Foreword

One amongst other objectives of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) is to investigate the diverse levels of interaction within a single geographical unit, region. What are the processes by which a particular place acquires significance as a major cultural centre? It becomes the place to which energies converge and from which energies relate; both centripetal and centrifugal movements are evident. While these centres emerge in historical time, they develop into sacred places, what are these confluences of socio-economic political forces, religious movements, which generate artistic expressions? How does overlaying take place over a period of time and why do they continue to hold attention of both those inside and outside the region or the cultural centres? Often a temple or mosque is the physical or notional centre, at other times the whole area acquires a trans-, space and time presence.

One such region is Vraj where millions throng to relive the experience of the childhood and beyond of Kṛṣṇa. Each place, hamlet or grove, lane or by-lane evokes the memory of the myth. An annual calendar of rituals and festivities recreates and relives the life of the blue god.

And yet the place is in historical time. Monuments were built at particular times by specific people. There are texts which testify to the self-awareness of the patrons and the community. Alongside are the living repositories of the tradition who transmit the memory of the community orally generation after generation. The temples have a living presence which is renewed, modified and even changed through ritual practices. Which methodological tools of research may be adopted to create a virtual picture of the totality and not the parts, the multi-dimensional dynamics of these places?

The IGNCA has endeavoured to evolve an alternative model for the study of such centres. Both textual and oral sources, primary and secondary, are explored, the layout of the area, the architectural features of the principal monuments and the inscriptional and epigraphical texts are analysed. An audio-visual documentation of the ritual is made, the artistic experience of sculpture, painting, music and dance related to the monument is studied. Finally an attempt is made to integrate the evidence from these diverse sources with a view to reflecting the holistic world view embedded in these places, and the staggering variety of interactions and dialogues which were and continue to take place. Vraj in the north and Tanjavur in the south were obvious choices for such an undertaking called
the Kṣetra Sampadā projects of the IGNCA which are now beginning to yield the first results of the research undertaken by a variety of scholars, each a specialist in his or her field. In the case of Tanjavur, a definitive study of the Bṛhadīśvara temple has already appeared. Two volumes on the sculptural schema and the iconography are in the press, a third volume on the inscriptions is under preparation. Concurrently the texts of the āgamas are being edited and translated and a fairly extensive documentation of contemporary rituals, hymnology and music and dance traditions has been made. All this is being integrated into a multi-media programme which will enable future research easy access to the material and facilitate comprehension of the complexity.

The Vraj and Nāthadvārā project is even more complex. Many dimensions of space, time and place have to be explored. There is an abundance of textual material, primary, secondary and tertiary. There are historical records, land grants and chronicles; the theologians kept their own records. Besides, there is a large corpus of literary material both theological as also poetic. Equally rich are the oral traditions. Contemporary practices emerge from the past, but also effect and affect it. No single scholar, or any institution could undertake such a task in isolation. Collaboration and multi-disciplinary team work was a necessity.

Fortunately, three institutions and many scholars had been engaged in diverse aspects of the Vraj and the Govindadeva temple in particular.

It was time to hold an international seminar on the Govindadeva temple as a first initial step. The Caitanya Prerna Sansthanā and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts brought together many scholars from different parts of the world to take stock of the work done and to explore the directions of further research. The volume entitled Govindadeva: A Dialogue in Stone testified to the complexities to studying the multifaceted and multilayered personality of Vraj through the great Govindadeva temple built in the Mughal period. Its subsequent enigmatic history of the deity travelling to Jaipur is as mysterious as revealing of the cultural movements. Two volumes; one a definitive edition of the Śrī Śrī Bhaktirasāṁrasindhū by Rūpa Gosvāmī and another entitled Evening Blossoms: The Temple Tradition of Sāñjhī in Vṛndāvana have been published. Alas the editor of the first and the author of the second, Dr. Premlata Sharma and Shri Asim Krishnadasa passed away before completing other works they had undertaken.

At the international seminar were present amongst other renowned scholars, Prof. Irfan Habib and Prof. Monika Horstmann. Both of them had been closely associated with the renowned scholar, the late Dr. Tarapada Mukherjee of SOAS, London, and the Vrindavan Research Institute’s programme. Prof. Irfan Habib along with Dr. Tarapada Mukherjee has published a series of seminal papers based on the Persian sources, the farmāns as land grants and much else. While these revealed the involvement of Akbar and the Mughal court, there was the other group of sources from Rajasthan. Rājā Mānsingh was equally engaged in the enterprise. Dr. Tarapada Mukherjee had collected many documents from the Vaisnava temples. It was left to Prof. Monika Horstmann to
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fill the void and complete the unfinished work of Dr. Tarapada Mukherjee in the spirit of a true scholar dedicated to continuing the unfinished task. Besides, the documents collected by Dr. Tarapada Mukherjee, Prof. Horstmann investigated the Bikaner Archives and has made full use of these. The result is this welcome monograph.

