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ROMANTIC POETRY OF GOLĀGHĀṬ AND ITS REPERCUSSIONS IN RELIGION AND CULTURE OF

Abstract

Rāma-rasik tradition is a medieval development of the North Indian Vaiṣṇava bhakti which flourished in Ayodhyā in XVIII-XIX century. Being a less known facet of the bhakti movement than Kṛṣṇa-rasik one, it still has a prominent centre, Kanak-bhavan temple, described in a XIX century's volume Rasikprakāś-bhaktamāl as famous and popular among sādhus. At the same time there are several rasik communities in the city that are more isolated and hidden from general public and visitors, so they have an opportunity to preserve their authentic lifestyle, poetry and performance patterns. One of them is Golāghāṭ where a small group of sādhus and their lay disciples live lives inspired by the legacy of a saintly poet Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ. In the multidisciplinary research the community's beliefs and life patterns are explored, the role of Yugalānanya's poetry in its members' world-view and activities is analyzed. The main sources of the present research are results of my fieldwork in Ayodhyā in 2017-2018 including interviews with the community's spiritual leaders and members as well as Yugalānanya's texts translated from Avadhi into English by the author.

Keywords: *Rāma-bhakti, Rasik, Ayodhyā, Vaiṣṇava, Avadh, Avadhi, Poetry, Sakhī*

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Golāghāṭ as a centre of the rasik tradition in Ayodhyā

Golāghāṭ is located in the riverside area of the city of Ayodhyā. It is one of the dhām's (1) hidden treasures normally unknown to outsiders, both tourists and pilgrims. At the same time the Lakṣmaṇ-quilā (the Fortress of Lakṣmaṇ) situated on top of a hill sloping down to the ghāṭ(2) is widely reflected in local literature and features in guide books as a pilgrims' attraction. This is where the rasik tradition of Ayodhyā emerged from presumably during XVIIIth – XIXth centuries.

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Before we go any further the definition of the words “*ras*” and “*rasik*” should be given. *Ras* (रस) is basically a Sanskrit word with a range of meanings denoting “taste”, “emotion”, “sweetness”; on a more “material” level it is also “juice”, “essence”, and “concentrated liquid”. All these notions passed on to North

Indian medieval dialects defined by Goswāmī Tulsīdās as *bhāṣānibandh* [SRCM: 1.7] and sometimes referred to as *sant-bhāṣā*, language of saints, as well as into modern Hindi. Mystic poets often play with these meanings, for instance in a verse that became a part of the Sikh scripture *Śrī Gurū Granth Sahib* Kabīr says: राम रसु पीआ रे – “I drink the *ras* of Rāma” presupposing a near-to-physical substance and then shifts to the idea of “taste”: जिह रस बिसरि गए रस अउर – “I have forgotten all other *rases* / tastes.” [SGGS: 337] *Ras* became the key-concept in the *rasik* tradition of *bhakti* both devoted to Kṛṣṇa and spread particularly in Braj and the Rāma-oriented one pertinent to Avadh. Here it denotes different moods of relationships between a devotee and Bhagavān. The range comprises all possible roles starting from the servant’s attitude (*dāsyā bhāv*) and culminating in the romantic mellows of *mādhurya bhāv*. While proponents of Kṛṣṇa cult used to reserve the latter for Kṛṣṇa only (as expressed in his well-known pastimes with *gopīs*), Rāma-*rasik bhakts* insist that it is the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* who bears the fullness of *mādhurya bhāv* and that the poem itself contains the essence of all possible *rases*: अहो गीतस्य माधुर्यं श्लोकानां च विशोषतः | | चिरनिर्वृत्तमप्येतत् प्रत्यक्षमिव दर्शितम् | - “The song (of the *Rāmāyaṇa*) is *mādhurya*, especially in terms of the *śloka*s meanings. Though the story itself happened long ago the feeling is as if it is happening now.” [VR: 1.4.17]

I had my first encounter with the *Golāghāṭ rasiks* in 2010 when I visited the *Lakṣmaṇ-quilā* in search of materials related to their poetry which is mostly transmitted orally during Rāma-kathās and satsangs. Limited editions of previous *rasikāchāryas*’ works had been published by the maṭh itself – among them *Śrī Dhām-kānti* and *Śrī Nām-kānti* by Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ, the most prominent saint and poet in the tradition who presumably lived in the XIXth century. In July-August 2017 I had an opportunity to study the community in detail with the help of Swāmī Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ, the current *Golāghāṭ mahant*’s successor, Swāmī Siyā-Kiśorī Śaraṇ. I will divide the further portion of this paper into two parts: the community studies’ results including some data from Swāmī Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ’s interviews and Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ’s poetry analysis in the perspective of the same anthropological research.

