THE << TRUE VAIŞŅAVA >> : A JAINA HERITAGE IN GUJARĀT*

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One of the best-known pada-s (devotional lyrics) in Gujaratī begins with the words "Vaiṣṇavajana to tene kahīye, je..." "He alone can be called a true Vaiṣṇava who..". The pada is attributed to Narasimha Mahetā, the foremost Vaiṣṇava bhakta poet of Gujarat (15th c.)¹. It has become famous all over India thanks to Mahatma Gandhi whose favourite prayer it was. It is a simple description of what makes a Vaiṣṇava and it reads thus²:

Vaiṣṇavajana to tene kahīye, je pīda parāī jāne³ re;

paradukhe upakāra kare,

ne mana abhimāna na āņe re. 1

Sakaḷa lokamāṁ sahune vande, nindā na kare kenī re.

vāca-kācha-mana niścala rākhe,

dhana dhana jananī tenī re. 2

Samadṛṣṭi ne tṛṣṇātyāgī,

parastrī jene māta re;

jihvā thakī asatya na bole,

paradhana na jhāle hātha re. 3

Mohamāyā lepe nahi tene,

dṛḍha vairāgya tenā manamāṁ re;

rāmanāma śum tāļī lāgī,

sakaļa tīrtha tenā tanamām re. 4

Vaṇalobhī ne kapaṭarahita che,

kāmakrodha jeņe māryā re;

bhaṇe Narasaiṁyo tenuṁ daraśana karatāṁ,

kuļa ekotera tāryām re. 5

He alone can be called a true Vaiṣṇava

who does not ignore the sufferings of others,

who helps them in their miseries

and has no conceit. 1

He greets everyone everywhere,

slanders none,

he is steady in speech, deeds4 and mind :

blessed indeed is his mother. 2

Equally he looks on all, he is without desire, another man's wife is a mother to him; untruth he does not utter nor grab the wealth of others. 3

Delusion does not touch him, nor deceit; detachment is firm in his mind; he is absorbed in the meditation of the name of Rāma, he embodies all holy places. 4

Free from greed, and guileless, he has defeated passion and anger. Narasaimyo says: The sight of such a man saves one hundred and one generations⁵. 5

The Definition of the Vaisnava

Etymologically speaking, the meaning of Vaisnava is clear "the one who belongs to Visnu, a follower of Visnuism". It appears, however, from the text that a Vaisnava is one who is able to practise a certain amount of virtues, such as compassion, humility, tolerance, control of passions, as well as to avoid a certain number of vices, such as lying, stealing, committing adultery, falsehood, lewdness, or anger. The devotion to Visnu doesn't figure among the essential components of his behaviour. At the most, the stanza 4 tells the reader that "the Vaisnava remains absorbed in the meditation of the name of Rāma" (Rāmanāma sum tālī lāgī), yet it is obviously not Rāma or Rāmacandra, the seventh avatāra of Viṣṇu who is meant but the Rāma of the Santa tradition conceived as the name of the all-pervading God who should be apprehended within. and is equivalent to the Upanisadic Atmarama6. No denominational affiliation, no sectarian adhesion seem to be implied by this definition of the Vaisnava, and besides, if devotees of Siva do exist, it has never seemed necessary to define the qualities of the perfect Saivite bhakta! What is proposed here is merely an ideal of conduct which, in accordance with the puritanic Santa nirguni tradition, is called Vaisnava7. This definition is confirmed by the fate of the pada "Vaisnavajana" in Gujarat as well as by the position of its presumed author towards Visnuism in Gujarat and within the framework of the religious substratum of the area.

Who was the author of Vaisnavajana?

Due probably to the non-sectarian ideal expressed in "Vaiṣṇavajana to...", the authorship of Narasimha Mahetā was questioned several times. Dalapatarāma (1820-1898) who inaugurated the modern period of Gujaratī letters, a reformist writer and a member of the Svāmī-nārāyanī sect⁸ was said to have written the pada under the name of Narasimha Mahetā⁹. It has even been considered to have been written by a Christian missionary¹⁰, again probably due to the ideal of conduct it advocated. These attributions, as well as the one to Dayārāma (1777-1852, the last author of the

medieval period)¹¹, had to be dropped after manuscripts anterior to 1780 were discovered, bearing the *chāpa* (signature) of Narasimha Mahetā¹².

