

# Preface

This monograph on the tradition and practice of Sāñjhī in certain temples of Vṛndāvana inaugurates The Vraja–Nāthadvārā Series, sponsored by the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi. The series is an outgrowth of the Vraja–Nāthadvārā Prakalpa (VNP), a holistic research project developed to explore the richness of the Vraja--or Braj--tradition by the IGNCA in cooperation with the Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana (SCPS), Vṛndāvana. Integrated into the Janapada Sampada division of the IGNCA, the VNP was its response to the cultural conservation, reclamation, and rehabilitation undertaken by the Samsthana over the years.

Three temples in Vṛndāvana are highlighted in the present monograph, and the Lādīlālā temple at Barsana is mentioned briefly. These are the main temples wherein Sāñjhī designs continue to be prepared. Persons who engage themselves in creating Sāñjhīs at these temples are among those responsible for making Sāñjhī designs occasionally or regularly at other temples as well. As is fairly common in the tradition of Indian craftsmanship, most of the people who make Sāñjhīs remain anonymous by their own choosing. Therefore, only the chief artisans, named within the text itself, will be introduced here.

Sri Jagadishlal Goswami is mentioned by name as both photographer and accomplished artisan in the Sāñjhī tradition. He belongs to the disciplic lineage of the saint, Śrī Gopāla Bhaṭṭa Gosvāmī, a direct disciple of the sixteenth-century Bengali mystic, Śrī Kṛṣṇa-caitanya Mahāprabhu, and founder of the Rādhāramaṇa temple at Vṛndāvana. Gosvāmī, now a surname, originated as a title of respect bestowed upon certain saints involved in the early bhakti (devotional) tradition of Vraja regardless of their sectarian affiliation; this title has been handed down in their lineages as a sign of respect and as a recognition that the families involved have safeguarded their tradition. In the present case, the main disciple of Gopāla Bhaṭṭajī, Śrī Gopinātha Gosvāmī, was requested by his guru to marry in order that the service (sevā) to the deity might be continued without interruption. However, it was his younger brother, Śrī Dāmodara Gosvāmī, who began a householder lineage of gurus and sevakas (persons who serve the deity). In the same lineage are the late Sri Rasbihari Goswami and his brother, Sri Brajbihari Goswami (Bhimsena), both of whom are recognized as consummate artisans. These Goswamis consented to speak with the author about their tradition and gave many helpful points which are gratefully acknowledged.

The temple of Śrī Rādhā-Madanamohana was founded by Śrī Gadādhara Bhaṭṭajī, also of the Caitanya Mahāprabhu school, and is known as Bhaṭṭajī's temple. The present head of the lineage, Sri Krishna Chaitanya Bhatta, faithfully continues the Sāñjhī tradition, as

well as other traditions that are gradually disappearing elsewhere. He regularly leads the singing of samāja (recital of the līlās or pastimes of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa described in the verses of the bhakti poet-saints), following the annual calendar of temple festivals, along with his sons and disciples. He and his sons, and their sons as well, continue to produce fine examples of Sāñjhī art as a spiritual practice in the service of their family deities. Thanks are due to Bhattaji, who agreed to an interview and provided information on the ritual practice and intention behind the creation of Sāñjhī, and to his sons, for unflinching kindness and help rendered to the author in understanding Sāñjhī as a sādhanā or spiritual practice.

Sri Shraavanlal Goswami, head of the Eighth Gaddī in the lineage of Śrī Vallabhācārya, settled at his Gopīnātha temple in Vṛndāvana after the partition of India. He has cherished the artistic traditions of service to the deity (sevā) for which the Puṣṭimārga school is noted and has enabled Sāñjhī to flourish at several temples. His son and nephew, who made Sāñjhīs under his guidance at the Rādhāvallabha temple in the past, have recently taken posts in commercial enterprises outside Vṛndāvana; it is significant that the breach in the Rādhāvallabha Sāñjhī tradition that would otherwise have resulted has been closed by a rekindled interest in the practice among the younger adherents of the community itself. Details are given in the Epilogue. Thanks are due to the members of his family for explaining the creation of Sāñjhī while they were engaged in the work itself.

Sri Shrivatsa Goswami is referred to in the text and is responsible for many of the earliest photographs of Sāñjhī reproduced here, which demonstrate his long-standing interest in preserving Vraja culture. He is the elder son of Sri Purushottama Goswami, one of the most eminent Goswamis of Rādhārāmaṇa temple and founder of Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana. Shrivatsa is now the Director of Sri Caitanya Prema Samsthana and the Vraja-Nāthadvārā Prakalpa. His willingness to share his knowledge and expertise has been crucial to the preparation of this monograph.

It may be noticed from the accompanying photographs that the older Sāñjhī designs were more carefully made, in more pleasing colour combinations, than some of the recent creations. The new generation of artisans is still learning the art of Sāñjhī from its accomplished elders and at the same time gaining an understanding of its spiritual meaning. Happily, despite a number of setbacks, the tradition of Sāñjhī is being carried on for at least another generation.

An explanation of spellings used in the text may be helpful. The spellings of contemporary persons, who write their names in English, have been referred to without the use of diacritical marks, while the names of historical personages, saints, poets, and so on, have been referred to by using the appropriate diacritical marks.

I want to thank the numerous persons whose contributions have enabled this volume to be compiled: the photographers whose work adorns the text, the priests and local scholars who have graciously shared their expertise and thoughts with the author, Dr. Umesh Sharma, with whom I read the Brajabhāsā verses, and those teachers and friends in Delhi, Vṛndāvana, and elsewhere who have constantly offered the wavering author encouragement: Śrīgurave namaḥ.

**Asimakrishna Dasa**  
*Gambhira, Jai Singh Ghera*  
*Vṛndāvana*