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A Newly Discovered Fragment of the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan

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Keywords: Middle Bengali, Newar, Kathmandu

Abstract
Baru Candidas’ Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan (ŚKK), a collection of songs on Kṛṣṇa, is considered the earliest text in Middle Bengali. For a long time, only one manuscript has been available to scholars. Recently, however, a fragment which contains several songs parallel to the ŚKK was discovered in Kathmandu.

The Caryāpada, a collection of Tantric Buddhist hymns written in the old forms of the Eastern NIA dialects, is considered the oldest specimen of Old Bengali by Bengali scholars, while Baru Candidas’ Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan (abbr. ŚKK), which is the second oldest document in Bengali, represents the beginning of the linguistic stage of Middle Bengali. Also from the point of view of the history of Bengali literature, the Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan is a very important work, in that, being composed in the 14th century, it is a forerunner of the Bengali Vaishnava poems which have never ceased to enjoy general popularity in the Bengali-speaking areas up to modern times. In spite of being such an important document, only one manuscript has so far been available to us.

Recently, however, a possible fragment of the ŚKK was discovered in Kathmandu valley. The details of the discovery are as follows. When Makoto Kitada visited the Nepal Research Centre, Kathmandu, in March 2011, Kashinath Tamot told him that he had found a manuscript of songs in Bengali language, and that Candidas was mentioned as the author. He expressed his conjecture that these songs could be from the ŚKK. In August 2012, we worked together on this manuscript. As a result of that, this manuscript in fact turned out to be a genuine fragment of the ŚKK, although only a very small part of it. This article was written by Kitada with the permission of Tamot, and published under both of our names.

The information about this manuscript (abbr. MS) is: Manuscript No. 1-1696, Real No. B287/2, titled merely as ‘Rāga’, written in Newārī script. It contains 13 folios, but those which concern us are the first six-and-a-half folios (Fol. 1r-7r). The rest (Fol. 7v-13v) deals with a collection of fables in Newārī based on the Pāñcatantra, which has nothing to do with the former part of the manuscript.

1 For general information on Baru Candidas’ Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan, see Amitrasūdana Bhaṭṭācāryya 2011, Bidbadballabh 2007/2008 and Das 1988.
2 I would like to express my cordial thanks to Prof. Rahul Peter Das for his helpful suggestions.
3 In Prof. Tamot’s opinion, the style of letters is that of about the 16th to 17th centuries.
Folios 1r-7r consist of two parts:

1. Thirteen songs numbered from 14 to 27. They contain many linguistic features and expressions common to the ŠKK. At the top of each song, the name of the rāga and the name of the tāla are mentioned.

2. Songs Nos. 28 to 34 seem to originate from the opening scene of a drama in Bengali, in which the characters appear on the stage one after another, introducing themselves to the audience in song. The name of a king, Govindacanda who is mentioned suggests that this drama is a version of the Gopicandranātaka which used to be one of the very popular dramas performed in the Kathmandu valley. Expressions such as bangesvara rāja, bangero bhuvāpati (meaning ‘the king of Vaṅga/Bengal’) etc. hint at a certain connection of this drama with Bengal. The text breaks off abruptly.

Accurate deciphering of the manuscript is difficult. Newārī script is in many cases not completely free from obscurity and ambiguity. In Classical Newārī spelling, the distinction between dental and retroflex as well as the distinction between L and R in the NIA languages is not perfectly retained and is very often confused. I have the impression that the Newārī transcriber[s] was/were not able to understand the original language (an earlier stage of Middle Bengali) any more. All these make the text extremely hard to understand. Therefore, in this short article, I will confine myself to a few brief remarks.

Song No.16 in its bhanitā verse mentions Baru Caṇḍīdās as the author:

vāsariya rāṇa śire vamdiya āyiro vadu caṇḍīdāsa //16,7d

"Thus sang Baru Caṇḍīdās, [holding] Goddess Basali on his head [and] praising [her]." \(^5\)

This is parallel to the bhanitā verse of, e.g., ŠKK 131\(^6\):

bāsali śire bandī gāīlo caṇḍīdāsa //ŠKK 131,4d

"[Thus] sang Caṇḍīdās, [holding] Goddess Bāsali on his head [and] praising [her]."

Song No.15 contains parallels of ŠKK 105\(^7\). I first give the whole text of No.15 below\(^8\), then Amitrasūdan Bhattācārya’s version.

