by Caitanya and his followers in Gauḍa (Bengal), Jayānanda's text says:

*kīrtan dharma kīrtan karma kīrtan yajñadān*

*kīrtan kīrtan tapa kīrtan gaṅgāsnān*

*kaliyuge kīrtan samān keho nahe*

*kaliyuge kīrtan sakal pāp dahe*

(p.142)

(Singing of *kīrtans* (religious songs) is the equivalent of observance of *dharma* and of offering of sacrifice, it is one's path of action, it is one's penance and a dip in the holy river of Ganges. In the Kali yuga there is no greater performance than the singing of *kīrtans*, which offer redemption from sin)

Selina Thieleman, in her essay 'Devotional Poetry in Performance', talks of the Caitanya Sampradāya's (sect's) musical tradition of *saṃkīrtana* in Bengali style and *samājagayana* (congregational singing) in Vrajabhāṣā (language of the land of Vraja of Kṛṣṇa, a form of pure Hindi) being performed with the lead singer and a chorus of other singers accompanied by a harmonium, a *pākhoyāja* or *mṛdaṅga* (wooden double-conical drum) and a pair of *mañjīras* (small cymbals).<sup>12</sup> This tradition continues to the present day. She also adds that *saṃkīrtana* is attributed particular significance in as much as it comprises all three essential components of worship, i.e. song, dance and instrumental music.

Of the four modes of worship through which the Vaiṣṇava envisages his relationship with the Lord Kṛṣṇa in his human form, that is *dāśya* (as servitor to the Lord), *sākhya* (as a friend to the Lord), *vātsalya* (as a parent to the infant Lord) and *mādhurya* (as erotic lover to the all-beautiful Lord), the Gauḍīya Vaisnavites led by Caitanya recognized the last as the supreme form of *bhakti* or devotion. This form re-creates the illicit longing of the

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<sup>12</sup> Thieleman, pp. 559-60.

*gopīs* and Rādhā for Kṛṣṇa in Vṛndāvan, the anguish of separation from the beloved and the bliss of supreme consummation. In *The Place of the Hidden Moon*, Edward Dimock<sup>13</sup> points out two reasons for the idealization of love in separation in Vaiṣṇava thought. The first is that separation of lovers is the best illustration of the proper attitude of the worshipper towards God because it draws the mind away from the satisfaction of the self. The second theory is that the *gopīs* being married to other persons at the time they fell in love with Kṛṣṇa made it possible to show that the pain of separation is more intense for one married to another than for one's own wife. By pledging themselves, their bodies and their love to Kṛṣṇa, their divine cowherd-lover in the forests of Vṛndāvan, these *gopīs*, and above all Rādhā, thus manifested a transgressive love, risking social ostracism in a staunchly patriarchal society, and marking absolute surrender of self to the divine through this closest form of proximity. David Kinsley, in his book *Kālī and Kṛṣṇa*, says that Vṛndāvan is envisaged as a charmed, idyllic place free from the strictures of ordinary life, and that true devotion is an intoxicating affair that needs such a setting for complete self-expression. "The divine as embodied in Kṛṣṇa the cowherd youth beckons man to leave the world of the humdrum and ordinary, to join him in an 'other' world of incomparable bounty, beauty, and ecstasy. He reveals the divine as eminently approachable, a presence to be intimately enjoyed in love rather than adored in humility."<sup>14</sup> Caitanya's performance of *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* (the divine amours of Kṛṣṇa with the *gopīs* and Rādhā in all the turbulent vicissitudes of their love) has been codified by Caitanya's disciples, mainly Sanātana Goswami and the afore-mentioned Rūpa Goswami into the Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana. It humanizes the divine to a degree where Kṛṣṇa is capable of human follies and foibles undergoing a transformation from a playful, self-seeking lover of all the *gopīs* to a single-minded devotion and submission to His supreme consort, Rādhā. This humanization reaches its culmination in Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda* when the Lord in an ecstasy of love, pleads with Rādhā to put her foot on His head:

*smaragaralakhaṇḍanaṃ mama śīrasi maṇḍanaṃ dehi padapallavam udāram*

(10.8)

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<sup>13</sup> Dimock, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup> Kinsley, p. 56.

(Place your foot on my head—

A sublime flower destroying poison of love)

The sensuous imagery of the alternation between the sorrow of separation (*viraha*), the bitter pangs of jealousy and the blissful fulfilment of sexual union and possession serves, as David Scott<sup>15</sup> points out, as love's ecstasy as well as a metaphor for faith.

