

Krishna's confidential cowherd boy friends

Introduction

Some time ago, I received from two well-known preachers an unsolicited message with the heading: Priya-narma sakhas are in madhurya-rasa and Rupanuga from Krishna Balaram Mandira. The end of the message read:

"[Priya-narma-sakhas] serve in madhurya-rasa under guidance of Rupa-manjari. Srila Swami Maharaja is of this category. Priya-narma-sakhas serve in madurya-rasa and are rupanuga. This is Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta from his own mouth. We follow Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta."

This message contradicted my understand both of shastra and of Srila Gurudeva's instructions, so I did some research. (I am not going to discuss Srila Prabhupada's svarupa. There is no point, because both the sakhya party and the madhurya party can both find evidence to support their point of view.)

I read the standard texts, and also consulted with other devotees to find out what is our Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta on these topics. I am indebted to them for their assurance and guidance. I found out that the priya-narma-sakhas are in fact much closer to Krishna and the gopis than I had previously understood, but they are still in sakhya-rasa, and not madhurya-rasa. Further, I confirmed that Srila Gurudeva strongly asserted that Srila Prabhupada is a manjari, and flatly denied that he is a priya-narma-sakha.

First of all, here are a few short quotations from çastra about priya-narma-sakhas.

General statements about sakhas and priya-narma-sakhas

[BRSB Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu-bindhu; CC MI Caitanya-caritamrita Madhya-lila; JD Jaiva-dharma; NoD Nectar of Devotion; RKGD Radha-Krsna-ganoddeça-dipika; UN Ujjvala-Nilamani]

Krishna has dear cowherd boyfriends in Vraja

Krishna has four kinds of cowherd boy friends in Vraja.

Those who are identical to Sri Krsna in terms of form, qualities and in dress, who are completely devoid of the constraints that are found in the servants and who are possessed of deep faith in Krsna imbued with intimacy, are known as vayasyas (friends). The vraja-vayasyas are described as follows in Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu (3.3.16):

Those who become perturbed when Krsna leaves their sight for even a moment, who always play with Him and who hold Him as dear as life, are the vraja-vayasyas. For these reasons they are foremost among all the friends of Krsna. [BRSB 220]

Priya-narma-sakhas are the best of all the friends

There are other friends who are still more confidential. They are called priya-narma, or intimate friends. Counted among the priya-narma friends are Subala, Arjuna, Gandharva, Vasanta and Ujjvala. The degree of intimacy shared by Krsna and Subala can be understood by the fact that the talks between them were so confidential that no one else could understand what they were saying. [NoD 41]

This is confirmed in BRSB 222 and JD 633-634.

Priya-narma-sakhas help in Krsna's amorous pastimes

The priya-narma-sakhas know the most confidential secrets of Krsna's pastimes with the gopis.

Their love for Krsna is almost as intense as the gopi's love. [Ujjvala-nilamani]

There are no confidential topics whatsoever about which these priya-narma-sakhas do not know. (RKGD 42)

The special prerogative of the priya-narma-sakhas is to assist in Krsna's madhura-lila. Like dasas, they decorate Krsna with forest flowers and render service such as fanning Him. [JD 633]

The priyanarma-sakhas deliver messages to the Vraja kisoris. They approve of the Vraja kisoris' love for Krsna. When the Vraja kisoris quarrel with Krsna, the priyanarma-sakhas take Krsna's side, but when the kisoris are absent, they are expert in supporting the side of the yuthesvari of whom they have taken shelter. They also whisper secret messages in Krsna's ear. These are the anubhavas that are unique to the priyanarma-sakhas. [BRSB 231]

The following example is sometimes cited as an example of Subala serving Radha and Krsna in a very intimate way, although Ujjvala-Nilamani does not actually name the particular gopi concerned.

Subala is described in the following statement where Rupa-manjari says to her gopi-friend: Then, when this gopi quarreled with Krsna and left Him, Subala met her, satisfied her with his words, and convinced her to return and enjoy amorous pastimes with Krsna in the forest-cottage. After Their pastimes were concluded, and Krsna rested His perspiring body on His beloved's breast, Subala fanned Him. What service is this Subala not qualified to perform? [UN]

Message from Krishna Balaram Mandir

Now we will go through the message the two preachers sent me, with appropriate comments.