The documents presented in the volume reflect the relationship of the Kachavāhā dynasty of Eastern Rajasthan (Amber/Jaipur) with the Gaudīya sect. The first custodian of Govinddevī was Rūpa Gosvāmī, and the deity’s great temple of Vrindavan, as it exists to this day, was erected by the Kachavāhā Rājā Mānsingh. He was a loyal exponent of the Mughal power and, at the same time, a Hindu King, eminently powerful in his own right. His royal architecture reflects this double bind, and so does the history of the temple of Govinda deva and other old Vaiṣṇava temples that were all the objects of both Mughal and Hindu royal patronage.

Mughal patronage is documented by Persian grants to this and other Vaiṣṇava temples and the representatives of various Vaiṣṇava sects. This book deals exclusively with the Kachavāhā grants and other documents, which are related to these grants or deal with the affairs of the custodians of the Govinda deva temple. Prof. Horstmann traces the history of the grants from the middle of the 17th century to the 1950s and thus implicitly establishes an aspect of the relationship between the Kachavāhās and the Gaudīyas, and even beyond that, between the modern state of Rajasthan and the specific religious sect.

The book thus provides a documentary history of a facet of the politico-religious history of Vraj and Rajasthan. It also provides insight into the character of the special type of its documents and, therefore, is a valuable contribution to the diplomatics of the chancery of Eastern Rajasthan. Prof. Horstmann states that although the focus of the book is mainly on the contents of the documents, she found it necessary to add a chapter (Chapter 2) devoted to their diplomatic and administrative aspects. Though these aspects have been studied carefully from the Persian documents available, they have not received sufficient attention as far as the Rajasthani documents are concerned. A description of the diplomatic conventions and administrative procedures involved goes a long way in understanding the structure of the documents.

This picture of an active collaboration and interaction will be complete only if the vast corpus of oral information gathered by the late Dr. Mukherjee from the Gosvāmīs is also transcribed and published. It will be our endeavor to do this also.

The late Dr. Tarapada Mukherjee to whom Prof. Monika Horstmann dedicates her volume was keenly aware of the nature of the materials and their significance. In an article published in the IAVRI Bulletin [No. 8, 1980:16] he said:

'These materials should not be seen merely as records of sectarian interest. They are, in fact, community
records that provide a key to the knowledge of the history of the area. In the absence of community records such as these, the traditional history of India is imperfect and inadequate. The history of India is not the history of the ‘seats of power’, the true and intimate history of India is the history of the centres of learning, religion and culture. How much do we know of these centres, how much do we care to know of them?

Vrindaban is a city of temples venerated for its association with Kṛṣṇa. Not unjustifiably therefore, one associates Vrindaban with devotion and devotional literature. This association, however, has obscured its historical identity and the materials of its history. We never expected that the ascetics who developed the area would record every step of their movement and preserve those records for the posterity. From these records we know how efficient and strong was the organisation of the sects and how firm was the control of the ascetics over the spiritual and economic life of the community. With an astonishing skill of diplomacy, the ascetics maintained their superiority over the rulers of the country while enjoying support and sympathy from them. Soon after the death of the six Gosvāmīs, the big temples of the Gauḍiya sect accumulated so much land and wealth that each of their custodians attained the status of a zamindar. The history of these zamindars is the history of Vrindaban. It is a history of the development of a mediaeval township which was cosmopolitan, prosperous and self-contained, and above all, a holy place that attracted pilgrims and ascetics of all denominations from all over the country. The rulers fostered its growth and the natives accepted the economic and social supremacy of the migrants without qualms. There were disputes and rivalries among and within the sects but life seems to have been harmonious and peaceful, at least while the six Gosvāmīs were alive. No other mediaeval town in India seems to have such a well defined and well documented history. The materials of its history now being accessible, it is hoped that the final outcome of the project would be a definitive history of Vrindaban. But the materials are yet to be deciphered, studied and interpreted.’

Pertinently he observed that a huge number of documents and materials remain to be deciphered and printed together step by step in order to eventually yield a history of Vrindavan and the political and religious ideologies of the characteristic of Kṛṣṇa devotionalism.

The IGNCA joins Prof. Horstmann in paying tribute to this scholar. It is grateful to her for offering her work for publication to the IGNCA. Shri Srivats Goswami, Director of the Caitanya Prema Samsthana has actively collaborated. We are thankful to him. Prof. Irfan Habib read the first draft and made useful suggestions. We are indebted to him.

Dr. Lalit M. Gujral, my colleague in the IGNCA, has painstakingly seen the book through the press. I thank him.

12 April, 1999

KAPILA VATSAYAN