

# REVERBERATORY REVELATORY : WHAT'S IN A NAME

"I recite some small part of the glory of the Name (*nām pratāp*). May the light of my heart make these words pure, so that the glory of the Name be described." (Agradās)

"The Name is a witness between the *nirguṇa* (formless, without qualities) and *saguṇa* (with qualities) realms; it is a clever translator through which both realms become illuminating. (Tulsīdās)

## DISTINGUISHING NAME FROM WORD AND NĀDA IN DARK TIMES

The *devotional* Name, as incarnation, is the most practiced prayer on earth. Epic, Puranic, Bhakti, Sikh, Sant and Gaudīya Vaishnava traditions all stress the primacy of recitation of the Name as the most direct and effective spiritual practice in the age of *Kali Yuga*, which, according to Hindu eschatology, is the final and most degenerate of the four ages, followed by a new epochal cycle (*kalpa*) of the four ages (at which time recitation of the Vedic mantras will once again re-constitute the cosmos.)

"Now, the Dark Age of *Kali Yuga* has come. Plant the Naam, the Name of the One Lord. It is not the season to plant other seeds. Do not wander lost in doubt and delusion." — *Guru Granth Sahib* (1185).

"In the *Kali age*, the *avatāra* of *Kṛṣṇa* is in the form of the name; from the name there is salvation of the whole world." — *Kṛṣṇadāsa, Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.17.19 (c. 1557).

We do seem generally unconvinced that our species should survive.

It was the bhakti movement that transitioned the Indian subcontinent from Brahmanical to Hindu Culture, through the agency of *nama-avatarā* —the prosody of the ambrosial-laden name same as divinity. *Anahata-bhakti*. A flavor or perfume of the Unstruck.

Name is both form and formless. Name is the phonic form of an uncreated creator non-different from the phenomenal world. Name is that without which we can't call upon or cry out, or curse. God as a grapheme not to be pronounced. Name outside of which we're clueless, inscrutable even to ourselves. Whether grapheme or phoneme, Name is unsurpassed for making present the sacred in the most immediate, intimate terms imaginable. For any one of us, which specific phoneme sequence is *the* one? Which name can credibly invoke and incarnate — accord with — that which — whom — without whom, addressable or not, by name or innately, could cause existence to exist, and cause, as part of the process of creation, our inexorable incomprehension? Our most elemental interrelationship is with the ungraspable, whether named or named "nameless"; whether attended to or left tacit, unarticulated or ignored.

How can the heart whose nature is to hear creation and to, like space with which it is coeval, contain everything, still be capable of closing? Who I name. "Who" is a verb. I who name. The living are, elementally, call-and-response, with or without calling or responding. Body is a bowing down, with or without consent or conceit. A bubble about to burst. The bud of a bloom about to no longer last.

Perhaps the Name is just a glorified trope that should be exposed, not exalted. Divine is generic, a not-namelessness. A not-heartfeltness behind the Names of others? What does namelessness of Name have to do with dissolute days? Overnamed? Lording over Name? Owning Name? Free of Name? Freeing of Name?

Perhaps the most confused dialectics in the history of sacred sound bears on the question whether "truth" is (1) the Name (*nama-avatarā*); (2) meaning (words, *śabd, artha*); (3) sound itself (*nāda*, vibration, the current); (4) syllable (phoneme, imperishable Aum, Omkara, Pranava, mantra); (5) the Word (Vāk, Logos, Divine revelation); (6) the Book (revelation, *granthe-apauruṣeya*); or (7) silence (unstruck, beyond words, ineffable, *avācyā, Para-Brahman*).

## REVERBERATORY REVELATORY

I write *from* the perspective of prosody and live *through* prosody because prosody, in my experience, inherently encompasses and resolves the contentions among the above 7 terms.

The nature of prosody—as the sound of the words, the meaning of the sounds, the power of the implied and paused, the patterning and dramatizing of expression, the tone of interchange and formative templates of the phenomenal, all rolled into one—is intercessory. Intonation alone, rising from an open heart, can disarm hatred, arrest aggression, upend ill will.