[KB title] Priya-narma sakhas are in madhurya-rasa and Rupanuga from Krishna Balaram Mandira From Krishna-Balaram Mandir

This title immediately raises two questions. (1) Are priyanarma-sakhas really in madhurya-rasa? (2) Are priyanarma-sakhas really rupanuga? We will answer these questions from shastra.

(1) Are priyanarma-sakhas really in madhurya-rasa?

Priya-narma-sakhas are in sakhya-bhava

Our scriptures make it clear that, despite their involvement in Krsna's amorous pastimes, and their absorption in sakhi-bhava, the priya-narma-sakhas are in sakhya-rasa. Verse 20 of BRSB describes priya-narma-sakhas as asrayalambana (the shelter) of sakhya-rati and JD 679 confirms this.

O Lalita and Vishakha! O Sridama, Subala and other friends in sakhya-rasa! Be merciful to me now! [Narottama Thakura - Hari! Hari! Kabe mora hoibe sudina!]

One attains sakhya-bhava by following priya-narma-sakhas

Since the priya-narma-sakhas are in sakhya-rasa, one may attain sakhya-rasa (and not madhurya-rasa) when one follows them.

One whose ruci is towards sakhya-rasa serves Krsna by following the bhava (sentiment) and ceta (endeavors) of one of Krsna's priya-sakhas such as Subala. [JD 535]

This is confirmed in JD 537, 819, and in NOD 16.

Madhurya-rasa is between Krsna and the gopis

It is also clear from the scriptures that madhurya-rasa is only possible between Krsna and the gopis. Kama-rupa bhakti "is only found in the female residents of Vraja." [JD 530]

The only ones who are situated in the madhurya-rasa of Goloka are the vraja-ramanis. [JD 669]

This is confirmed in JD 532, 610, 641, 706; in BRSB 191, 231; and in CC MI 19 183-184.

The reason why madhurya-rasa is only for those with a female spiritual body is obvious:

On the platform of conjugal love, the devotee offers his body in the service of the Lord. Thus on this platform the transcendental qualities of all five rasas are present. [CC MI 19.232]

Priya-narma-sakhas are eligible for madhurya-rasa to some extent

In Jaiva-dharma, after Brajanath had realised his svarupa in sakhya-rasa as an assistant to Subala, Gosvami Maharaja prepared to speak about madhurya-rasa. Brajanath was somewhat apprehensive, but Gosvami Maharaja reassured him.

Gosvami: The priya-narma-sakhas are eligible for srngara-rasa to some extent. I will keep your qualification in mind and speak whatever is appropriate for you, and I will say nothing unsuitable.

[JD 641]

Gosvami Maharaja then spoke generally and not at all confidentially, which shows that priya-narma-sakhas are not such confidential participants, and cannot (for example) follow Sri Rupa Manjari in all respects.

Priya-narma-sakhas may experience the ecstasy of amorous love as part - and not as the whole - of their mood

In another statement, Subala is addressed thus: "My dear Subala, the damsels of Vrindavana who had the opportunity of enjoying Krsna's kissing must be the foremost of all the fortunate women in the world." In this example, the ecstasy of fraternal devotional service is the whole, and the ecstasy of conjugal love is the part.

Conclusion

It is evident from the above that priya-narma-sakhas are in sakhya-rasa, and not madhurya-rasa, and that one who follows them attains sakhya-rasa. They are eligible for madhurya-rasa and mahabhava only to some extent, not fully, and their experience of madhurya-rasa is a part within the whole of their main mood of sakhya-bhava.

(2) Are priya-narma-sakhas rupanuga?

