



Rādhā-Kanḥayyā kā Qiṣṣā¹

Nawab Wajid Ali Shah
Introduced and translated by
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Introduction:

Wajid Ali Shah, the last king of Avadh, was a great patron of the arts. He is known for the passionate personal interest in promoting the arts, aesthetics, culture and architecture. Literature, aesthetics and performing arts were the ruling passions of his life and he was a talented writer himself. Under the pen name 'Akhtar,' he published some six-collection of ghazals, three volumes of *maṣnavīs* and *qaṣīdās*, besides a treatise of music called, *Sant-e-Mubārak* (holy greetings). His passion for dance and drama is evident in the patronage he offered to dancers and musicians and the great pains he took to master these arts. The task of scripting the first drama in Urdu and then the task of dramatizing this play for the purpose of the stage goes to Wajid Ali Shah. Similarly, the pride of constructing the first theatre for Urdu Drama, *Rahasya Manzil*,² also goes to Wajid Ali Shah.

Professor Masud Hasan Rizvi Adeeb's book *Urdu Drāmā aur Stage* (Urdu drama and the stage) is in two volumes; *Lucknow kā Shāhī Stage* (the royal stage of Lucknow) and *Lucknow ka Awāmī Stage* (the popular stage of Lucknow). He writes that though the history of Urdu

¹ I owe this translation to Professor Masud Hasan Rizvi Adeeb, for it has been translated from *Urdu Drāmā aur Stage*, published in 1957 (pp 210 – 224). This book won the Sahitya Academy Award in 1959.

² According to Rizvi details regarding the stage equipment are missing. P 170.

theatre begins with Amanat's *Indar Sabha* (1853), it was it was Wajid Ali Shah who laid the foundations of the Urdu stage, commissioned Amanat to write the play and provided a congenial ambience for its performance. Wajid Ali Shah's play *Rādhā Kanḥayyā kā Qiṣṣā* was first written 1843, is in the first volume of Rizvi's book and Amanat's *Indar Sabhā* is incorporated in the second volume. It was Professor Rizvi's research on Wajid Ali Shah that unravelled not only this play but the history of Urdu theatre.

Rizvi has described the various stages of theatrical entertainment at the court of Wajid Ali Shah. The first stage shows the Shah dressed as a *jogī* (hermit), the second stage shows the Rahasya dances conceived by Wajid Ali Shah. In the 1850's Wajid Ali Shah composed three *masnavīs* for theatrical presentation. While the original Persian texts of these fairy tale romances are extant, no scripts or production directions for these theatrical presentations have survived. A few illustrations of these entertainment extravaganza in the words of the commentators who were witnesses to these *jalsās* have survived. One of the accounts is in the words of *Iqtidār-ud Daulāh*, who has described these magnificent *jalsas* in his book *Tariq-e-Iqtidāriyāh*. (History of this period has been recorded in this book) According to the account of *Iqtidār-ud Daulah* (who was also Wajid Ali Shah's uncle), the Shah's staging of his plays was beyond grandiose and the whole play took more than one month to perform. This performance was staged in fourteen sessions. Shah spent lakhs of rupees on the dramatization of each of these plays. According to Professor Rizvi this was perhaps the costliest stage in history³ (169).

The three eloquent romantic poems composed by him in the form of *masnavīs* are called *Daryā-e Ta'shuq* (ocean of love), *Afsana-e-'Ishq* (story of love), *Behr-e-Ulfat* (sea of love). Their dramatization marked a significant development in the Urdu theatre. He created here a fantastical world of the paristan (fairyland), *devs* (giants), genies and the fairies coexisting with the world of humans and their amorous love intrigues which became extremely popular among the public. Dramatists of the popular theatre like Syed Agha Hasan Ali (Amanat was his pen name), drew upon them for the plot of his work *Indar Sabhā*, plays based on similar plots were scripted by other dramatists of his time as well. Wajid

³ In the chapter "Shāhī Rahasya ka Sāz-o Samāñ," Rizvi has elaborated on how costly stage equipment and costumes were prepared using pure gold and silver. According to him if we calculate the cost of this theatre then it will run into lakhs or even crores of rupees.

Ali Shah's court had been compared to the court of Indar⁴ (Rajab Ali Beg Suroor compares the court of Wajid Ali Shah to that of Indar, Pg 21) by a number of poets before Amanat composed his *Indar Sabhā*.

Kathryn Hansen has credited the court theatre of Wajid Ali Shah for the popularity of *Indar Sabhā*. She has pointed out that it was the evocation of the vanished Islamic court atmosphere that motivated the popularity of *Indar Sabhā*⁵ (Hansen 78-79). Whereas, Afroz Taj attributes the popularity and success of *Indar Sabha* to the play's celebration of the richness and diversity of Indian culture⁶ (Taj 167). I agree with Hansen that the public identified the court of Indar with that of Wajid Ali Shah court and they continued to look for similar means of entertainment when the court theatre that the King had evolved was dismissed and Wajid Ali Shah was exiled to Calcutta.