Of more interest are two partially similar versions found in manuscripts under the names of Vācho and Nākara.

Vācho's text, discovered by M. B. Vyas¹³, has 8 stanzas in a sequence differring from the one adopted in the pada going under the name of Narasimha Mahetā; but this frequently happens in the case of orally transmitted lyrics in which the number of antarā (stanzas) between two teka (refrains) and their sequence may fluctuate¹⁴. Neither the manuscript nor the text of Vācho, although apparently old, bear a precise date, and the author remains difficult to identify. K. K. Shastri¹⁵ proposes to equate Vācho with Vasto: the author of two ākhyāna-s: Śukadeva¹⁶ and Subhadrāharaṇa; he is supposed to have lived before 1568¹⁷. There are also one or two authors named Vaccharāja¹⁷ belonging to the 16th century, one of whom wrote a Rasamañjarīnī vārttā¹⁷ and the other a Kabīrapada²૦, but neither the first nor the other two authors figure among the known Vaiṣṇava bhakta-s.

As far as Nākara is concerned, a prolific writer of $\bar{a}khy\bar{a}na$ belonging to the 16th century²¹, H. G. Bhayani has found in a passage of his Gujaratī version of the "Āraṇyakaparva" of the Mahābhārata²² formulas and phrases recalling those of "Vaiṣṇavajana..." used here to describe the qualities of a hero ($\hat{s}\bar{u}ra$) in the Yakṣa-Yudhisthira samvāda²³.

Whatever the answer to the question of authorship, it appears from these texts that one need not be a sectarian Vaiṣṇava in order to praise the Vaiṣṇava ideal of conduct. And, conversely, a sectarian Vaiṣṇava need not abide exclusively by the universal ideal of the "Vaiṣṇavajana...". This becomes curiously evident if one considers the attitude of the Vallabhans, who form the major part of the Gujaratī Vaiṣṇava, towards Narasimha Mahetā and his pada.

How do the Vallabhan Vaisnavas see Narasimha Mahetā?

Narasimha Mahetā's name appears in none of the Braja vārtā (hagiographic biographies) of Vallabhan saints, although Mīrā Bāī herself is mentioned in the last of the "Eighty-four Vārtā" (Caurāsī vaiṣṇavana ki vārtā), but only to be denigrated²⁴. No pada of Narsī is used in the Vallabhan liturgy (with one astonishing exception in the Bālakṛṣṇa mandira at Surat²⁵). However, among the dhola songs in use with the Vallabhan laymen, there are a few pada-s by Narasimha Mahetā. Indeed he could not be entirely rejected and, although he is not admitted among the puṣṭi-bhakta-s, he, at least, has the quality of maryādā-bhakta, of one who follows the path of the 'dharmic' duties but does not abandon himself to the grace of Kṛṣṇa²⁶. This is illustrated by the belief, among Vallabhans, that Narasimha Mahetā could reach ultimate perfection only after having been reborn in Gopāladāsa, the author of the Vallabhākhyāna²⁷ or Navākhyāna, of the last quarter of the 16th century, the only Gujaratī Vallabhan work

to become known outside Gujarāt as it was instrumental in founding the cult of living Mahārājas, descendants of Vallabha, as constant reincarnations of Krsna²⁸.

Whatever their doubts about Narasimha Mahetā, the Vallabhans approve of the "Vaiṣṇavajana..." as defined by him, and any commoner will recognize in Narasimha Mahetā, the author of "Vaiṣṇavajana...", the oldest and most important Gujaratī Vaiṣṇava totally free from sectarian links, whose life conformed to the generous ideal given in his poem, and who was perceived as being anterior to the arrival of Vallabhism in Gujarāt.

