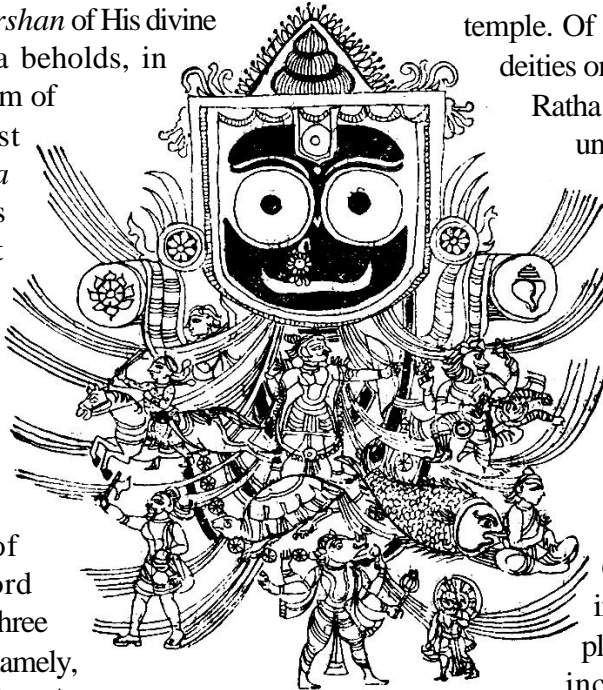


## ‘Mote sehi rupa dekha-a Hari’: Divine Longings of Salabega and Arjuna

Dr. Bibhudutt Dash

This paper makes a comparative study of the impassioned longings of Salabega and Arjuna for a vision of God. References are made to “Mote sehi rupa dekha-a Hari,” a devotional song by Salabega and to the Eleventh Chapter of *Srimad Bhagvad Gita* where we find Arjuna beseeching Sri Krishna to have a *darshan* of His divine manifestations. Arjuna beholds, in reality, the awesome form of God, and the most yearned for Vishnu *rupa* whereas Salabega’s longing continues, but what is central to both is their earnestness in supplication and absolute surrender to the Almighty.

Salabega’s song evokes pictures of incarnations of Lord Vishnu—in particular, three incarnations out of ten, namely, the Vamana Avatar, the Ram Avatar, and the Krishna Avatar. In addition to these *rupas* which the poet longs to see, he also wishes for hearing the enticing, mellifluous music of the Lord’s flute, and having a *darshan* of the *chaturddha murati* (the holy trinity along with Lord Sudarsan)

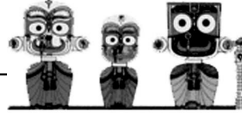


in the sanctum sanctorum of Sri Mandir at Puri. It may seem slightly intriguing as to why the poet wishes to see these three Avatars and not all, but his passionate wish to see the deities on the *ratna vedi* may have arisen out of the deprivation faced as a non-Hindu being denied access to the temple. Of course, Salabega sees the deities on the chariots on the day of Ratha Yatra, but the fact of being unable to see them inside the temple must have saddened him very much.

As Sri Krishna makes it clear in *Gita* that whenever time exacts an incarnation, He comes to annihilate the evil, to deliver the good and to restore *dharma*, or the moral order. While in some incarnations He appears in pleasant forms, in some other incarnations such as

Narasimha, Parasurama and Kalki,

He manifests in divine fury. Salabega’s wish to have a sight of the three Avatars, mentioned in his poem, may not be a studied choice on his part, but a simple wish as such since all the



manifestations of the Lord are essentially one and the same.

Salabega's desire to hear the melody of Krishna's flute that entranced Sri Radha and the *gopis* conceals his personal wish to experience the selfsame captivation. His entreaties to Krishna to show him this graceful figure of playing the flute is a mark of his intensity of prayer where the desire to see His many forms is but a devotee's natural, ardent wish. What is important is the poet's supplication to God to reincarnate—just for him !

In praying to God to show him the Vamana Avatar, Salabega is overwhelmed with God's plan to crush the overweening pride of Bali and he stands in amazement at His mercifulness in choosing to be a guard at the door of Bali whom he pushed to the netherworld. What Salabega hints at is this: while God knows how to punish, He also knows how to bless. Strange are His ways!