In the re-enactment of this *Kṛṣṇa-līlā* in the propagation of Rāgānuṅga, the devotee, whether male or female, must necessarily adopt the role of the female consort of Kṛṣṇa in his/her surrender to the Lord through love. Edward Dimock<sup>16</sup> notes that according to some texts, man and woman have in them both the divine Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā: a woman is female, because she has in her a preponderance of Rādhā, a man is a man because he is mostly Kṛṣṇa. For Caitanya and his followers, there is therefore the internalization of a female identity to a degree where his male body begins to acquire female functions like that of lactation. I have however deliberately chosen to use the word 'androgyny' because while Caitanya's body acquired female *bhāvas* and physical characteristics in his complete identification with the female roles during his enactment of Krishna's life, his handsome male body aroused the same erotic desire in the women of Navadvīpa as the archetypal lover Kṛṣṇa did in Rādhā and the *gopīs*, as we shall see later in this essay. Thus we can find an amalgamation of both genders in him. Jayānanda's text also depicts a reversal of gender roles in the narration of a Puranic myth associated with the amorous Kṛṣṇa. Once when the *gopīs* were bathing in the river, Kṛṣṇa playfully hid their clothes, leaving these village belles overcome with shame and embarrassment. In Jayānanda's text, the plight of the *gopīs* is attributed to Gauraṅga (Caitanya's name in his pre-ascetic days) when while bathing in the river, Mother Gaṅgā herself hides his clothes and laughs at his nudity. He thus takes on the role of the *gopīs* here. Jayānanda and Vṛndāvanadāsa (one of the earliest hagiographers of Caitanya) both tell us that while realizing his *bhakti* in the form of *śṛṅgāra* (erotic emotion), Caitanya took on numerous female roles, like those of the *gopīs* as earlier mentioned, of Rādhā, Rukmiṇī (Kṛṣṇa's wife), Lakṣmī (Viṣṇu's

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<sup>15</sup> Scott, <http://www.gaudiya-discussions.com/index.php?showtopic=1971>.

<sup>16</sup> Dimock, p. 15.

heavenly consort) and of Prakṛti (the primordial female energy of the universe). Jayānanda's text notes:

*saṅkīrtane nācite rukmiṇī bhāb hoila*

(p. 229)

(While dancing during the performance of *saṅkīrtan*, the collective singing of hymns, the *bhāva* (emotion) of Rukmiṇī overcame Caitanya)

Similarly, the *Śrīśrīcaitanyabhāgavata*, Vṛndāvanadāsa's text on Caitanya, says:

*lakṣmīveśe aṅka-nṛtya karibe thākura*

(M.XVIII.20a)

(The Lord (Caitanya) will dance as Lakṣmī)

*prakṛti-svarūpa nṛtya hoibe āmarā*

(M.XVIII.18-19)

(I will dance as Prakṛti, Caitanya says)

Bozena Sliwczynska<sup>17</sup> in her essay 'Caitanya's Performances', talking of these performances of Caitanya at the house of his disciple Candraśekhara, describes how Caitanya then danced as *Jaḡat-Janani* (Mother of the world) and as other forms of *Śakti* (Divine-feminine), and how participation at these events was considered to be a special privilege and could be witnessed only by those who could overcome their sensory faculties. This identification with the female roles both by Caitanya and his followers was so complete that even Caitanya's mother Śacī and his wife Viṣṇupriyā failed to recognize him. When the night's events were at an end and the audience having been lost in the spirit of divine ecstasy, was heart-broken at the prospect of dissociation from their Master, he, Caitanya, then became overcome with motherliness (*mātrbhāva*) and gave his

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<sup>17</sup> Sliwcznka, p. 186.

disciples his breast to suck. Joyfully they then sucked milk from his breast, their fear of separation from him now over, as the *Śrīśrīcaitanyaabhāgavata* says:

*mātr̥bhāve viśvambhara savāre dhāriyā*

*stana-pāna karayā param snigdha hoiyā*

(M.XVIII.203)

Jayānanda's *Caitanya Maṅgal* also notes the same outpouring of mother's milk from the Master to his Vaiṣṇava disciples:

*stana-pāna karaile sakal vaiṣṇave*

(p.89)

Thus Caitanya adopts both 'mādhurya' and 'vātsalya' forms of androgynous expression of faith, the first as a female lover to his Lord and the last as mother to the disciples who accepted him as their Lord or Master. David C. Scott<sup>18</sup> cites the similar instance of the fifteenth-century Gujarati Bhakta poet Narsi Mehta who says: 'I took the hand of the lover of *gopīs* (Kṛṣṇa) in loving converse.....I forgot all else. Even my manhood left me. I began to sing and dance like a woman. My body seemed to change and I became one of the *gopīs*.' Scott comments in the above context that the transcendence of the boundaries of gender becomes imperative for the male devotee who endeavours to behave like a woman in relation to the Lord. Legend has it that in the last years of his life, when Caitanya had totally lost awareness of the world around him, he submerged himself into the divine. He sought to plunge into the waters of the sea near Puri, mistaking the blue waters for the body of the dark/blue-skinned Kṛṣṇa, thus endeavouring complete oneness with his Lord.