A possible source of "Vaisnavajana..." in old Gujaratī

Bhayani, in his article 'Vaiṣṇavajana' padanī samasyāo²⁹, discusses the different possible sources of the pada as proposed by anterior research. If he thinks it interesting to identify passages of the Visnupurāna³⁰ or of the Bhāgavatapurāna³¹, he prefers to stress the importance of an isolated text published by A. Bhojak32, the Vaisnava bhakta prabandha copāī or Viṣṇubhagata by a certain Māvo Vaiṣṇava. This poem was written at Talājā, the birth-place of Narasimha Mahetā in Saurashtra, in the year Samvat 1587 (1530 A. D.) for a certain Gorā Rsi of Patan, the manuscript of which was kept in the collection of the Jaina Ācārya Śrī Vijaya Āmkārasūrijī Mahārāja. In 51 stanzas written in the copāī metre, the poem lists the qualities of the Vaisnava in a manner resembling the ideas and the vocabulary of "Vaisnavajana..." to such an extent that Bhayani is inclined to see in Narasimha Mahetā's pada a mnemonic summary of the Visnu bhagata of Mavo Vaisnava33. Mavo starts with 15 copai enumerating the characteristics of the avaisnava "the one who is not a Vaisnava" with the following teka (refrain): Kahu śrīrāmani te kima gamai ? "How will he please Śrī Rāma ?" In stanzas 16 to 48 he describes the qualities of the Vaisnava with the teka of stanza 16 using the very word "Vaiṣṇavajana...34"; Kahi śrī rāma vaiṣṇava jana teha "Says Śrī Rāma : This is a true Vaisnava". In the last three stanzas he states his name, date and place of writing, and the benefits rewarding the reader.

Māvo fits well into the tradition of non-sectarian saints of northern India, using the name of Śrī Rāma or the Nāthapanthī terminology, as in stanza 45 and 46 for instance³⁵. But what is more striking is the fact that he includes purely Jaina rules among the rites to be observed by the Vaiṣṇava, as for instance:

stanza 16: the Vaisnava must observe jīvadayādharma,

stanza 20: he must drop the evening meal,

stanza 22: he must never drink unfiltered water, and finally

stanza 46: he must restrain the eight kinds of karma-s.

Māvo knew the *Jaina dharma* and recommended its observance³⁶. These features, as well as the fact that he was preöccupied with a purely ethical ideal, show to which extent Jaina influence had penetrated into the pre-Vallabhan Viṣṇuism of Gujarāt³⁷. It is well known that the present-day Vaiṣṇava and Jaina faithful strive to outdo each

other in strictly observing ahimsā and severe vegetarian rules. Their aims, however, are different: the Vallabhans try to keep themselves free from any kind of pollution, whereas the Jainas want to annihilate the effects of karma. Yet in Māvo's text on the Vaiṣṇava dharma one finds a complete convergence of views on how to achieve moral perfection and how to determine the norms of human behaviour.

Conclusion

The ideal of "Vaiṣṇavajana..." of course does not belong exclusively to Gujaratī bhakti. From Kabīra³8 to Tulasīdāsa³9, there is a wealth of definitions in the devotional literature in new Indo-Aryan languages. But what may have been Jaina influence in Gujarat, may have been the work of Buddhist influence in the North⁴0. Whereas Buddhism disappeared, Jainism survived and became predominant in Gujarat, and this may explain why Gujaratī bhakti kept on a permanent interest in the theme of moral perfection and why non-sectarian forms of Viṣṇuism did not disappear. Dayārāma, who wrote in the 19th century and was a Vallabhan, gave a final description of what a Vaiṣṇava is not⁴¹. His composition⁴² is sung in bhajana sessions at least frequently as "Vaiṣṇavajana to tene kahīye..":

Vaiṣṇava nathī thayo tum re, harijana nathī thayo tum re, sīda gumānamām ghume.

Harijanane joī hayum na harakhe, drave na Hari guṇa gāṭām, kāma dāma caṭakī nathī phaṭakī, krodhe locana rātām. 1 Vaisnava nathī tum re,...

Tuja samge koi vaiṣṇava thāë, to tum vaiṣṇava sāco, tārā samgano raṃga na lāge, tahām tum kāco. 2 Vaisnava nathī tum re,...

Paradukha dekhī hṛdaya na dājhe, paranindā nathī ḍarato, vhālā nathī Viṭṭhala śuṁ sācuṁ, hatḥe tuṁ huṁ huṁ karato. 3 Vaiṣṇava nathī tuṁ re,...