In the nine years of his reign, Wajid Ali Shah did much to enhance the reputation of Lucknow as the leading cultural centre. Professor Masud Hasan Rizvi gives the credit of giving a permanent stage of Urdu drama to Wajid Ali Shah. He staged the magnificent *rahasyas* in his state-of-the-art theatres at the Baradari. Often the King himself enacted the role of Krishna, and his favourite wives played the *gopis* (milkmaids). *Rādhā Kanḥayyā kā Qiṣṣā* is the first drama in Urdu. The text of the play has been provided to the readers and stage directions have been supplemented as a prerequisite in performance.

Prof. Masud Hasan Rizvi while analysing Wajid Ali Shah's interest in Rās Lila, or incidents concerned with the life of Sri Krishna, points out, that in the fourth chapter of his book *Bani* (*Bani* can be translated as *Creation or Composition*), Wajid Ali Shah has interpreted the word *rahasya* in two ways, first as the Rādhā-Kanḥayyā dance (Rās Lila), and the other as the stage illustration of the events in the life of Sri Krishna (*Rahasya naṭak*). Wajid Ali Shah was interested in both these forms of *Rahasya*⁷, he evolved a number of new forms of *rahasya* dances that he has elaborated in his book *Soutul Mubārak* (Blessed Soul). At the same

⁴ Saroor, Rajab Ali Baig. in *Fasana-e-Ajaib* (he has compared the court of Wajid Ali Shah to that of Indra), Lucknow. Matba Naval Kishore, 1912.

⁵ Hansen, Kathryn. *Grounds For Play: The Nautanki Theatre of North India*. Berkley: University of California Press, 1992.

⁶ Taj, Afroz. *The Court of Indar and the Rebirth of North Indian Drama*. New Delhi. Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu, 2007.

⁷ Rizvi, Quoting Wajid Ali Shah from *Bani* in *Lucknow Ka Shahi Stage*, Lucknow: Kitab Nagar, 1957.

time Wajid Ali Shah also applied the term *Rahasya* to his later plays that had nothing to do with the life of Sri Krishna. He has given the heading '*Preparations for Rahasya Mubārak*' to the dramatization of his masnavi '*Darya-e-Ta'shuq*, in his book of couplets *Ishq-nāmā Manzūm (Book of Love)*. He has mentioned in his book, *Bani*, the five *mandalis*⁸ (quoted in Rizvi, Vol I, 112) or troupes of dramatists who staged the *Rādhā-Kaṇḥayyā rahasya*.

Rizvi has referred to the Indian theatrical tradition of Sanskrit drama that Wajid Ali Shah draws upon, the *Drishya Kāvya* or *Nāṭya*. '*Drishya Kāvya* implies poetic-verse that is meant to be staged. The couplets of this literary art form are such that it is meant to be relished on stage instead of simply being read. The essence of Sanskrit drama is *Nirṭya* or dance. This implies that the element of dance or performance takes precedence over the element of action or *Natak*. Wajid Ali Shah's dance-dramas, borrowed from this ancient Sanskritic tradition, and were a combination of dance, music and play-acting, *Rādhā Kaṇḥayyā kā Qiṣṣā*, too draws upon the same tradition. And it is accompanied by a *Kathak* performance, where characters enact what they say in dancing postures.

The characters in this play converse with each other in prose, only *Rādhā* and *Kaṇḥayyā* on occasions try to express themselves in idioms. Whatever work the characters perform like entering and leaving the stage, performing stage activities like persuading *Rādhā*, drawing water from the well, churning curd, extracting butter, is done with stage-synchrony and rhythm. They often display these activities upon stage with dancing postures. Professor Rizvi points out that on this basis the *rahasya* can be explained in terms of a *dance-drama*, and its acting can be likened to *abhinay*⁹ in the ancient Sanskritic plays. Here it is accompanied not only by the *Kathak* dance sequence, but also *hori*¹⁰,

⁸ Rizvi, Quoting Wajid Ali Shah from *Bani* 1957.

⁹ *Abhinay- Nāṭak* [Indian Theatre or Drama] on the stage was popular since centuries and is known as *Abhinay*.

¹⁰ *Hori* is a genre of semi-classical singing popular in U.P and Bihar. It can be adored with a *Bhairavi*, *thumri* etc. Songs of *Hori/Dhamar* are related to *Rādhā- Krishna lila* in the festival of *Holi*. It comes in the series of season songs like *chaiti*, *savan*, *kajari* and is traditionally sung in the villages and towns of Uttar Pradesh around Benaras, Mizapur, Mathura, Allahabad and the *Bhojpur* regions of Bihar. It is also called *Dhamar*, which is sung with *Dhamar taal*.

thumri¹¹ and holi singing that adds to it the traditional flavour of folk-music of Awadh of its day. *Hinḍola* dance, Ladoo puja and worshipping various incarnations of Krishna is enacted in this drama accompanied by dance and music.