The potency of prosody lies in its intermediary role among the very elements of composition: meaning, sound, emphasis, phoneme, grapheme, syllable, word, name, book, silence and so on.

Integratively, the sciences of cognition and language evolution have proposed prosody as protolanguage. In the emotional and interactional prosody (EIP) of Pierra Filippi prosodic chorusing is the precursor of language emergence. Positing prosody as precursor of both music and language, Steven Brown coined the term "musilanguage." Prosody acts as our original, universal Motherese. (Our everyday, turn-taking conversations continue to be resonantly coeval with the origin of language.)

Voice itself will be the vanguard of the next, non-invasive, interoceptive, so-called *subtle*, vibrational medicine. Poets have called this *invocation*. Saints have said *intercession*. Humanity, at this point in time, is a plea to continue to exist. The plea itself is quintessentially prosodic. I'm emphasizing prosody's soteriological role. I favor the stiffness of the term "soteriological." It expresses the *rigor mortis* we must face in order to find succor, solution and sweetness in Kali Yuga, as prosody mediates the ultra-resonant space of interbeing.

Prosody is the *reverberatory revelatory*. Tone of voice connected to the unstruck, in action, under circumstances, is *moksha*. The unstruck, wherein lies our origin, for a bhakta, or for Bahá'u'lláh or Jesus, is, unequivocally, love. Any attainable state of health or harmony is incidental to this ascesis.

There is no god if there is no name that is the same as god.

## NAME ALONE, THE STONE BOAT

"... So stricken with longing for Kannan it rivalled the ocean's depths and she sent out the black kuyil-bird to deliver her message begging him to be with her, to wear her garland of verses that if we centuries later recite, would reveal to us the true name of Narayana (the omnipotent)."

I can only touch upon the trajectory of *bhakti*, not in an attempt to give a complete picture of the devotional path that overspread India, but to provide a context for deepening devotion in dark times. I'll form a triangle, roughly corresponding to the boundaries of India, from Tamil Nadu to Rajasthan to West Bengal, bringing forward a few key terms and texts.

Bhakti as liberation-through-divine-love is glossed in the Bhagavad Gita (c. 300 CE) and mandated in the *Bhagavata Purana* (latter half of the first millennium CE). But the vernacular *bhakti* "movement" that would ultimately radiate throughout India began in earnest in the sixth to ninth centuries CE in Tamil Nadu with the Vaishnavite Alvar and Śaivite Nayanmar poet-saints. It's believed that Tamil-*bhakti* was inaugurated by devoted-wife turned cremation-ground-ascetic Kāraikkāl Ammaiyaṛ, the "Mother from Kāraikkāl (also self-described as Kāraikkāl Pēy, the "Demoness.") Kāraikkāl set the intimate tone of devotional poetry by referring to herself in both first person and third person voices:

"...if I cannot serve you by seeing you, and worshipping you by saying "Our Father," even if I get the whole world, I do not want it." (*Arputat Tiruvantāti*, Sacred Linked Verses of Wonder, 72, trans. Elaine Craddock).

"Those who say the words of this garland of these verses uttered by Kāraikkāl Pēy, melting with love, and worship with everlasting devotion will reach the Lord and praise him with unceasing love." (*Arputat Tiruvantāti*, Sacred Linked Verses of Wonder, 101).

"For those who dance and sing these ten verses by Kāraikkāl Pēy who has sharp teeth and a fiery mouth, by abundant grace of Śiva-Natarāja who wears a swaying snake around his waist, and who wears the moon on his matted hair, and spins in his divine dance — their sins will be destroyed." (*Tiruvāḷankāttu Mūttā Tiruppatikan*, First Sacred Verses on Tiruvāḷankātu, 2.11, trans. Elaine Craddock).