Golāghāt community and its spirituality

The main Rāma-rasik pīṭh (3) of the Golāghāt called Sadgurū-sadan is located on the riverside itself. It is a group of relatively small buildings hosting temples of Sītā and Rāma as well as dormitories for sādhus and their disciples. Bhajan and chanting of the Divine Couple's names are carried out since early morning and throughout the day, morning and evening āratīs normally attract about 20-30 locals some of whom have been associated with the pīṭh since their childhood. It is interesting to mention that Swāmī Vivekānanda (1863-1902) visited Golāghāt and stayed for a week or so in the sadan studying the rasik-tradition which is mentioned in Swāmī Sītā-Rām Śaraṇ's Introduction to *Śrī Dhām-kānti* with a reference to *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*: "At the insistence of Akhandānanda, the Swāmī next went to Ayodhyā and to the āśram of Jānakīwar Śaraṇ, a Sanskrit and Persian scholar, the mahant of a local temple with vast estates. The Swāmī was much impressed with his learning and spiritual fervor and remarked to his brother-disciple: 'I have seen a man, a real holy man.'" [Yugalānanya, Dhām: 18] As we get to know from the same text, the above mentioned Swāmī Jānakīwar Śaraṇ was a direct disciple of Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ. Both were in kept in high esteem by local religious communities and Yugalānanya was even considered to be one of the four most renowned siddhas of Ayodhyā along with Swāmī Raghunāthdās, Swami Mādhavdās, Udāsīn mahant of Ranopālī and pandit Umāpati Tripāthī. It shows that the Rāma-rasikism was not really unknown to the Indian public but rather hidden unlike the more popular and wide-spread Kṛṣṇa -rasikism.

Visually the difference between an "ordinary" Vaiṣṇava institution and the Rāma-rasik one is in the accent on the romantic dimension of the Divine Couple: thus, they often stay alone on the altar (often without Lakṣmaṇ and Hanumān who accompany them on most other altars; though the Lakṣmaṇ-quilā mandir also hosts the whole set of the Rāma-parivār) with this or that rasik poet behind them (Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ in our case), flowers are in abundance both in decorations and in the worship process. The Golāghāt rasik's tilak is a vertical urdhvā-pundrā with a red, yellow or white dot below (4). According to a legend this type of tilak was introduced by Sītā herself: once she personally added a dot on the forehead of a sādhu who forgot to draw a red line typical for the Rāmānandīs in between the two white ones. The rasiks of Ayodhyā trace their spiritual genealogy to Śrī Rāmānandāchārya and thus form a part of his lineage along with nāgās and tyāgīs. However, unlike the two latter groups they approach the Divine with romantic mood (mādhurya bhāv) and thus became "treasurers" of exquisite Rāma-oriented poetry, music, dance and other types

of performance which are considered to be authentic means of attaining the supreme bliss in themselves. When the rasik ideology penetrated this particular sub-lineage is a difficult question. If we analyze the paramparā presented in the Golāghāṭ's books and documents we will find that its mahants started acquiring the Śaraṇ title common for rasiks quite late – between the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries (starting from Yugalānanya): all previous sādhus were “Dās” like their tyāgī counterparts. [Yugalānanya, Nām: 11] In an interview given to me in August 2017, Swāmī Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ explains that “the sakhī-paramparā proceeds from the digambara-akhāḍā thanks to its famous saint Swāmī Śankardās. The saintly poet Yugalānanya followed his footsteps...” [Demchenko] Thus this exact institution had not been rasik one from the beginning – it was “rasikized” later on due to some conversion of its previous mahants. It seems that such development is still common for the tradition as my vis-à-vis' personal story is similar: he used to be an Udāsīn sādhu and then, disillusioned about his spiritual quest, came to Ayodhyā which is considered to be a place which gives emancipation to everyone, even those who are not eligible for it. This idea is central to Yugalānanya's *Śrī Dhām-kānti* and we will go back to it in the second part of this paper. This belief proceeds from the idea that the earthly dhām is a not really a town in Uttar Pradeś, but a visual manifestation of the Supreme Abode of Sītā and Rāma known as Śāket so anyone who happens to die in this holy place immediately finds himself there. One of the cornerstones of rasik ideology Rāmcharandās (XIX century) mentions in his opus magnum *Ānandalaharī* that “all those who reside in Ayodhyā even being sinners are saved from infernal sufferings – they reach the heavenly Śāket in no time. Those who spent at least half a minute in the city are born in their next life in Ayodhyā as human beings, insects, birds or animals according to their karma and then pass over to the kingdom of Śrī Rāma.” [Ānandalaharī: 1.104 – 105]