Paropkāre prīta na tujane, svārtha chuṭyo che nāṃhim, kaheṇī tevī raheṇī na maļe, kyām lakhyum ema kahenī. 4 Vaiṣṇava nathī tum re,...

Bhajanā rūḍha nathī mana niścaya, nathī Harino viśvāsa, jagatataṇī āṣā che jyāṁ lagī, jagata guru tuṁ dāsa. 5 Vaiṣṇava nathī tuṁ re,...

Manataṇo guru mana karīśa to, sācī vastu jaḍaśe, Dayā duḥkha ke sukha māna, paṇa sācum kahevum paḍaśe. 6 Vaiṣṇava nathī tum re,...

You are not a Vaiṣṇava Hari's devotee you are not. why are you engrossed in your pride? (refrain)

At the sight of a devotee of Hari, you don't rejoice at heart, to hear him sing the praise of Hari, your heart doesn't melt; You did not keep yourself away from the charms of lust and wealth, your eyes are red with wrath. 1

If someone in your company becomes a Vaiṣṇava, only then you are a true Vaiṣṇava, but as long as your company is not powerful enough to imbue him, a raw devotee you remain. 2

Seeing the miseries of others does not set your heart on fire, you are not afraid of speaking ill of others; your love for Vitthala is not true, with obstinacy you only think of "Me! Me!" 3

Generosity you do not love, never you leave alone your own interest; your deeds do not match your words, where has this been written ? 4

Devotional singing isn't firmly established in your mind and on Hari you do not put your faith; so long as you place your expectations on the world, the world is your guru and you are its slave. 5

But if you take for guru your own mind, you will reach the true Reality; says Dayārāma: calamity or bliss, the Truth should be told. 6

Annotations:

- * A first draft to this paper was read at the "Third International Conference on Devotional Literature in New Indo-Aryan Languages", at Leyden (The Netherlands), in December 1985.
- On Narasimha Mahetā, see F. Mallison, Au point du jour, les prabhātiyām de Narasimha Mahetā, poéte et saint vishnouite du Gujarāt (XVe siecle), Paris 1986 17-47 and bibliography 10-12; and J. Kothari, Narsimha Mahetā, Delhi 1994.
- 2. The Gujarātī text is taken from H. Bhayani "'Vaiṣṇavajana' padanī samasyāo," Bhāṣāvimarśa, 5-4, Ahmedabad 1982, 163. This is an emended version of the edition by S. Jesalpura, Narasimha Mahetāni kāvyakṛtio, Ahmedabad 1981, 382. Several translations into English and even into French were collected by D. Patel and J. N. Trivedi, Eds., Love Poems and Lyrics from Gujarātī, Ahmedabad 1977, [42]-[45].

