



Jayadeva's
Gita Govinda

translated from the Sanskrit
by C. John Holcombe

Ocaso Press 2008

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by Jayadeva

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by

Colin John Holcombe

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GITA GOVINDA

INTRODUCTION

The Gita Govinda—a cycle of Sanskrit songs, commentaries and invocations that depict Krishna’s courtship of the cowherdess Rādhā—was the most popular and influential poem to emerge from medieval India. The text was added to temple inscriptions, set to music, choreographed for dance, and studied as a religious text. Contemporary poems, recitations, songs and dances point to its continuing popularity. With frank and tender lyricism, the Gita Govinda explored the many aspects of passion, from first awakening through fierce regrets and jealousies to the rapture and contentment of bodily possession. On one level it narrates the loves of Rādhā and Krishna as simple cowherds, but the poem also celebrates nature’s regeneration through sexual congress, the interplay of the human and divine, and the profound mystery of erotic experience.

The poem can be dated to the late twelfth century and was probably written in north or north-eastern India, as it shows some familiarity with Vishnu sects in Orissa and mentions fellow poets at the court of the last Hindu ruler in Bengal, Maharaja Laksmanasena (AD 1175–1200). Of the author there are many anecdotes but no certain information. Jayadeva was

probably a court poet, but tradition gives him a sound education before turning him into a wandering scholar, one of many at a time of Sanskrit revival. Poets were men of taste and learning given spacious quarters and a court position in return for ready compositions on conventional subjects and religious matters. Form took precedence over the content. Jayadeva was apparently a saintly ascetic induced to settle by marrying the temple dancer, Padmāvati, and take up writing the Gita Govinda. Other verses are ascribed to Jayadeva, but Gita Govinda is his certain masterpiece.

By tradition, Padmāvati was a model wife, modest and devoted to Jayadeva, and very different from Rādhā, who is the typical heroine of classical Sanskrit poetry: proud of her heavy breasts and hips, consumed by longing, but also playful, sulking, jealous, tempestuous and despairing. Krishna is the eternal male: urgent and charming and uncommitted. Rādhā submits to his entreaties, but feels abandoned when Krishna returns to his other women. The ten long parts of the poem that separate Rādhā's first submission to her final reconcillation with Krishna, in which the lovers declaim and despair, appearing to say a few verses to each other or sending the go-between to plead their case, allow Jayadeva to explore the changing moods of attraction, which are both natural to the situation, and what audiences expected. Krishna repents, longs for Rādhā, commiserates with her distress, waits for her, makes her jealous, importunes and praises her, enjoys and assures her of his love. Rādhā sulks and despairs, wastes away, flies

into tempers, rails at Krishna, consents and finds joy and contentment with him.

Jayadeva's poem became the focus of a religious sect in India. Buddhism and Hinduism sought to release the enlightened from worldly illusions through reunciation, meditation and physical austerities. Particularly to be avoided was carnal pleasure. In Gita Govinda, however, Krishna embodies the erotic sentiment, and in that sense the cowgirls serve him with rapture and unselfishness. Jayadeva developed the aesthetic experience of love, and the songs typically end with dedications to Krishna, which urge readers to cultivate an appreciation of a taste that is both mental discrimination and physical relish. The two are inseparable, each growing from the other. The poem melds the sweetness of the experiences described, the poetry itself, and the joy that devotees find in relishing Krishna through the text. Indian theologians in the eleventh century took this concept of taste further, seeing the lover as someone lifted from the particular into an abstract and universal experience of love, which is the ultimate joy or beatitude, a taste of Brahman itself. The aesthetic experience became a religious one, a state of total absorption in, devotion to and enjoyment of Krishna.

