

Vaishnavism as Fine Literature

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Threading Verses: The dual authorship of Rūpa Gosvāmī's Padyāvalī

One of Rūpa Gosvāmī's earliest works is an anthology of Sanskrit devotional verse, simple called Padyāvalī ('A String of Verses'). The work consists of verses culled from older Sanskrit anthologies, the works of older poets, as well as the compositions of Rūpa's contemporaries (including his own), and is roughly divided into two sections: the first deals with the nature of devotion (bhakti) and devotional practices, the second with the divine play (līlā) of Kṛṣṇa. In this paper I will examine this second half of the work, and argue that the Padyāvalī is more than just a collection of verses, but a narrative text that Rūpa Gosvāmī carefully constructed with the compositions of other poets, both devotional and secular. In this new narrative context, the cited verses often gain a new meaning not intended by their authors--at times even turning secular verses into devotional ones--which makes Rūpa more than just the compiler of the verses, but also their secondary author. This paper will explore, through examples, the narrative structure of the Padyāvalī and the role of Rūpa Gosvāmī re-creating the poetry of older poets.