- 3. The formula Pīḍa parāī jāṇe is also found in the Barvai n.79 of the poem 'Barvai' in Early Hindi of Rahim (1536-1627): Pīra parāī jānaī "who can perceive another's pain", cf. R. Snell, "'Barvai' Metre in Tulsidās and Rahim," Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature Eds. A. W. Entwiste and F. Mallison, New-Delhi-Paris 1994, 394.
- 4. kācha: M. A. Mehendale (Samskṛti, 26-7, Ahmedabad 1972, 219-220) proposes to understand kācha as "act, deed" and not as "body" or "sex" as it is often translated, duplicating the meaning of the following stanza. He proposes the etymology: Skt. kṛtya > Pkt. kacca > Guj. kāca or kārya > kāja > kāca.
- 5. Ekotera: according to H. Bhayani in "Śabdaprayogonī pagadandī," Forbes Gujaratī Sabhā Traimāsika, 54-2, Bombay 1989, 93: "bādotera so, bilamtara so," ekotera is to be read as ekotara so (i.e. as a Sanskrit copy of ekottara śata) and to be translated into Gujaratī as so upara eka 'one plus one hundred' or 'one hundred and one' and not as ekotera, usually translated as 'seventy one'.
- 6. Ch. Vaudeville, L'Invocation, le Haripath de Dñandev, Paris 1969, 62-65.
- 7. Ch. Vaudeville, Kabir, Oxford 1974, 99.
- 8. The Svāmī-nārāyanī sect is a Krishnaite movement which was founded at the beginning of the 19th century and which subsequently developed Guru worship in a separate branch. It always showed a strong reformist and puritanical tendency.
- 9. K. K. Shastri, Narasimha Maheto, eka adhyayana, Ahmedabad 1971, 263.
- Vaiṣṇavajana was even compared with the Bible's Ten Commandments by M. H. Bhatt in "Vaiṣṇavajana to tene kahīye," Narasimha Mahetā āsvāda ane svādhyāya, Ed. R. Chaudhari, Bombay 1988, 296.
- 11. See below Conclusion.
- 12. Shastri, Narasimha Maheto, 264 and S. Jesalpura, "Vaiṣṇavajananuñ pada Narasimhanuñ che, e viśe śamkā nathī," Forbes Gujaratī Sabhā Traimāsika, 49-1, Bombay 1984, 78f.
- 13. M. B. Vyas, Vimalaprabandha, Surat 1913, Introduction, 44.
- 14. See M. Lath, "Bhajan as Song: Towards an Oral Stemma of Namdev's padas", Bhakti in Current Research, 1979-1982, Ed. M. Thiel-Horstmann, Berlin 1983, 231-233.
- 15. Shastri, Narasimha Maheto, 263.
- 16. Ed. I. S. Desai, Bṛhat Kāvyadohana, IV, Bombay 1890, 247-288.
- 17. K. K. Shastri, Kavicaritra (bhāga 1-2), Ahmedabad 1952, 318-323; R. Sh. Desai, Prācīna kavio ane temanī kṛtio, Baroda repr. 1977, 414.
- 18. A third one is actually mentioned by K. M. Munshi, Narasimhayuganā kavio, Bombay 1962, 111.
- 19. Ed. Desai, Bṛhat Kāvyadohana, IV, 199-246.
- 20. Shastri, Kavicaritra, 356-361; Desai, Prācīna kavio.,300. It was not possible to consult the manuscript published by M. B. Vyas, but it would be interesting to check whether Vācho was not misread (or eventually miscopied) instead of Narachaio, one of the possible

bhanitā of Narasimha. K. K. Shastri quotes the example of an old version of Vaiṣṇavajana bearing this signature (Shastri, Narasimha Maheto, 264).

- 21. Shastri, Kavicaritra, 203-216, and Desai, Prācīna Kavio., 254-260.
- 22. Ed. K. K. Shastri, Śrī Mahābhārata (Gujaratī prabandha), II, Bombay 1933, 274.
- 23. Bhayani, "Vaisnavajana," Bhāśāvimarśa, 165.
- 24. This vārtā records the life-story of Kṛṣṇadāsa, the fourth of the eight aṣṭachāpa, himself hailing from Gujarat. The account of Mīrā-bāī is in the first episode (prasamga): in order to prove his exclusive faith in the community of Vallabhācārya, Kṛṣṇadāsa refuses Mīrā's offer of hospitality and her gifts (see Ed. G. D. Parekh, Caurāsī vaiṣṇavana kī vārtā, Mathura 1970, 530f., and R. Barz, The Bhakti Sect of Vallabhācārya, Faridabad 1976, 41 and 213f.)
- 25. Pada: 'Padhāryā Hari Kumkumane pagale', Ed. Jesalpura, Narasimha Mahetānī., 241. The Vallabhan gaddī at Surat which serves the svarūpa of Bālakṛṣṇa was not always acknowledged by the other gaddī of the sampradāya. It owes its installation at Surat in the year 1670 more to internal problems of inheritance than to Muslim persecution.
- 26. In fact, I was even told once at Māļīā, a small town near Junagadh in Saurashtra where Narasimha Mahetā is supposed to have spent his life, that Narsī was not a 'puṣṭi-puṣṭi-bhakta' but a 'maryādā-puṣṭi bhakta'!
- 27. Ed. I. S. Desai, Bṛhat Kāvyadohana, VIII, Bombay 1913, 458-470.
- 28. See the introduction of M. T. Teliwala to his edition of the Vidvanmandanam of Śrī Viṭṭhaleśvara, the son of Vallabhācārya, Kaman 1926, 3f.
- · 29. Bhayani, "Vaiṣṇavajana", Bhāṣāvimarṣa, 163-167.
- 30. K. N. Joshi, "Narasimha Mahetāe Vaiṣṇavajananī vyākhyārūpe sarjelā padanī mīmāmsā," Svādhyāya, 11-4, Baroda 1973, 326-328.
- 31. Shastri, Narasimha Maheto., 264f.
- 32. Ed. A. N. Bhojak, "Kavi Māvā-Māvajī racita Vaisṇavabhaktaprabandhacopāī," Sambodhi, 6-3,4 Ahmedabad 1977-78, 1-5.
- 33. Bhayani, "Vaisnavajan," Bhāsāvimarśa, 166.
- 34. According to K. N. Joshi, "Narasimha Mahetāe.," Svādhyāya, 324f., the word Vaiṣṇavajana might have been coined by Narasimha and is less frequent than harijana.
- 35. Bhayani in "Narasimha-svädhyāya-3: Vaiṣṇava Narasimha," *Bhāṣāvimarśa*, 7-3, Ahmedabad 1984, 4, lists the different aspects of the Vaiṣṇavism of Narasimha Mahetā which includes Jainism, Nāthism and the sambhoga-śṛmgāra type of bhakti.
- 36. In fact the unique manuscript of this poem was produced for a Jaina collection, according to the colophon.
- 37. It is remarkable that the influence is mutual. Instances of Jaina monks composing Gujarātī verses on the Kṛṣṇa legend and miracles can be quoted; see, for instance, H. Bhayani, "Jalakamala prabhātiyānī prācīnatā ane tenuīr kartṛtva," Anusandhāna, Ahmedabad 1972, 55-78 (reprinted from Svādhyāya, 7, Baroda 1969 398-412); or the Somakṛta Sudāmāsāra,

