

The Discourse on Kuṇḍalinī

Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta: An Examination

Shubhra Jyoti Das

Abstract

The whole text of *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* is repeatedly dotted with the advice to leave *kāminī* and *kāncāṇa* i.e. objects of sexual and material desire. They have been described as the main hindrances in the path of yoga. According to *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa*, even a little of *viśayabuddhi* does not permit the vision of God. Therefore, everyone is expected to put his or her best self – effort in order to get rid of these two impediments on the path towards enlightenment. But at the same time, in his discourse on *kuṇḍalinī* energy, *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa* asserts that due to presence of *kuṇḍalinī* in the *mūlādhāra* cakra, a common human mind abides in the genital organ (*liṅga*), the anus (*guhya*) and in the naval (*nābhi*) region. One can't get rid of the pull of *kāminī-kāncāṇa* until the energy rises up to *anāhat* cakra, located in the heart. Thus, it seems futile to give such an advice to anyone. The paper explores the possibility of reconciling this contradiction present in the text and examines whether it is real or not. Moreover, the rise of the *kuṇḍalinī* energy is not solely dependent on human effort. As per the prescription given in the *Kathāmṛta*, a devotee or seeker can only pray for it; but it depends primarily on the Divine-Will. Therefore, further, the paper looks for a solution to the question of freewill that springs as an implication of this discourse.

Keywords: *kāminī-kāncāṇa*, *kuṇḍalinī*, free will, *bhakti*, *Advaita Vedānta*

Introduction:

The whole text of *Śrī Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* is repeatedly dotted with the advice to leave *kāminī* and *kāncāṇa* i.e. objects of sexual and material desire. They have been described as the main hindrance in the path of yoga. The text, in Bengali, reads: “*kaminikancanijogerbyaghat / bastubicarkorbe/ meyemanushersharire ki ache – rakta, mangsha, charbi, naribhuri, krimi, mut, bishthaeishob/ sheishorireruparbhala basha keno?*” (Gupta, 2007, p.61) (transliterated from Bangla by author). According to *Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa*, even a little of this *vicayabuddhi* does not permit the vision of God in the same way as wet

match – sticks cannot be used for the purpose of ignition. As a matter of fact, these two are portrayed as synonyms of *māyā*. The text further reads: “*kaminikanchani maya/urbhitoranek din thakle hoosh chale jay/ mone hoy beshachi/ methorguerbhar boy/ boiteboiteaarghennathakena*” (Gupta, 2007, Vol.1, p. 80). This, of course, is in a kind of Ethico – Philosophical nomenclature and is not used in the metaphysical sense. Until and unless this form of *māyā* is discarded, no aspirant can look forward to have an experience of God. Therefore, everyone is expected to put his or her best self – effort in order to get rid of these two impediments on the path towards enlightenment. But in addition to this strict injunction found in the *Kathāmṛta*, one parallel, if not contradictory, discourse seems to exist in the same text.

A very important discussion, in this context, takes place during his dialogue on the uprising of the *kuṇḍalinī* energy. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa asserts that a common human being’s mind abides in the genital organ, the anus and the naval region. “*Shadharaonjibermom linga, guhyaaarnabhite*” (Gupta, 2007, Vol.1, p.504). It seems that the condition of the mind is primarily due to the fact that the *kuṇḍalinī* is seated in the *mūlādhāra* – the lowest of all the *cakras*. According to him, Divine mother is present in every human body in the form of *kuṇḍalinī*, as if a serpent is sleeping in the four – petal lotus in the coiled form. The energy rises through the *suṣmnānādī* after yogic practices. Only when the energy reaches *anāhat cakra* located in the human heart, after crossing *svādhiṣṭhāna* and *manipura cakra*, the mind relocates itself from its usual abode and the seeker gets the glimpse of the Divine Light. The dialogue further continues to illustrate what happens to the seeker as the energy rises up to the *viśuddhi*, the *ājñā* and how it culminates in the *sahasrāra* where *śiva* unites with *śakti*. According to him, God can’t be realised unless *kuṇḍalinī* rises and, *bhakti* is the easiest of all methods to meet this end. Therefore, he advises everyone to pray to the Divine Mother so that She wakes and moves up: “*jago Maa kula-kundalini, tumintyananda swarupini prashupta bhujagakaraadharapadmabashini*” (Gupta, 2007, Vol.1, p. 504).