Priya-narma-sakhas are not rupanuga

Priya-narma-sakhas sometimes serve Srimati Radhika, but that does not mean that they are rupanuga in the sense of following Sri Rupa Manjari. Anuga means "following" and it also means "constantly", so to be rupanuga, one must have the same mood and nature as Sri Rupa Manjari, and one must be with her all the time, following her in every respect. The priya-narma-sakhas do not fulfil these conditions. For one thing, they have a different permanent relationship (sthayi-bhava) with Krsna; priya-narma-sakhas are in sakhya-bhava, whereas Sri Rupa Manjari and others in manjari-bhava relate primarily with Radha, and only secondarily with Krsna, through Radha, and as Her Beloved. The manjaris spend most of their time with Srimati Radhika, unlike the priya-narma-sakhas, who spend much of their time with Krsna. [See Vraja-vilasa-stava 22, and NoD 42]

Priya-narma-sakhas help all the gopis

Another difference between Sri Rupa Manjari and the priya-narma-sakhas is that Sri Rupa Manjari's mood and permanent relationship is specifically to Srimati Radhika, rather than to Krsna. However, the priya-narma-sakhas help in Krsna's amorous pastimes with all the gopis, not just Srimati Radhika and Her party.

One gopi addressed Radharani thus: "My dear Krsangi [delicate one], just see how Subala is whispering Your message into Krsna's ear, how he is delivering the confidential letter of Syama-dasi silently into Krsna's hand, how he is delivering the betel nuts prepared by Palika into Krsna's mouth, and how he is decorating Krsna with the garland prepared by Taraka. Did you know, my dear friend, that all these most intimate friends of Krsna are always engaged in His service in this way?" [NoD 41]

When there is competition between Krsna and the gopis, Sri Rupa Manjari will side exclusively with Radha, whereas the priya-narma-sakhas side with Krsna against the gopis.

After the Holi festival, Madhumangala loudly shouted, "Hee! Hee! O Subala and my friends, we have won! Today Krsna has broken the pride of the famous daughter of King Vrsabhanu." [Ananda-vrindavana-campu 229]

Priya-narma-sakhas can have mahabhava, but not the adirudha-mahabhava of Radha's group

The rati of the narma-vayasa associates reaches up to anuraga, but the rati of Subala and others reaches up to mahabhava. [JD 753]

See also Ujjvala-mani-kirana 46.

Priya-narma-sakhas cannot have the adirudha-mahabhava of Radha's group

Adhirudha-mahabhava is seen only in Srimati Radhika's group. [Ujjvala-nilamani-kirana 46]

[The Krishna Balaram preachers continue] Priya-narma-sakhas are in Madhurya-rasa and are Rupanuga from Srila Gurudeva's actual words, with tape references: 1. 19931212_13

SB10_31_15_16 CONT SBSSP DISP WITH SDG TAPE 7 (from 33:00) "...without Rupa-manjari we cannot serve Radhika.

The logic here is presumably: (1) We cannot serve Radhika without Rupa Manjari; (2) the priya-narma-sakhas serve Radhika; (3) therefore they are rupanuga. This argument is very weak.

It is true that to serve Radhika fully as a surrendered maidservant, one must be rupanuga, under the

guidance of Rupa Manjari. However, there are also many who serve Radhika in some capacity, but who are definitely not rupanuga. We will come to this point again a little later.

[Srila Gurudeva continues] "There are also - you know that Subala, Sridama, they are priya-narma-sakha - Ujjvala. They are inclined to Srimati Radhika and they are pleased if Radhika and Krsna meets. But there are some also cowherds, priya-narma-sakha for Candravali. Those who plea- But Prabhupada was very, very much inclined to Srimati Radhika in favor of rupanuga. He was rupanuga."

Presumably, the KB preachers are using this passage to assert that Prabhupada is not one of Candravali's priya-narma-sakhas, but one of Radhika's rupanuga priya-narma-sakhas. Again the argument is extremely weak, and is nullified by Srila Gurudeva's other statements:

"Our all Rupanuga Acaryas are manjaris.;"

"All who are under the guidance of Sri Rupa Manjari are her manjari sakhis."

[Again quoting Srila Gurudeva] 2. 19921120_21BOMBAY SB 10_31_8 CONT NOV 20 EKADASI TALK IN SRILA PRABHUPADAS ROOM P1.MP3 (from 01:26:40) "...that they used to know that - only they could guess that he is only of sakhya-rasa. When i heard I got so much pain in my heart that they are not feeling these things accurately. So I should make them in faith - in full - that full conception - that he was in madhura-rasa."