Rizvi has pointed out that in the Sanskrit drama there was a *Vidushak* or jester whose purpose it was to entertain the audience with his jests. Urdu drama too has borrowed the character of the *Vidushak* to entertain the audiences with his jesting and gimmicks. In the Shahi Rahasya, the character of Ramchira is the same as that of *Vidushak* in the Sanskrit *Nāṭak*. In the ancient Sanskrit stage, the part of Vidushak was always played by a Brahmin, since the hero of the Natak was usually the King, and no one besides a Brahmin could dare to speak to the Raja with frankness, talk to amuse, and generate laughter. Wajid Ali Shah kept this tradition alive. Rizvi has also pointed out how Wajid Ali Shah has taken special care to mention even the most trivial details regarding costumes, equipment and the specialties of the performers in his royal plays. Wajid Ali Shah often referred to the rules laid down by the ancient Indian Stage and used the same in his plays. However, his royal tastes could not agree with the idea that the plays of rahasya that he evolved should make use of copper or bronze ornaments, therefore the royal crown that Kaṇḥayyā adorned was made of gold and not bare copper plate. All the ornaments that embellished his fairies were made of real gold and studded with precious jewels and gems. We must remember that it took a period of months to prepare the ornaments and costumes of the characters of his royal plays. Zari or brocade work on costumes was done in real gold or silver threads.

Wajid Ali Shah gives a detailed account of the dresses and jewellery adorned by various characters in the first drama of the royal stage in his book *Bani*.¹²

¹¹ Thumri-is a vocal genre or style of Indian music. The term thumri is derived from Hindi verb, *thumakna*, which means to walk with dancing steps so as to match with the tinkling ankle bells. This form is thus connected with dance, dramatic gestures and evocative love poetry from Uttar Pradesh. The lyrics are usually in Awadhi or Braj Bhasha, though there are regional variations. There are several forms such as *Dādra Horī*, *Kajarī*, *Sāvan*, *Jhūla* and *Chaiti*.

¹² Rizvi, *Urdu Drāmā aur Stage*, Vos. I and II. Lucknow: Kitab Nagar, 1957.

1. Kanḥayyā: Golden crown, golden anklets, silver flute (for the royal rahasya this was made of gold), short dhoti.
 2. Rādhā: Lehnga, nose ring and all the ornaments worn by Hindu women.
 3. Sakhiya (milkmaids): stole, *pajāmā*, gown, *peshwāz* (tunic, a 'ngarkha style of dress), sultan-bandh (bracelet), and complete jewellery.
 4. Fairies: They wore dresses embellished with *zari*, embroidered *pajamas*, jewelled wings, complete jewellery.
 5. Ifrit¹³: black jacket, black pants, black gloves, black socks, face mask, long black colour paper feathers. (English attire like pants and jacket displayed a contempt for the British, Professor Masud points out in the first volume of the book, Pg 110¹⁴).
 6. Jogan: Ochre coloured clothes, dhoti, long hair tresses (artificial wig was used), rug sack, begging bowl, a long snake made out of cloth, wooden lathi (stick) and ashes.
 7. The Butter-women (Milkmaids): all the ornaments requisite for Hindu women, wooden churner, earthen vessel, broad tray, vessels.
 8. The Water-Drawers: wearing simple jewellery, copper vessel, dhol (vessel), artificial well.
 9. Traveller: *A'ngarkhā* (tunic), *pajāmā*, turban, earthen-vessel, *loṭā* (water pot), wooden stick, carrying a baggage and a duri (mat made of cotton).
 10. Ghurbat: *A'ngarkhā*, *Achkan* (knee length coat), *pajāmā*, turban, and all the other perquisites are white in colour.
- Ramchira: *dhotī*, *mirzai* (woolen jacket), *a'ngarkhā*, *ja'neyu*, silver anklets.
- Rahasya-waliya: A heavily embroidered stole, embroidered *pajamas*, *peshwāz*, and all the jewellery (quoted in Rizvi, 108).

One of the most significant developments in the Urdu theatre according to Prof. Rizvi was the *Jogiana Mela* at Qaiser Bagh.¹⁵ (Prof. Rizvi has given an elaborate description to this in *Lucknow a Shāhī Stage*, on pages 172-187) The drama's which were played as 'Rahasya' at the Shahi Mahal of Lucknow, could not be witnessed by anyone besides the King, his family and the nobility for a long period of time. In 1267 Hijri (year 1850), permission was given to the prominent citizens of the town to witness these plays. The influence of the Lucknow court

¹³ Ifrit is a powerful type of demon in Islamic mythology. The Ifrit is also associated with the spirit of the dead.

¹⁴ Rizvi, *Urdu Drāmā*, Vol I. 1957.

¹⁵ Rizvi, *Urdu Drāmā*, Vol I. 1957.

theatre and the syncretism that was a part of the culture of Awadh is also reflected in the professional Urdu theatre and North Indian folk theatre of its time, for they borrowed and incorporated from Urdu and Persian forms like *Ġhazal*, *Maṣnavī*, *Qavvālī Marsiya*, *Qaṣīda*, together with the Hindu poetic forms such as *Basant* (folk songs of the spring season), *Savan* (folk songs of the rainy season), *Holi* (songs sung during the Holi season; more popular ones are the Rādhā-Krishna songs) and *ṭhumrī*, *bhiravī* (Bhairvi- Hindustani classical heptatonic raga of Bhairvi).

