

ON THE DOCTRINAL BASIS OF SIDDHA-PRAṆĀLI

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A *siddha-praṇāli* consists of the *guru-praṇāli*, a channel of gurus, in their *siddha*-forms (*mañjarī-svarūpas*). One’s own guru, his guru, and the subsequent gurus traced back to the associates of Śrī Chaitanya Mahāprabhu form the *guru-praṇāli*, or *guru-paramparā*.

In due course of time, a guru in the Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇava *sampradāya* reveals the details of his own *siddha*-form, of the *siddha*-forms of the preceding gurus, and of the *siddha*-form of the *sādhaka* to the qualified practitioner. This is popularly called *the giving of siddha-praṇāli*, as the initiate becomes the last link in a channel of *mañjarīs* preserved over the generations from a guru to a disciple.

The legitimacy of this practice is sometimes brought into question. This concise document is compiled to shed light on its doctrinal basis.

The concept of *siddha-rūpa* in the realm of Gauḍīya-theology makes its famous appearance in Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī’s *Bhakti-rasāmṛta-sindhu*, in a section where the practice of *rāgānugā-bhakti-sādhana* is explained.

sevā sādḥaka-rūpeṇa siddha-rūpeṇa cātra hi |
tad-bhāva līpsunā kāryā vraja-lokānusārataḥ | | BRS 1.2.295

“One should serve both in his present *sādḥaka*-form and in his *siddha*-form, following in the wake of the residents of Vraja, desiring to have feelings similar to theirs.”

This quest for a *siddha*-identity in the land of Vraja is at the core of *rāgānugā-sādhana*. The concepts of *rāgānuga* and *rāgātmika* have been thoroughly discussed elsewhere¹; there is therefore no need to delve further into that. In essence, the *sādḥaka* is to one day become akin to the associates of Śrī Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, the *rāgātmikā-jana*.

Given that the *sādḥaka* is yet to attain *siddhi* and subsequently a *pārṣada-deha* (body of an associate) in Vraja, one may be perplexed over whether it is possible to contemplate on a *siddha-deha* prior to the attainment of *siddhi*. The commentators on the aforementioned verse by Śrī Rūpa all state with a single voice:

siddha-rūpeṇa antaś-cintitābhīṣṭa-tat-sevopayogi-dehena | Śrī Jīva & Śrī
Viśvanātha

¹ See *Raganuga.Org – Saṅkṣipta-rāgānugā-bhakti-sāra*.

“In the *siddha*-form means in an internally conceived, desired body suitable for His service.”

siddha-rūpeṇa manaś-cintita-svābhīṣṭa-tat-sevopayogi-dehena | Śrī Mukunda

“In the *siddha*-form means in a mentally conceived, desired body suitable for His service.”

Hence, at the time of *sādhana*, one is to contemplate on a suitable, desired *siddha-deha* in his mind. However, how is one to acquire information of that which is beyond his sense perception and intellectual abilities? The traditional method should satisfy an audience of practicing Vaishnavas: *tasmād guruṃ prapadyeta, jijñāsuḥ śreya uttamam*. Approach a guru to learn of the highest welfare for the soul.

As Śrī Jīva-pada has explained:

kecid aṣṭādaśākṣara-dhyānaṃ go-dohana-samaya-vamśī-vādya-samākṛṣṭa-tat-tat-sarvamayatvena bhāvayanti | yathā caike tādṛśam upāsanaṃ sāksād vraja-jana-viśeṣāyaiva mahyaṃ śrī-guru-caraṇair mad-abhīṣṭa-viśeṣa-siddhy-artham upadiṣṭaṃ bhāvayāmi | | Bhakti-sandarbhā 312

“Some, while remembering the eighteen-syllable mantra, meditate on the pastimes of tending cows and playing flute, becoming attracted and absorbed in them. In such *upāsana* (worship), in order to attain my specifically desired perfection, I should meditate on that very form of a resident of Vraja my revered guru has instructed me in.”