Srila Gurudeva says that Srila Prabhupada is in madhurya-rasa, and now the KB preachers give their commentary to make Srila Gurudeva's statement fit their own preconception that Srila Prabhupada is a priya-narma-sakha.

[The Krishna Balarama preachers continue:] Srila Gurudeva was pained that Srila Swami Maharaja's disciples did not realize his special connection with Srimati Radhika, believing that he was 'only' of sakhya-rasa, as an ordinary cowherd boyfriend of Sri Krsna. The full conception, however, is that some priya-narma-sakhas are inclined to Srimati Radhika's seva.

Yes, it is true that some priya-narma-sakhas are inclined to Radhika's seva, but that does not mean they are in madhurya-rasa, as we have seen.

[The Krishna Balarama preachers continue:] Srila Rupa Gosvami explains in Radha-Krsna-ganodesa-dipika (198) they are "Radhika dasa"

This verse mentions a whole assortment of people who serve Radhika in various ways. They include brahmanis; associates in dasya-rasa; vitas (another category of sakha, who are definitely in sakhya-rasa [see JD 679]); and Gandharva, who is not a priya-narma-sakha, but one of the priya-sakhas, who are also definitely in sakhya-rasa. These associates are obviously not all in madhura-rasa, and so cannot be rupanuga.

Furthermore, this verse is part of a section entitled "Sri Radha's servants", which mentions various maidservants; messengers who are older than Radha; young Pulinda girls (some in Krsna's group); and Her cow, calf, swan, peacock, and parrots. They are all said to serve Sri Radha, but they are not all rupanuga.

[The Krishna Balarama preachers continue:] The preachers go on to say: "... and in Ujjvala-nilamani (2.14 - 15) that they have 'sakhi-bhava.'"

Other shastras also mention that the priya-narma-sakhas have sakhi-bhava. The priyanarma-sakhas are engaged in extremely confidential services and are possessed of a very special bhava (sakhi-bhava). [BRBSB 222]

This means that they have taken shelter of the bhavas of the gopis.

[Priya-narma-sakhas] are privy to extremely confidential secrets and have taken shelter of the bhavas of the sakhis. [JD 679]

Subala is most expert in arranging meetings between Sri Radha and Sri Krsna. He has taken shelter of sakhi-bhava (amorous love) and is endowed with various good qualities which bring joy to Krsna. (RKGD 44-45)

However, taking shelter of the moods of the gopis does not mean that the priya-narma-sakhas become gopis, or that they are in madhurya-rasa. Priya-narma-sakhas have sakhi-bhava, but they do not act as sakhis; rather, they assist Krsna's pastimes with the sakhis, as explained in BRSB:

In other words they perform confidential services for the preyasis (lovers) of Sri Krsna, they assist Krsna in meeting with the preyasis and they desire to give pleasure to them. [BRSB 222]

[The Krishna Balarama preachers continue:] Therefore, they can make Sri Radha-Krsna's flower bed, and when Sri Krsna is perspiring in the kunjia they can fan him. When Radharani is in mana and leaves the kunjia they pacify Her and bring Her back.

The verse from Ujjvala-nilamani that they are quoting here does not actually say who the gopi is with whom Krsna is having pastimes. The Krishna Balaram preachers have inserted her name in the passage.

[The Krishna Balaram preachers continue:] They [priya-narma-sakhas] serve in madhurya-rasa under guidance of Rupa-manjari. Srila Swami Maharaja is of this category.

It may be that priya-narma-sakhas sometimes come under the guidance of Sri Rupa Manjari (I have not read this in shastra), but they certainly do not serve in madhurya-rasa. In any case, the statement "Srila Swami Maharaja is of this category" is completely false, because there is literally no such category. The category of rupanuga priya-narma-sakhas in madhurya-rasa is an empty category that they have concocted themselves. It is not just a false category; it is simply a contradiction in terms.