No.15
Rāga Pahariyā // Parimāna //

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\(^4\) Song No.14 (Bhatyārī, Jatī), No.15 (Pahariyā, Parimāna), No.16 (Korāba, Parimāna), No.17 (Bhatālī, Paritāra), No.18 (Śrī, Ekatālī), No.19 (Śrīrāga, Ekatālī), No.20 (Śrī, Raṅga (?) Jatī), No.21 (Rāga Varārī, Ekatālī), No.22 (Rāga Patamanjali, Paritāla), No.23 (Śrīrāga, Tāra Mātha Jatī), No.24 (Savali, Mātha Jatī), No.25 (Nāta, Rūpaka), No.26 (Nāta, Rūpaka).

\(^5\) The term rāna is unclear.


\(^8\) Words are not separately written in the manuscript, but here, separations are given according to our own provisional interpretation.
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The corresponding song, SKK 105 in Bhattacarya’s edition, runs as follows:

Desagaragah //

āti rūpasa padumini jāṭī dekhi thīra nahi mane /
tora birate cīta beākula moerī nā jiborī kenāmane //105,1
henaka bacana nā bola kāhnāninīrīrī tora bāpē nāhini nājī /
sōdara māūlānitā bhōle parilāhā dekhīrīnī rūpasa kāja //2
mādanabāne cīta beākula kībā ghosāsi māmī māmī /
michā kāje moke bhāndītērīnī cāho sakale jānīe āhmī //3
chāoyālā kāhnāninīnī bola na bujhīsī bujhīla tohmāra mātī /
morīn jē goālīnī ābālī rādhā na jānō raṅga suratī //4
āhmē se kāhnāninīnī goālə nāgara tohmāra būra bariśe /

nahuli yauvana āti susobhana surati deha hariśe //5
prathuna yauvana mudīta bhāndīrā tātā nā sambāc curī /
āhmāra yauvana kāla bhujāngama chuilerīnī khāilerīnī mārī //6
āhmē se kāhnāninīnī tohmē candrābāhī maraṇē tohmā nā chārtī /
tohmāra yauvana kāla bhujāngama āhmēho bhālə gārūṛī //7

nāgara kāhnāninīnī moke bigute āsēsa neāa juri /
koṇa bibudhī e hena pathe ānile dārūrī burhī //8

---

9 An unclear letter.
10 Unclear letters.
11 Or: caise?
12 Or: kācapū?
13 Or: supū?
This is a dialogue about a quarrel between Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā. For convenience, I quote the translation by Klaiman14:

“You’re so alluring, a natural seductress15. My heart quickens pace when I see you. / With your aloofness, my thoughts are untranquil. Oh, how can I go on surviving?”

“Krishna, don’t say things like this. You don’t have any modesty. Where are your parents?16 / You’ve merely spotted a juicy affair; you’re entranced by the wife of your uncle.”

“Why must you say, ‘I’m your aunt, I’m your aunt’? I’ve been driven insane by love’s goading. / Radha, you’re trying to use unfair means to elude me; I know all about it.”

“You’re a child, Krishna; you can’t understand what I’m saying. I see your intentions. / I am just Radha, a dairymaid; I’m very small. I know nothing of passion.”

“I’m dashing Krishna, your cowherd pursuer, and you are a twelve year old lady. / This is most lovely, your blossoming youth; you should gladly bestow it upon me.”

“My blooming youth is a treasure that’s sealed. There’s no possible way you could rob it. / I have a poisonous snake in this youth; if you touch and are bitten, you’ll perish!”

“I am your Krishna and you’re my Candrāvalī. Till I am dead I can’t leave you. / You say your youth is a poisonous snake – I’m an excellent venomist, Radha!”

“There is no end to these intricate arguments! Krishna’s too smart, he unnerves me. / What sort of folly induced that cruel Granny to have me approach by this pathway?”

“Look at your lover, bestow an embrace on me. Why are you overexcited? / How is your Granny at fault? It’s because of my merits that you have been brought here.”

“Milk that is hot can’t be drunk through a straw; when it is cooled, it is tasty for drinking. / Breasts which are starting to bud are like marmelos; no one enjoys them unripened!”

“When someone’s hungry for something, he couldn’t care less if it’s ripe or it isn’t. / He’ll eat it as he encounters it till all his hunger is gone, clever Radha!”

“Krishna, I’m looking you square in the eye and I’m warning you: better avoid me. / Even a tiger will not...”

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14 Klaiman 1984, p. 91. I do not necessarily agree with her interpretation in every single detail, but this will suffice for the moment, for a minute examination of the SKK is not the purpose of this article.

15 Padminī, i.e. women with the ideal beauty as mentioned in the Kāmasūstra.

16 Klaiman (ibid.) notes that the literal meaning is: “you have no shame from your parents.”
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eat a creature he meets face to face in the forest.”

“Beautiful Radha, discard your misgivings. Be pleased to agree to my wishes.”