This manner of *ātma-dhyāna* (self-meditation) is further explained in the *Sanat-kumāra Saṃhita*, as cited by Śrīla Ṭhākura Mahasaya in his *Prema-bhakti-candrikā*:

*sakhinām saṅginī-rūpām ātmānaṃ vāsanāmayīm |
ājñā-sevā-parām tat-tad-rūpālaṅkāra-bhūṣitām | | PBC 58*

“One should meditate on oneself in a form that is a female associate of the *sakhīs*, engaged in services on their command, decorated by Her ornaments.”

Śrī Visvanātha Cakravartī-pāda comments in his *ṭikā* as follows:

sakhinām śrī-lalitā-śrī-rūpa-mañjary-ādīnām saṅginī-rūpām ātmānaṃ dhyāyed iti śeṣaḥ | kimbhūtām? ājñā-sevā-parām ājñāyā tāsām anumatyā sevā-parām śrī-ṛādhā-mādhavayor iti śeṣaḥ | punaḥ kimbhūtām? tat-tad-rūpālaṅkāra-bhūṣitām suprasiddha-śrī-kṛṣṇa-manohara-rūpeṇa śrī-rādhikā-nirmālyālaṅkāreṇa bhūṣitām nirmālya-mālya-vasanā-bharaṇās tu dāsya ity ukteḥ | punaḥ kimbhūtām? vāsanāmayīm cintāmayīm ikṣate cintāmayam etam īśvaram ity ādivat | | 58

Sakhinām - One should think of himself as a female associate of *sakhīs* such as Śrī Lalita, Śrī Rupa Mañjarī and others. In which way? *Ājñā-sevāparām* - Serving Śrī Rādhā-Madhava with their consent and according to their orders. And again, in which way? *Tat-tad rūpālaṅkāra bhūṣitām* - Decorated with an exquisite form captivating the mind of Śrī Kṛṣṇa and the left-over

ornaments of Śrī Rādhikā; in service, ornamented with the left-over flower garlands. Thus it is said. And again, in which way? *Vāsanāmayīm* - Seeing oneself in contemplation in this capacity; and so forth.

It is evident that although the associates of Śrī Rādhā-Madhava certainly are the greatest inspiration for our desired service, we are not to contemplate on ourselves as being nondifferent from them. Rather, we are to envision ourselves as one among them, serving in their footsteps and under their command and *anugatya*.

Śrīpād Dhyānacandra offers an alternative reading of this verse in his *Paddhati*:

sakhinām saṅginī-rūpām ātmānam bhāvanā-mayīm |
ājñā-sevā-parākāṣṭhā-kṛpālaṅkāra-bhūṣitām |
tataś ca mañjarī-rūpān gurvādīn api saṁsmaret | | DhPad 110

“One should meditate on oneself in a form that is a female associate of the *sakhīs*, decorated with the ornaments of orders, aspiration for service and mercy. Thereafter, one should meditate on the *mañjarī*-forms beginning with the guru.”

The verse is cited as the last one in a series of verses elaborating on the specific ways in which one should meditate upon one’s identity, preceding a description of *aṣṭakāliya-sevā* (eight-fold daily services) in the *līlā-rājya* (kingdom of pastimes).

Such meditation is also known as *bhūta-śuddhi*, or the purification of one’s being, engaged in prior to worship. There are varieties of *bhūta-śuddhi* described for different methods of *upāsana*; in *siddha-rūpa-sevā*, the concept of *bhūta-śuddhi* consists of identification with a *pārṣada-deha*.

As explained by Śrīpād Jīva Gosvāmī:

tatra bhūta-śuddhir nijābhilaṣita-bhagavat-sevopayika-tat-pārṣada-deha-
bhāvanā-paryantaiva tat-sevaika-puruṣārthibhiḥ kāryā nijānukūlyat | evaṁ
yatra yatrātmano nijābhīṣṭa-devatā-rūpatvena cintanaṁ vidhīyate tatra tatraiva
pārṣadatve grahaṇaṁ bhāvyaṁ | | Bhakti-sandarbhā 286

“Thereupon one purifies his existence by contemplating on his own desired *bhagavat-sevā* (service to the Lord) and a *pārṣada-deha* (associate-form) suitable for such service; thus one engages in the desired service for his own auspiciousness. Thus, wherever one is, he should engage in meditating on the form of his own desired *devata* and in the future attain the status of an associate of his.”

