

# Śrī Śrī Viṣṇuprīya Devi



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The world-renowned poet Rabindranāth Tagore has said that Urmila, Anasuya, Priyamvada and Citralekha are famous personalities in our history whose biographies have been neglected. Although Rabindranāth's observation is true, there is another important person in our history who has been neglected - Devi Viṣṇuprīya is not mentioned in our Gosvāmi śāstras. Viṣṇuprīya is Gaurāṅga's *prāna-priyatama* (most dearly beloved) - she is equal to Him in beauty and virtue.

Madana-mohana Gaura is more attractive than millions of Cupids, and to Priyājī He is dearer than millions of lives. Nevertheless She willingly accepted great distress and hardship upon Herself to bid Prabhu farewell for the sake of *jīva-uddhāra*, His saving the *jīvas* .

Viṣṇuprīya became a *sannyāsini* at home, and performed greater *tapasya* than most *sannyasis* are able to perform:

*prabhura viccheda nidra tyajila netrete  
kadacit nidra haile sayana bhumite  
kanaka jiniya anga – se ati Malina  
krsnacaturdasira sarira praya khina*

"In her husband's *viraha* *devi* Viṣṇuprīya gave up sleep; yet in accepting a moment's rest She would lie on the ground. Her complexion outmatches the luster of gold - yet she neglected to look after Herself. Due to fasting She became thin; Her body appeared like the last visible sliver of the moon." (*Bhakti Ratnākara*)

*Bhaktiratnākara* continues :

*harinama sankhya purna tandula karaya  
se tandula paka kari prabhuke arpaye  
takari kinchinmatra karaye bhakhana*

“While chanting her quota of *japa* Viṣṇupriya counted with grains of rice. At the day's end She cooks the rice and offers the bhoga to Her Prabhu. In accepting a morsel of those remnants, She maintained her life.”



It is a cause for sadness that *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, *Caitanya Bhāgavata* and the *Gosvāmī śāstras* don't narrate about Viṣṇupriya's hardship as a *sannyāsīnī*. The *Caitanya Bhagavata* mentions the distress of Śaci and the *bhaktas* after Nimāi's *sannyāsa* but it doesn't mention one word about Priyājī. In the *Gosvāmī śāstras* we we find many stories of important and less important *bhaktas*, yet nobody has described Viṣṇupriya's life of renunciation and *bhajan* for our welfare. What is the reason?

Perhaps someone will answer: The *Gosvāmīs* have described Gaurāṅga as having the complexion and the mood of Srimati Rādhārāni. In Gaurāṅga's *Rādhā-bhāva līlā* He sees Himself as Rādhā – and sees Kṛṣṇa as His beloved. Hence, in Rādhā's mood, He is the '*āśraya*' (shelter) of Kṛṣṇa's love. He never becomes the '*viṣaya*' (enjoyer) like Kṛṣṇa. But reversely, in Viṣṇupriya's relationship with Gaurāṅga, She is the '*āśraya*' and He is the '*viṣaya*'. So Gaurāṅga's becoming

the '*viṣaya*' in their relationship is a disturbance to Gaurāṅga's *Rādhā-bhāva* where He assumes the position of the '*āśraya*'. This is the reason why the *Gosvāmīs* have omitted writing about Viṣṇupriya.

If we accept the above-mentioned logic it still doesn't present a satisfactory reason for why the *Gosvāmīs* have omitted Viṣṇupriya, for they have not limited their writings to Gaurāṅga *madhura-rasa* alone. Prabhu is the '*viṣaya*' for Mother Śaci's *vātsalya-prema*; and she doesn't see Gaurāṅga as Rādhā or see Him in the position of '*āśraya*'. Yet the *Gosvāmīs* have written extensively about her. The same holds true for Gaurāṅga's *sakhya* and *dāsyā-rasa āśrita bhaktas*; in their relationship with Gaurāṅga they also relate to him as the '*viṣaya*'. Yet their inability to see Gaurāṅga in the '*āśraya*' position hasn't influenced the *Gosvāmīs* to refrain from writing about them.

So why have the *Gosvāmīs* omitted writing about Viṣṇupriya? Indeed, the reason is very hard to understand. I certainly feel that to exclude Viṣṇupriya's topics from our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava literature renders it incomplete. Devi Viṣṇupriya is a bright star in our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava universe; by removing this star, the sky's lustre fades .

What hurts the most? Because the *Gosvāmī śāstras* haven't narrated about Viṣṇupriya, the worshippers of Gaurāṅga in *Rādhā-bhāva* often conclude that Viṣṇupriya's worship is improper – they sometimes even fail to respect Her. Perhaps they do not know who Śrimati Priya is? Do they know that Viṣṇupriya is *bhakti-svarūpīnī* (*Prema-bhakti*) Herself? Do they not know that without *Bhakti-svarūpīnī's kṛpā*, *Bhakti-rānī* will never take her seat in our hearts? And do they not know

that because *Bhakti-svarūpini* Viṣṇupriya desired to spread Her auspices to benedict our human society, we have been fortunate to receive Gaurāṅga?

It is true that the Gosvāmīs have neglected to write about Viṣṇupriya, yet nowhere have they disrespected her. So in our present Vaiṣṇava world we certainly hope that *bhaktas* do not inherit an element of disrespect for Priyājī . For such a mood will create a serious *aparādha* .