Jayadeva brought song into classical Sanskrit verse, and developed the association with a beauty not easily matched in English. While the prose meaning of Gita Govinda can be brought over reasonably well, despite many ambiguities in the Sanskrit text, and the restricting form of English stanzas, the

aesthetic qualities that make Gita Govinda poetry and supremely worth reading have to be created independently. Classical Sanskrit poetry was sonorous, repetitive, ornate, formal, ambiguous, and conventional. Its long lines with their various but intricate quantitative metres have no counterpart in English, any more than our explicit words have a religious dimension. My solution has been to use English verse devices to explore a text winnowed down to the bare bones of its Sanskrit meaning. A particularly harmonious line in the Sanskrit does not necessarily find its echo in the English translation, therefore, nor the other way about, though the Sanskrit will always tend to be the more beautiful, as its harmonies exceed even those possible in ancient Greek. In short, this translation stresses the literary more than scholarly or religious aspects, but the Appendix does provide a commentary, suggest what has been lost in the rendering, add a note on metrical issues, and list works for further reading.

Syllables are long in Sanskrit words when the vowel is naturally long (shown with an accent), or the vowel is followed by more than one consonant. Aspirated dh, bh, and gh count as single consonants, however, and are pronounced in a breathy manner. Long vowels are generally to be stressed in the reading, though not all proper names can be made to fit the English iambic.

GITA GOVINDA

Part One: Joyful Krishna

With clouds the sky is thickened, and the woodlands
darken with Tamāla trees. Tonight
is someone leading home a doubting Rādhā
near the Yamunā, by Nanda sent
by every path and tree and branching arbour
to win her Mādhava in honeyed sport.

As speech's deity adorns this house
the dance of Padmāvati turns the world,
and prince of wandering poets, Jayadeva,
tells of Vāsudeva and his Shri.

If, in memory of Krishna's mind,
you're curious to learn the arts of love,
then hear these sweet and tender verses
Jayadeva makes to eloquence.

Umāpatidhara causes words to bloom,
Sharana dazzles with his lightning thought.
Dhoyī's lord of poets, Govardhana
has his love skills, Shrutidhara fame,
but Jayadeva is both clear and true.

First Song

When world was water, you became
a tireless vessel of the Vedas.
You, in Pisces form, Keshava:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

When this heavy earth you carried
on your callused turtle's back,
how venerable you were, Keshava:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

A blemish on the hare-marked moon,
the earth became as on your tusk:
you held us when a boar, Keshava:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

With nail on lotus hand you cut
the bee-like Hiranyakashipu.
What a lion-man, Keshava:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

A marvellous dwarf, Keshava, you
outwitted Bali: from your toenail
water poured to bless the people:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

Bhrgu's lord, you made in blood
of Kshatriyas the people bathe.

As evil left, the heat declined:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

In Rāma's body, you have hurled
around you heads of Rāvana,
a blessing of the war, Keshava:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

You carried beauty as a cloud
and shone as wielder of the plough
that struck with fear the Yamunā:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

Kind as Buddha, you refused
to take the sacrificial life
of animals despite our customs:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

In Kalki's body you became
a sword to scourge the foreign people,
comet-like in fire, Keshava:
conqueror of the world, Hari!

You, in a decad form, Keshava,
are the comfort of our life.
Hear the poet Jayadeva,
conqueror of the world, Hari!

* * *

To he who bore the world, who raised the Vedas,
Bali, demon and Kshatriyas killed:
Pulastya's victor, compassion's spreader, wielder
of the plough and scourge of foreign races:
Krishna, your ten faces: reverence.

Second Song

Held within the rounded breasts
of the goddess of the lotus,
impelled to wanton, garlanded:
victorious you are, Hari!

A jewel of our day abroad,
the breaker of our bond of death,
the spirit moving Mānasa:
victorious you are, Hari!

Yadu's lineage, people pleasing,
but bane of venomed Kāliya,
ruler of the sun and lotus:
victorious you are, Hari!

Garuda aided, you have vanquished
Madhu, Mura, Naraka:
you caused to play the other gods:
victorious you are, Hari!

Eyed as is the petalled lotus,
releasing us from this existence,

three-world dweller and its end:
victorious you are, Hari!

Hung as ornament for Sītā,
still you conquered Dūshana
quelled the war and Rāvana:
victorious you are, Hari!

You, supporting Mount Mandara,
look as clouds do, a chakora
at the moon of Lakshmi's face:
victorious you are, Hari!