As mentioned by Śrīpād Dhyānacandra, this contemplation also involves meditation on one’s *siddha-praṇālī*, or the chain of one’s gurus in their *siddha*-forms. One may not directly jump into the presence of Yuga-lakṣmī; it is imperative to approach them through one’s revered gurus, both in this world and in the *siddha*-realm.

tatrādau mañjarī-rūpān gurvādīn tu svīyān svīyān praṇāly-anusāreṇa
saṁsmaret śrī-guru-parama-guru-krameṇeti tataḥ śrī-rādhikāṁ dhyāyet | tataḥ
śrī-nandanandanam | | DhPad 344

“In this meditation, before anything else, the practitioner should meditate on the *mañjarī*-forms of his *guru-praṇālī*, beginning with his guru, then *parama-guru*, etc. Then he shall meditate on Śrī Rādhikā, and after that Śrī Nandanandana (Kṛṣṇa).”

The descriptions of oneself, one’s gurus and the other *mañjarīs* are all learned from the guru. Whenever in doubt, the *sādhaka* ought not to venture into the realm of creative imagination, but rather consult a person acquainted with the realm of the *līlā*.

mañjaryo bahusāḥ rūpa-guṇa-śīla-vayo ‘nvitāḥ | |
nāma-rūpādi tat sarvaṁ guru-dattaṁ ca bhāvayet |
tatra tatra sthitā nityaṁ bhajet śrī-rādhikā-harī | |
bhāvayan sādhamo nityaṁ sthitvā kṛṣṇa-priyā-gṛhe |
tad ājñā-pālako bhūtvā kāleṣu aṣṭasu sevate | | DhPad 107-109

“One should meditate on the various forms, qualities, natures, blooming youth and so forth of the *mañjarīs*, as described by the guru. One should always stay with them, worshipping Śrī Rādhikā and Hari. The practitioner shall stay in the home of Śrī Rādhā, the beloved of Kṛṣṇa, following their orders and rendering service throughout the eight phases of the day.”

As one learns of the characteristics of the *mañjarīs* from one’s guru, so one learns of one’s own *mañjarī-svarūpa* from one’s guru. Indeed, the *mañjarī-svarūpa* is born of the guru’s grace!

sarva-lakṣana-sampannā bhāva-hāvādi-bhūṣitā |
guru-prasāda-jananī guru-rūpā-priyānugā | | DhP 87

“Endowed with all qualities, ornamented by alluring gestures, moods and so forth, she is born of the grace of the guru, being a dear follower of *guru-rūpa-sakhī*.”

The concept of *guru-rūpa-sakhī*, or guru in the form of a *sakhī*, is commonly featured in the songs and prayers of our *ācāryas*. For example, in the *Prārthana* of Śrīla Ṭhākura Mahāśaya:

kanaka kaṭorā pūri, sugandhi candana būri,
doṅhākāra śrī-aṅge dhaliba |
guru-rūpā-sakhī vāme, tribhaṅga bhaṅgima thāme,
cāmarera bātāsa kariba | | Prarthana 30

“With fragrant *candana* filling a golden jug, I anoint their beautiful limbs. Standing on the left side of *guru-rūpa-sakhī* before the one with a three-fold bending form, I fan with a *cāmara*.”

Thus, staying under the guidance of the guru both in this world and in the *siddha*-realm, one engages in *rāgānugā-sādhana*.

Though the moods and aspects of the *mañjarīs* are certainly infinite, they are customarily categorized under eleven headings, collectively known as the *ekādaśa-bhāva*. Śrīpād Dhyānacandra enumerates them in his *Paddhati* as follows:

*asyaiva siddha-dehasya sādhanāni yathā-kramam |
ekādaśa-prasiddhāni lakṣyante 'ti manoharam || 92
nāma rūpaṁ vayo veśaḥ sambandho yūtha eva ca |
ājñā sevā parākāṣṭhā pālya-dāsi nivāsakaḥ || 93*

The aspects of the *siddha-deha* are praised as the following eleven enchanting constituents:

- (1) *Nāma* – name;
- (2) *Rūpa* – form (which includes *varṇa*, or complexion);
- (3) *Vayas* – age;
- (4) *Veśa* – dress;
- (5) *Sambandha* – relationship between the servant and the served;
- (6) *Yūtha* – the group of a particular *yūtheśvarī* (leader of *sakhīs*);
- (7) *Ājñā* – following the orders of the *yūtheśvarī*;
- (8) *Sevā* – a particular primary service;
- (9) *Parākāṣṭha* – aspiration to be like Śrī Rūpa Mañjarī and others;
- (10) *Pālyadasi-bhāva* – the mood of a maintained maidservant;
- (11) *Nivāsa* – residence.