It is obvious that MS song No.15 is closely connected with ŠKK 105, but, containing many variants, fails to agree with it word for word.

It must be noted that the ŠKK was originally orally recited. This fact raises the question, to what degree the written sources are reliable, while the texts orally handed down vary. It may be whether a collection of components of various origins, or the enlargement and alteration of a single kernel.

MS Song No.27 again has a bhanita verse in which the name Caṇḍīdās (caṇḍīdāse) appears, and contains many lines parallel to ŠKK 291. The text runs as follows:

rādhe // tīni kitana dadhi, torā hoyiveka kāta nā vudhi //27,1
kahnāyī, haivo mayi govārini jāti, morā gṛṇta duḍha utapati //2
rādhe, o torā do ṛjāvaisya māi uthi dayā curase //3
kahnāyī, kācaraṇ pākerokali, māi nahi jāne <su>17 rati murāri18 //4
rādhe, kāta vāṣāna19 se sati, paṁca puruse pohāyi rāti //5
kahnāyī, uceta paṁthera nāli, yībe vāṃchita tuyi he murāri //6
rādhe, sargga maṇḍa pāṭāre mu jāni, yībe ahmāke sati vāṣāni //7
kahnāyī, kaṃsāsura vada duruvāre, tehi sunire nahi ucāre //8
rādhe, kaṃsa vadhire ahme vāne, tave sādhivo māhādāni lo //9
kahnāyī, mūyi reki putanā māri, khāyire aje tīri vadhīya murāri //10
rādhe, māyi reki jānahi māli, tathī pāpa je nahi sundari //11
kahnāyī, khāyireki tanera khūra, ive vāla <vāra>20 vacana vīra //12
rādhe, piyara māi jānani rakṣāṃ lire, mora teja vasira śārire //13
kahnāyī, tohara mukha nahi cāhi, ati pāpeta kāla kahnāyī he //14
rādhya, ahmāke na patisc hāṃdhā, moke vudhi thāyiyō jāha vāṃdhā //15
kahnāyī, reho mora sāta sārihār21, moke vaḍāyi deho ekovāra //16
rādhe, deho moke surati simghāre, tave vaḍāyi dī[śā?]22 tuṅmāke //17
kahnāyī, dvāḍaśa vāriśe ahme nahi jāna, surati dhammāri he //18
rādhyā, māṭhāya guri phure tora khoyā23, ralaksaka mulelo //19
kahnāyī, yītuṇ cchāda paṭiyāse, kavi gīta gāyila caṇḍīdāse he //20

The corresponding verse, ŠKK 29124, runs as follows:

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17 This syllable is marked with a sign of deletion.
18 Or: suṁāri
19 I.e. bakhāna < Skt. vyākhyāna.
20 Marked with a sign of deletion.
21 Here is a virāma sign.
22 Extremely obscure.
23 Or: khopā
korāragah // kriṣṇa // laganī // daṇḍakāhy //
raudhā nītī bikānasī dadhī // torā hābe kata nā budhī //1
kāṃnāaḥī mhorī mo goḍalānī // mora budhī tora khetūmātī //2
raudhā / māthata gulālā phule // tora nahe se lākhēka mūle25 //3
bolāsi toṁ tutābacane // tāta nā lāge ātmāra mane //4
hoāṁ torō goḍalānārī // tohme eta barā āchidārī //5
nāhoī kāhna mo āchidārī // barā nilajā tohme murārī //6
raudhā tora thōrā nahe maṇe toke manda boloṛī tekāroṇe //7
kaṇṣa barā durūbāre // tāra bhae nibāroṛī tohmāre26 //8
kaṇṣa māriboṛī parāṇe // tabe sādhiboṛī āpaṇa maṇe27 //9
kālī khālaṁhī tohme khīre // āji bolāsi bāmāna bīre28 //10
kaḥāṁ rūtānārā khīre // tāra parāṇa harīloṛī śārīre //11
vadhīloṛī pūtanā nārī // tohme tīrūbāhī mūrārī29 //12
mār̥antāka ye nā māre // tāra pāṇi nā lae pītāre //13
tora mukha nāhiṁ cāhī // tohme ātī pāpiā kāṃnāārī //14
jūrīṁ hī pāṛhca bāne // āji lāboṛī tora parāṇe //15
tohme nā kara mora nirāṣe // gālā bāru caṇḍīdāse //16