However, like most other hagiographers of Caitanya, Jayānanda, attributing both human and divine characteristics to him, further intensifies the context of androgyny. On the one hand, in his human avatar he is initially Gauraṅga/Viśvambhar/Nimai, and with the onset of asceticism and renunciation he becomes Caitanya or Kṛṣṇa-Caitanya. On the

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<sup>18</sup> Scott, <http://www.gaudiya-discussions.com/index.php?showtopic=1971>.

other hand, he is also called ‘the living Jagannāth’<sup>19</sup> in Jayānanda’s text and his mother Śacī is repeatedly referred to as ‘Kṛṣṇa-garbha Śacī...Kṛṣṇa samīpe’ (Śacī who holds Kṛṣṇa in her womb and has Kṛṣṇa before her). Vṛndāvanadāsa’s *Śrīśrīcaitanyaabhāgavata* compares Śacī to Yaśodā and Devakī (Kṛṣṇa’s foster-mother and biological mother respectively). Jayānanda’s text shows how this invokes *vātsalya* within Śacī towards her miraculously conceived son as well as in the matrons of the village of Navadvīpa where they live, their breasts are shown overflowing with milk at his approach, even in their old age. On the other hand, the fair-skinned Caitanya (‘Gauraṅga’, literally, ‘fair-bodied’) is like a ‘golden-hued’ Kṛṣṇa for the young village belles. Therefore the same text projects both male and female identities for Gauraṅga/Caitanya.

Having gone through two marriages to Lakṣmī and Viṣṇupriyā, Caitanya rejects worldly life as illusory and the company of women as inimical to the practice of asceticism. The paradox of the text lies in the fact that while Caitanya adopts a female identity in his worship of Kṛṣṇa as his lover, the village belles of Navadvīpa are overcome with the same feverish sexual excitement towards Gaurāṅga himself:

*keman keman kare man prāṅ ucāṭan*

*parān putali mar kande.....*

*bidhire balibo ki kareche kuler jhi*

*ār tahe nahi svatantrī....*

*kahile je lāj bhay parān rakhilo nai*

*madan ālasye pūre mari*

(p.62)

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<sup>19</sup> Jagannāth, literally ‘lord of the world’ is a manifestation of Kṛṣṇa. The wooden statues of Jagannāth along with his siblings Balarām and Subhadra are worshipped in the temple at Puri.

(My mind is restless, my breast heaves, my heart cries out in pain. How can I narrate my woes for I am a married woman, I have lost myself, I am overcome with shame and fear, how can I remain alive? The erotic fire of the god of love, Madandeva, burns within me.)

This is similar to the erotic fantasies that Jayadeva described in Rādhā for her blue-skinned Lord Kṛṣṇa, also known as Mādhava, in *Gītagovinda*:

*sā virahe tava dīnā*

*mādhava manasijaviśikhabhayād iva bhāvanayā tvayi līnā*

(IV.2)

(Lying dejected by your desertion, fearing Love's arrows,

She clings to you in fantasy, Mādhava)

And when Gauraṅga departs from his village having shaved off his beautiful hair and donned the ochre robes of the mendicant in his search for *caitanya*, his ascetic quest for Kṛṣṇa-consciousness which gave him his name, the women are left as physically and sexually destitute as Rādhā when Kṛṣṇa's amorous dalliance with the other *gopīs* causes her acute anguish and jealousy. His young wife Viṣṇupriyā pleads with him not to desert her in the first flush of her youth, his mother Śacī warns of the dangers of the frustrated sexuality of a forsaken bride. The detailed account of a woman's grief at separation from her husband and lord, also called *bāramāśya*, is a poetical device frequently found in the Maṅgal Kāvya which Jayānanda adopts, as the editors of the *Caitanya Maṅgal* point out in their introduction to the text.<sup>20</sup> There is sheer lyrical beauty in Viṣṇupriyā's poignant outpouring of sorrow as she visualizes the passage of the seasons, the corresponding beauty and variety of Nature and her own tempestuous emotions as she thinks of her lord as a mendicant braving the elements during his pilgrimages. In Vaiṣṇava poet Vidyāpati's verses, Rādhā, undergoing similar pangs of separation from the beloved

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<sup>20</sup> Jayānanda, p. xxi.

during the beauty of the monsoon season when the peacock dances, the *ḍāhuk* bird utters its plaintive cry and Nature bursts into life, says,

*śūnya mandira mar...*

*...kāma dāruṇ<sup>21</sup>*

(my body is like an empty temple...I am overcome with uncontrollable desire) Therefore the text projects amalgamation of both genders for Gauraṅga/Caitanya as earlier stated in this essay.