Golāghāṭ as it has already been mentioned is a riverside community so the role of the Sarayū river in its life and spirituality cannot be overestimated. Yugalānanya begins his *Śrī Dhām-kānti* with a greeting to the holy river (श्री सरयू पुलिनविहारिणे नमः) and his commentator Sītā-Rām Śaraṇ draws the readers' special attention to the fact that Sarayū is not only a life-giving stream descending directly from Śāket, but also a river into which Rāma merged in the end of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The place of his disappearance is now associated with Guptārghāṭ in proximity to Faizabad, however Sītā-Rām Śaraṇ presents his own view on the toponym's etymology: “Four miles away from Ayodhyā there is a ghāṭ called Gopratārghāṭ. Nowadays people call it Guptārghāṭ, because of the “merging process” (गुप्तार का अर्थ). They believe that it was there that Śrī Rām Jī disappeared (गुप्त हो गए थे)

which is not actually true. Thus both the name of Guptārghaṭ and its function have been wrongly perceived. Śrī Rām Jī did not merge into the river; he ascended to upper worlds... And this happened on the banks of Sarayū at Gopratārghaṭ).” [Yugalānanya, Dhām: 18]

In any case Sarayū is a symbol of life as well as that of the final emancipation and reunion with the Divine which is imitated (or rather contemplated) by sādhus and devotees during their daily ritual (and even ordinary) bath. It is during the periods of the day when such bath (snān) is considered to be especially beneficial (morning hours till about 10 a.m. and evening hours around sunset) one can meet sādhus on the ghāṭ and talk to them. It is interesting to mention that as a foreigner I experienced neither particular interest from their side like in more popular pilgrimage areas nor aversion: they approach me as they would approach any local devotee and gladly share their ideas and opinions. It was on the ghāṭ during snān time when I met my principal informer Swāmī Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ who invited me to Sadgurū-sadan of which he is in charge. Sadgurū-sadan is quite a small space behind the main temple where a set of relatively small deities (Sītā and Rāma) is kept. Portraits of Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ are behind the altar and on the walls. A painting of rāsālīlā, amorous play of Kṛṣṇa, is in the upper right corner. It should be noted that in the Golāghāṭ tradition practically same patterns are attributed to both “human forms” of Bhagavān which is in line with the Goswāmī Tulsīdās vision as expressed in his poetry where even Rāma’s brothers are seen as bearers of the mādhurya sentiments:

जयति	Victory
भूमिजा-रमण-पकंज-मकरंद-रस-	To (Bharata – M.D.) the bumble-bee,
रसिक-मधुकर भरत भूरिभागी।	gathering honey from the feet of the one
भुवन-भूषण, भानुवंश-भूषण, भूमिपाल-	who brings joy to Bhūmijā,
मणि रामचंद्रानुरागी।	You cherish romantic (mādhurya! – M.D.)
	mellows and sentiments!
	Oh, the universe’s ornament, jewel of the
	Solar dynasty and protector of the earth,
	Love and attachment to Rāmachandra
	overflow you! [VPK: 39.1]

While interviewing Swāmī Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ apart from asking questions mentioned here above we covered a series of issues that are peculiar to the rasik tradition and not clearly articulated in other forms of Rāma-bhakti. Firstly the importance of the title “Śaraṇ” (“the one who took shelter) normally chosen by rasiks instead of a more common “Dās” (servant). Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ explains: “Śaraṇ is the one who performed śaraṇāgatī that is surrendered to Sītā (Sic! Not Rāma in this tradition; or at

least not only Rāma). The one who did it never experiences any difficulties... And this is not our own decision – this is the grace of the queen and well-wisher of this world (here a reference to tenkalei branch of the Rāmānuja’s school which insists that śaraṇāgatī is a sole and unique grace of the Lord and an adept can do nothing to attain it).” Further on the role of Sītā is elaborated: “She is the only cause of creation and of the emergence of life on our planet...” [Demchenko] Apparently this is one of the reasons why the status of female devotees is also higher than in other sects: “Our sādhanā begins with the respect to the feminine and service to women as well as to sādhus. This is the first ras (“taste”) which should be developed in order to set off for the spiritual journey.” [Demchenko]

As it was mentioned before, flowers play crucial role in the Golāghāt’s aesthetics and worship process: “Flower, given to the disciple by his gurū during the initiation process symbolizes attainment of prem, the supreme love, Flowers bring immense joy to Kīśorī Jī as she met Rāma for the first time in the puṣp-vātikā in Mithilā (5) won him and surrendered to him. Flowers are a manifestation of this puṣp-vātikā and they should be revered. It is through them that the mantra is passed on and it is through them that we surrender to Kīśorī Jī.” [Demchenko] The meeting in puṣp-vātikā is played out by sādhus, their young disciples or even professional actors annually during the Sītā-Rāma Vivāh-panchamī festival within the frames of the performance-cum-ritual dedicated to the Divine Couple’s wedding vividly described in a short poem by Goswāmī Tulsīdās which also highlights the mādhyura mellows of the rasik cult’s foremost characters:

राम-लखन-छबि देखि मगन भए पुरजना

उर अनंग जल लोचन प्रेम पुलक तना॥

नारि परस्पर कहहि देखि दोउ भाइन्हा

लहेउ जनम फल आजु जनमि जग आइन्हा॥

Having seen the beauty of Rāma and Lakṣmaṇ all the denizens got excited:

Their hearts were overwhelmed with bliss, eyes were full of tears and bodies were trembling...