In the spiritual realm there are infinite *siddha-rūpas*, each reserved for one individual *jīva*.

*vaikuṅṭhasya bhagavato jyotir-amśa-bhūtā vaikuṅṭha-loka-śobha-rūpā yā
anantā mūrtayas tatra vartante, tāsām ekayā saha muktasyaikasya mūrtir
bhagavatā kriyata iti vaikuṅṭhasya mūrtir iva mūrtir yeṣām ity uktam || Priti-
sandarbha 10*

“In the spiritual world, the Supreme Lord has unlimited spiritual forms; they all are expansions of Himself illuminating that world. With each one of those forms, the Lord enjoys pastimes with a single individual liberated soul.”

The *siddha-deha* one longs to attain is not a figment of imagination; it is one among the infinite *siddha-rūpas* in the spiritual realm. In fact, beyond being expansions of *bhagavān*, the *sakhī-gaṇa* with their various *svabhāvas* are expansions of Śrī Rādhā. As in the *Chaitanya Caritāmṛita*:

*ākāra svabhāva-bhede vraja-devī-gaṇa |
kāya-vyūha-rūpa tāñra rasera kāraṇa || CaiCa 1.1.79*

“The multitude of *Vraja-gopīs* have various natures (*svabhāva*). They are the forms of Her bodily expansions (*kāya-vyūha-rūpa*) and Her instruments for creating *rasa*.”

The one desirous for service in the wake of the *sakhīs* will certainly be granted an appropriate form for such service.

vraja-lokera kona bhāva lañā yei bhaje |
bhāva-yogyā deha pāñā kṛṣṇa pāya vraje | | CaiCa 2.8.122

“Whoever accepts the *bhāva* of the residents of Vraja, engaging in *bhajana* appropriate for that *bhāva*, will receive a body suitable for it, attaining Śrī Kṛṣṇa in Vraja.”

This is accomplished through Śrī Guru, the Lord’s able agent in this world. The guru, being the *bhagavat-kṛpā-svarūpa* (a form of the Lord’s mercy), by dint of empowerment received from him, has the insight to reveal the various details of the *siddha-rūpa* of the disciple.

The mercy and revelations of *bhagavān* and His *pārṣadas* descend to this world through the medium of *guru-praṇāli*. As in the *Siddhānta-ratna* of Baladeva Vidyabhūṣana:

eṣā tu bhaktis tan nitya parikaragaṇād ārabhyedānīntaneṣvapi tad bhakteṣu
mandākinīva pracarati ... sā tathābhūtā nitya-dhāmni nitya-pārṣadeṣu nityam
cakāsti surasarid iva tad bhakta-praṇālyā prapañce ‘vatarati | | Siddhanta-
ratna

“This *bhakti* is being promulgated from the *nitya-parikāras* (eternal associates) of Śrī Hari down to the present day practicing devotees like the current of the Mandākinī-river (the celestial Ganges). *Bhakti* is always present among the *nitya-pārṣadas* in the *nitya-dhāma* (eternal abode), flowing to this world through the *bhakta-praṇāli* (channel of devotees) like the stream of the Mandākinī.”

The disciple is thus introduced to a *mañjarī-svarūpa* specifically reserved for him and is blessed with allegiance to the *siddha-praṇāli* corresponding to the channel of his gurus. A practical example of introduction to a *mañjarī-svarūpa* is found in the sixth chapter of *Prema-vilāsa*, as Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī bestows *dikṣā-mantra* to Śrīnivāsa Ācārya.