If bowed we must be at your feet,
then bless us to become the most
obedient among adorers:
victorious you are, Hari!

Let these praises by the poet
Jayadeva be auspicious,
as befits a deity:
victorious you are, Hari!

* * *

Madhu's killer, clasped upon the lotus-
goddess's exhausted breasts, has caught
her mark of saffron in his fondest loving:
may you follow in his sweated drops.

In springtime, tender bodied with its creepers,
so they wander in the love god's pain,
so many of them, through the forest, led
by Krishna, when the friend to Rādhā said:

Third Song

Watch the clove-tree with its creepers
in the warm Malaya breeze.
Attend to honey bee and cuckoo
murmuring in cottage glade.

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:
endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

Traveller's brides are rent by passion,
much they wander in their pain
to see Bakula flowers, unruffled,
thick with swarms of honey bees.

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:
endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

Garlanded with leaves, Tamāla trees
are overcome with musky scent:
as love god's nails, Kinshuka buds,

must lacerate the youthful heart.

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:
endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

Keshara trees with golden pistils
reign as sovereign of the spring,
and bees the arrows lovers take
from trumpet quivers of their flowers.

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:
endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

How the young Karuna flowers
laugh at prudishness, and spears
of sharp Ketaka buds attack
the separated, lovelorn one.

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:
endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

When air is thickly wreathed with Jasmine,
and fragrant Mādhavī will catch
the notice of the forest hermit,
what will youth then not commit?

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:
endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

Here tendrils of the Atimukta
clasp the bristling Mango buds,
and all around the Brindavan,
watered by the Yamunā.

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:
endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

At the feet of radiant Krishna
Jayadeva speaks, remembering
how spring returned to forest meetings
colours every hint of love.

Look to Hari in the spring time,
dancing with his youthful women:

endlessly the pain encircles
one who's solitary, my friend.

* * *

The wind that hums like arrows brings
to hearts the frank Ketaka tree—
inflaming them as forest clothes
itself with Jasmine's pollen scent.

The hungry bees at Mango shoots,
the cuckoo's fever in the ear:
sweet days when travellers must think
how breath and amorousness unite.

* * *

Again her girlfriend told her: see how, Rādhā:
there he wantons, friends with all.
Here's Mura's enemy, embracing many,
how that trembling eagerness invites.

Fourth Song

With sandal smeared the darkish body,
garlanded, with yellow clothes.
With jewelled earrings on the cheeks,
now to and fro the smiling roves.
Carelessly the women play.

Burdened there by heavy breast
is one embracing passionately.
And here another, simple herder,
sings in elevated key.
Carelessly the women play.

Yet another, young and artless,
dreams of Krishna's rolling glances.
Sees in Madhu's slayer's gaze
the beauty of a lotus face.
Carelessly the women play.

Someone to his ear has spoken,
kissed him sweetly on the cheek:
and someone with the splendid buttocks,
as he bristles with delight.
Carelessly the women play.

Someone sporting, skilled and eager,
along the slopes of Yamunā:
now through hibiscus bowers she's led him,
beautiful, her hand on dress.
Carelessly the women play.

Hands are clapping, bracelets softly
lift above the bamboo flute.

What power and uproar in the dancing:
one engrossed is praising Hari.
Carelessly the women play.

One by one he takes and kisses
these most beautiful of girls.
And then another, all surpassing,
smiles and beckons, leads him on.
Carelessly the women play.

How marvellous this secret rapture
Jayadeva grandly tells:
through Brindavan and wantoning,
now let it radiate in Krishna's fame.
Carelessly the women play.

* * *

The love god's festival a darkened body
draws them garlanded as lotus blooms.
How freely, through their limbs, the comely Vraja
women sport with Hari through the spring.

From pent with snakes in sandal trees, the mountain
breezes plunge in Himalayan snows,
and, sweet and loud, the cuckoo's coo coo callings
echo from the shoots on Mango trees.

Part Two: Careless Krishna

But still was Krishna equal with his kisses.
Rādhā felt she should be first and left him,
and in those thickets humming bees encircle
now unhappily to girlfriend said.