Mapping the issue:

Now, to the author’s mind, there appears to be a subtle contradiction when both these expositions are placed together. One can definitely ask – What is the point of advising someone to give up *kāminī* – *kāncāṇa*, as due to the natural location of *kuṇḍalinī*, the mind is bound to reside in the *linga*, *gūhya* and *nābhi* only? And since the movement of the energy depends on the Divine grace only, it is virtually impossible for the aspirant to get rid of the carnal pull by means of self – effort. It unnecessarily inserts a lot of negativity and strong feeling of remorse, when one fails to control the natural tendencies of the mind, for anyone who practically attempts to tread the advised path. Moreover, the subsequent question could be – is there any room of freewill for the seeker of Truth, at all, at least in this context, where the entire process takes place as a consequence of Divine Blessing? But a counter thesis can be argued based on the fact that the advice is qualified by various conditionals at various stages of the total recorded conversation.

One may argue that Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa’s sets of advice differ from group to group – viz. the disciples, the

devotees and the visitors. He actually has asked the *sannyāsīns* (Gupta, 2007, Vol. 1, p. 142) to give the duo up in toto, and the householders are supposed to renounce them mentally. But in practice, mentally giving them up presents a more difficult challenge than the physical abandonment since, even for the ascetics, there exists always a trap of *mithyācāra* as described by the *Bhagavadgītā*. As the text reads or rather warns with its subtle psychoanalysis –

“*karmendriyāṇisamyamya yāstemanasāsmaran/
indriyārthānvimu
uḍhātmamithyācāraḥ saucyate//*” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 3.6)

meaning, one who ponders over the objects of desire mentally, after giving them up externally, is a hypocrite. And therefore advises –

“*yastvindriyāṇīmanasāniyamya ārabakte ’rjuna/
karmendriyaiḥ karmayogamasaktaḥ saviśiṣyate//*” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 3.7)
“*tasmā dasaktaḥ satataṁ karmaṇ karma samācara/
asakto hyācāraṇ karma paramāpnoti puruṣaḥ//*” (*Bhagavad Gītā*, 3.19)

The first verse means, “Controlling the sense-organs with the mind, he who commences the yoga of action with the organs of action, unattached, is held to excel, O Arjuna” (Warrier, 2000, p. 107); and the second one means, “Therefore, unattached, always do the work that has to be done; for, doing work with detachment, man attains the Supreme” (Warrier, 2000, p. 116).

This could be the reason why Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, at one place, goes onto say that complete renunciation is not meant for everyone. Some people will have to enter the life of a householder. They would attempt *niṣkāma karma* and break the jackfruit with the protection of mustard oil. Thus, at times he appears very adamant and at times quite flexible.

In addition, some people argue that, at places, Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa has advised the devotees to turn the vices like *kāma* and *krodha* towards God. One should have *kāma* i.e. desire to have a vision of God and should direct his or her anger towards all the obstructions that stand in between. Otherwise also, in the larger discourse of the *puruṣārthas*, we find a similar trend where *dharma* has been depicted as the controlling principle of *artha* and *kāma*. But still, in the author’s opinion, the subtle issue remains, at least partly, unaddressed since, for Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa, even an iota of *viśayabuddhi* does not allow the seeker to realise God and absolute elimination depends only on the grace of the Divine Mother.

A re-look at the discourse and its implications:

Therefore, there is a need to have a re-look at Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa’s thoughts, in order to understand his advice of giving up *kāminī-kāncāṇa* and its implications in the larger context of Indian Ethics. With a little intense reading, it seems that devotion and surrender towards the Divine mother is the corner stone of his scheme. Objects of sexual and material desire can be given up, in the absolute sense of the term, so that it leads

to emancipation, only by dint of Divine intervention. Therefore, as a matter of fact, a devotee is supposed to engage in intense devotion and subsequently worldly desires will fall as the petals of flower falls after fructification. In other words, *saguṇabhakti*, in his exposition, gets established as a means for the eradication of the carnal and material cravings.

This has important suggestions in the domain of *Advaita Vedānta* Philosophy. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa seems to have appropriated the path which was denoted as secondary by Śaṅkara. In his introduction to the *Bhagavad Gītā Bhāṣya*, Śaṅkara writes, “The Vedic law of works, promoting prosperity in the world, and enjoined on the class and life stations, promotes the purification of mind when it is observed with a sense of dedication to God and without any expectation for reward; though normally i.e., when done for desire for fruits, it leads its practitioners to the higher stations of heavenly being and so forth. It also indirectly subserves the attainment of emancipation, since such work purifies the mind and the purified mind becomes fit for practicing the discipline of knowledge which, in due course generates the liberating knowledge itself” (Warrier, 2000, pp. 4–5). In the *prasthāna* framework, it can be denoted as a selective reading since all the three paths are independent and equally valid according to the *Gītā*. Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa has supplemented this deficiency in Śaṅkara *Vedānta*.