rādhā-kṛṣṇa-mantra kahe kara-yuge dhari |
kāma-bīja śunāila aṅguli anusāri | |
ei saba mantra tumi karibe smaraṇa |
yei kāle tad-āśraye karibe manana | |
guṇa-mañjarikāśraye maṇi-mañjarikā tumi |
tomāra yūthera vivaraṇa kahi saba āmi | |
rūpa guṇa rati rasa mañjulāmañjula |
ei saba saṅge saṅgī ei anukula | |
sevā rāgātmikā rāga bhajanera mata |
śrī-rūpa gosāñīra vākya āchaye sammata | |
sevā nāma sādhakera yata baḍa ārtti |
tāhā siddha haile haya esa saba prāpti | |
sādhana karaye deha sādha nāma haya |
sakhīra āśraya siddhi jāniha niścaya | |

Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī spoke the Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa mantra, holding Śrīnivāsa’s two hands, and explained the counting of *kāma-bīja* with fingers. “You should meditate on all these mantras; at that time, contemplate on taking shelter of them. You are Mani-mañjarī under the shelter of Guṇa-mañjarī. I shall tell

you all about your *yūtha* (group of *sakhīs*). Rūpa, Guṇa, Rati, Rasa and the charming Mañjula – your welfare is in being their companion. In *rāga-bhajana*, *sevā* is like that of the *rāgātmikas*; this is the conclusion in Śrī Rūpa Gosvāmī’s words. As great as the *sādhaka*’s desire for *sevā* and Name is, accordingly *siddhi* will arrive and all of this be attained. As the *sādhaka* chants the Names and engages in *sādhana* in this body, *siddhi* at the shelter of the *sakhīs* is a certainty.”

In this narrative, a description of the *siddha*-identity of Śrīnivāsa was given at the time of his *dikṣā*, to be embraced while enrapt in *smaraṇa* of the *dikṣā-mantras*. As the narrative continues, Śrīpād Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī also speaks of engagement in the 64 *bhakti-aṅgas* and of the need to exercise caution in the course of *sādhana*, remaining aloof from *ninda* (slander) and other evil deeds thwarting the path of attainment – all of which is pertinent information for someone about to embark on the path of *rāga-bhajana*. The concrete attainment of the described identity and all that it entails, Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī notes, will come in proportion with the *sādhaka*’s eagerness for *sevā* and the worship of the Names.

As one contemplates on and serves in the *antaś-cintita-siddha-deha* during his *sādhana*, he will eventually come to attain the perfection he longs for. As in the *Prema-bhakti-candrikā*:

yugala caraṇa sevi, nirantara ei bhāvi,
anurāgī thākibo sadāya |
sādhane bhāvibe yāhā, siddha dehe pābe tāhā
rāga mārge ei sei upāya | | PBC 55

“With attachment, I will always serve the feet of Śrī Yugala, remaining attached to them forever. Whatever I think of during *sādhana* I will attain in *siddha-deha*; such is the means on the path of *rāga*.”

sādhane ye dhana cāi, siddha-dehe tāhā pāi,
ṣakkāṣakka mātra se vicāra |
aṣakke sādhana-riti, ṣākile se prema-bhakti,
bhakati-lakṣana tattva-sāra | | PBC 56

“The treasure I covet during my *sādhana* I will attain in my *siddha-deha*; It is merely a matter of ripe or raw. The stage of *sādhana* is unripe, and the stage of *prema* is ripe. This is the essential truth on the characteristics of *bhakti*.”

It is evident from the last stanza that such meditation is not a matter of generic meditation, but of specific conceptions. The difference between a ripe mango and a raw mango is in the taste; a raw mango has the shape of a mango still. The specific nature of such contemplation during *sādhana* is proven with the context of the verse; the passage of *Sanat-kumāra-saṁhita* mentioned earlier comes after the verses above, and the preceding verse reads as follows:

vṛndāvane dui jana, catur-dike sakhīgaṇa
samaya bujhibo rasa sukhe |
sakhīra iṅgite hobe, cāmara ḍhulābo kobe,
tāmbūla yogābo cānda mukhe | | PBC 54

“In Vṛndāvana are the Two, and the assembly of *sakhīs* surrounding them; all absorbed in the joys of *rasa*. On the hint of the *sakhīs*, I will fan them with *cāmara*, offering *tāmbūla* into their moonlike mouths.”