The Alvars and Nayanmars would not have considered themselves *bhaktas*. Nor would they have felt that their work was discontinuous with the prior lyric, lovelorn and animistic Cankam culture. The difficulty of definitively defining *bhakti* overlaps the difficulty of determining whether any given *bhakta* practiced "pure" *bhakti* or was partially brahmanic, tāntric, jogic, Sikh or siddha. It's not uncommon for a *bhakta* to both appropriate and oppose rival religions. The early Tamil poet-saints allied themselves with the brahmanic orthodoxy in order to expel the invasive Jains and Buddhists from their land. *Gaudīya bhakti* employs meditation techniques straight out of *astāṅga-yoga* textbooks. Even the *Bhagavagita*, the great *bhakti* sourcebook, presented *bhakti-marga* (the path of devotion) as but one among a few other "preeminent" (*uttamam pavitram*) paths of liberation: *jana-marga* (the path of knowledge and investigative introspection),

*karma-marga* (the path of virtuous action) and *raja-marga* (the path of meditation) (BG.12.6-7.) The very type of *bhakti*, typically determined by the Name of the God that is worshiped (whether Krishna, Śiva, Śakti, etc.) can be mixed. Tulsīdās, the great Rām-*bhakta*, dedicated an entire text to Krishna (*Krishna-Gītāvalī*.)

*Bhakti* (from the verb *bhaj* "to share with" "to participate in"), if not understood as the path itself, can be integral to the inquiry of any path taken. This writing is my experiencing of *bhakti*, as may be your reading. I will (hopefully deftly) cut through the discursive and scholarly body of research and go straight to the words of the *bhaktas*.

For *bhaktas* as well, their poems are their devotion ... and the devotions are multifarious — even within a specific era or region or, for that matter, within an individual poet. *Bhakti* is what a *bhakta* sings. And this pure *bhakti* is the nectar — while the scholarly, on the other hand, can all too easily present *bhakti* as *less* than devotion, or as devotion *alone* bereft of other practices (both of which are patently false).

The quote at the head of this section is from the eighth century *bhakta*-saint Andal. She was among the first *bhakti* poets, and the only woman among the twelve Vaishnavite Alvars. The quote is drawn from her final work, the *Nachiyar Tirumalai* (The Sacred Songs of the Goddess), a dauntless, divinely-directed eroticism. As her hagiographers recount: she began her songs when she was thirteen years old; at sixteen she married — merged with — her god during her wedding ceremony at his temple in Srirangam, at the moment of her death. *Bhakti* is intimacy (in contradistinction to the non-personal Brahman of the *Upanisads*). In the Cankam poetics preceding *bhakti*, there are two types of expression: *akam* (subjective, intimate, erotic) and *puram* (public, political, heroic). *Akam* is the "voice" of *bhakti*. Emotion is the paradigm for the relationship between devotee and deity. To name the divinity allows direct address and access. Preeminence of the recitation of the Name, as a personal or communal practice, has been vital for *bhakti* from its inception. The Name is, of course, that of the creator; the name that *is* creator; the name that creates; the intimately cosmogenic Name which the *bhakta* merges with; an un-fabricated participation in creation *through* utterly refined verse. Any attempt to separate the Name from the act of devotion would be futile, as the Name is the embodiment, the physical (phonic, resonant) presence — *avatāra* — of the deity. Moreover, with the potency of the Name as the encapsulation of the Vedas and all the poems composed in the vernacular languages, the early *bhakti* poems, to a considerable extent, were able to fulfill their egalitarian (*saulabhyam*) purpose. Here is an instance of Andal's divine devotion *in the flesh*:

"I will pluck out my fruitless *konkai* at the root. And casting them on his *mārvu*, I will quench my fire! If I cannot succeed in this birth, in my impure services to Govinda, and in quenching the affliction of my round *mulai*, why even do penance? One day, join me to that beautiful sacred *mārvu*. (Nācciyār Tirumoli 13.8-9).