Fifth Song

Such spilling sweetness from his flute and lips
and tremulous the movement from his cheeks:
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment and fun of me.

His hair was plumed with moon-eyed peacock tails,
his dress the rainbow out of darkened clouds.
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment and fun of me.

He had the heavy milkmaids dance about
the red Kadambas of his smiles and kisses:
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment and fun of me.

His arms entwined about a thousand there;
his body's ornaments made day of night:
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment and fun of me.

From clouds his moon-like brow was rising,
breasts with doorway to the heart he bruises:
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment and fun of me.

Rich the earrings on his cheeks, a dress
that hangs with demons, sages, gods and princes:
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment, and fun of me.

At the Kadamba tree my fears were quiet,
the love god darting to my soul in joy:
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment, and fun of me.

So speaks Jayadeva: led astray
was Rādhā by an undissembling shape:
In my heart I still see Hari dance
in playful merriment, and fun of me.

* * *

Ever roaming, ever fickle, why
with women round him should he stop? I see
the love god in him will delight and then
desert me: what in conscience can I do?

Sixth Song

I found him in his forest's leafy home,
in which in loneliness he lies concealed:
in looking round was frightened, till I saw
his violent passion in abounding laughter.
Why can't Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

At first meeting I was bashful, but
his words were flattering and urgent, kind:
he smiled and pressed me, and that cloth was loosed
that left me standing with pudenda bare.
Why can't Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

How tenderly he treated me, as on
my breast he lay as though asleep:
To me alone he gave his arms and kisses,
played and drank there fully at my lip.
Why can't Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

In indolence, my eyelids closed, I felt
his cheeks there swell and quicken, charming me.
How tired the body was and drenched with sweat
with him in passion riding to and fro.
Why can't Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

By all love's treatises he won his pleasure;
like the cuckoo bird I cooed in murmurs.
My massy breasts he scored with nailmarks, made
my hair go all ways as it dropped its flowers.
Why can't Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

My jewelled anklets jingled as he delved
in love's complexities to pleasure me.
I lost my girdle belt: he tore my hair,
but gave me kisses, kisses violently.
Why can't foe Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

Resting, pleased from that union, I,
with budded lotus eyes still closed to me,
with no more strength than has a creeper, felt
in Madhu's enemy the love increase.
Why can't Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

So Madhu's enemy, sings Jayadeva,
ever moving, laughing in his sport.
By him deserted, Rādhā knows such sadness
as the tale, and slowly, goes its way.
Why can't Keshi's foe, my friend, reform
his ways, and meet me in desiring him?

* * *

Govinda with his curly eyebrowed Vraja
women dancing in the forest saw me.
Glancing, cheek in sweat, he dropped the flute,
as I delighted when he looked at me.

Though winds from forest lakes may coax the buds
from spired Ashoka creepers, and the bees
can wander happily in tufts of Mango,
there is only care in me, my friend.

Part Three: Bewildered Krishna

Therefore Kamsa's enemy, now chained
to all the inclinations of this worldly life
by lodging Rādhā in his heart,
has left his multitude of lovely women.

And more, with love god's arrows in his thoughts,
and much repenting, he has followed Rādhā:
the sloping thickets of the Yamunā
now find him Mādhava with honey lost.

Seventh Song

All too plainly in my crowd of women
her looking found me, and I feel ashamed.
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

Not knowing how she sees this absence, what
are followers or home or wealth to me?
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

Those eyebrows bent I see as circling bees
will irritate the reddened lotus flower.
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

Must I now follow her and call in woods
who had the pleasure of her close to heart?
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

With courteous words your rage and jealousy
I'd calm if I could know where you have gone.
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

Not here, not there, you're gone, and do not hold
me eagerly in passion as you did.
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

Forgive me for the things I'd not repeat
with one so beautiful, whose love I seek.
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

So Jayadeva praises Krishna, star
above the sea that is his native village.
So thoughtlessly I acted, Rādhā left.

* * *

Why, when coiling lotuses are not
a snake, nor petalled neck has venomous hue,
nor sandal paste be ash on this poor body,
should the love god choose to ravage me?