The Nawab as a Shia Muslim King consulted priests and celebrated Hindu festivals like *Savan*, *Holi*, *Basant-Panchami* or even *Nauroz* (*Nauroz*- Persian New year which begins with spring) with great pageantry and entertained himself with grand sessions of *Ras*. He learnt *Kathak* from his court dancers and musicians, *Pandit Thakur Prasad* and the dancing brothers *Kalka* and *Bindadin Mahārāj* were employed by him. The Nawab invested exorbitant amounts of state wealth in arts, culture and the entertainment of his people. Thus, it was Nawab Wajid Shah's creativity, diverse interests, artistic ability, expenditure and unlimited wealth that combined to lay down the foundation of a rich theatrical tradition amongst the people of Awadh and it was this tradition that formed the milieu in which *Amanat's Indar Sabha* and the popular theatre of the day emerged.

The First Urdu Drama: *The Tale of Rādhā and Kanḥayyā*¹⁶

Dramatist: Sultān-e Ālam Wajid Ali Shah

Preface: This drama *The Tale of Rādhā Kanḥayyā*, was written by Wajid Ali Shah during his reign, between 1258 to 1262 Hijri (year 1842-1846), and later this was included in his book *Bani*, that was compiled by him in 1292 Hijri (year 1875). The whole drama has been written as a continuous narrative, and upon cursory examination the directions appear to be a part of this narrative. In the middle of this are also incorporated the stage-directions given to the play actors, which at a glance seem to be the whole idea behind this commentary. Here this drama has been written in accordance with the present-day writing conventions. The actual text of this drama is in a bold script, and the directions are written in slightly faint script. There are words here which have become obsolete, for they were not considered standard when this text was edited. Thus, they have been elided in the favour of the standard

¹⁶ "Rādhā-Kanayya ka Qiṣṣā"

convention in writing. Therefore in a few places Hindi words have been corrected. Besides this no change has been made to the text of the play.

There is another tale of Rādhā and Kaṇḥayyā given in the book *Bani*. At the time when this book was completed, Wajid Ali Shah had been living Calcutta for twenty years. It is not known if he wrote this second story in Lucknow or in Calcutta.

Prof. Masud Hasan Rizvi Adeeb

Characters in the play:

Sehra: A distraught woman who has taken to asceticism

Ġhurbat: The servant of the *jogan*.

Ifrit: A dev or a giant.

Arghwan Pari: Zafran Pari: Two fairies.

Kaṇḥayyā: Hero of the play.

Rādhā: Heroine of the play.

Lalita, Sakha, Cheena, and Laḍva: Four friends or companions of Rādhā (the *gopīs* or milkmaids)

Ramchira: Kaṇḥayyā's pampered servant.

A traveller: he has arrived from Mathura, Brindavan with his trunks.

Four water-women: Four women drawing water from the well.

Four Milkmaids: Four women churning butter from the curd.

The Tale of Rādhā-Kaṇḥayyā

Two friends dressed in the attire of fairies, they are embellished with wings and draped in an exquisite dress.¹⁷ One of them is named Arghwan Pari and the other is called Zafran Pari. One of the men is disguised as a dangerous looking Dev, his name is Ifrit. One of the women plays the role of a *jogan* and is called Sehra. The *jogan* is accompanied by a man servant called Ġhurbat. At the end of the *Rahasya*, all the *sakhīs* (milkmaids or *gopīs*)¹⁸ sit down upon the stage. Seated on their sides upon the chairs are the fairies. At one end of the stage is seated the *jogan* on a chair. The Dev is standing in front of the

¹⁷ Exquisite dress- This probably refers to a dress designed by Wajid Ali Shah. Kārchobī embroidery is hand stitched and fashioned with needle work. It is a form of raised zari or gold thread embroidery created by sewing flat stitches on cotton padding.

¹⁸ *Gopīs* are famous within Vaishnavism for their unconditional devotion to Krishna as described in the *Bhagvata Purānā*. Among the *gopīs*, Rādhā is the chief *Gopi* and personification of Krishna.

fairies with folded hands, Ġhurbat stands before the *jogan* with folded hands. On one side of the stage are seen Rādhā and Kaṇḥayyā upon the chairs. Kaṇḥayyā is wearing a crown, and Rādhā is wearing a nose ring and a tika, she has taken the veil in a Bengali style. Ramchira is waiting on them and is standing with his hands folded. And the four friends Lalita, Sakha, Cheena, Laḍva are all wearing adornments and are standing in a circle. The four water-women are at the well (an artificial well has been made upon the stage) and they are singing a *ṭhumrī* compiled by Raquīm,¹⁹ while drawing water from the well. A man who appears to be a traveller passes by, while carrying a bundle and a *lāthī*. There are four butter-women (Milkmaids) singing a Hori composed by Raquim, and are churning butter. The *jogan* is also sitting here and is looking quite distraught.