The earliest collection of Śaivite Nayanmar works (the *Thirumurai*) opens with a poem spontaneously sung by the seventh century prodigy Sambandar when he was only three years old. Sambandar, an unrivaled Vedic scholar by the age of seven, declared that the name of Śiva is the essence of the Vedas, i.e., the full realization of Vedic knowledge as divine presence (13). (The formal act of calling upon the Name as the embodiment of Śiva "while love's tears outpour" is known as the *panchakshara*, the 5-syllable mantra: *na-mah-Śi-vā-ya*). Appar, the next poet in the *Thirumurai* (and a contemporary of Sambandar) asks "why bother reciting the Vedas, pilgrimaging, fasting, purifying, practicing austerities or being penitent when liberation only comes by calling upon the Name?" He warns "those who don't call out the 5-syllable Name have been born so that foul plagues might torture them to death, then death bring rebirths endlessly forlorn." (63,

translation F. Kingsbury, G.E. Philips.) As essential for practicing the *bhakti* path, Appar also repeatedly calls out to Umā ("Word" ... Śiva's consort, Vedic Vāk) to reveal her glory.

(Coincidentally, the advent of *bhakti* in the Muslim world is attributed to Kāraikkāl and Andal's contemporary and distant counterpart, the legendary ascetic, proto-sufi and martyr-to-divine-love Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya (714-801). It's said that she is the one who initiated *ishq-e-haqeeqi*, the path of passionate, absolute devotion to God — the "*ishq*" that is ubiquitous in Sufi poetry. "*Consume with fire, O God, a presumptuous heart that loves you.*" "*The one who tastes, knows; the one who explains, lies. How can you describe the true form of something in whose presence you are annihilated, and in whose being you still exist?*")

Name-devotion (*nāma-bhakti*) has been a constant in the South Asian evolution of *bhakti-marga*. In the latter half of the sixteenth century in North Indian Rajasthan, eight hundred years after the inception of *bhakti* in Tamil Nadu, the founder of Rām-rasik *bhakti*, the poet-saint Agradās, wrote:

*"The Name of Rām is the crown jewel of all accomplishments. Where there is no country, time, family, or daily rites, there I have abandoned both the proscriptions and restrictions of religion. The Vedas, Purānas, smṛti and śāstras, having considered them all, I have embraced Rām-Nām. On a highway with gold in both my hands, I walk fearlessly day and night, well-adorned with the Name. Having mulled over all knowledge, scholars have revealed this essence, thus Agra endlessly recites the Name of his own Lord-husband."*

*"For the one who follows the Name of Rām, proscriptions and restrictions are not obstacles; the three karmas fall away from his body. One who sits on a stone boat loaded with countless pieces of iron, with the Rām-Nām even he crosses the ocean of existence."*

Seeking union with the divine, Agradās preferred a female identity. This gender-fluidity and "espousal mysticism" is also a constant in *bhakti*, traceable all the way back to the rapturous interior voice of the "soul-heroine" (*talaivi*) of Cankam *akam*. The two quotes above are drawn from a work titled *Nām-Pratāp*, a long poem dedicated to the saving grace of the Name. "*Without the Name, all spiritual practices are worthless.*" (Agradās' principal book, the *Dhyān Mañjarī*, is a mediation manual, drawing on tantric and yogic interiority and visualization techniques; exemplifying how readily *bhakti-marga* subsumes other "exclusive" paths ... a multi-preeminent practice, if you will.)

Shaikh Farīd, twelfth century Punjabi Muslim and the lone Sufi poet included in the *Adi Granth*: "*Those who forget the Naam, are a burden on the earth.*"

And, Kabir Das (1398-1448 CE): "*O brother, listen: Without the name of Ram, none ever achieved salvation.*"

## ŚAKTA BHAKTI

Shifting from Rajasthan to West Bengal ... as the saying goes: "*In Kolkata, throw a stone and hit a poet.*" Perhaps as explanation for this poet-density, it's also said that devotees worship Kali *in order* to be inspired to write poetry. Kolkata and Kali are nearly synonymous, while West Bengal at large is the epicenter of the