In sport you conquer. Do not lift at those
who are already faint your Mango bow.
Those fusillades of darting, deer-like glances
find me torn and thoughts in disarray.

Her brow the love god has for archer, crossing
glances for his arrows, earlobe even
as his weapon. She, embodied in
a goddess, has the moving world cast down.

That arched brow hurts me with its loosened arrows,
breath deserts me in those coils of hair,
all consciousness is lost at those red lips,
and life's a plaything at those rounded breasts.

A touch, her comfort in it, play of eyes,
that mouth, its fragrance and uncertain words,
a lip that fills with nectar: still I yearn
for thought disordered in this separation.

Part Four: Tender Krishna

Rādhā's friend, to one love-burdened in
the reeds of Yamunā, then came and said:

Eighth Song

Confused, she blames the sandal paste and moon,
finds venomed serpents in Malaya winds.

In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

She hopes in watery lotus leaves to shield
her vital being from love's raining arrows:

In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

She'd turn the barbs to flowers, make her bed
in blossom echoing to your embrace:

In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

Her eyes are trembling and her gentle face
is split as moon is by serrated tears:

In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

She paints with musk how love has been,
inclines to monsters with a Mango branch:
In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

Though unapproachable and locked in thought,
aloud she laughs and trembles at her tears:
In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

Declares each step she takes is to your feet:
how thin the moon is when you've turned away:
In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

If thought would dance to Jayadeva's words
then study what the friend of Rādhā said:
In Mādhava she dreads the love god's arrows:
apart and miserable, she thinks of you.

* * *

Her home's the forest and her friends a snare;
she fans her blazing griefs with sighs.
The absence terrifies: as with a deer,
your play becomes the deadly tiger's sport.

Ninth Song

She wears the bright and slender pearls
upon her breasts as though a burden:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

She feels the soothing sandal cream
as potent venom on her body:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

She sighs the compass of her love
and in that breath the passion burns:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

She scatters everywhere a tear
as lotus from its hollow stem:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

She holds her palm against her cheek
as evening steadies with the moon:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

She sees a bed of tender leaves
ordained for her as fire instead:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

Again she whispers Hari, Hari,
as though your absence brought her death:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

Let Jayadeva's song so chanted
please and lead to Krishna's feet:
Krishna, Rādhā feels deserted.

* * *

With pain she bristles, sighs, she shuts her eyes,
she rises, whirls about and falls in fains:
unless your heavenly healing aid in this
her raging fever holds until her death.

But you, divine physician, by a touch
of your blest body can relieve her pain,
do not abandon Rādhā, lest you'd hurt
her grievously as Indra's thunderbolt.

Against that wantoning and dragging fire
she looks to lotus, sandalpaste and moon,
and thinks of lover in his lonely place,
and of his coolness as she lingers on.

Before she would not even close her eyes
a moment lest you leave her sight; no more
she breathes with you away, nor bears to think
of how the Mango trees were full of flowers.

Part Five: Desiring, Lotus-Eyed Krishna

Krishna told the friend of Rādhā:
here I wait but say these words
to pacify and make her come.
At this the friend to Rādhā went.

Tenth Song

Malaya breezes speak of swelling passions,
blooms in opening tear at lovers' hearts:
forest-garlanded, he sits apart.

To him the cooling moonbeam seems as fire,
the falling love god's arrows leave him hurt:
forest-garlanded, he sits apart.

As though beset by humming bees at night
he puts the pain of absence out of mind:
forest-garlanded, he sits apart.

He leaves his pleasant house to live in thickets,
and rolls on earth, his bed, and calls your name:
forest-garlanded, he sits apart.

Poet Jayadeva tells of loving's
parting: Hari favours fervent thought:
forest-garlanded, he sits apart.

* * *

As was passion first accomplished, now
is Mādhava inside his river bower,
constantly in thought and chanting prayers
to have the ferment of your spilling breasts.

