

PŪRVĀPARAPRAJÑĀBHINANDANAM
EAST AND WEST, PAST AND PRESENT

**Indological and Other Essays
in Honour of Klaus Karttunen**

EDITED BY

BERTIL TIKKANEN & ALBION M. BUTTERS

STUDIA ORIENTALIA 110

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DRAMA IN THE SERVICE OF KṚṢṆA: RŪPA GOSVĀMIN'S NĀṬAKA-CANDRIKĀ

Måns Broo

INTRODUCTION

Rūpa Gosvāmin (1470–1554) was a follower of Kṛṣṇa Caitanya (1486–1533), the founder of Gauḍīya or Bengali Vaiṣṇavism, also known as Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism (for general introductions to this school of thought, see De 1961 or Eidlitz 1968). Together with the other so-called “Six Gosvāmins of Vṛṇḍāvana”, Rūpa Gosvāmin is responsible for creating much of the theological groundwork of Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. While best known for his doctrine of *bhakti-rasa*, he was actually a prolific writer who had already begun writing poetry about the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa before meeting Kṛṣṇa Caitanya and becoming converted to his brand of Vaiṣṇavism – or perhaps rather Kṛṣṇaism (for more on Rūpa Gosvāmin and his influence on Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism, see De 1961, Delmonico 1993, Kapoor 1995 and Rosen 1991). Of all of his works, the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* or “Moonlight on the Play” is surely the least well-known, as well as the only one which has never been translated into a Western language. In the following essay, I will offer an overview of this little text, focusing on the question of its purpose.

Unlike many of Rūpa Gosvāmin's other texts, few editions of the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* (NC) are available. Of the two printed editions used here (the only ones that I am aware of), the Bengali edition is superior to the Hindi one in every respect. Nārāyaṇa's 18th-century commentary on Rūpa's drama, the *Lalitā-mādhava*, was also employed to determine correct readings, as it frequently quotes the NC.

The *Nāṭaka-candrikā* is a small book on *nāṭaka*, of course, the play par excellence of Sanskrit dramaturgy. According to Warder (1989: 135–136), the *nāṭaka* is characterised by having a “well-known” story and five to ten acts. Sanskrit dramatists favoured this kind of play, since it gave full scope for the application of dramatic theory, both in terms of structure and aesthetic development. While most similar books on dramatic theory deal with all the classic types of plays, Rūpa Gosvāmin focuses exclusively on the *nāṭaka*.

CONTENTS OF THE TEXT

As the following table (Table 1) shows, NC is full of technical details dealing almost exclusively with the writing of a drama. There is nothing in the book about how to construct or arrange props, how to dress the actors, or other such practical details. This reflects the fact that at this late juncture in the evolution of Sanskrit drama, it had turned into an almost purely literary genre. There is no indication that the *nāṭakas* written by Rūpa Gosvāmin himself, for example, would ever actually have been staged in their entirety (Wulff 1984: 32).

Table 1 Contents of the *Nāṭaka-candrikā*

1–6	Introduction and outline of contents (<i>grantha-pratijñā</i>)
7–10	The hero (<i>nāyaka</i>)
11	<i>Rasa</i>
12–13	The story (<i>itivr̥tta</i>)
14–29	The introduction (<i>prastāvanā</i>)
30–125	The five elements of the story (<i>prakṛti</i>), the five stages of the story (<i>avasthā</i>) and their five junctions (<i>sandhi</i>), as well as the 64 parts of the junctions (<i>sandhy-aṅga</i>)
126–148	The 21 other conjunctions (<i>sandhy-antara</i>)
149–185	The 36 embellishments (<i>vibhūṣaṇa</i>)
186–192	The four introductions of subsidiary matter (<i>patākā-sthāna</i>)
193–228	The ways of introducing events unsuitable for representation (<i>arthopakṣepaka/praveśaka</i>)
229–241	A deliberation on language (<i>bhāṣā-vidhāna</i>)
242–269	The dramatic styles (<i>vṛtti</i>)

The subjects dealt with in the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* are all traditional topics found in standard textbooks, such as the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, and ascribed to the legendary Bharata Muni (2nd c. CE?), Abhinavagupta's *Abhinava-bhāratī* (c.980 CE), or Dhanañjaya's *Daśa-rūpaka* (c.975 CE). The text is written in the standard technical style of *anuṣṭubh kārīkās*, providing definitions and occasionally theoretical discussion that are followed by illustrations. The style is comparable to what one finds in Mammaṭa's *Kāvya-prakāśa* (c.1140), for example (for more on these texts, see De 1923, Keith 1924 or Warder 1989). This is to say, the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* contains little innovation in terms of either contents or style.