Śaktism known as *Śakta bhakti* ... devotion to the divine feminine, *the potentiality for all appearances*, "Mother of all worlds." And consonant with Name-glorification as the preeminent practice for surviving our dissolute age, Kali is known as the *Kali-Yuga devi*: goddess of the apocalypse, having appeared to preside over the current catastrophic *yuga*. In *Śakta bhakti*, as in all *bhakti*, the heart is the scripture; the path is experiential, direct, intimate relationship ... while theology and rituals, on the other hand, are mere "religion." This is not a mundane love, but love of an unknown beloved by means of our familiar emotions: eros, amour, altruism, familial bond, friendship, passion, jealousy, lust, unconditional love ... are all worldly attributes of one beauty, one Goddess dancing, one energy, her energy, directed to her, in reciprocity. There's nothing we feel that is not hers. All we feel is the recitation of her presence, provided to us for the perfecting of love offered to her. A single sigh of separation from her is more instructive than any teaching, greater than any faith. Her name is Śakti. Her name is Mahadevi as Durga, Uma, Pārvatī, Devi, Kālī, Rādhā, Tārā, Sītā, Laksmī, Sarasvati, Gāyatrī, Mother, Ma, or even Śakti in the male form of Vishnu, Kṛṣṇa, Śiva or Rāma. The poet-saint Ramprasad (c. 1718 – 1775) began the Bengali *Kali-bhakti* tradition by addressing Kali in two, distinct, intimate modes: in a parent-child relationship with Kali as his Mother, and Kali as a young girl cared for by parents:

*"Be utterly dedicated to her reality. Cry aloud Ma Kali, Ma Kali. Know that she can clarify the inconceivable maze of relativity... This intricate play of transparent energy is initiated, sustained, and dissolved by Kali, who is the dream power of Absolute Reality. At this very moment, you are resting on the vast lap of Mother's cosmic dream that you misperceive as the narrow prison of suffering. Why abandon the kingdom of awareness to obsession with self and disdain for others, to hollow passion and abject clinging? You are creating a disease without a remedy. The brief day of your earthly life is almost over... Meditate now on beautiful Black Tara. This poet sings drunkenly: "Tara! Tara! Tara! Your name is ambrosia. May all beings enter the secret sanctuary through this name, tasting your unique sweetness, self-luminous awareness." (From Mother of the Universe, translator Lex Hixon.)*

Śakti is the name of the beginningless. As incarnate omnipotence, she also has an aspect that is unmanifest — *saguna* and *nirguna* states, with and without form or attributes. In her, these two states are absolutely non-contradictory. Just as sound is both struck and unstruck, in practice there is fluidity between form and formlessness. We live and die in utero, in the unborn Mother. Our longings to beget life and to be embraced by life have been born of her. Our conventional language is a listening into its beginnings in the unborn. Again, from Ramprasad:

*"Where is this brilliant lady, this black light beyond luminosity? Though I have never seen her, simply hearing her name, the mind becomes absorbed completely in her astonishing reality. "*

*"O Ma Kali, wearing a garland of skulls ... You taught me how to call you, and at the moment I chanted "Ma" You drove me to ecstasy! Ma Tara, please tell me the source of your sweetness — where did you get this name full of nectar?"*

Ramprasad's poems are commonly sold as a booklet, *Ramprasadi Sangit*, at Śakta temples in West Bengal.

The two primary texts of Śaktism that honor the goddess as cosmogonic divinity are the *Devi Mahatmya* and *Devi-Bhagavata Purana*.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

"When one is actually advanced and takes pleasure in chanting the Name ... one also laughs, cries, becomes agitated and chants just like a lunatic, not caring for outsiders. Love of God increases and is manifested as affection, counterlove, love, attachment, sub-attachment, ecstasy and sublime ecstasy. This development is compared to sugarcane seeds, sugarcane plants, sugarcane juice, molasses, crude sugar, refined sugar, sugar candy and rock candy." — Caitanya Caritāmṛta 2.23.41-43.

"My dear Lord, when will my eyes be beautified by filling with tears that constantly glide down as I chant your holy name? When will My voice falter and all the hairs on my body stand erect in ecstatic love as I chant Your holy name?" — Caitanya Caritāmṛta 3.20.36.