Salabega's wish to see the incarnations of God is based on a prayer that exudes innocence, and it is very deep and moving:

*Mote sehi rupa dekha-a Hari.*

*Jaya Sri Radhe dake bansari.*

*Jeun rupe Bali dware hela bhikari.*

*Tripade dana nei Bali ki patale thoi*

*Tenu kari Shukra mantra nayanare kusha vari.*

(Show me that form of yours, O, Hari! when you played the flute calling, O, Radhe! That form of yours when you incarnated as Vamana to humble the proud Bali and blessed him with your eternal company. Show me that *rupa*, O, Hari !).

Another wish of Salabega is to see God in His incarnation as Sri Ram, who, victimized by the machinations of Kaikeyi went on exile with wife Sita and brother Laxman. The poet is

disturbed to think the pain his Lord must have undergone and the tribulations faced in rescuing Sita from Ravan. His love for God is strengthened by his power of empathy since he attempts to feel the anguish of Ram in exile. Salabega's wish to see the Ram Avatar is backed by a wondrous eagerness to see his beloved Lord who could also fall a victim to the vagaries of chance! Far from entertaining thoughts of any divine susceptibility to the capricious turns of fate, the poet only longs to see that form of God who manifested in Him all goodness as the *Purushottama*.

Salabega's desire to see the Krishna Avatar is his wish to rejoice in the exploits of Krishna in His childhood. The poet's longings relate, in particular, to have a *darshan* of the Lord as a cowherd, taking the cattle to graze, and dancing with fellow cowherd friends, swaying from side to side in a spectacle of divine ecstasy. The poet sings beautifully:

*Gope janama hoila bane dhenu charaila*

*Gopal puanka mele nachutha-a dhali dhali*

(O, Lord! Show me that form of yours, taking the cattle to the forest, and dancing with your friends so gracefully. O, Hari! Show me that form of yours).

As for Salabega's wish to see this form of God, he also makes references to one of Krishna's childhood exploits in killing the eight formidable wrestlers of Kamsa, who had ordered them to kill Krishna. The irresistible longing of the poet to see this divine manifestation of God demonstrates in him an exigency of desire.

However, a sense of deprivation affecting the poet is seen in his wish to see the three deities and Sudarsana seated on the sanctum sanctorum. Being a non-Hindu, he was not allowed to enter



the Jagannath temple at Puri, but he longs to see the deities in the temple.

*Dahane Sri Halapani madhye Subhadra bhauni  
Bamapase basicbhanti sankha chakra gada dhari.*

Salabega refers to Krishna's elder brother Balabhadra or Balaram as Halapani, and Jagannath as 'sankha chakra gada dhari' or Vishnu, and between them is seated their sister Subhadra. He is eager to see them there, on the *ratna vedi*, but he can't. Hence the anguish. However, he is sanguine about his prayers to be granted since he knows that God is merciful: 'kahaku na achha tari' (whom have you not redeemed, O, Lord!). The word "tari," which means 'to salvage,' 'to save,' 'to redeem,' 'to extricate,' does also signify 'to bless,' 'to grant,' 'to give.' The poet is hopeful that God will honour his request, but he is never skeptical of God's mercifulness.

Unlike Salabega, Arjuna does not ask Krishna to show His other incarnations, but implores to see His Universal Form, being least aware of the fact that he is too puny to sustain His immensity and splendour. In Chapter XI of *Gita* entitled "The Yoga of the Vision of the Universal Form," we see him saying to Krishna: "Lord, You are precisely what You declare Yourself to be. But I long to see Your divine form" (3). In any case it cannot be said that he is skeptical of Krishna as God, the reason why he desires to see His *Viswarupa* in order to dispel the doubt from his mind as to who Krishna is. But it can be asserted that he is curious if not skeptical.

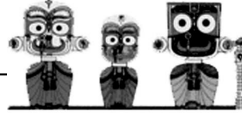
Krishna tells Arjuna to behold "in hundreds and thousands My multifarious divine forms, of various colours and shapes," to behold "the twelve sons of Aditi, the eight Vasus, the eleven Rudras (gods of destruction), the two

Asvinikumaras (the twin-born physicians of gods) and the forty-nine Maruts (wind-gods)," and to "behold as concentrated within this body of Mine the entire creation consisting of both animate and inanimate beings" (5,6,7). Since Krishna knows that Arjuna's earnest longings are fraught with his human limitations, He gives him the divine eye to see His Universal Form. Arjuna's amazement at the effulgence and splendour of the Lord in this form, which is beyond the expanse of description, makes him wonder at the mystique of Krishna.