THE RAISON D'ÊTRE OF THE BOOK

If there is so little originality in the *Nāṭaka-candrikā*, why bother writing a new book at all? In the two very first verses, Rūpa Gosvāmin states that he wishes to summarise the description of the *nāṭaka* after studying Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra* and "the delightful" *Rasārṇava-sudhākara*. Furthermore, since the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* is not very suitable, contradicting the opinions of Bharata Muni, that book has generally not been accepted.¹ Here Rūpa mentions two of his sources, and perhaps more interestingly, the book that he will not follow.

Let us begin with the latter. The *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* was written by Viśvanātha Kavirāja in the early 14th century. Though Warder (1989: 140, 144) calls it "later and not very reliable" twice in the first volume of his *Indian Kāvya Literature*, it quickly became very popular, especially in Bengal, due to its encyclopaedic nature. Rūpa Gosvāmin's disapproval of the work did not seem to deter later Caitanya Vaiṣṇavas. The *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-śeṣa* ascribed to Jīva Gosvāmin follows the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* almost verbatim. And the famous reformer of the early twentieth century, Bhaktisiddhānta Sarasvatī (1874–1937), quotes it on numerous occasions in his commentary to the classic hagiography of Śrī Caitanya, the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*.

So why then does Rūpa Gosvāmin find the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* "not very suitable"? Paramānanda Sena Kavi Karṇapūra, a Caitanya Vaiṣṇava contemporary with Rūpa Gosvāmin, critiqued the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*'s famous definition of poetry (*vākyam rasātmakam kāvyam*) as being both too narrow and too wide (*Alaṅkāra-kaustubha* 1.2), but I think Rūpa's main problem with this book lies somewhere else. In the context of dealing with *rasa*, the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* (3.263) alludes to Kṛṣṇa and the milkmaids of Vṛndāvana as an example of *rasābhāsa*, a perverted semblance of *rasa*, since their relationship is unlawful. As we shall soon see, this is a major issue for Rūpa Gosvāmin.

The allegation that the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* contradicts the authoritative statements of Bharata needs not be taken as seriously. While Rūpa does point out such instances in his text (e.g. 189), he himself follows Bharata only very generally.

The more direct source of the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* is rather the second one Rūpa mentions: Siṁhabhūpāla's *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* from the late 14th century. Siṁhabhūpāla II was a king in the Recarla dynasty at Rachakonda near Hyderabad. His *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* is not a particularly well-known work – Warder, for example, does not mention it by name even once – but it is a compe-

1 *vīkṣya bharata-muni-śāstram rasa-pūrva-sudhākaraṅ ca ramaṇīyam/lakṣaṇa-mati-samkṣepād vilikhyate nāṭakasyedam// nāṭīva saṅgatatvād bharata-muner mata-virodhāc ca/ sāhitya-darpaṇīyā na grhītā prakriyā prāyag//* NC 1–2.

tent and fairly exhaustive book.² While Rūpa Gosvāmin does borrow from other works as well, as the following chart (Table 2) shows, just over half of all the *kārikās* of *Nāṭaka-candrikā* are taken directly from the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara*. It is also interesting to note that despite the deprecation discussed above, the *Sāhitya-darpaṇa* is quoted much more often than the *Nāṭyaśāstra* itself.

Table 2 Sources of the *kārikās* in *Nāṭaka-candrikā*

165	<i>Rasārṇava-sudhākara</i>
91	Original
21	<i>Sāhitya-darpaṇa</i>
17	<i>Daśarūpaka</i>
13	<i>Nāṭyaśāstra</i>
307	Total

Neal Delmonico (1993: 147) has offered two possible reasons for Rūpa's favouring of the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara*. While Rūpa and his brother Sanātana are generally considered Bengalis, they stemmed from a Karnatic Brahmin line of the Bharadvāja gotra. It was only Rūpa's grandfather's father who had moved to Bengal. Moreover, during the period when Rūpa worked for the Muslim government of Bengal, before meeting Caitanya, he had invited a community of Karnatic Brahmins to settle there and evidently spent much time in their company. Perhaps it was with them that he was introduced to the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara*. Alternatively, there are indications that he may have been related to Viśveśvara, Siṃhabhūpāla's guru and the author of the *Camatkāra-candrikā*. As an aside, the influence of the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* on Rūpa's *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* is an important issue worthy of investigation.

Rūpa's expressed reason for composing the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* is to summarise the description of the *nāṭaka*. The *Rasārṇava-sudhākara*, approximately four times larger than Rūpa's text, deals with many items that he leaves out. Yet compared to the extremely brief *Daśarūpaka*, Rūpa's text is not at all particularly concise. Rather, the real reason for the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* lies somewhere else.