"We don't have the wiring for love that isn't subject-object based. A love that's not transactional. But this can be rewired through repeating the names. This creates new pathways for love to flow through." —  
Krishna Das (Twitter posting, 6/20/21).

Bhakti shattered the 4 primary goals of life (*puruṣārthas*): *dharma* (living virtuously), *artha* (prosperity, living meaningfully), *kama* (enjoyment) and *moksha* (liberation), by adding a fifth, foremost goal, *devotion*. Bengali Krishna-*bhakti* then introduced a further affection, an acme of *bhakti* known as *prema-rasa*.

The encyclopedic *Bhagavata Purana* is the consummate source-text for Krishna devotion in northern India. It's a *grantha-avatāra* (book of incarnations of the Name that is itself a divine incarnation). It's an Upaniṣadic/devotional amalgam, a sanskritization of Krishna-*bhakti* intended to supplant the Vedas — "the ripened fruit of the wish-fulfilling tree of Vedic knowledge." In the *Bhagavata Purana*, *nāma-bhakti* is broken down into: *nāma-kīrtana* (singing the Name), *nāma-śravaṇa* (hearing the name), *nāma-smarana* (contemplative recollection of the Name), *mantra-dhyāna* (silent repetition of the Name), *pathana* (recitation of the scriptures and hymns), *nāmāksara* (inscribing the body with the letters of the Name), *līlā-kīrtana* (recounting the exploits of the gods), *rāsa-līlā* (dramatic dance performances in which the performers are revered as living forms — *svarūpas* — of the deity) and, finally, *nāma-samkīrtana* (the communal call-and-response singing that has become the essential expression of *bhakti* for merging with the phonic embodiment of the deity whose absolute body consists of *sat-cit-ānanda*, being-consciousness-bliss).

The nectarous path of *nāma-bhakti* reached an apogee in the *prema-rasa bhakti* of the Gaudīya Vaisnava tradition founded by the Bengali saint Caitanya Mahaprabu (1486-1533 CE), a gender-fluid *avatara* of Radha and Kṛṣṇa. Caitanya left behind only an 8-verse poem, the *Śikṣāstaka*. The entirety of Gaudīya Vaisnavism emanates from the wisdom of the *Śikṣāstaka*, as extensively elucidated by his immediate followers and biographers. Verse six of the poem states: "With eyes flowing tear-streams, voice faltering, words choked, with ecstatic feelings in body, when shall I be able to chant your divine name?" At the end of the poem Caitanya introduces the term *prema-rasa bhakti* (i.e. perfected or fully-blossomed love). In just a handful of verses Caitanya maps the path of an embodied devotion that leads to ecstatic love. Through the lens of *prema-rasa* we can ask further: can the nature of the Name be known through the exterior and interior effects of its recitation?

What constitutes the Name? How does it work? What happens.

In 1616, Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvāmī completed a 17-volume biography of Caitanya's life and teachings titled *Caitanya Caritāmṛta*. Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja left no doubt that Caitanya's primary teaching was the mantric efficacy of the repetition of the divine name, the full embodiment of the Vedas in the vibration of "K-r-i-s-h-n-a." By reciting the divine name even once, from just a hint of the Name: the eyes fill with tears and hairs stand on end (3.20.33); undesirable habits are destroyed (3.20.11); the devotee becomes lower than the grass on the ground (3.20.22); *moksha* is easily attained (2.25.154); the devotee is equally disposed toward every living creature (2.23.155); the mirror of the heart is cleansed, miseries of material existence come to an end and one is allowed to fully taste the nectar of the Name at every step (3.20.12); the lesser signs of ecstatic emotion (*anubhāva*) appear in one's behavior as forgiveness, detachment, absence of false prestige, hope, eagerness, the urge to never waste time, and of course a deepening taste for chanting the holy name of the Lord (2.23.18-19). Kṛṣṇadāsa attested that when Caitanya spoke the name of God "... his body trembled, and his voice faltered. He perspired, turned pale and wept a constant flow of tears, which wet all the people standing there. Eruptions on his body appeared like kadamba flowers." (2.25.68.)