I quote Klaiman’s translation31:
“Most of time you spend selling your produce. / How much intelligence you must have Radha!”
“Krishna, although I was born among cowherds, / I have my sense, while you’re addle-minded!”
“One hundred thousand’s the worth of your head with its blossoms of basil. / You haven’t the money!”
“You may address me with flattering comments; Still I’m not taken in by them, Krishna.”
“You’re completely intractable, Radha, / Even though you’re a dairyman’s daughter.”
“I’m not the one who’s intractable. Krishna. / You’re extremely audacious, Murārī.”
“You’re impulsive in temperament, Radha; / This is the reason I call you unworthy.”
“Kaṇṣa is very implacable, Krishna. / Since I’m afraid of him, I must resist you.”
“I am about to assassinate Kaṇṣa; / Then I’ll be able to salvage my honour.”
“Only a day ago, milk was your diet. / Now you proclaim you’re a hero, you midget!”
“While I imbibed Lady Pūtānā’s milk, I / Extracted the life from her body, my Radha.”
“Did you destroy Lady Pūtānā, Krishna? / Why, you have murdered a woman, Murārī!”
“Forefathers don’t accept votive oblations / From those who avoid killing murderous people.”

25 Corresponding to MS 27,19: rādhya, māthāya guri phure toṁ khoyā raḷaśaka mulelo.
26 Cf. MS 27,8, although its second half is different.
27 Corresponding to MS 27,9: rādhē, kaṃsā vadhīre ahme vāne. tave sādhiho māhādāni lo.
28 Corresponding to MS 27,12: kaḷṇāyī, khāṭīrekī tanera khīre, āye vola <vāra> ṭha vacana vāra.
29 Corresponding to MS 27,10: kaḷṇāyī, māyī rekī putānā mārī, khāṭīre aje tīrī vadhīya mūrārī.
30 Corresponding to MS 27,14: kaḷṇāyī, tohara mukha naḥi cāhī, aii pāpetā kāla kaḷṇāyī he.
31 Klaiman 1984, p.223f.
"I cannot look at your face any longer. / You are extremely unprincipled, Krishna."

"This very day, I'll discharge these five arrows / and snatch you away from the world of existence!"

"Don’t take away my serenity, Krishna!"

These are all the portions that have been elucidated so far. Although the language shows many linguistic features common to the ŠKK, many lines remain unclear because of the above mentioned difficulties. Nevertheless, many parallel expressions and lines are found, which suggest that these songs are from the ŠKK.

Song No.18, although not identified in the ŠKK, is one whose meaning is relatively clear:

Śrī // ekatāli //
antare antare gopi antare arangā / rāsa mandara kṣere devakinandane //dhru
kāhu deya āriṅgana kāhu deya cuṃbane / stane nakha ghāta deya adhara daṃsane //dhru
nivi visarccana kare kṛṣṇa rasa vase gagane apasaragana sayatnikhase //
rāsa mandare krḍā dekhe thira candra rāti bādhe kṛṣṇa rame candra kāma dhandhā //18

The gist would be:
"Inside , inside, cowgirls, [come] inside the court! / In the circle of the dance party (rāsa) plays (kṣere = khele) the son of Devaki (= Kṛṣṇa). He gives someone an embrace, gives someone a kiss, / [and] gives [someone] a scratch of nail in the breast, and [someone] a bite in the lips. // In the excess of desire (rasa-vase), he unties someone’s waist string. / In the sky, apsaras [??]?. // Seeing the play (krḍā = krāḍā) in the circle of the dance party, the moon is motionless, / Kṛṣṇa enjoys the night [??]. //"

As for MS Song Nos. 28 to 34, i.e. the second subdivision dealing with a drama scene, a question remains about what relation this drama has with the preceding Kṛṣṇa songs. Does it indicate that the Kṛṣṇa songs were sung before the drama began on the stage? Or, were the two texts without any connection put together in one manuscript? As pointed out in the beginning of this article, expressions like “the king of Bengal/Vāṅga” shows that this drama has a certain connection with Bengal. At the moment we are not able to give an adequate answer to this question without comparing this fragment with other manuscripts of the Gopicandranātaka preserved in the Kathmandu Valley. Whatever it may be, we will continue further investigations into this matter and our results will be published in the future.

Abbreviations
MS = manuscript  NIA = New Indo Aryan  ŠKK = Śrīkṛṣṇa-kīrtan

References
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ボル・チョンドーシュ (Baru Caṇḍīdāś) 作『クリシュナ讃歌』 (Śrīkṛṣṇakīrtan) は中期ベンガル語最初の作品である。今まで、写本はベンガル地方で一個しか見つかっていなかった。ところが最近になって、ネパール・カトマンドゥでこの作品の写本断片が発見された。本論文では、この写本断片を簡潔に記述し、そこに記載された歌詞のうち、二つを『クリシュナ讃歌』のものと同定した。