In his classic work on Sanskrit drama, A.B. Keith (1924: 294) writes, "... but his own *Nāṭaka-candrikā* shows little improvement over the [*Sāhitya-darpaṇa*], whence it draws much of its material; its real purpose is to eulogize the saint Caitanya, whose disciple Rūpa was and in whose honour he composed dramas of no merit". It is sometimes said that no self-respecting critic ever actually *reads* the

² T. Venkatacharya's introduction to his edition of this work is very thorough and informative.

book he reviews, a statement Keith apparently took seriously, since he wouldn't have had to read farther than the first verse to see the falsity of his statement on the source of the text. Had he gone so far as to read the whole book, he would have noticed that Caitanya is not even mentioned in it.

Sushil Kumar De (1961: 581), the patriarch of studies on Caitanya Vaiṣṇava, is more accurate when he claims that “Rūpa Gosvāmī wrote his dramaturgic work *Nāṭaka-candrikā* chiefly to explain and illustrate the various features of his own dramatic works”. I do not think that this is the main purpose of the text either, but a look at the sources of the illustrative passages used by Rūpa Gosvāmin (Table 3) reveals that the great majority (73.7 %) of them are taken from one and the same play, Rūpa's own drama, the *Lalita-mādhava*. In most cases, an illustration consists of a few lines of prose dialogue in Sanskrit and/or different types of literary Prakrit, often including one or two verses as well.

Table 3 Sources of the illustrations in *Nāṭaka-candrikā*

98	<i>Lalita-mādhava</i>
21	Original
6	Other dramas (1 each)
5	<i>Rasārṇava-sudhāka</i>
3	Other texts by Rūpa Gosvāmin (1 each)
133	Total

In the sections dealing with the constituents of the drama and the embellishments, all the examples are taken from the *Lalita-mādhava*. Drawing so much from his own work is, of course, helpful for the reader, who thus only needs to know this particular drama to grasp the context of the illustrations. It is no doubt also intended to show how well this drama adheres to all the classical rules of dramatic composition.

The orthodoxy – or lack of originality, if you will – of the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* brings us to the crux of the matter. It was, of course, a deliberate choice. As the table above shows, Rūpa Gosvāmin was an author quite capable of writing his own text. Of the 133 illustrations, only 11 (or 8.2%) quote other authors, compared to 208 out of 307 (or 67.8%) of the *kārikās*. In the case of the *kārikās*, he thus decided not to write his own text but to generally follow earlier authorities – with some notable exceptions.

KṚṢṆA AS THE PARADIGMATIC ROMANTIC HERO

Most of the original *kārikās* of the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* are found in the very beginning of the book. After the general introduction quoted above, Rūpa goes on to give a brief description of a *nāṭaka*, one that also functions as a kind of table of contents for the book. This is followed by an extremely concise description of the *nāyaka* or hero. Rūpa writes:

One whose majesty is directly manifest – such as Kṛṣṇa – is called divine; one who is divine but behaves in a human manner – like Rāma – is divine and human; Yudhiṣṭhira and others are human. Amongst all of these, Kṛṣṇa, abundant in qualities, is the one in which all the qualities of the heroes are known completely. Because he, the supreme beauty, is the very manifestation of playfulness and loftiness, he is the hero most suitable for a play about the supreme passionate love.³

The division of heroes into the three classes mentioned here is common, but making Kṛṣṇa the ideal romantic hero is Rūpa's own innovation. In his next book, the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, Rūpa Gosvāmin proceeds to explain how Kṛṣṇa in fact exemplifies all the four main types of heroes in Sanskrit poetics, giving a list of his sixty-four most prominent good qualities.⁴ There is one problem with Kṛṣṇa, however, which Rūpa briefly addresses:

That which concerns a married woman and her lover is considered a subordinate *rasa* by the knowers – with the exception of Kṛṣṇa and the milkmaids. As it is said in the *Rasa-vilāsa*, “Love for another man's wife is not accepted as a principal *rasa* by the poets, except for the lotus-eyed girls of Gokula, because the enemy of Kāṁsa, the crest jewel of tasters of *rasa* (*rasikas*), made them descend to earth to announce the rules of *rasa*.”⁵

In other words, the conduct of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* can never contravene the rules of *rasa*, since Kṛṣṇa is the foremost of the connoisseurs of *rasa* and since he brought the milkmaids down to earth specifically to announce the rules of *rasa*. Rūpa and his source turn the tables here on the – one would imagine, perhaps,

3 *svayam prakāṭitaiśvāryo divyaḥ kṛṣṇādir īritah/ divyo 'pi nara-ceṣṭatvād divyādivyo raghūdvaḥah// adīvyo dharmaputrādir eṣu kṛṣṇo guṇādbhikah/ nāyakanām guṇāḥ sarve yatra sarva-vidbhāḥ smṛtah// lālityodāttayor atra vyaktyā śobhābharo 'dhikah/ tenaiṣa nāyako yuktaḥ śṛṅgārottara-nāṭake//* NC 7–9.