Devotion is specifically *not* a path of speculative knowledge, beneficial actions, meditative disciplines and austerities; not *jnana-karma-dharma* yoga, but *nāma-prema-rasa bhakti* (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.17.75). "The fifth end of man is the sea of the nectar of the joy of prema; and the joys of moksha and the rest are less than a single drop of it. (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 1.17.82). . Liberation is incidental to devotion. Freedom is the fantasy that *jivan-mukti* (individual liberation in this life) is foolproof, durable or even desirable. The dissolution of afflictive emotions, biases, karmic scarring, vicious cycles, self-inflicted anguish (*aṁhaḥ*) are byproducts of the recitation of the Name, while the aim is *prema-upajaya* (awakening of intensely emotional ecstatic love). "Mukti is the insignificant result derived from a glimpse of awakening of offenseless chanting of the holy name." (*Caitanya Caritāmṛta* 3.3. 185-186.) Practicing *jnana* (speculative knowledge, gnosis) without *bhakti* is like beating an empty husk of rice. Deity is for reaching devotion. Devotee even surpasses divinity as devotion is the deity's desire. *Prema-bhakti* is not a morbid identification with the body or its immolation in the divine (*sayujya-mukti*). It is the realization that our living identity is that of a fully sentient servant of the Named, a realization of our *svarupa* (inherent form). To luxuriate in never-ending longing is the beginningless glory that is merely reflected in our mundane accomplishments and relationships. One's nature — or fundamental frequency — is not bliss but the service that engenders it by settling into one's elemental affection.

If God wants to be pleased, *bhakti* is how one would be pleasing (by rejecting the deep sleep of any form of liberation.) "My devotees do not accept *salokya*, *sarsti*, *sarupya*, *samipya*, or *oneness with me (sayujya)*—even if I offer these freedoms—in preference to serving me." (*Bhagavata Purana* 3.29.13). In the words of Caitanya: *mama janmani janamanisvare bhavatad bhaktir ahaituki tvayi*: "Let me be born again and again as long as I can engage in *Bhagavad-bhakti*."

The *Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa* is the bliss-bestowing feminine counterpart to the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, venerating Devi and other feminine *avataras* as primordial Mother of all. The two texts were coevally collated and share strikingly similar *bhakti* methodology, with somewhat differing terminology. In the *Devī Bhāgavata* the total softening of the heart and utmost emotional state is *mahabhava*. The *Devī Bhāgavata* lays out a progression of four qualities (*gunas*) of *bhakti*: *tamas*, *rajas*, *sattva* and utmost *para-bhakti*. In *tamasic-bhakti* the devotee is filled with anger and practices *bhakti* in order to harm others; *rajasic-bhakti* is practiced for personal opportunism and power; the *sattvic-bhakti* worships for no rewards, wants no liberation, knows nothing greater than serving Devi and is situated to reach the supreme state of *para-bhakti*.

"Now hear attentively about the Parā-Bhakti that I am now describing to you. Whoever hears always My Glories and recites My Name and whose minds dwell always, like the incessant flow of oil, in Me ... With hearts filled with love and hairs standing on their ends, all should glorify me with tears of love flowing from their eyes and voices choked with emotion and with dancing, music and singing with their whole bodies filled with joy." (Devī Bhāgavata Purāṇa 11-20.)

*Prema-rasa* perfectly links us back to the beginning of *bhakti* in Andal's bodily "succulent light." "Withering I wait in vain in Maliruncolai's splendid grove where pollen bursts, nectar drips, fragrances waft, fruits swell. I'm ready... I wait like a garland unworn."