What, then, is the qualification for hearing of one’s own *siddha-deha*, and the *siddha-dehas* of one’s gurus? *Lobha*, defined as a yearning for attaining feelings similar to the *rāgātmika-vrajavāsīs*, is the qualification for *rāgānugā-sādhana*. (BRS 1.2.291-292) Hearing of the desired goal to incite the greed in the heart is certainly among the initial requirements of *rāgānugā-sādhana*. *Nitya-siddhasya bhāvasya prākṛtyaṁ hṛdi sādhyatā* (BRS 1.2.2) – The very aim of the *sādhana* is to have *nitya-siddha-bhāva* awaken within the heart!

That being said, of course the various limbs of practice such as *aṣṭakālīya-līlā-smaraṇa* require a substantial degree of purity of mind that is attained through practices such as *śravaṇa* and *kīrtana*, are the constant companions of a *rāgānugā-sādhaka*. As said by Śrī Jīva Gosvāmī (BhS 276): *smaraṇaṁ tu śuddhāntaḥ-karaṇatām apekṣate* – “*Smaraṇa* is dependent on the purity of the mind.” Therefore (BhS 275): *śuddhāntaḥ-karaṇaś cet nāma-kīrtanāparityāgena smaraṇaṁ kuryāt* – “If the mind is pure, one should engage in *smaraṇa* without abandoning *nāma-kīrtana*.” This consideration is very practical. The mind of a person whose heart is impure is bound to be flickering by nature, and with a flickering mind, how can one possibly become enrapt in meditation on the *līlā*?

Śrīla Ṭhākura Mahāśaya, however, reminds us of the great importance of the *sādhana* of *līlā-smaraṇa*, encouraging all *sādhakas* to swiftly come to a stage at which its proper practice becomes possible.

*sādhana smaraṇa līlā, ihāte nā koro helā,
kāya mane koriyā susāra |
manera smaraṇa prāṇa, madhura madhura dhāma,
yugala vilāsa smṛti sāra |
sādhyā sādhana ei, ihā boi āra nāi,
ei tattva sarva vidhi sāra | |
(Prema Bhakti Candrikā 14, 61)*

“Do not neglect the practice of *līlā-smaraṇa*, hold it as the essence of the body and the mind.”

“The very life of the mind is *smaraṇa*, the abode of all sweetness, and the essence of *smaraṇa* is the *vilāsa* of Rādhā-Kṛṣṇa. That is the *sādhyā* (perfection), that is the *sādhana* (method of practice), and there is nothing apart from this. This truth is the essence of all principles of devotion.”

Is the consideration of mental purity a matter of black and white, that the mind is either entirely impure or entirely pure, without any intermediate stages of development? In other words, will one need to attain *siddhi* before the *sādhana* of *līlā-smaraṇa* becomes possible? Certainly not! This is evident from the words of Śrīla Viśvanātha Cakravartīpāda in his *Rāga-vartma-candrikā* (1.8):

*sa ca lobho rāga vartma vartinām bhaktānām guru-padāśraya lakṣaṇam
ārabhya svābhīṣṭa vastu sāksāt prāpti samayam abhivyāpya “yathā yathātma*

*parimṛjyate'sau mat puṇya gāthā śravaṇābhidhānaiḥ, tathā tathā paśyati vastu
sūkṣmaṁ cakṣur yathaiivāñjana samprayuktam ।” iti bhagavad ukter bhakti
hetukāntaḥ karaṇa śuddhi tāratamyāt prati dinam adhikādhiko bhavati ।*

It is described that the devotees on the path of *rāga* gradually progress from the initial surrender to the feet of Śrī Guru up to the stage of directly attaining the object of their desires.

“When the eye is smeared with medicinal ointment, its ability of perception becomes more and more refined, and accordingly it is able to perceive more and more subtle objects; similarly, according to the degree of the mind’s having become purified by hearing and chanting of My purifying pastimes, all the subtle truths of reality become manifest in the heart of the *sādhaka*.” (BhP 11.14.26)

From these words of the Lord it is known that through *sādhana-bhakti* the consciousness of the *sādhaka* becomes more purified every day, and he gradually becomes more and more greedy.

With hopes that the above may have clarified the conceptions at the root of the practices and precepts maintained among traditional *rāgānugīya-sādhakas*, we conclude this brief presentation on the teachings of the *pūrvācāryas* on the matter.