What becomes clear to Arjuna is that Krishna is not that what he thought of Him before. Arjuna's shudder at the majesty of this vision makes him ask: "Tell me who You are with a form so terrible? My obeisance to You. O best of gods; be kind to me. I wish to know You, the Primal Being, in particular; for I know not Your purpose" (31). Realizing who Krishna really is, Arjuna feels sorry for addressing Him in the past as "Ho Krsna! Ho Yadava! Ho Comrade!," the expressions he deems as irreverent (41). He prays to Krishna to forgive him for this profanity because, as he feels, "It behooves You to bear with me even as a father bears with his son, a friend with his friend and a husband with his beloved spouse" (44).

Arjuna's prayer to Krishna to show him the form of Vishnu with four arms since he can no more sustain the ecstasy and awe of the Universal Form is conceded by Him. As Krishna says: "Arjuna, pleased with You I have shown you, through My power of Yoga, this supreme, effulgent, primal and infinite Cosmic Body," and this *Chaturbhuj rupa* of Vishnu, as Krishna says, can be seen "Through single-minded devotion" (47, 54).

It is important to see that Arjuna's divine longings to have a *darshan* of His manifestations are soon fulfilled by Krishna, whereas in



Salabega's song we have no such picture. But the fact of Chariot Nandighosa halting at the grave of Salabega where Jagannath gives *darshan* to his beloved devotee is a testimony to the boundless grace of God which He has for His devotees. Wherever one may be, his intense prayer to the Lord is always answered:

*Satasa panchas kosa chali na parae  
Moha jiba jae Nandighosa thiba rahi*  
(Salabega, "Jagabandhu he Gosain," 3-4).

(Lord! I am unable to walk such a long distance. I am very ill. I long to see you on Nandighosa. Please wait for me).

And Jagannath had to wait. This is the mercy of God. His devotee is never disappointed.

The desperate craving of a devotee to see the forms of God is a natural desire, and the Lord has fulfilled this.

*Yo mang pasyati sarbatra sarbam cha mayi pasyati  
Tasyaham na pranasyami sa cha me na pranasyati*

(*The Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter VI, 30).

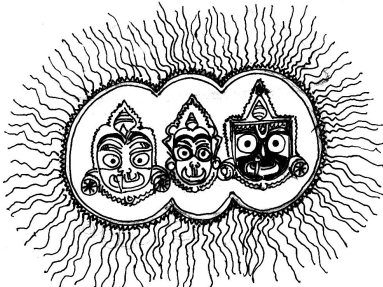
(He who sees Me (the Universal Self) present in all beings, and all beings existing within Me, never loses sight of Me, and I never lose sight of him).

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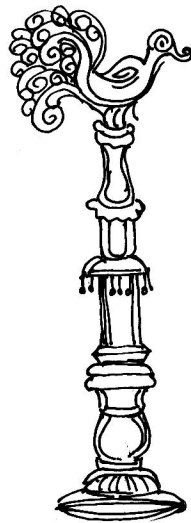
Dr. Bibhudutt Dash, Plot No.307, Haladipadia, Laxmisagar, Bhubaneswar-751006, E-mail : bibhudutt@live.com



Oh; Lord Jagannath  
You are  
Almighty, most powerful  
Your temple is Shree Mandir,  
throne is Ratnasinghasan  
Prasad is Mahaprasad  
You are Lord of Universe.

Oh; Lord you are  
most loving and cheerful  
you know everything  
can hear a little beat of sound

## Lord of Universe



and you can feel  
the deep prayer and devotion of all.

Oh; Lord you are  
the true friend, philosopher  
and guide of all  
you are called  
Prakruti and Purusa  
of the whole creation.

*Sadasiba Mishra*

Sadasiba Mishra, Bimanbadu Sahi, Chatiapada Lane, Puri - 752001.