Eleventh Song

To the god of love's own house he's gone:
where you must follow him with heavy hips.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

He plays your name and softly on his flute,
adores the air's light pollen you have touched.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

No leaf or feather falls but you are near,
his eyes make incantations on the bed.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

Leave off the anklets that betray your sport,
but in the darkest thicket, friend, delight.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

Be on Krishna's breast as falling cranes,
the flash that lights up thunderclouds.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

Let fall the girdle cloth from your strong hips:
your bliss his treasure in that bed of leaves.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

The night is ending, and in Krishna's pride
fulfil the words I gave to his desire.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

Jayadeva speaks to honour Krishna:
bow to him who is compassionate.

Steady breezes sweep the Yamunā
and on its leafy shoreline Krishna lives.

* * *

Around and round about he sighs and watches,
and fights, as bees in thickets, for his breath,
and makes, remakes the bed, and still he watches:
tired, by love bewildered, still he waits.

Your stubbornness now quenched as setting sun,
and Krishna's passion thickening with night,
the long-lamenting cuckoo bird repeats
delay is useless: let the lovers meet.

How many through the dark on some affair,
impelled by pleasure and in passion keen
to clasp and kiss and claw their bodies, find
then bashfully it is their spouse they greet.

Still fearful, trembling on the gloomy path,
by each tree loitering, and with crossing step,
she comes with promises of fortune in
her face and love god moving through her limbs.

Part Six: Indolent Krishna

With Rādhā passionate but in her bower
and Krishna slow to act, to him she said:

Twelfth Song

Rādhā sees you everywhere
as drinking sweetness of her lip.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

Moving in her haste to meet you
she takes her little steps and falls.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

With bracelets of white lotus shoots
she keeps alive that doubtful love.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

As I am ornament in play,
she says, I'm Krishna too in this.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

Why won't Hari haste to me?
incessantly she asks her friend.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

The dark she kisses, hugs the clouds,
from which she thinks her Hari comes.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

She moans and wails and decks herself,
all modesty now thrown away.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

May the pride of Jayadeva
spread to all who have his taste.
Rādhā serves you in her house.

* * *

In boundless ecstasy she bristles, brings
a note of lamentation to her voice.
On you, her great deceiver and her treasure,
the fawn-eyed woman meditates and clings.

She ornaments her body, has each leaf
announce your coming, makes her couch a hundred
times anticipating you in love:
alone this beauty cannot pass the night.

Part Seven: Cunning Krishna

A maze of beams, a mark of shame, a spot
of sandal blemishing young beauty's face:
to light the paths that unchaste women take
in Brindavan's vast wood there swells the moon.

Mādhava is lonely. She laments.
A hare-marked disc of light hangs low.

Thirteenth Song

She says: no meeting Hari in the wood:
in vain the shining figure of my youth.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

In dark frequenting of that wood was where
unequally love's arrow caught my heart.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

Shamed and useless, it is better death
than burn continually as one apart.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

I am alone this ardent, sweet spring night
while she, more merited, with Hari sports.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

My jewelled ornaments in glints convey
too well the fires of Hari fled from me.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

Though delicate my body, as a flower,
barbed, the flowers hung there hurt the heart.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

I linger in the innumerable thick reeds,
that he for all his thinking never sees.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

The words of Jayadeva fall at Krishna's feet
to live supported in a woman's heart.
What refuge is there when a friend deceives?

* * *

My love is somewhere wantoning or held
by relatives or lost his way, his mind
confused, the forest dark, to nowhere find
the pleasing arbour of that thicket place?

Returned without her Mādhava, the friend
so tongue-tied and dejected, Rādhā knew
he sported fecklessly with someone else.
As though there seeing him, now Rādhā said:

Fourteenth Song

Bedecked as courtesan, the hair now shaken
in love's long tournament where stems are broken.
Krishna's garland is some other girl.

In shimmering necklaces above each breast,
by Hari stirred and changed in each embrace.
Krishna's garland is some other girl.

Around her moon-like face waves clouded hair
as there, exhausted, of his lips she drinks.
Krishna's garland is some other girl.

To and fro his earrings strike her cheeks,
and then the stirrings of her girdle zone.
Krishna's garland is some other girl.