4 For the four types of heroes, see *Daśarūpaka* 2.1–11, *Nāṭyaśāstra* 24.16–23, *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* 1.61–79.

5 *yat paroḍhopapatyoś ca gauṇatvaṁ kathitāṁ budhāḥ/ tat tu kṛṣṇaṁ ca gopīs ca vineti pratipāditam// tatbā cuktam rasavilāse – neṣṭā yad aṅgini rase kavibhiḥ paroḍhās tad-gokulāmbuja-dīśāṅkulam antarena/ āśamsayā rasa-vidher avatāritānām kāmśārīṇā rasika-maṇḍala-śekhareṇa//* NC 10.

rather shocked – Viśvanātha Kavirāja and other earlier authors, by saying that if the rules don't fit Kṛṣṇa, they would need to be changed.

This dramatic departure from tradition was made possible, of course, by the development of the conception of Kṛṣṇa of Vṛndāvana from being something of a racy side of Viṣṇu to the very emblem of divine love, a process which began perhaps with the Alvars in the South and was brought out especially in the tenth *skandha* of the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* and by Jayadeva (for studies on this process, see Hardy 1983, Preciado-Solís 1984 and Sheth 1984). What Rūpa is doing in NC, then, is not only trying to wrangle Kṛṣṇa into Sanskrit dramatics, but also to fit dramatics around Kṛṣṇa. By writing the *Lalita-mādhava* and now NC, he is showing his learned contemporaries how Sanskrit poetics – in its supreme form, the play – can be used in the service of his deity, Kṛṣṇa.

Such one-pointed devotion to Kṛṣṇa is, of course, a trademark of Rūpa Gosvāmin's master, Śrī Caitanya. Caitanya himself wrote almost nothing, so the task of codifying his teachings fell to his disciples. It was in Vṛndāvana that the Six Gosvāmins systematically developed the theology of the school. In a successful bid to gain respect in orthodox circles and royal patronage, the Gosvāmins chose to write in Sanskrit, contrary to their spiritual brethren in Bengal, who continued spreading the teachings in the vernacular, more typical manner of the *bhakti*-movements of North India.

INNOVATION WITHIN ORTHODOXY

Combining the charismatic insights of Caitanya with the orthodox canon was, as may be expected, not always an easy task. When creating a new, Kṛṣṇa-ised aesthetic, Rūpa Gosvāmin was not content to simply follow earlier texts on theory. While at times taking an almost ultra-orthodox stand on minor details – such as the order and use of *sandhy-aṅgas* – Rūpa had no qualms about altering original sources to make them suit his Kṛṣṇa-centered purpose, as he had done before in his anthology of Kṛṣṇaite verse, the *Padyāvalī* (De 1934: xxii–xxiv). When the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* (3.18) says that the *kārya*, the objective of the characters, is characterised by *dharma*, *kāma* and *artha*, Rūpa simply removes these (in his opinion) unnecessarily mundane words and instead gives the example of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa's union as presented in the *Lalita-mādhava* (36).

In most cases, however, Rūpa keeps the *kārikās* from the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara* intact or shortens them a bit, adding examples of his own. Regardless of what Keith might have thought of Rūpa Gosvāmin's plays, they are full of exquisite poetry. One example is the illustration of the *sandhy-aṅga* of *vidhāna*, an act

causing both distress and happiness.⁶ After seeing Kṛṣṇa in the disguise of a Brahmin, not recognising him but feeling attracted to him, Rādhā curses herself for her fickleness of emotions until she realises (*Lalīta-mādhava* 2.12):

*sahacari harir eṣa brahma-veśam prapannaḥ
kim ayam itarathā me vidravaty antarātmā
śaśadhara-maṇi-vedī svedadhāram prasūte
na kila kumuda-bandhoḥ kaumudīm antareṇa*

Friend, it is Kṛṣṇa, disguised as a Brahmin!
Why else would my heart have leapt?
The moon-gem does not sweat
without the rays of the moon.