[The Krishna Balaram preachers conclude:] Priya-narma-sakhas serve in madurya-rasa and are rupanuga. This is Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta from his own mouth. We follow Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta.

Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta

The question now arises, "Are the Krishna Balaram preachers really following Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta? What is his siddhanta in this connection?"

Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta in this connection is as follows.

1. Srila Prabhupada is in madhurya-rasa as a gopi, and specifically as a manjari, as are all our Rupanuga acaryas.

Srila Swami Maharaja and my Gurudeva are both serving there in their female forms as gopis. Our all Rupanuga Acaryas are manjaris.

2. Srila Prabhupada is definitely not a priya-narma-sakha.

Devotee: It is okay for a particular disciple whose sthayi-bhava may be in sakhya-rasa to see Srila Prabhupada as a priya-narma cowherd boy?

Srila Narayana Gosvami Maharaja: Someone can think like that if he desires, but he is quite wrong – wrong, and wrong, and wrong. Actually, pujyapada Srila Bhaktivedanta Svami Maharaja has come in the line of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu and Srila Rupa Gosvami, so he must be like them. He has written this in his books. [Walking with a Saint, 2008, p. 238, 239]

Any Acarya who is a follower of Sri Rupa is never in sakhya-rasa [whereas priya-narma-sakhas are].

3. Only manjaris can be rupanuga.

All who are under the guidance of Sri Rupa Manjari are her manjari sakhis.

4. Priya-narma-sakhas are in sakhya-rasa, and those who follow them are raganuga, and not rupanuga.

Those who follow Srila Rupa Gosvami's Bhakti-rasamrita-sindhu under the guidance of the sakhas, like Subala, Sridama and all others like them, desiring to serve Lord Kṛṣṇa like them, will also not be called rupanuga. They will be called raganuga.

5. Priya-narma-sakhas can understand and participate in the pastimes in madhurya-rasa to a limited extent.

Some sakhās, such as Madhumaṅgala, Subala Sakhā, Kokila, Bhr̥ṅga, and other priya-narma-sakhās, who have a semblance of mahābhāva, only assist these pastimes of Śrī Kṛṣṇa from a distance, because they are also forbidden to enter the kunjās. On the other hand, all the gopīs can enter the kunjās. [Coming second edition of Origin of Rathayatra, as translated from the Hindi Jagannatha Rathayatra, Chapter 10]

Even Yaśodā-maiyā does not know about these confidential pastimes. Only Yogamāyā Paurṇamāsī-devī, Vṛndā-devī, Dhaniṣṭhā, and Kundalātā etc. know of them. Śrī Kṛṣṇa's priya-narma-sakhās such as Subala and Madhumaṅgala know something about them, but even then, they do not have entrance into those pastimes. [ibid.]

They have "a semblance of mahabhava", whereas we have already seen that gopis have mahabhava, and those in Radhika's group have adhirudha-mahabhava.

Final conclusion

I found out that the conjectures in the message that I had received were quite false. They completely contradicted standard shastras, such as Jaiva-dharma and Bhakti-rasamrita-sindu-bindhu, on simple points regarding the position of the priya-narma-sakhas.

The message also misrepresented the teachings of our Srila Gurudeva in a vain attempt to show that their teachings correspond to his, or his to theirs. They wrote, "This is Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta from his own mouth. We follow Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta." In fact, it was very far from "Srila Gurudeva's siddhanta from his own mouth."

The honest course of action for the Krishna Balaram preachers will be to declare openly that they do not regard our Srila Gurudeva as authoritative where there appears to be a difference between what he says and what their shiksha-guru (who also happens to be a sannyasa disciple of our Gurudeva) says. This will be difficult for them, because they want to use Srila Gurudeva's sanga as a source of potential recruits.

Those who have really taken shelter of our Srila Gurudeva must remember his instruction: "Guru-nishtha is the backbone of bhakti." The first business of a preacher is to help the devotees increase their faith in their Gurudeva. Following Srila Rupa Gosvami's advice, we like to associate with those who do so, and we avoid the association of those who reduce our faith in our Gurudeva.