Ġhurbat: (addressing Sehra or the *jogan*) Long Live! Be cheerful Jogan Sahib! Why are you unhappy, what is upsetting you?

Sehra: It's been twenty-four years of living with a grievance.

Ġhurbat: What is that sorrow, let me know if you think it right.

Sehra: It's been twenty-four years of living with a regret that I have not seen a Rādhā- Kaṇḥayyā dance.

Ġhurbat: Is this the only woe that is upsetting you? I will try and help in making this come true.

(Ġhurbat goes and calls upon Ifrit in person).

Ġhurbat: Salam Alaykum, Miañ Ifrit.

Ifrit: *Wa ālaykum-as-salām, Al-Sen, Wa-as-salām, At-Tam, Wal-Kalam, Lakshmash-Walidam, Mia Ghurbat Ali Khan, Bahadur, Bahaduran, Khat-Pat- Jung, Na-Mardi, Va-Dha-Par-Chor.*²⁰

(Both of them embrace while greeting each other and Ifrit laughs out aloud in a strange manner)

Ifrit: *kau' kau' khi khi khi khi.*

¹⁹ Raquim implies the writer. In this play it is Wajid Ali Shah.

²⁰ These dialogues by Ifrit consist of disconnected words and thoughts. Some words used here by Ifrit don't convey much meaning.

Ġhurbat: Miañ Ifrit! We have long been friends. I have an important entreaty to call upon you, if you can help me in accomplishing it.

Ifrit: What is the task?

Ġhurbat: There is a *jogan*, who is unhappy.

Ifrit: What is her regret?

Ġhurbat: Jogan Sahiba says that she is unhappy that she has not seen the Rādhā-Kanḥayyā Ras. I have promised her that I will try and do my best in helping her in accomplishing this, if you could help me in realizing this promise.

Ifrit: *Tenti, manti, dum qabisi, lotak lata, jhotak jhata, sandook, maulak, sari gao ki dum.*

I swear by the children, that I will not hesitate in doing whatever is in my means, I will try my best in accomplishing this.²¹
(Both Ifrit and Ghurbat now exit the stage together).

Ifrit: *Babasator-bazi, hammal-bazi, Nez-bazi, qallal-bazi, Shamsher-bazi, Rast-bazi, come with me.*²²

(Zafran pari and Arghwan Pari step forward upon the stage).

Ifrit: (addressing the fairies) A woman has embraced asceticism in her yearning to see a Rādhā-Kanḥayyā Ras, and she longs to see this dance.

Fairies: Go and bring the *jogan*.

(Ifrit accompanied by Ghurbat arrives to escort the *jogan*).

Ġhurbat: (addressing Sehra) Jogan Sahiba come, the fairies have summoned you.

²¹ These dialogues by Ifrit consist of disconnected words and thoughts. Some words used here by Ifrit don't convey much of meaning.

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(The Jogan accompanied by Ghurbat and Ifrit comes to call upon the fairies).

Ifrit: (to the fairies) The *jogan* has arrived.

Fairies: Call her.

(When the *jogan* arrives, both the fairies stand up and embrace her).

Fairies to Sehra: What has happened to you? Why have you taken to asceticism?

Sehra: For twenty-four years this yearning has been ailing me, that I get a chance to see the Rādhā-Kaṇḥayyā Ras.

Fairies: Oh Ifrit! Let's show the Rādhā-Kaṇḥayyā dance to the *jogan*.

Ifrit: (while calling out aloud to Rādhā, Kaṇḥayyā and Sakhiya). Rādhā! Kaṇḥayyā ! Sakhiya! Dance the Hindola dance.²³

(Now all the dancers assemble in two rows and stand facing each other, one end of a *dupatta* is held by Kaṇḥayyā and the other end by Rādhā. They sing the Hindola, [and also stage a dancing performance with appropriate dancing poses in synchrony with the song and the rhythm of music] and dance while moving their feet in synchrony with the song and to its rhythm. The dancers accompanying Rādhā ji and Kaṇḥayyā too dance behind them while harmonizing their dancing steps with Rādhā ji and Kaṇḥayyā . Kaṇḥayyā takes a step forward and stands facing Rādhā ji, then while tugging at her dupatta, he takes a step backward, and at the same time he loosens the edge of the dupatta. (All the friends stage a mesmerizing dance performance, while Rādhā, Kaṇḥayyā and the milkmaids gracefully perform the Hindola dance).

Āstai: *Hindola jhule, Shyama Shyama, Ghanse-se- Ghana- chalat, pon-sana-sana-sana*. (Baby Krishna is in the swing, when people sway the swing while performing the hindola),

²³ Hindola dance- is a festival celebrated by devotees of Sri Krishna. The festival finds its origin in the streets of Brindavan over 5000 years ago where the *gopis* rocked Krishna over a decorated swing. It was usually the idol of baby Krishna. Hindola dance in this book is a reference to the same festival.

