

Classic Poetry Series

Jayadeva
- poems -

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Jayadeva(1200 AD)

Jayadeva (Oriya: ?????, Sanskrit: ?????) was a Sanskrit poet circa 1200 AD. He is most known for his composition, the epic poem Gita Govinda, which depicts the divine love of Krishna-an avatar of Vishnu and his consort, Radha, and it is mentioned that Radha is greater than Hari, and is considered an important text in the Bhakti movement of Hinduism. He was born to a Hindu Brahmin family.

Biography

Jayadeva was born in Kenduli Sasan (formerly Kendubilva), in the Prachi valley, Khurda district in Orissa. Kenduli Sasan is a village near the famous temple city of Puri. At the time of Jayadeva's birth, Orissa was under the rule of Eastern Ganga dynasty king Chodaganga Deva. It was during the reign of this monarch and his son and successor, Raghava, that Jayadeva composed his Sanskrit epics. Chodaganga Deva, originally a Shaiva, was strongly influenced by the devotion to Krishna in and around Puri and became a Vaishnava devotee of Krishna himself.

The poet's parents were named Bhojadeva and Ramadevi. From temple inscriptions it is now known that Jayadeva received his education in Sanskrit poetry from a place called Kurmapataka, possibly near Konark in Orissa. Later on, Jayadeva married Padmavati, who according to temple inscriptions, may have been an accomplished temple dancer on her own right.

Prachi valley has a long history of worshipping Madhava, another name for Krishna. During Jayadeva's period, it was known as a religious place dominated by Vaishnava Brahmins. Even today, the village of Kenduli Sasan is replete with images of Madhava. Undoubtedly, the great poet must have been influenced by the devotional milieu in that area when he composed his magnum opus, the Gita Govinda.

Historical Records on Jayadeva's Life

Inscriptions at Lingaraj temple, and the more recently discovered Madhukeswar temple and Simhachal temple that were read and interpreted by Dr. Satyanarayan Rajaguru shed some light on Jayadeva's early life. These inscriptions narrate how Jayadeva had been a member of the teaching faculty of the school at Kurmapataka. He might have studied there as well. It must have been right after his childhood education in Kenduli Sasan that he left for Kurmapataka and gained experience in composing poetry, music and dancing.

The earliest mention of Jayadeva outside Orissa are by Chand Bardai, the court poet of Prithviraj Chauhan. The next earliest reference outside Orissa is found in an inscription of Raja Sarangadev in the year 1201 A.D. These records establish that the Gita Govinda became popular throughout India within a brief period of its composition, perhaps because it was regularly performed in the Jagannath temple of Puri.

Some further details about Jayadeva have been garnered from a book by an Oriya Vaishnava poet Madhava Patnaik, who was contemporaneous to Chaitanya in the fifteenth century. Madhava Patnaik's book gives a clear account of Chaitanya's visit to Puri. He mentions that Chaitanya paid a visit to Kenduli Sasan near Puri to pay homage to Jayadeva and to chant passages from the Gita Govinda. The book mentions that Kenduli Sasan was in fact the birthplace of the illustrious poet. Madhava Patnaik's book also gives an account of Jayadeva's early life from the legends around Puri. It mentions Jayadeva as excelling in the Shastras and the Puranas from early childhood.

Literary Contributions

Jayadeva was instrumental in popularizing the Dasavatara, the ten incarnations of Vishnu in another composition, Dasakritikrite. Furthermore, the classic Tribhangi (threefold) posture of Krishna playing the flute gained popularity due to him.

Two hymns composed by Jayadeva have been incorporated in the Guru Granth Sahib, the holy book of the Sikh religion. Although it is not clear how these medieval Oriya hymns found their way to the Sikh religion, there are records narrating how Jayadeva's work had a profound influence on Guru Nanak during his visit to Puri.

The illustrious poet also institutionalized the Devadasi system in Oriya temples. Devadasis were women dancers specially dedicated to the temple deity, and as a result of the great poet's works, Oriya temples began to incorporate a separate Natamandira, or dance hall, within their precincts for Odissi performances.

Gita Govinda

The Gita Govinda is the best known composition of Jayadeva. It is a lyrical poetry that is organized into twelve chapters. Each chapter is further sub-divided into twenty four divisions called Prabandhas. The prabandhas contain couplets grouped into eights, called Ashtapadas.

The first English translation of the Gita Govinda was published by Sir William Jones in 1792, where Kalinga (ancient Orissa) is referred to as the origin of the text. Since then, the Gita Govinda has been translated to many languages throughout the world, and is considered to be among the finest examples of Sanskrit poetry.

