PROJECT DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Vraja Nathadwara Prakalpa a project undertaken by Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana and Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts is dedicated to the study of the great cultural heritage of Vraja, a centre of Indian culture. We envisage the study of Vraja as an integrated unit which should consider the geographic and environmental parameters of the area, its social and economic history, as well as the artistic, ritualistic and devotional dimensions, in order to elucidate what it may be that provides the parameters of this centre. These dimensions give a body to the centre, yet at the same time, it needs a system of ideas to work as its driving spirit.

The Indian tradition is the worshipper of the absolute as *sat, cit* and *ānanda* or the *satya, śiva, sundara.* The cognitive awareness (*jñāna*), the volitional enterprise (*karma*) and the aesthetic experience (*ānanda*). Although absolute and non-dual in its own nature, the ultimate experience manifests differently due to variety in the nature of seekers. The Indian mind had understood the human nature through the categories of cognitive, conative and emotive—and predominance of one of these traits characterizes the person. The predominantly cognitive seekers travel on the path of *jñāna.* The more active conative beings follow *karma* and the emotive seekers take the route of *bhakti.* Despite the destination is common—the undifferentiated experience of ultimate; the same non-dual reality appears as absolute *sat*, absolute *cit* and absolute *ānanda*, respectively. This *sādhanā* or the journey is the process of uncovering the real from the unreal, via negativea; which tells us that knowledge is not not-knowledge (*ajñāna*), consciousness is not inert (*jaḍa*) and *ānanda* is not suffering (*duḥkha*).

The evaluation of the experience of the Absolute Knowledge, the Absolute Will and the Absolute feeling seems not possible. Logically speaking the cognitive process focusses upon the objective dimension of human experience. The experience of the Absolute Will is where the subject totally eclipses the object in the last analysis. But in the feeling mode a relational experience of subject with the object is a prerequisite, which exists even in the last analysis. Therefore, the path of feeling or *bhakti* includes object (knowledge) and subject (will) and transcends them both in its relational category.

Bhakti or devotional love is the way of directly encountering the *rasa* is the human experience. The aesthetic experience of *rasa* which is beginninglessly and constantly available to us was somehow not fully manifest and established from the "intellectual" point of view. Whether it is the hymns of the Vedas or the deliberations of the Upanisads, whether it is the poetic tradition of Kālidāsa or the Puranic tradition of Vedavyāsa, the *prema, bhakti* and *rasa* never stopped flowing; however, intellectually unaccomplished it remained. A glimpse of the *rasa* accomplishment is available in the encounter between Uddhava and Gopīs. After that encounter the wisdom of knowledge wanted to be a domicile of Vraja, the realm of *prema rasa.*

Humans, by nature, are rational and logical beings. They prefer logical conclusions which have universal applicability. To logically establish and communicate the path of *rasa* was the endeavour of the seekers and thinkers of Vrindavan which emerged as the distinguished 16th century intellectual, cultural, spiritual centre of the Vraja region. Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmin was a shining member of the Vrindavan Gosvāmin's club. For him the emotionally experienced *bhakti-prema-rasa* is equally knowable and communicable. The human *rasa* consciousness

could reach the ocean of *rasa* through Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmin's unique work, *Śrī Bhakti-rasāmṛtasindhu.*

The aesthetic experience of *rasa* is not only the *summum bonum* but also the human *raison d'etre.* If there is an experience it can be expressed and for an expression to be meaningful it had to be guided by a "grammar" or a *śāstra*. The communication and application of the sastric tradition enriches the artistic creativity in media which in turn enriches the sastric process. The famous trilogy of *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu, Ujjvalanīlamaṇi* and *Nāṭakacandrikā* of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmin provided for the first time a total *śāstra* of *bhakti-rasa*. In the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu,* the *bhakti-rasa* is totally uncovered and consecrated in its own right. The human intellect drank to its hearts content this pure, unadulterated *rasa* through this text. This comprehension gets manifested in the rich poetic, musical, dramatic, ritualistic and architectural traditions of the 16th century Vraja. We have covered some of these manifestations in the following Vraja Nathadwara Prakalpa studies: *Evening Blossoms—The temple tradition of Sanjhi in Vṛndāvana* (1996); *Govindadeva—A Dialogue in Stone* (1996); *In Favour of Govindadevji—Historical documents relating to a deity of Vṛndāvan and Eastern Rajasthan* (1999).

The Prakalpa is aware of a peculiar transitory moment in our scholastic history where the interpreters of the *śāstras* in Sanskrit are getting fewer by the day. Hence, it is imperative that this wisdom is made available to the future generations through translations in Indian languages and possibly also in English.

In the Vraja Nathadwara Prakalpa it is a major commitment to make available this wisdom of *rasa* tradition, the tradition of *Śrimad Bhāgavata* and the *Nāṭyaśāstra* of Bharat culminating to the text of *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* by Śri Rūpa Gosvamin. The late Dr. Premlata Sharma, an esteemed scholar of *rasa-śāstra*, undertook the responsibility of translating this famous *rasa* trilogy into Hindi. Fortunately before departing from this world Dr. Premlata Sharma had finished her work and it is being put together for press by her able successor, Dr. Urmila Sharma. Her Hindi translation of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* is being published as VNP Series No.3, the first volume of which was given a very appreciative scholarly reception. Her second and third volume of *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* are in press.

It was also felt that these works of Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmin be made available to the non-Hindi speaking world as well. We are grateful to Dr. David Haberman for fulfilling this need by undertaking the stupendous task of translating this definitive text on *bhakti-rasa* in to English. Any translation necessarily brings in the element of interpretation. In the realm of scholarship where interpretation is involved, differences of viewpoint will be natural and are even welcome. Hence, we have decided to include the original Sanskrit text in Devanagari for the discerning scholarly community. An exhaustive table of contents will also serve as an index to the volume. An exhaustive introduction on the author, text and methodology together with the endnotes, glossary and the bibliography will be found as useful tools.

We are pleased to present the English translation of the *Bhaktirasāmṛtasindhu* by Dr. David Haberman. This translation not only shows his academic capability but also brings out his being soaked in the *rasa paramparā*. Not his two decade long physical journeys in the forests of Vraja-Vrindavan but several of his well acclaimed published works on the cultural-spiritual traditions of Vraja bear witness to that.

Vasanta Pañcamī, 2056 SHRIVATSA GOSWAMI