Laughing bashfully at lover's looks,
and then what murmuring and long she makes.
Krishna's garland is some other girl.

Broken, bristling, trembling sighs she sheds
who has the love god under shuttered lids.
Krishna's garland is some other girl.

The body fortunate and dewed in sweat,
that chest in joy she rests on after fight.
Krishna's garland is some other girl.

* * *

The moon-pale splendour of the lotus face
of Mura's enemy may stop my pain.
To one left solitary in thought, the moon
is friend to passion but no peace of mind.

Fifteenth Song

The face in rapture for a kiss he marks
with musk as antelope attend the moon.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

A flower he places in the tumbling hair:
as fast as deer or lightning to the mouth.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

He hangs a pendant on her musky breasts
that shine resplendent as the deer-marked moon.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

Her arm he subdues with an emerald clasp
as bees cool-clustered on a lotus shoot.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

Around the golden house of love, the hips,
he hangs a laughing girdle arch of gems.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

The feet that touch his heart he paints with lac,
as garment covering love's inner house.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

He's mesmerized by beauty's eyes, while I—
say why, my friend—reside in sapless shoots.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

Jayadeva echoes Hari's best
that age's discords end at Krishna's feet.
On sandy Yamunā's thick-wooded shore
triumphantly is Krishna revelling now.

* * *

He's false and hurts my messenger. He has
too many loves, my friend: he will not come.
Yet I am drawn to him and burst with longing:
consciousness itself would go with him.

Sixteenth Song

His eyes are round her like the wind-tossed lotus:
a palliasse of leaves will never scorch her
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

His mouth volumptuous as open lotus,
her blossoms will not break the love god's arrows
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

With words so ever-living, sweet and soft
she will not blaze up in Malaya breezes
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

Like the land-borne lotus on her are his hands
and feet: the cool of moonbeams will not hurt
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

Coalescing, radiant as the clouds,
no separation there can cleave the heart
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

His clothing leaves the touchstone gold:
she pays no heed to how her servants sigh
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

This youth is better than a world of people,
despite the pain and pity and the sorrow
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

May Jayadeva's singing words so give,
my friend, this Hari entrance to your heart
when she is pleasuring one forest-wreathed.

* * *

The Sandal winds delight and fill my mind,
but move so variously in love or spite.
The life-breath of the world you bring me for
a moment, then as Mādava you're gone.

My friends deceive me, the chill wind is fire,
the sweet light venom, and a scourge my mind:
though forcibly the heart is drawn to hardness,
auspicious looks and I am loving mad.

Afflict me, Sandal wind, with love's five arrows,
take my life-breath back, I have no home.
My sister-death, the Yamunā, relieve
this conflagration in your cooling waves.

Part Eight: Abashed Krishna

Somehow having spent the night's long watches,
in the morning, and still stung with arrows,
with him in front of her, conciliatory
and bowing even, angrily she said:

Seventeenth Song

With eyes still reddened from a wakeful night,
would you in condensation offer me
a look belated as your sluggish love?

I ask you, Hari: speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

Besmirched by kissing of her lampblack lids,
your morning lips are marked with that deep hue
which is the colour, Krishna, of your shape.

I ask you, Hari, speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

How harsh love's battle your scratched body shows:
the nailmarks driven as dark emerald bits
that write your victory in their gleaming strokes.

I ask you, Hari, speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

At heart and printed on your belly go
the trail of pale lac feet: the tree of love
displays—how charmingly!—its train of leaves.

I ask you, Hari, speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

For me her tooth mark on your lip is pain.
By that you'd urge, and urge compellingly,
I merge that splendid body into mine?

I ask you, Hari, speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

Your mind is blacker than your colour, Krishna,
to lead astray the followers brought down
unequally with fevers of the heart.

I ask you, Hari, speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

Why would your lordship wander in the woods
to prey on foolish women there, suck out
their life as from the demoness Putana?

I ask you, Hari, speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

So Jayadeva of a girl deceived,
and wailing. Sages listen: not in Heaven
even is there sweetness heard as this.