The verse is in the *mālinī*-metre. The following chart (Table 4) shows the metres used in the illustrative verses. Like Jayadeva and other mediaeval Sanskrit poets, Rūpa Gosvāmin prefers long metres such as *śārdūlavikrīḍita* and *śikhariṇī*, but he employs quite a few *āryās* of different kinds as well. This is a good indication of Rūpa's sources of poetic inspiration.

Table 4 Metres used in the illustrations

35	<i>Śārdūlavikrīḍita</i>
18	<i>Śikhariṇī</i>
16	<i>Āryās</i> (of 4 types)
12	<i>Vasantatilakā</i>
12	<i>Mālinī</i>
11	<i>Pr̥thivī</i>
9	<i>Anuṣṭubh</i>
6	<i>Hariṇī</i>
5	<i>Mandākrāntā</i>
5	<i>Drutavilambita</i>
3	<i>Svāgatā</i>
3	<i>Vajras</i> (of 2 types)
2	<i>Puṣpītāgrā</i>
4	Others (1 each)
141	Total

6 *sukha-duḥkha-karam yat tu tad vidhānam budhā viduḥ*/NC 57.

As mentioned before, Rūpa Gosvāmin devotes no more than one verse (11) to *rasa* in the *Nāṭaka-candrikā*. This informs the reader only that the *rasas* should be gleaned from the *Rasārṇava-sudhākara*, with most of the second chapter being devoted to this subject. Even considering that Rūpa had not yet written the *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, his magnum opus dealing exclusively with *bhakti-rasa*, it is remarkable that he completely sidesteps the topic here (for more on this topic, see Haberman 1988 and Wulff 1984). The only plausible explanation is that he was already planning that book. When looking at Rūpa’s literary contributions as a whole, it is clear that from an early stage he was planning a systematic and complete “Kṛṣṇaised” system of aesthetics, replete with plays, songs, poetry and hymns. His brother, Sanātana Gosvāmin, added a new understanding of the mythology in his purāṇa-styled epic story, the *Bṛhad-bhāgavatāmṛta*, and in the *Vaiṣṇava-toṣaṇī* commentary to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmin wrote on rituals and Jīva Gosvāmin set down the theology. These were men charged with creating the scriptures of a new religious movement, a task they fulfilled primarily by turning towards the authority of the past.

But it must be emphasised that we are not speaking about a slavish following of tradition. When dealing with the *itivr̥tta* or story of the play (12–13), Rūpa gives the ordinary three-fold division of “traditional”, “invented” and “mixed”, but then notes that invention is delightful in plays!⁷ This is a far cry from later and especially modern Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavism, where any invention is viewed with extreme suspicion (Broo 2003: 219–227). In the *Lalīta-mādhava*, where the story is mixed, Rūpa Gosvāmin takes such poetic license with the story of Kṛṣṇa and the *gopīs* (e.g. having Rādhā and her rival Candrāvalī reappear as the queens Satyābhāman and Rukmiṇī in Dvārakā) that later Vaiṣṇavas have had a hard time understanding whether or not the story should be seen as “true” (see Dasi 2001, Sridhar 2001: 176). With Kṛṣṇa placed right in the centre of it all, Rūpa Gosvāmin goes on to deal with the technicalities of the play in an intentionally un-original way. He drives his point home with his Kṛṣṇa-centered examples.

CONCLUSION

In terms of technical details, the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* adds little to Sanskrit aesthetics. Even later Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas have neglected it. A commentary to the text by eighteenth-century theologian Baladeva (Wright & Wright 1993: 184) is supposed to exist, but I have not been able to locate any printed edition of

7 *itivr̥ttam bhavet khyātam kṛptam mīśram iti tridhā/ śāstra-prasiddham khyātam syāt kṛptam kavivirmitam/ tayoh saṅkulatā mīśram kṛptam ramyaṁ tu nāṭake//* NC 12.

it. Even in the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja's hagiography from the early seventeenth century, where one of the main points is to have Caitanya present the philosophical and theological doctrines of the Vṛndāvana Gosvāmins in Bengali, the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* is quoted only once – exactly as often as the text it was expressly written against, Viśvanātha Kavirāja's *Sāhitya-darpaṇa*.

The *Nāṭaka-candrikā* really isn't a very important text, even within its own tradition. However, in terms of the overarching idea of making Kṛṣṇa the perfect hero of the play, around which everything revolves, it is revolutionary and an important part of Rūpa Gosvāmin's life project, continued in his more famous *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu* and *Ujjvala-nīlamanī*. He is creating a drama not only pleasing to Kṛṣṇa but in the service of Kṛṣṇa, a hero deemed so captivating that seeing or hearing about him will capture the heart of the audience. If the *Nāṭaka-candrikā* has fallen into near oblivion, that project lives on within Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism today.

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