First Antara (Antara is the second note in Hindustani classical music, the middle line). All the sakhi's together unfurl their wings and swing (to the tune of music), tana-tana-tana-tana- tana.

Second Antara: *Mor-Mukut*,²⁴ *kat-ranghar wa khanger*,²⁵ *payal baje, chana-nana, chana-nana, chana-nana.*

(At the end of the Hindola dance, all the Sakhis cry out: "May Victory be yours, Raja Ram Chandra! [Raja Ram Chandra ki Jai!]." Rādhā and Kaṇḥayyā again return to the stage and stand while facing each other and all the dancers gather in equal numbers behind Rādhā and Kaṇḥayyā . Now a question-and-answer sequence resumes between Rādhā and Kaṇḥayyā. Rādhā and Kannayya speak to each other in couplets and idioms and there is a dancing performance staged to illustrate these couplets in dancing postures, requisite in dramatically staging these verses. They move their feet synchronically with music while performing these couplets that they are reciting.)

Rādhā: In this crowd of strangers, you chose to punish me;
Slayer! You didn't bother to think about me.
I was destined to be an ascetic with no companions;
Weaving the bamboo bark, my hands look bruised.

Kaṇḥayyā : My name is Kaṇḥayyā and I understand you;
Rādhā ji I treasure you and love you more than my life.
The bindia on Rādhā ji's forehead is so mesmerizing;
It appears like a bee smelling a fragrant ketaki flower.²⁶

Rādhā: I am madly in love with you, O Kanha;²⁷
I understand you, for I love you from the depth my soul.
O dear Mohana, I can see you, with my eyes closed;
I will not cast an eye upon another, nor allow you to seek another.

²⁴ Mor-Mukut- A crown made of peacock feathers. It can also mean a crown in shape of peacock.

²⁵ Ranghar- Khanger - The echoing of music in the ears.

²⁶ The flower of ketaki, for bearing false witness was cursed to be never used for the worship of Shiva. The Gods cursed ketaki flower, which probably was a boon for mankind. Ketaki flowers are very fragrant and are used extensively in oils and perfumes.

²⁷ Kanha- Kaṇḥayyā in this play has been referred to by various names, Shyam, Kanha, Shiv PRādhān, Bihari Lal, Mohan.

Kanḥayyā : To attain your love Rādhā ji, I have traversed jungles;
Dev's and fairies too could not recognize me.

Rādhā: Embellishing a crown upon the head, robed in dhoti and
playing a flute;
In my heart forever dwell Nanak, Momin, and Bihari Lal

Kanḥayyā : Rādhā's door is like the lofty tree of dates;
If you scale it, you taste the nectar of love, if you fall
you are shattered.
Sitting at the window, I relish the scenes outside;
Our wheel of fortune,²⁸ decides our fate.

(After this conversation, Kanḥayyā gives away gold coins to the audience. They stretch out their hands and collect them, in thanks-giving, and touch them to their forehead and eyes and kiss them.)

Rādhā: The smoke is rising near the river and I wonder what the occasion is;
I became an ascetic for your sake, but you are unwavering.
Face like the moon, pink eyes²⁹, hands are handcuffed in loops,³⁰
I understand the heart and have travelled the world, as life comes knocking.
Open your mind and heart but don't touch the old wounds;
If we share our pain Mir³¹, then we lose our dear ones.
You are the creator of two worlds and I seek your protection;
Just as the sailing ship eyes only the harbour.
Kanha, you don't know what it means to lose you;
I am like a creeper that blossoms while seeking you.
Crows devour all bodies, pick away all flesh;

²⁸ Chakri means servitude, here this word implies that our deeds decide our fate, what we give to the world comes back to us. Chakri is also a disc like weapon used by Vishnu or Sri Krishna, the chakra-dharī.

²⁹ The beauty of the pink color lotus feet that Krishna is seen standing upon illuminates the world and dissipates the darkness in the world.

³⁰ Krishna had a fight with the serpent Kalia, whose loops engulfed him and dragged him into the water while he was playing with the Sakhis. This reference to handcuffs and loops could be the same encounter.

³¹ Wajid Ali Shah is referring to Mir Taqi Mir, one of the major court poets at Bahadur Shah Zafar's court.

But don't devour those beautiful eyes waiting for the beloved.³²
Oh, flute bearing Mohan, do look at me;
You dwell in my eyes, like the kohl in my eyes.

Kaṇḥayyā : Rādhā's home and courtyard can never be far from me;
My love (for Rādhā) flows as inevitably as colouring myself
while applying henna.

Rādhā: Oh, ruler of the world, Mahārāj, long live, be happy. Where
is your flute that plays six ragas and thirty-six raginis? Where have you
left that flute? Play your flute.

Kaṇḥayyā : (spreading his hands while pleading) Oh queen of her
kings' heart, Maharani, Kanha bows in obeisance before you. Long Live,
be happy. I plead to lord Ram, for I have lost the flute.