Women are telling each other:

Now when we have seen these two brothers, Our birth is not in vain – we have received its fruit. [JM: 55-56]

According to Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ there is no caste bias or discrimination in the rasik-samāj (community) and anyone who performed śaraṇāgatī and passed through proper initiation process can serve the deities at the altar and perform other religious and social tasks. However in practice I have never met a temple priest or a sādhu of a non-brāhman origin. Neither have I seen any discrimination on the level of other devotional practices and even as a foreigner was invited to participate in all the activities on par with brāhmaṇs and sādhus.

To conclude this section I would like to draw a link between Golāghāt and another prominent rasik community of Ayodhyā – the famous Kanak-bhavan the saints of which are widely described in *Rasikprakāś-bhaktamāl*, a concise volume published by Jivārām Yugalapriyā in 1849 and representing hagiographies of Rāma-rasik poets and saints who lived before the XIX century. Kanak-bhavan is mentioned in all Ayodhyā guide-books as a palace-temple gifted to Sītā and Rāma by Kaikeyī after their marriage. The Divine Couple spent there their honeymoon including the first night so the place itself became the main rasik spot that has yielded various mystical experiences to advanced devotees. The actual version of the temple was built and consecrated by Mahārāj Pratāp Singh of Orchhā in 1891. His wife Mahārāṇī Vṛṣabhānukumvari Jū and other members of the royal family being ardent devotees of the rasik cult actively participated in the project. It is probably still the most visited temple in the city. Though Golāghāt rasiks are not anyhow affiliated with the temple being in a sense a competing institution, they regularly attend its events and participate in (or even give) satsangs in its premises. Lives of Kanak-bhavan saints offer them a wide range of stories and experiences to retell and meditate on. I will just site one example of such material borrowed from the temple's own edition *Kanak-bhavan Mahimā* compiled by Swāmī Jayrāmdev. It covers such important motives as how a person becomes a rasik-devotee, what the rasik mystic experience is like, what role the temple (or any holy space) plays in the tradition and finally how the rasik poetry is formed and developed. It is about the poet Rasikalī, also known as Jānakīrāj Kīśorī Śaraṇ, who was born in mid-XVII century in a brāhmaṇ family. As a teenager he came to Ayodhyā and settled in Kanak-bhavan where he sensed the place's mādhyurya flavour that made him lose interest in brāhmaṇism and advaita philosophy (6). Once while meditating in the inner court of the temple he realized his inborn feminine nature and found himself surrounded by sakhīs, female attendants of Sītā (key rasik characters who give another name to the tradition – Sakhī –sampradāya). Having taken a decision to dedicate his whole life to the rasik worship in the premises of Kanak-bhavan, he started visualizing pastimes if the Divine Couple and other participants of the mysterious līlā. He, for example, realized that all the close associates of Rāma have their female sakhī forms, including Hanumān whose female manifestation is Chārūsīlā also praised in the temple's daily routine:

प्रथम चारुशीला सुभग, गान कला सुप्रबीन । युगल
केलि रचना रसिक, रास रहिस रस लीन॥

The foremost among the sakhīs is the charming Chārūsīlā, the best of skillful singers. She prepares amusements for the Young Couple drowning in the ocean of sweetness. [KB: 96]

Rasikalī as well as all other saintly poets affiliated with Kanak-bhavan believe in special role of sakhī, invisibly residing in the temple, in spiritual formation of an aspirant. He starts his poetic experiments with a Sanskrit invocation to these female attendants of the Divine Couple:

वन्दे सखीसमाजं तं प्रेवरज्वा वशीकृतम् । वबन्ध क्रीडामानो यो श्रीरामं रससागरम् ॥

His poems beautifully reflect the mellows of mādhurya bhāv:

प्यारे प्यारी को झुलावै, गावै रस भरी तान।
कनकभवन में कनक हिंडोरा रवि शशि जोति लजावै॥
चहूँदिशि ललित वितान दादले झमकि सुहावै॥
इस घन गरजत रिमझिम बरसत मृदु मृदु मृदंग धुनि
छावै॥
रसिकली प्रिया प्रियतम ऊपर बार-बार बलि जावै।
सजनी मोरे मन मन भावै हँसि दोउन की लपटान
प्यारे॥

The Beloved and his love are amusing themselves listening to romantic songs;

They are swinging on golden swings, in the golden palace the glamour of which puts both the sun and the moon to shame;

Charm is all around, rooms are decorated with beautiful garlands,

And then the thunder is playing mṛdanga and raindrops are resonating in the monsoon. Rasikalī surrenders to the precious supreme Beloved:

His heart overflowed with emotions is taken over by the Beloved. Laughing I give him all of myself. Oh, Beloved! [KB: 60]