It is a cause for joy that nowadays Viṣṇupriya's *bhajan* is increasing in popularity. And not simply in a dry way – the *jugal-upāsana* of Viṣṇupriya and Gaurāṅga is beginning to spread. Perhaps it is Mahātma Śiṣira Kumāra Ghoṣa who has inaugurated this trend. If so, we will surely recognize his valuable contribution. Śiṣira Bābā has given a lot to improve our Bengali culture – but the worship of Viṣṇupriya and Gaurāṅga is his foremost gift .

Two reasons why many Vaiṣṇavas oppose Gaura Viṣṇupriya's *jugal-upāsana* are :

- this worship isn't mentioned in the Gosvāmī *śāstras*
- in such worship Viṣṇupriya is the *kānta-bhāva's 'āśraya'* and Gaura is the '*viṣaya*'.

In Viṣṇupriya's worship Gaura is the *kānta* or *nāgara*. This is disturbing for the *bhaktas* who desire to worship him in *Rādhā-bhāva*. In my opinion, however, I don't think that the above-mentioned points offer a just reason for us to oppose Viṣṇupriya and Gaurāṅga *upāsana* .

First, because the Gosvāmī *śāstras* don't mention Viṣṇupriya and Gaurāṅga's worship, does this mean that Their worship is unauthorized? No. The Gosvāmīs haven't written about the worship of Lakṣmī-Nārāyaṇa, Sītā-Rāma or Pārvatī-Śiva either; on this basis shall we dare to say that these forms of worship go against the scriptures? Śrī Bhagavān is *Ananta-rūpa* and *Ananta-bhāva*, he has infinite forms with infinite moods. Anyone can receive Śrī Bhagavān's *krpā* by adopting the appropriate *bhāva* to worship the form of their choice. Śrīmatī Viṣṇupriya-devī is Bhagavan Śrī Gaurāṅga's *antaraṅga-śaktī*. The worship of Śrī Bhagavān and his consort as *śaktī* and *śaktīmāna* is an eternally established *śāstric* tradition. Therefore Viṣṇupriya and Gaurāṅga's *jugal-upāsana* fits the *śāstric vidhi* .

The second objection, that Gaurāṅga's *kānta-bhāva* or *nāgara-bhāva* is distracting to His *svarūpa*-identity in *Rādhā-bhāva*, is also baseless. Now please hear my submission:

In the Gosvāmī *śāstras* Gaura is described to be of Rādhā's *bhāva* and complexion. Because He is Kṛṣṇa, all of Kṛṣṇa's traits and *bhāvas* are within Him – plus Rādhā's *bhāva*. He hasn't given up Kṛṣṇa's nature to become Gaura. Rather, when Rādhā's *bhāva* takes prominence, His Kṛṣṇa-*bhāva* as the enjoyer becomes *pracchanna* (hidden). Although Gaura accepts the *āśraya* position in Rādhā *bhāva*, His mood as Vṛndābaṇa's '*viṣaya*' still remains *pracchanna* inside. Narahari Sarkāra, Vāsudeva Ghoṣa and many other Navadvīpa-*bhaktas* have detected this *rāsamaya* mood in Gaura and brought it out. These *bhaktas* are the *Nāgarīs*, and they worship Gaura as having the *nāgara* trait that we find in Kṛṣṇa. In such *kānta-bhāva* worship, Gaura is the *viṣaya* and they are the *āśraya*. Śrīla Prabhodānanda Sarasvatī addresses Gaurāṅga as: '*viśvambhara nāgarendra, viṣṇupriyeṣa gaura*' - 'Viṣṇupriya's sweetheart and the Lord of all *nāgaras* (romantic heroes).'

In *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*, Kṛṣṇa dāsa Kavirāja hints about Gaurāṅga's *pracchanna nāgara* trait in many places. So Gaurāṅga factually does relish both the *āśraya* and the *viṣaya* modes of *madhura rāsa*. In our failure to acknowledge this *tattva*, we are ultimately failing to accept Śrī Gaurāṅga's supremacy as the *Avatāri*, *Pūrṇa Bhagavān* and the *Paratattva-simā* whom the Gosvāmīs depict. Because Gaurāṅga is *Pūrṇa Bhagavān* – Rāma, Nṛsimha, Varāha, Kṛṣṇa and every other Bhāgavat-*svarūpa* lie

*pracchanna* within Him. And at specific times He has shown his *bhaktas* such forms, what to speak of showing them the forms of Rukmini and Bhagavati-Devi. Although Gaura is Kṛṣṇa with Rādhā's complexion and *bhāva*, it is easy for Him to manifest those previously mentioned Bhāgavat-*svarūpas*. And similarly, it is easy and natural for Him to take the *rāsa's viṣaya* role for the *bhaktas* who view Him in *kānta-bhāva*. Hence, the second assertion that Viṣṇuprīya's worship is a disturbance to Gaurāṅga's Rādhā-*bhāva* is baseless .

Because Gaurāṅga's mood changes from moment to moment, and because each of His *bhāvas* are *nitya* (eternal), we find a rich diversity in various modes of worship in our Gauḍīya *sampradāya*. Thus let us not be stereotyped and limit our conception. If we criticize a particular mode of worship as being unauthorized because it doesn't conform with our particular taste, this doesn't show our progressive advancement (*niṣṭhā*). Rather, it becomes a sign of our blatancy (*dṛṣṭāta*). We can imbibe a lesson from Mother Ganges; *Patita-pāvana* Gaṅga flows in her course from the Himalayas to the sea. Along this long stretch one can bathe at any place to receive spiritual purification. Yet wouldn't it sound absurd if one group were to argue with another group saying: “Only those who bathe at our *ghāṭa* will become purified”?

It is sad that this kind of blind sectarianism plagues our Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya*.