Rādhā: Mahārāj, I know you very well, you have given it (flute) to
Kubra³³.

(On saying this Rādhā ji is annoyed and she goes and sits in a
corner. At this point Kaṇḥayyā pleads with Rādhā while singing a
thumri and also performs the same with expressions in a dance-
dramatization. He falls at her feet and pleads with her with folded
hands).

Kaṇḥayyā : My Queen, Rādhā Rānī.

What is my fault, my queen? Is Akhtar not giving you the respect
due to you?

(Now feeling compelled, Kaṇḥayyā ji calls out to his servant
Ramchira).

Kaṇḥayyā : Ramchira!

Ramchira: Coming Mahārāj! Coming!

³² This couplet is attributed to Baba Sheikh Farid, a 12th century Punjabi
Muslim preacher and mystic. His disciples were both Hindus, Sikhs and
Muslims and humanity was his religion. He wrote Sufi poetry.

³³ Kubra was one of the lovers of Krishna whose deformed body was cured
by Sri Krishna and she turned into a beautiful woman.

Ramchira: (while presenting himself in his service) Servant of the Raja, Mahārāj, Shiv Prādhān (another name for Kaṇḥayyā), Chatrapati! (Emperor) Do let me know what happened?

Kaṇḥayyā : Rādhikā is annoyed with me. She knows that I have given my flute to Kubra.

Ramchira: Mahārāj! Then you persuade her.

(In the same way Ramchira is summoned thrice in his service, and he requests him repeatedly in the same manner, on the fourth occasion Ramchira advises him further).

Ramchira: Mahārāj! You ask one of her friends to intervene and accord a reasonable explanation.

Kaṇḥayyā : Oh Lalita!

Lalita: Coming Mahārāj.

(The Sakhis make an entry upon the stage while dancing in wave like movements to the beats of the music - one-two, one-two - and sit down.)

Kaṇḥayyā : Oh Lalita! It is impossible to make amends with my Rādhā, what should I do?

Lalita: Plead with her, rub your nose, go down upon your feet, apologize, only then she will listen to you.

Kaṇḥayyā : I have made all the efforts, but she cannot be won over! I will try again at your entreaty.

(Kaṇḥayyā again tries to make amends. He sings a thumri for her and tries to persuade her again, but Rādhā and cannot be won over. He pleads with her and also performs this in dancing postures).

Kaṇḥayyā : Rādhā ji, why don't you speak to me?

Did I commit some mistake, my queen? Smile and lift the veil off from your face.

(In the same manner he complains to Ramchira four times. In the same way he also summons the sakhis (*gopis*) of Rādhā three times, and

the friends repeat the same dialogues all over again. When it is the turn of the fourth friend to arrive, then Kanḥayyā sings a thumri that reiterates his anxiety and he demonstrates the same in dancing postures).

Kanḥayyā : You are my life, Rādhā.

I bow down at your feet Lalita, at yours Sakha, at yours Cheena, at yours Ladva. I am not at peace when I don't see you (alluding to Rādhā).

(The companions of Rādhā whose name is called out, step forward while Kanḥayyā pleads with them for the sake of Rādhā, and prostrates at their feet. The Sakhis' get up, while Rādhā keeps sitting. They plead with Rādhā for the sake of Kanḥayyā and perform these gestures accompanied with song and dance. And she cries out to the beautiful melody of music in the background).

Rādhā: *ḍhi a ta ta ta ta thai, ḍhi a ta ta ta ta thai.*

thai thai thai, di di a ta ta ta ta thai, di di ata ta ta ta thai.

(Kanḥayyā now gets up to sing and performs on the melodious music along with Rādhā).

Kanḥayyā : Rādhā! Rādhā! Rādhā! Rādhā! the streets echo with Rādhā, Rādhā and the homes echo with Rādhā, Rādhā.

(He dances at the same time while matching his steps synchronically to the beats of music. At this moment Ramchira steps forward upon the stage and says.)

Ramchira: Mahārāj pray and ask the Almighty for Rādhā, and meditate, possibly you might win her over.

(At this moment Kanḥayyā performs a yogic asana, he clasps his nose with his right hand and stops his breath. Rādhā ji rises up and embraces Kanḥayyā immediately. The *gopis* assemble together to perform the laddoo-puja,³⁴ [in the laddoo-puja the child avatar of Krishna is worshipped, so Kanḥayyā is here mimicking a child] and its formality is that Kanḥayyā swells his cheeks, his eyes-balls are so still

³⁴ In the Laddoo-puja the child avatar of Krishna is worshipped. In the pictures and idols, Krishna is often depicted with laddoo in one hand and this is considered to be one of the favourite foods of Krishna. Birth of Krishna too is celebrated with Ladoo-puja when the baby Krishna is swayed upon the swing.

that they bear no movement. He stands on his left foot, and he places the heel of his right foot on his left knee. The four friends lean upon the floor while resting upon their right knee. They place their left foot on a higher-level, at the platform upon the stage, and while folding their hands they cull their fingers, in a circle like a laddoo. Then they move their hands to the rhythm of music, and they get up in turns and lightly pat Kanḥayyā ji on his cheeks with their fist, while singing these lines in synchrony).