The text also precipitates a conflict between the two identities of Caitanya—that of the Brahmin and of the Vaiṣṇava. Though Caitanya is born of a Brahmin family and is often referred to as *Dvijaśiromaṇi* (crown jewel of the twice-born or Brahmin community), the text repeatedly denigrates the ethical codes of Brahmins who remain unconverted to the Vaiṣṇava faith. In his renunciation of worldly life Caitanya neglects his duties as a householder to his wife and widowed mother which as a Brahmin might have been his foremost duty. Moreover, by not allowing his wife to follow him into asceticism and offer her service to him as a righteous wife, he has violated the Hindu code of the duties prescribed for a *pativrata* (a chaste and devoted wife) as pointed out by Viṣṇupriyā herself. Instead he re-defines for her the role of the *pativrata* which patriarchy imposed upon its subjugated upper-class womenfolk incarcerated within the inner quarters of the home:

*patidharma rakṣā kare sei pativrata*

*navadvīpe viṣṇupriyā tumi kalpolatā*

(p.125)

(The one who protects her husband's dharma is a *pativrata*. In Navadvīpa, you will be the protector of the faith, Viṣṇupriyā)

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<sup>21</sup> Bandopadhyay, p. 35.

By taking away from her the role of a dutiful wife offering service to her husband, he thrusts upon her the role of universal mother to the Vaiṣṇava community of Navadvīpa. She will be a *sahadharminī* (one who pro-actively follows and propagates her husband's dharma) outside the home, in the temple and within the Vaiṣṇava community of Navadvīpa by keeping alive the tradition of *saṃkīrtans* in his absence. As noted by several hagiographers of Caitanya, Śacī and Viṣṇupriyā formed an important part of the Vaiṣṇava community practising the Rāgānuga Bhakti Sādhana.

Though, as a renunciate, Caitanya abjured the company of women, he advocated a more egalitarian faith among the Vaiṣṇavas, embracing lower castes and women as well in its practice. Men and women together attended the *saṃkīrtan* sessions and the dramatic performances. In the Puranic myths narrated by Caitanya to his followers cited in Jayānanda's text, upper class women danced and sang in ecstasy in the Vaiṣṇava temples (just as Padmāvati, Jayadeva's muse for his *Gītagovinda*, did), breaking the patriarchal codes for such women, and found salvation through their performance of the hymns of the Lord. In other myths narrated for the edification of the disciples, women from the lowest untouchable caste and even prostitutes could redeem themselves within the Vaiṣṇava faith, merely by singing or chanting the name of the Lord. The *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* (XI.VIII) tells of the courtesan Piṅgalā, who, realizing the insignificance of her human paramours, offers herself up as Lakṣmī the divine consort in service to the Lord. Thus the salvific potential of this new form of *bhakti* enlarges the scope of the availability of redemption and offers the subaltern a voice within its fold. As the poet Jayānanda notes:

*jātibhed na karimu caṇḍāl yabane*

*prembhakti diyā sabhaye nācamu kīrtane*

*.....kulabadhu nācāimu kīrtanande*

(p.235)

(I will not discriminate against *caṇḍāls* (the lowest caste) and Muslims. Through their offering of love and devotion they will dance to the *kīrtans*. Even the married women will come out to dance in the collective performance of *kīrtans*.)

In conclusion, it may be said that the concept of androgyny or even gender reversal was particular to male saints of the Bhakti movement, the female like Mirabai or Akka Mahādevi automatically adopting the role of beloved to their male Lord. Talking of this characteristic of the movement, A. K. Ramanujan calls it the establishment of the ‘third gender’ by the male saint. “The male saints wish to become women; they wish to drop their very maleness, their machismo. Saints then become a kind of third gender. The lines between male and female are crossed and re-crossed in their lives.”<sup>22</sup> Whether we may use the term androgyny, the amalgamation of male and female characteristics as a comprehensive term applicable to all these male saints as has been done for Caitanya for reasons outlined in this essay, or whether we should merely state that gender outlines have been blurred in the course of the movement, remains a matter of debate. Therefore I conclude with a quote from the medieval Kannada poet Dāsīmayya, part of the same movement who questions conventional definitions of gender:

*If they see*

*breasts and long hair coming*

*they call it woman,*

*if beard and whiskers*

*they call it man:*

*but, look, the self that hovers*

*in between*

*is neither man*

*nor woman*

*O Rāmanātha.*<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ramanujan (1989), pp. 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> Ramanujan (1973), p. 110.

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