

A Vaiṣṇava Poet in Early Modern Bengal: Kavikarṇapūra's Splendour of Speech. By REMBERT LUTJEHARMS. Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018. Pp. 360. \$99.

This book provides a long overdue examination of the work of one of the most important, and prolific, scholar-writers of the foundational years of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava school, Paramānandadāsa Sena, or as the tradition knows him, Kavikarṇapūra. Kavikarṇapūra's work, in Sanskrit, is wide-ranging, as he composed in several literary genres. Lutjeharms investigated the many works ascribed to Kavikarṇapūra, and arrived at a list of six that he could confidently say that author composed: the *Caitanya-caritāmṛta-mahākāvya*, the *Caitanya-candrodaya*, the *Gaura-gaṇodeśa-dīpikā*, the *Ānanda-vṛndāvana*, the *Kṛṣṇāhnikā-kaumudī*, and the *Alaṅkāra-kaustubha*.

Although Kavikarṇapūra was quite productive, the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition itself largely ignored him. While its writers were exceptionally self-referential in their works, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja did not draw from Karṇapūra's hagiographical works in formulating his massive *Caitanya-caritāmṛta*, which ultimately became the "final word" (per Tony K. Stewart) on the life of Caitanya. Perhaps, as Stewart suggests (*The Final Word*, p. 262), Karṇapūra's theology was not sufficiently representative of the party line. Lutjeharms suggests that it instead represented a broader vision of a community that had room for many approaches to Vaiṣṇavism, and made many other important contributions as well.

Previous scholars of the tradition, most notable among them S. K. De, have somewhat denigrated the work, but Lutjeharms argues that they miss the point. He was both a skilled poet, and a thoughtful philosopher; earlier scholarship has tended to overlook Karṇapūra's theological significance. Lutjeharms urges us to consider both components of the poet's legacy simultaneously, for Kavikarṇapūra's theology is key to appreciating his elaborate poetics, and *A Vaiṣṇava Poet in Early Modern Bengal* as a whole explains how, and why, we should do so. Lutjeharms points out Kavikarṇapūra's contributions as he analyzes each of his compositions.

For example, Karṇapūra makes an astonishing theological claim in his *Caitanya-candrodaya* that Kṛṣṇa, not Nārāyaṇa, is the fundamental source of God revealed through his various *avatāras* (p. 95). In his *Ānanda-vṛndāvana* the poet explains why God chooses to descend to mortal realms, namely to steer people toward devotion, to please his devotees, and to alleviate problems caused by demons (p. 97). And in the *Caitanya-candrodaya* he shows Caitanya's dual androgynous identity as both Kṛṣṇa and his favorite lover Rādhā. Thus devotion to Caitanya is devotion to Kṛṣṇa, or to the divine couple Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā.

Karṇapūra's guru was Śrīnātha, who in his theology insisted that "God is somehow both: characterized by myriad divine attributes and yet also entirely devoid of attributes" (p. 87). That distances the two somewhat from the theology of the *gōsvāmīs* of Vṛndāvana; their thinking "is neither the theology of classical Advaita Vedānta teachers, nor that of Vaiṣṇava Vedānta authors like Rāmanūja or Madhva" (p. 87). This point is important in considering the mysterious disciplic succession Karṇapūra mentions in the *Gaura-gaṇodeśa-dīpikā*, which would seem to connect the Gauḍīyas with the lineage of Madhva. These verses have been the subject of conversation and consternation among scholars, so I look forward to reading Lutjeharms' promised critical edition and comments on that particular text in the near future!

By examining each of Karṇapūra's works in considerable detail, Lutjeharms allows us to realize the poet's skill, but more important, to see "the subtle complexity of Kavikarṇapūra's poetics" (p. 12). He shows us his scholarly and poetic antecedents, telling us whose influence plays a strong role and whose influence the poet rejected, and those moves in turn reveal the poet not only as part of the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava community, but as a well-educated, thoughtful scholar of his time.