most probably a version of the Sudāmā caritra in Old Gujarātī by a Jaina author, edited by M. R. Majmudar, Sudāmā caritra, Baroda 1922, 105-109.

- 38. Kabīra, sākhī 4, 24, Ed. Vaudeville, Kabīr, 183.
- 39. See the pada quoted by K. N. Joshi, "Narasimha Maheta." Svādhyāya, 330f.
- 40. It is interesting to note that the Section XXVI of the Dhammapada which bears the title of The [true] Brāhmaṇa lists in 41 verses (v.383-423) the qualities of the perfect follower of the Buddha. The description of the [true] Brāhmaṇ recalls our definition of the true Vaiṣṇava: dispassionate, merciful, pure, free from anger, bereft of ill intention towards anybody, without attachment..., and in the same way as "Vaiṣṇava" does not mean a mere devotee of Viṣṇu but one who observes a high ideal of conduct, likewise "Brahman" does not mean one who is born into the brahmanic caste, but only one who embodies all the virtues of a perfect renouncer. Moreover, the same definition does exist in the Jaina Scriptures: Uttarādhyayana, XXV, 19ff. (ed. Sacred Books of the East, XLV, 138ff.) which describes the [true] Brahman as no more the specialist of rites and sacrifices but as one pure in mind, words, and deeds, without any attachment, a nirgrantha. I thank Mr J. P. Ozier for having brought to my notice these points (J. P. Ozier, "Le jainisme", Un monde de eligions, I. Les traditions de l'Inde, Ed. M. Boisvert, Québec 1997, 95f., and the author's French translation of the Dhammapada to appear in Paris in 1997, 75-81).
- 41. See D. Dholakiya, "Vaiṣṇavajana : be bhinna dṛṣṭibinduo", Parab, 31-4, Ahmedabad 1990, 36-38.
- 42. The text given here is taken from an oral version collected during a bhajana at Surat (August 18, 1984, Bālakṛṣṇa Mandira). It varies slightly from the old edition of Kavi Narmadāśamkara (Dayārāma kṛta Kāvyasamgraha, Bombay 1887, 299) and from the current edition by Sh. Ch. Raval (Dayārāma-rasasudhā, sec. ed., Bombay 1953, 153). See F. Mallison, "Les chants dhoļa au Gujarāt et leur usage pour la dévotion vallabhite", Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, LXXV, Paris 1986, 91-93.