We're a human form of that of which God consists; this is *relationship*...not to be given up by merging with the divine or shunning the corporeal. Just as one has a civic duty, one has a devotional service to fulfill. One term Gaudīya-Vaishnavism uses to express — or finesse — this play of devotional intra-distinction is *acintya bheda abheda* (inconceivable difference-in-nondifference). This is akin to *atiyoga* (utmost yoga) wherein samsara and nirvana are the same phenomenon spontaneously arising from primordial wisdom ... with no elsewhere to be liberated into or away from. While the goal of *bhakti* is ecstatic service in the name of God, *atiyoga* is the realization of *bodhicitta*, the benefitting of all beings by means of a cognitive, hearing, comprehensive heart. Both *bhakti* and *bodhicitta* are "utmost" paths that ultimately meet at a single word *amṛta*—translatable as "nectar" or "ambrosia" or, less equivocally, "immortality," an inner process of having transformed the basic poisons of life into the vibration of pure love. (*Bhakti* as *ambrosial prosody* is matter for a further, yet unfathomable tantric essay, or it can simply be left to its enactive expression.) *Bhakti* emerged in sixth century Tamil Nadu by booting the Buddhists out of the land, to be supplanted by intimate, ecstatic, love-struck relationships with the local Lords, Śiva and Vishnu. The enlightened heart of a *bodhisattva* and the nectar-filled heart of a *bhakta* are distinctly different devotional abodes. A *bodhisattva* can exhaust *samsāra*, expose the projective mind as the basis of confusion, never weary of impartially serving others, perceive all demons as loving parents, unfailingly honor every vow of *bodhicitta*, bestow countless blessings on all sentient beings ... yet all this, void of *rasa*, may still be altogether without meaning or purpose for a *bhakta sādḥaka*.

Buddhist devotion to the *bodhisattvas* of compassion (Avalokiteśvara and Tara) notwithstanding, It's perhaps fair to say that the heart of *bodhicitta* is omniscience, while the heart of *bhakti* is omnipresence. Although, in the end, it's not necessary to draw any distinction between the two.

To offer a short definition of *prema-rasa*: "fully matured, all-consuming love for the divine." Yet, because *prema-rasa* is in fact untranslatable, un-etymologizable, context-sensitive, and can only be known experientially, I'll offer a more ponderous, heuristic interpretation of *prema-rasa* as: the sweetness of divine love induced through devotional service and poured into an unriddled heart (neither perplexed nor punctured by greed, hatred, ignorance) of a devotee who, as humble as a blade of grass, seeing God in all things, recites the holy name, not as a string of letters or shadow of the Name but as the whole Name, a pure phonic entheogen, which is non-different from the mind of the divinity that is adored. Both divinity and devotee are embodied by the Name as sweetness-bliss.

The Name (Īśvara, or Krishna for Gaudīyas) is the same as the deity because it is self-manifesting and imbued with the deity's *svarūpa-śakti* (essential, inherent energy, or *vibration*) as distinct from the material

*prākṛta* (illusory energy of *māya-śakti*) and because being-sweetness-bliss is the form in which the Name consists. A vastly integrative imagination is required to even approach this insight. This name-soteriology is why the recitation of the name is most efficacious during dissolute times: it provides a transcendent vibration that manifests as a *nāma-avatāra* to save the world from ignorance, through the human voice, i.e., recitation of the name, or *prosodic-bhakti*—an evolutionary, wish-granting science of the confluence of language, mind, emotion, devotion and harmonized materiality.

Name/Deity nondifference is a practice reaching back into prehistory. Breaking down a few of the critical terms from *prema-rasa bhakti* can help us realize this practice.

We can't extract God from what is, nor place God in our midst.

*Svarūpa and Śakti*: immaterial energy—that without which nothing can manifest. *Svarūpa*, taken alone (before it intermixes with materializing energy as the Name which embodies its deity) is simply *innateness*. Phenomena's innateness. That which every form is an *avatāra of*. The Unstruck's soundings, if you will. Countless intonations and connotations, as we resonantly embody our words in our inherent *rasik* nature, intimate with the divine—whether as servant, friend, parent/child or lover: *dāyasa-rasa*, *sakhya-rasa*, *vātsalya-rasa*, *mādhurya-rasa*, respectively.

With *prosodic-bhakti*, every word is the same as deity. *Nāma-prema-rasa bhakti*—nectarous, horripilated, choked-up, overflowing *bhakti*—might say *alaukika*, revelatory emotion of name, sense-surpassing.