There is no doubt about the fact that Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa’s thoughts contain seeds of the *Advaita Vedānta*. In addition to his acceptance of the possibility of *jivanamukti*, in *Kathāmṛita* only Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa says that at times, due to intensification of *devabhāva*, he used to feel restless until someone would come and prostrate before him. This is an echo of Śaṅkara’s ‘śivohamśivoham’ (Bāl Padāvali, 2016, p.34). He, while identifying Brahman and Kālī, agrees with Śaṅkara’s position on *saguṇa* and *nirguṇa* Brahman, to the extent that both are different aspects of the same Reality and improvises upon it claiming that experience of a personal God is possible.

The author doesn’t subscribe to the view that *Advaita Vedānta* is a copyright of Śaṅkara only. *Advaita* begins from *Upaniṣads*. The Bṛhadāraṇyaka calls it the supreme way and the supreme achievement, and goes up to Ramana Maharshi. The exponents and the commentators have appropriated the paths and the details present in the *Upaniṣads*. Therefore, I don’t think there is a need to create new terminologies with each appropriation, unless the commentator himself does that; by *Advaita* the author mean the end where there is no two-entity left.

Similarly, the problem of freewill also gets a balanced treatment in him. Though the awakening of *Kuṇḍalinī* can’t be met through self – effort, but the practice of devotion is a choice for the seeker of Truth. Therefore, freewill exists by dint of God’s *māyā* (Gupta, 2007, Vol.1, p.175) and since that *māyā* is real till the knowledge of Brahman dawns, freewill is real for every aspirant. According to Śrī Rāmakṛṣṇa this so called freewill is placed in the individual by God only and it is not unreal from the relative standpoint. As and when the seeker realises that there is no freewill in the absolute sense, by then, he becomes a *jivanamukta*.

Conclusion:

As the concluding remark, the author proposes his own interpretation of the tension that erupts due to the prescription to leave sexual and material desire on one hand and the declaration that human mind cannot come out of the whirlpool of such desires until *Kuṇḍalinī* rises to the level of *anahata*. It is perhaps true that one cannot fully get rid of the pull of *kaminī-kāncāṇa* until the *Kuṇḍalinī* crosses the first three *cakras*. But that should not lead one to conclude that there is no need to make any effort to get rid of the carnal and material desires at all. As a matter of fact, the process of awakening and rising of *Kuṇḍalinī* and the operation of giving up of the desires is complementary to each other.

This phenomenon is comparable to the operation of converting a piece of iron into a piece of magnet by means of the process of electromagnetic induction. When the piece of iron is subjected to voltage difference, it immediately gets converted to a perfect magnet. But when the voltage difference is withdrawn, it no more remains the perfect magnet; however, it does not become a perfect piece of iron either. As a matter of fact, in lieu of going to the aboriginal state, it retains a little bit of magnetism in it. When the same piece is subjected to the voltage difference once again, it becomes a perfect magnet more easily; since, it has to begin from a certain level of induction. When the process is repeated time and again, the process becomes easier in every cycle, till the iron becomes a perfect magnet.

In the similar pattern, the process of self-control and the rise of *Kuṇḍalinī* promote each other. If the energy awakens, it helps in getting rid of the desires and in those individuals, who try to control their carnal desires; and in those seekers who direct their desire towards God, as a form of *bhakti*, *Kuṇḍalinī* rises very fast. One progress facilitates the other process. Therefore, the conflict that is noticed between the two processes, *prima facie*, actually does not exist at more fundamental level. But, in order to realize this truth, one has to dive deep into the practice of *Vedānta* instead of just engaging in theoretical reflections.

References:

- Goyandka, J. (2007). *The Bhagavad Gītā: The song divine*. Gita Press.
- Gupta, M. N. (2007). *Srī Srī Rāmakṛṣṇa Kathāmṛta* (Vols. 1–2). Udbodhan Karyalaya.
- Vivekananda Kendra. (2016). *Bāl Padāvali*. Vivekananda Kendra Hindi Prakashan Vibhag.
- Warrier, A. G. K. (2000). *Śrīmad Bhagavad Gītā bhāṣya of Śaṅkarācārya*. Sri Ramakrishna Math.