Extracts From English Translation Of Gita-Govinda

'The sky is encompassed by clouds.
With the hue of Tamala trees,
darksome appear the sites of woods.
This dear Kahna
feels very timid at night.
O Radha! You therefore please
accompany him to reach home aright.'
Thus by the words of King Nanda,
stepped ahead both Radha and Madhava
towards the tree of bowers on the way.
Glory to their plays of love, secret and gay,
on the bank of river Yamuna.'

* *

'If your mind is fraught with sentiment
in remembering Lord Hari,
if you have any curiosity
in the arts of joyful dalliance,
then listen to Jayadeva's writing literary,
that contains the words sweet, delicate and lovely.'

* *

'Here appears the pleasurable Spring,
wherein the delicate zephyr
of Malaya mountain
gently blows having loving embrace
of the graceful Lavanga creeper
and wherein the cottage of bowers is
filled with the sweet cooing of cuckoos
mingled with the humming of black-bees.
O Dear Friend! Hari enjoys wandering
and dances with the young maidens
in this season which is unbearably afflicting
to the couple separated from each other.'

* *

'During the days of Spring season,

ears of the wayfarers
painfully feel very feverish
by the noisy sound of cooing of cuckoos
sporting in the mango-blossoms
that slowly swing by the black bees
craving for the emerging sweet aroma.
These vernal days are anyhow
passed with difficulties
by the lonely wayfarers
who in cheerful sentiments enjoy union
with their life-like maidens
attained in some moments of concentration
within their mental sphere.'

* *

'By this time,
as a big dot of sandal paste
on the forehead of the Direction-Damsel,
Moon, spreading own rays, illuminated
the inner area of Vrindavana.
He had borne the beauty of a distinct stain
as if caused by sin due to own appearance
on the path of the adulterous maidens.'

* *

'These lips of thine really bear similarity
with the beauty of flower Bandhuka.
O Self-esteemed Lady!
Thy comely cheeks compile the lustres of Madhuka.
Manifesting the beauty
of blue lotuses, thy eyes are very lovely.
The stature of Tila flower, thy nose bears.
Thy teeth, O My Dear!
spread the radiance of Kunda flower.
Serving thy fine face with these five flowers,
the Flower-shafted Love-god Cupid
conquers the entire universe indeed.'

* *

'Languid are thy eyes with intoxication (Madalasa) .
Effulgent is thy face with charming moonbeam (Indumati) .

Thy gait gladdens mind of all the beings (Manorama) .
Thy thighs form the tremulous plantain tree (Rambha) .
Embellished with art is thy erotic play (Kalavati) .
Thy brows have lovely lines of painting (Chitrlekha) .
O Slim-limbed beloved lady!
Ah, present on earth,
You bear the juvenile exuberance of nymphs
who adorn the dominion of gods.'

* *

'Ye noble self like the divine doctor!
All the illness of Cupid-stricken Radha
can be cured very well
only by the ambrosia
of your loving embrace.
If you do not make her
free from this grief so far,
O Dear Upendra!
Really very cruel
more than the thunderbolt you are.'

* *

'O Krishna!
In the days by-gone,
she was unable to endure your separation,
by the grief caused by closing of eyes,
and now how can she tolerate having sighs
the long estrangement,
looking at the branch of mango tree
having blossoms at the top? '

* *

'O Krishna! Owing to pangs of separation,
for Radha, her home seems to be a forest.
The group of her dear maiden-friends
appears as a trapping net.
With heavy sighs, the heat of separation
turns to be a vast forest-conflagration.
It is a matter of severe woe

that because of thy separation,
Oh, how she appears as a doe,
and Love-god Cupid for her,
has become Yama, the Lord of Death,
displaying the activities of a fierce tiger.'

* *

'O My Friend! Here
floreescence of new Asoka creeper
bearing few bunches of flowers
is not at all pleasurable to my eyes
and causes distress immense.
Breeze of pleasure-grove beside pond
gives me pains further.
This budding of mango-blossoms with sharp tips,
though charming with the humming of black-bees
roving over them, does not give me a gleeful sense.'

* *

'O Liquor of Madhuka!
No noble thought arises for you.
O Sugar! You're very unsavoury really.
O Grape! Who will behold you?
O Nectar! You're gone dead.
O Milk! Your essence is mere water.
You weep, O Ripe Mango!
O Lips of Beloved Lady!
Down to the nether region you go,
as long as the sweet words of Jayadeva
in this world on all sides offer
emotional feelings of erotic expression.'

Jayadeva

The Song Of Cowherd Krishna (The First Verse Of Gita-Govinda)

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darksome appear the sites of woods.
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