To sum up this part of my paper it should be said that despite the fact that rasik communities normally function within quite a limited range of beliefs and practices related to the hidden story of Sītā and Rāma's pastimes, thanks to its narratives, poetry and performances they became significant players on the field of social, cultural and religious life of Ayodhyā. Comparing the rasik experience of Golāghāṭ with a similar one in the life and works of Rabīndranāth Ṭāgor (1861 – 1941) we can find striking correspondences proving that the “romantic religion” is one of important facets of human spirituality. As Ellen Goldberg puts it: “...at the root of the romantic movement, and the romantic poet's temperament, resides a profound sentiment or belief in “man as God” – a feature that, as we have shown, appears at the heart of Ṭāgore's writing on religion.” [Goldberg, 2015: 35]

Swāmī Yugalānanya's poetry in the context of the Golāghāṭ community life

As it was mentioned above Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ is considered to be the key saintly poet of the Golāghāṭ community. It was him who enhanced the rasik character of this ex-tyāgī institution and formed the poetic basis for all further developments. His works can be roughly divided into two currents: those concentrating on the glory of the holy names of Sītā and Rāma (represented, for example, by *Śrī Nām-kānti*) and those which

praise the city of Ayodhyā as a unique soteriological field (*Śrī Dhām-kānti*). I will analyze these two poems and will show how they function in the real life of the community.

Śrī Nām-kānti is solely devoted to pious practice of repetitions of “*Sītārāmnām*” which is known and widely used by all schools of bhakti; however in our case its purpose shifts to development of mādhurya bhāv. Normally recitation of the poem is preceded by a list of the poet’s paramparā starting from Rāma himself:

1. Anant Śrī Rām Jī Mahārāj
2. Anant Śrī Jānakī Jī Mahārānī
3. Anant Śrī Hanumān Jī Mahārāj
4. Anant Śrī Brahmā Jī Mahārāj
5. Anant Śrī Vaśiṣṭh Jī Mahārāj
6. Anant Śrī Parāśara Jī Mahārāj
7. Anant Śrī Vyāsa Jī Mahārāj (and so on till Śrī Rāmānand)

The second (historical) part of the paramparā is traced back to Swāmī Rāmānand:

1. Śrī Swāmī Rāmānand Jī Mahārāj
2. Śrī Sursurānand Jī Mahārāj and further on to Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ himself. [Yugalānanya, Nām: 11]

Commentator of the two poems in question, Swāmī Sītā-Rām Śaraṇ, in his foreword entitled *Śrī Sītārāma nāma tattva mīmāṃsā* explains the mechanics of how the holy names stimulate romantic mellows in practitioner’s consciousness. First of all he states that it is only the name of Rāma and not of other deities “which is free from all material qualities and thus is a form of Brahman, Being, Consciousness and Bliss.” [Yugalānanya, Nām: 1] Why? Because according to the *Vedas* all other names correspond to different qualities, setting aside “Viṣṇu” as a generic name of God. “He removes troubles as Harī and sleeps on the ocean as Nārāyaṇa... Thus while all other names being related to various qualities can only remove difficulties and sorrows, the name of Rāma can bring the fullness of joy... the joy that brings one to emancipation, joy of meeting between an individual soul and Paramātman.” [Ibid. 2] The same speculations can be found in any treatise within the bhakti tradition, but further Sītā-Rām Śaraṇ turns to a peculiar rasik discourse: Rāmānām is not just a name of God in a general sense (like, for example, it is used in *Śrī Gurū Granth Sāhib* – M.D.), but the name that causes particular sentiments bringing a devotee’s mind and heart

to “the swarthy son of king Daśaratha... possessing names and beneficial qualities...” [Ibid.] He cites an example of Lakṣmaṇ who says: “Oh brother, amuse yourself with your beloved wife, and I will enjoy serving you!” Sītā-Rām Śaraṇ goes on to say: “How were Sītā and Rāma amusing themselves and what kind of joy was young Lakṣmaṇ experiencing? This all is the subject matter of the rasik rahasya-granths.” [Ibid. 3]

Yugalānanya is described as a “Sanskrit and Persian scholar” and the influence of Persian poetry is quite obvious in some of his verses. He not only highlights romanticism of the Divine Couple Sītā and Rāma but also tries to extract the same mellows from Persian sources and to create an exemplified ideal version of it having universal value and applicable in all cultures and circumstances:

प्रीति प्रनय परतीति एकरस श्री मज्जू लैले सि है |
युगलानन्य इशक बलों को कीमत चाहिए जैसी है | |

Love between Majnun and Laila is the unique romanticism and devotion. According to Yugalānanya, the adept (rasik devotee) has to experience the same. [Yugalānanya, Nām: 19]

It is the name itself that contains all the romanticism just like a mango fruit contains sweet juice:

श्रीसीतावर नाम मुबारक सादी सहर सोहावन है।
परमानन्द परेश प्यार परतीति प्रभा परचावन है॥

The name of Sītā’s husband is a wonderful city full of sweet emotions. Supreme bliss and the light of love and devotion can be acquired there. [Ibid. 17]

And if it is so, why searching for mangoes with their skin and seeds (as rasik lecturers would put it) if pure juice can be found without any difficulty:

द्विज देवता मुनीश भए क्या काम कलपना नासेगो।
छन्द प्रबन्ध योग जप तप से परतम प्रभा प्रकासेगि॥

Why then consulting the twice-born ones, gods and wizards? Do you really hope that chanting (of the Vedas), contemplation, yoga, prayers or ascetic efforts will help you to see the Supreme Light? [Ibid. 20]

Comparing Yugalānanya’s view on the Rāmnām with that of Goswāmī Tulsidās we will find that the latter focuses on its salvific character, while in the former’s case being romantically charged it is the supreme bliss itself, far from being a mere instrument on the spiritual path:

राम नाम नरकेसरी कनककसिपु कलिकाल।
जापक जन प्रह्लाद जिमि पालिहि दलि सुरसाल॥

The name of Rāma is the divine Lion-Man (Narasimha), while the Kali-age is Hiranyakaśipu; Those who chant the Rāmnām are Prahlād: the Lord will defend them in form of the name. [SRCM: 1.27]

Love and not salvation or protection becomes the main goal of rasik practice in Yugalānanya's poetry:

जय श्रीयुगलकिशोर नाम चितचोर चैन चित दानी।
जयति प्रियापरतन्त्र लाल हिय हरन रहस रसखानी॥
जयति सरस उज्ज्वल उतंग गुन धन अनुराग बितानो।
युगलानन्यशरण जीवन जय विदित विभव बरबानी॥

Glory be to the names of the Young Couple who steal the heart and bring comfort!
Glory be to the names that Lāl (Hanumān) cherishes in his heart as they are sources of romantic mellows. Treasure of all blissful qualities and raises they ignite love.
Yugalānanya praises these beautiful names with his life while the best of the holy utterances reveal their greatness.
[Yugalānanya, Nām: 13]

Thus it is the name and poetry chanting that becomes the core of rasik devotees' identity. It influenced their life-style and pastimes to the extent that chanting sessions mark different periods of the day and even young people somehow associated with the rasik cult try to create pieces of poetry as per their skills and knowledge of the language.

The second collection of Yugalānanya's verses is probably even more relevant to the anthropological research of the Golāghāt community as it is dedicated to the holy city itself and is called *Śrī Dhām-kānti*. For rasik devotees it is important not to DO any spiritual practice but just to BE in the sacred space, in the city of Ayodhyā or, in particular, in the Golāghāt community. Simple being there enhances romantic mellows in the mind and heart of a devotee and he becomes eligible to be called rasik. Just like the holy name, the sacred space itself is a salvific agent acting without any consent on behalf of its resident:

पाप ताप संताप दाप दल दलत पलक भर पेखे।
अद्भुत कला कुशल कामद श्री अवध धाम दृग देखे॥
अखिल लोक सेवित पंकजपद असद समन भ्रम बेषे।
श्री युगलानन्य शरन विमलावर वास न त्याग निमेषे॥

The city sets one free from all sins and disperses all sorrows.
The holy Avadh is the summit of all virtuous deeds,
The entire worlds bow down to its feet and it liberates from doubts.
Yugalānanya does not wish to separate from Ayodhyā even for a moment. [Yugalānanya, Dhām: 22]

It is so not only because Ayodhyā is a meeting point between the Divine Sphere and our world but also due to the fact that its atmosphere is permeated with romantic mellows manifested in the Rāmnām, rasik poetry, songs, performance and dances constantly practiced in the dhām. The reference to such perception of the holy city can be found in Tulsidās' poetry too: thus, describing return of the newly married Sītā and Rāma to Ayodhyā

he hints that the presence of them stimulates mādhyurya sentiments the “material” manifestation of which is the rasik poetry. Listening to its vibrations is equated to personal vision of the Divine Couple:

सब बिधि सब पुर लोग सुखारी। रामचंद सुख चंदु
निहारी॥
मुदित मातु सब सखीं सहेली। फलित बिलोकि मनोरथ
बेली॥

Having seen the moonlike Rāmachandra, all denizens of the city experienced boundless bliss.
Mothers, sakhīs and girl friends were happy that their hearts’ desires had born fruit.
[SRCM: 2.1.3]

It is interesting to note that some terms from the rasik vocabulary are already there: sakhīs and sahelīs are the key notions thereof. Further on Yugalānanya elaborates the idea of the sacred and salvific space saying that:

सर्वोपरि आनन्द सुधा निधि आठयाम जहं सरसे।
रसिक राज तिरताज संग नव रंग बिलच्छन बरसे।
बैकुण्ठादि धाम सेवा रत रहत एक रस तरसे।
श्रीयुगलानन्यशरन धामो सुख बिना धाम नहिं दरसे।
नाम रूप गुन गन सेवन मधि यतन सुति अवधारी।
काहू मध्य एक रस दुर्लभ दृढ अनन्य मन भारी।
सबसे सुलभ सहज मंगलमय धाम रहस्य विचारी।
श्रीयुगकलानन्यशरन सेवन श्रीअवध स्वच्छ श्रमहारी॥

The supreme bliss and joy ever reside here, New tastes of union with the king of all sweet emotions are flowing like rain.
They say that to reach Vaikuṅṭha one has to dedicate himself to restless service, Yugalānanya believes instead that if one can’t find happiness in Ayodhyā he has no chance to reach the Supreme Abode.
Names, forms and qualities (of the Lord) are perceived by intense service only –
And it is difficult to concentrate on them constantly so a person whose mind is directed to them only is rarely found.
It is easy to achieve the goal in a spontaneous way in this fortunate city – such is its mystery.
Yugalānanya teaches that service in Śrī Avadh is pure and uplifting. [Yugalānanya, Dhām: 24]

To prove the idea that anyone who got in touch with purifying vibrations of Avadh spontaneously achieves the supreme goal, the poet cites a popular legend about five sinners from Punjab who came to Ayodhyā in order to commit their crimes but got transformed and became saints. There can be an allusion to five senses transfigured by the city’s atmosphere:

पापी पाँच प्रपंच पगे पंचाल देश के वासी।
चोरी करन हेतु आये श्रीअवध बीच अघ राशी।।
कृपा प्रसाद पाय दरशन पद पाये परम प्रकाशी।
युगलानन्यशरन गाथा वर विदित प्रभाव प्रभासी।।

Five sinners from Punjab Came to Avadh for robbery.
Having seen the holy city they received the great mercy and went directly to the Supreme Abode. Yugalānanya: this well-know anecdote reveals the glory of Ayodhyā. [Ibid. 26]

How is this dimension of the rasik lore practically experienced by local communities? First of all it is being spread by means of oral tradition both poetical and conversational. As we can clearly see from Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ's interview quoted hereabove, many local sādhus came to Ayodhyā because they had heard rumours about salvific effects of the sacred space. Before settling on Golāghāt some of them had belonged to other sects (often Shaivite or Advaitin) and got "rasikized" on spot (gradually or momentarily). Having various backgrounds they imported certain spiritual and cultural patterns to their new home and thus enriched their respective communities. Also it should be said that local non-rasik institutions undergo influence of rasik lore and may host hidden rasiks in their fold. Siyā-Anup Śaraṇ himself mentions that he was born in Harihār (Bihār), as a youth was initiated into Udāsīn Panth by Bābā Śankardās in Paṭnā and after a period of living in an Udāsīn temple he set off for a tour around sacred places such as Ilāhābād (now Prayāgrāj), the Himalayan Chār Dhām and Vārāṇasī. Dissatisfied with the community of Udāsīn sādhus he heard a legend about the salvific sacred space of Ayodhyā transmitted orally among itinerant ascetics. This is how he found himself in the Golāghāt community. It seems that this itinerary is quite common for rasiks who were not born in Avadh itself as Yugalānanya keeps on insisting:

धाम निवास दरश पाये बिनु धामी भेंट कहां है
पीट-पीट सिर मूढ़ सुवे भवकुंवे पड़े न लहा है।
साधन बिना सिद्ध इतही श्रीवाणी मधुर महा है।
युगलानन्य शरण सुधाम बिन कोटिन कल्प वहा है।

If you don't settle in the holy place, how can you meet the One who lives there?

Even being a dull-witted person you will not die there:

Without any sādhanā you will obtain all the siddhas, listening to the sweet and glorious poetry.

Says Yugalānanya: if you don't come to live in the dhām, you will wander from one life to another during endless cosmic cycles.

[Ibid. 30]

Golāghāt as an exemplary rasik community

The existence of a community the life of which is fully based on romantic narrative and performance and its survival in the XXI century is the main outcome of my research. Rāma-rasik communities were described before in well-known monographs by Peter Van der Veer, Bakker. However most of them tend to describe the tradition as a fading one. It was my first impression too when I first visited rasik institutions of Ayodhyā and could not find any young sādhus. However, it is explained by the fact that most young ascetics are normally wandering from one holy place to another taking a break for the Monsoon season. For example Dr. Bevilacqua mentions in her Doctoral Thesis that "the main component of rasik branch

today consists of Dās ascetics” which is partly true however it does not diminish the influence of the Golāghāṭ’s Śaraṇ clan of sādhus on the spiritual and social life of Avadh. She further admits that she visited “the Lakṣmaṇ-quilā, which is one of the most important rasik centres in Ayodhyā, and asked a sādhu to explain his sādhanā. He said that in that centre they worship saguṇa form of Sītā and Rāma, regarding Sītā as their sister and Rāma as their brother-in-law. Their worship therefore emphasizes the feeling of being a young lady. For this reason during ceremonies they wear female clothes or accessories.” [Bevilaqua, 2015: 168]