The book opens with what we know of the poet's life and his works, including an examination of his position within his community. The second chapter describes his theology, to provide grounding for the subsequent discussion of his poetics. That discussion begins in earnest in the third chapter, which is devoted to Kavikarṇapūra's understanding of the all-important concept of *rāsa*, first articulated in Bharata's *Nāṭya-śāstra* and later variously interpreted. The fourth chapter continues that discussion

in detail, with emphasis on the influence of the ninth-century poet Vāmana, whose work, Lutjeharms asserts, led Kaṇṇapūra “to formulate a poetics that prizes phonetic ornamentation” (p. 18).

That poetics includes an unusual understanding of *rasa*. The experience of the audience is important to him, but so is that of the characters themselves in a play. Kaṇṇapūra distinguishes between the *sthāyi-bhāva* (which Lutjeharms translates as ‘stable emotion’) in the singular, and its ultimate branching into the several classically understood *sthāyi-bhāvas* to allow him to explain why “we can experience even ... unpleasant emotions as *rasa* while reading a poem, even though we would not be able to do so in our everyday life” (p. 137). That is to say, “Just as the reader relishes his own emotional states, aroused and diversified as *rasa* by the narrative elements of the literary work, so can the literary work itself depict the emotional intensity of the characters, whose stable emotions can in the appropriate circumstances also climax in *rasa*, provided the particular stable emotion is enjoyable” (p. 143). Kaṇṇapūra draws from, or responds to, nearly all *rasa* theorists who preceded him, including, among others, Bhoja, Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Daṇḍin, and Abhinavagupta. He thus develops a sort of double *rasa* theory of his own that allows him to recognize devotional literature as both constituting and producing *rasa* (p. 144). No one else (aside from his own guru) in the Caitanya Vaiṣṇava tradition thinks about *rasa*, and *prema-rasa* in particular, in the same way. For Kaṇṇapūra, love, specifically the love of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, is the culmination of, that is, the ultimate, *rasa*, but is not erotic.

In his *Alaṅkāra-kaustubha*, he extends the metaphor to say that the soul of Poetry is *rasa*, and its body is language. Lutjeharms devotes his fourth chapter to exploring this notion. Again here Kaṇṇapūra reveals the depth of his education as he draws from some surprising sources in formulating his thinking on sound and on poetry itself. He, and Lutjeharms, expound on various figures of speech at length. Collectively, the poet regards them as “the jewellery that adorns the body (language) of Poetry” (p. 202), which are different from the essence of Poetry but can help draw our attention to that essence. His drawing on the works of earlier philosophers of poetics provides us with “a framework to think more fruitfully about the poetry of his time” (p. 219).

Kavikaṇṇapūra retells the familiar events of Book X of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa* in his *Ānanda-vṛndāvana*. He does this not simply to provide us with another opportunity to experience the *rasa*, especially of the nocturnal dalliances, but to focus on the emotions of those *gopīs* involved. He insists that their love is not *śṛṅgāra* (amorous), but *prema*, the source of all *rasa*. Unlike the author of the *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, Kavikaṇṇapūra names the lover with whom Kṛṣṇa disappears from the circle dance; she is Rādhā. And when Kṛṣṇa disappears from her company, she suffers, and all the *gopīs* suffer in her grief. She is central “in Kavikaṇṇapūra’s retelling, to emphasize that Kṛṣṇa should not be worshipped without his inseparable companion Rādhā” (p. 314). For him, this entire episode is not about teaching the *gopīs* humility; in his version, Rādhā stands with Kṛṣṇa in the centre of the circle while the other women dance around them. “The *rāsa* dance reflects not just Kavikaṇṇapūra’s understanding of the nature of God and of devotion, ... but also of his vision of the devotional community itself” (p. 319).

Rembert Lutjeharms demonstrates why scholars need to consider seriously the work of Kaṇṇapūra. Kaṇṇapūra was a skilled poet by any measure, steeped in literary tradition as well as in the many facets of Caitanya and the community Caitanya inspired. Lutjeharms provides detailed analysis of each of Kaṇṇapūra’s six works, showing us how they fit into literary theoretical history as well as their place in Caitanya Vaiṣṇavism. His careful scholarship, and his philological skills, allowed Lutjeharms to produce an important monograph that belongs in the library of every scholar of early modern Vaiṣṇavism.

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