Sakhiya: *Le le la la ladva le.* (Alluding to the sweet laddoo)

On performing the laddoo-puja they collect in equal numbers in two rows and sing this dohra.

Sakhiya: (1st *tuk*)³⁵ A woman so full of yearning, it's like a knife stab.

(2nd *tuk*) O Vidhata give me wings, so I can fly and have a glimpse of my beloved.

(3rd *tuk*) My friends advise me not to reflect too much, as to what he would expect from me in-return.

(4th *tuk*) If the beloved (lord) could be won with prayers, then Yali³⁶ could have attained the lord.

(When the women have finished singing, they sit down in two rows in equal numbers. And it is now Kanḥayyā 's turn to stand and to sing this dohra).

Kanḥayyā : (1st *tuk*) I have lost my flute on the way to Mathura, Brindavan.

(2nd *tuk*) I can't find it on the roads and in the fields.

Rādhā: Mahārāj! I will be happy only when you find the flute for me.

Kanḥayyā : Fine, I will go and look for the flute.

(Kanḥayyā now goes looking for the flute and is inquiring from everyone he comes across).

³⁵ Rhythm

³⁶ Could mean a she-drake or monster here. Yali is also a mythical creature seen in many South-Indian temples, often sculpted onto the pillars. It may be portrayed as part lion, part elephant and part horse. It has also been described as a leogryph with some bird like features, and wings.

Kanahyya: Has anyone seen my flute?

(Ramchira mimics and parodies Kanahyya hilariously).

Ramchira: Have you seen my hen anywhere?

(Kanḥayyā in turn punches and pushes him and chases him away and exclaims while laughing).

Kanḥayyā : Am I looking for the flute or the hen?

(Ramchira again parodies him and he retorts).

Ramchira: Mahārāj does your flute have two horns and a tail?

(Kanḥayyā again pushes and punches him, then he gets occupied in looking for his flute again, he recites the Kalima Avval).

Kanḥayyā : Has anyone seen my flute?

(Ramchira again parodies Kanḥayyā).

Ramchira: Has anyone seen my buffalo?

(While searching for his flute, Kanḥayyā comes across four water-women who are drawing water from an artificial well, and singing a thumri composed by Raquim).

Water-women: I searched all the paths of Brindavan for the sake of my beloved, I have rummaged the paths of desolate forests and inquired if anyone has heard the mellifluous sound of the flute in these desolate paths.

(the water-women are singing while drawing water)

Walk gently upon the banks of the river, don't turn my pitcher near the river bank;

Don't hold my wrist tightly at my bangle, for I am carrying the vessel to Akhtar's abode.

(At this moment Kanḥayyā cries out to the traveller in anguish).

Kanḥayyā : Dear traveller, where are you coming from?

Traveller: I am coming from Mathura, Brindavan.

Kaṇḥayyā : Have you seen my flute with anyone?

Traveller: Yes, I have seen, there are four water-women who are drawing water from the well. One woman out of them who is fair, short and stout has your flute. Go and ask her to return it.

Kaṇḥayyā : (pleads with the water-women with folded hands) I will treat you to laddoo's, do return my flute.

Water-women: (while pushing away Kaṇḥayyā) Go, go, go away, go away, the flute is not here.

(Kaṇḥayyā ji pleads with each one of them, and all four of them in turn pat him on his cheeks and push him away. At last, they cry out together).

One Water-woman: Oh Lord of the world, Shiv Pradhan, long live, be happy. If you get us some fresh butter, we will return your flute.

(Kaṇḥayyā ji promises to get butter for them and departs in contemplation. And the four water-women sing a thumri while drawing water from the well. There is no noise during the question-and-answer session and the instrumentalists too stop playing).

Kaṇḥayyā : (while addressing the milkmaids) Long live, be happy, give me some butter.

(The milkmaids have placed the pitcher upon a broad tray and they are churning butter from curd. They keep churning the butter while singing this Hori composed by Raquim).

Butter-women: Oh women, I churn butter and go sell it.
Don't take this butter away Kanha, for I will sell this to Akhtar.

(Kanha repeatedly requests the butter-women for the butter, who in turn, just resonate the lines from a Holi. At last, he manages to steal away a tray of butter, and he gives it to the water-women and in return takes away his flute from them and starts playing his flute. On hearing the mellifluous sound of the flute, Rādhā ji runs and embraces him and she is delighted to be with him again).

Rādhā: (to Kanḥayyā) Long live the fame of Mahārāj! Now my heart is cheerful. You sit upon this throne. I will sing and dance before you.

(At this moment she approaches the instrumentalists and goes and stands in the midst of the instrumentalists while singing a thumri in thanks-giving, she is happy and in turn delights the audiences with a mesmerizing dance performance on these verses before him).

Rādhā: Shyam is playing the flute again.

Near the stream Akhtar is playing his flute. It seems that my soul is singing again.

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