This information basically coincides with results of my own investigation but I would like to stress not a purely religious aspect of the Golāghāṭ rasik tradition but introduce it as a spiritual and cultural phenomenon of a romantic and poetical religion, if it can still be defined as religion, taking into consideration the fact that most Western scholarly definitions of religion have the verb “to believe” as a key word while in our case we deal with “to experience” pattern which in a sense transcends belief systems. Going back to the previously quoted Dr. Goldberg’s article dedicated to Tāgore, we can find parallels to this supposition. According to her “the concept of religion in its social and corporate aspects still retains an element of externality in terms of doctrine, while at the same time its personal or private aspect is seen as an inward emotion or disposition...” [Goldberg: 31] She further cites a maxim of H.N. Fairchild that “romanticism, at its deepest and most intense, is essentially a religious experience.” [Ibid. 35]

Rasikism can never be a popular religion because it requires a strong emotional input that would govern the whole life of an individual both on personal and community levels. This is why it has always required existence of a relatively small and close nuclear community which would generate the romantic mood. However the society around this nucleus will still experience its impact on the level of narrative and performance. This is how the Golāghāṭ community communicates itself to the world at large. In conclusion one more aspect of the rasik lore should be dwelled upon: the story-tellers, poets and sādhus become treasurers of the Avadhi language which is still used among local people but is not widely and properly studied in comparison with the normative Hindi. Once Avadhi poetry was the main transport of spreading the ideas of social and political unification of the peoples of India, now it remains a tool of preserving the community identity of both Rāma-rasiks and native speakers who use it in their families. This research on the one hand continues the interdisciplinary studies of communities in Avadh started by previous researchers mentioned above, but on the other hand it is a beginning of scrutiny in the field practically

unknown to academic scholars. Still various questions remain and further developments of the Golāghāṭ's tradition in the changing world are to be observed studied.

NOTES

Note on transliteration

In most cases IAST was used to transliterate words coming from Indian languages (viz. Sanskrit, Hindi and Avadhi). In cases of phonetic discrepancies between the Sanskrit and Avadhi (Hindi), the latter option was chosen due to the fact that the paper deals mostly with realities where vernacular languages are applicable. Thus, we transliterate the word धाम as dhām and not as dhāma. However we kept the final “a” for names of Hindu Gods Rāma and Kṛṣṇa.

Note on references

While giving references to poetic works that are considered to be holy scriptures by the community in question we indicate their abbreviated title (for example SRCM) and a verse number after the column. In case of *Śrī Gurū Granth Sāhib* a figure after the column refers to the page number according to Khalsa editions numeration. In case of books by Swāmī Yugalānanya Śaraṇ as well as in all other references the figure represents the page number. Abbreviations of the scriptures by Goswāmī Tulsīdās are as follows:

JM –	<i>Jānakī-Mangala</i>
SRCM –	<i>Śrī Rāmacaritamānasa</i>
VPK –	<i>Vinaya-Patrikā</i>

Other abbreviations:

VR-	<i>Vālmiki Rāmāyaṇa</i>
SGGS -	<i>Śrī Gurū Granth Sāhib</i>

General notes

- (1) Dhām – in rasik (both Rāma and Kṛṣṇa oriented) worldview, a holy place where the divine līlā had previously manifested and thus it

- became a “meeting point” between the celestial and the earthly world. The two most known dhāms are Ayodhyā and Vṛndāvan.
- (2) Ghāṭ - descent to a holy river where ritual bath is taken and riverside rites (including cremation) are conducted.
 - (3) Pīṭh – a centre where a gurū resides and gives his teaching and spiritual advice to his disciples and guests.
 - (4) Tilak is a sectarian mark drawn with clay on forehead and other body parts to indicate belonging to this or that sect. Most Vaiṣṇava sādhus and devotees sport a vertical urdhvā-pundrā which may consist of white and yellow lines, dots, etc.
 - (5) Puṣp-vātikā – the “garden of flowers” introduced by Goswāmī Tulsidās as a background scene for the first romantic meeting of Sītā and Rāma before the svayaṃvara. It is not mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmīki.
 - (6) By brāhmaṇism we mean the tradition of brāhmaṇs based on a particular set of rituals and rules of conduct prescribed in Dharmaśāstras. Advaita is a philosophy proposed by Śrī Śaṅkarācārya (circa VII century) and stipulating the illusory character of this world and absolute unity (non-duality) between the Supreme Being and a living entity which is questioned by all the Vaiṣṇava schools of thought.

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