I ask you, Hari, speak no lying words,
nor, Mādhava, to make those eyes at me.
Be off, the pair of you, Keshava, Krishna:
following me will only add to grief.

* * *

My love is on the roads: your chest displays
the decoration of her red-lac feet:
my swollen heart is broken by some cheat,
and worse than grieving is the shame I feel.

Part Nine: Languishing Krishna

To her so separated, passion broken,
hurt by Hari, now the girlfriend said:

Eighteenth Song

Hari's speaking is as first month breezes;
what further pleasure can there be, my friend?
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

In essence fuller than the fan-palm fruit,
why won't you press on him those pitcher breasts?
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

How soon and many times, must I repeat:
do not withhold yourself from Hari's gifts.
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

Why such a spectacle of prostrate grieving?
Your whole community of girls is laughing.
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

A bed of cool and watery lotus leaves
has Hari: feast on what your eyes have seen.
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

Why conjure up such heavy thoughts, but hear
the parting words unwanted that I bear.
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

When Hari comes to speak melodiously
why would you make your heart so solitary?
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

Let then Hari's amorousness expressed
by Jayadeva move the man of taste.
Why scorn the purposes of Mādhava?

* * *

He's friendly, bows. You are unkind. He lifts
his face, you turn away. Perverse, you make
of sandal paste a poison, frost a fire,
moon's coolness sun, and love a suffering.

Part Ten: Four-Armed Krishna

And then so gentle at her tears and rage
he brought a brightness to her ravaged face:
in joy and modesty a friend to her,
so Hari, stammering that evening, said:

Nineteenth Song

A little even of your glowing teeth
dispels my gloominess, as comes the moon's
rich nectar trembling from your lower lip
to salve my longing in chakora eyes.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

If you, with teeth so beautiful, are truly
angry, claw at me with arrow nails,
bind, fetter me with arms, and with your teeth
attack whatever happiness you find.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

You are my ornament, my breath, my world,
my jewel in the endless sea of life:

that you at last will yield to me I make
perpetually the motive of this heart.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

As blue lotuses your eyes, that show
the red of water lilies, slender Rādhā:
those barbs that strike my body with their fiery
passion find the darkness of your eyes.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

May gems which, trembling, hang beneath the pitcher
breasts entreat those quarters of the heart,
and girdle zone that circles those strong hips
obey the love god who is murmuring there.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

Outshine the flared hibiscus, soft-voiced one,
and let me paint your feet with pale red lac,
that you in amorous disporting place
a shining harmony about my heart.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

Place as ornament upon my head,
to slake the love god's venom, your soft feet,
and douse the tawny-embered fire of passion
that all too pitiless still burns in me.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

In words so sweet so pungent and so pleasing
Mura's enemy addresses Rādhā:
so the poet Jayadeva, wins
his joy in eloquence of Sarasvatī.

My love, you have no cause to curse me so:
I ask, as this fierce passion burns my mind,
for nectar's sweetness in that lotus mouth.

* * *

How can there be, with spreading breasts and heavy
haunches, latitude for someone else?
In me alone, and bodiless, embracing
you, the love god holds you in his heart.

Confuse, compress me in those urgent breasts,
bind hard your arms about me, and, like Durga,
have the rage of teeth and fivefold arrows
tear in love the life-breath out of me.

Disturb the young men with those serpent-sooted
eyebrows frowning on a moon-like face,
a danger, from the fear of which the only mantra
is that sweet nectar spilling from your lip.

Needlessly your silence hurts me: sing
and cure my fevered longing with a glance.
Do not withdraw your graciousness from one
whose vast bewilderment must show his love.

Bandūka are your lips, Madūka cheeks,
your nose the Sesame, white Jasmine teeth
the lotus glances: so the flower-weaponed
god in worshipping has conquered all.

Your face as is the languid moon and shining;
thighs, as plantains moving, charm the races;
pleasing's skilful, and the brow-line's bright:
you lead all heavenly women here on earth.

Part Eleven: Blissful Krishna

From long entreaty of the doe-eyed woman,
rich-clothed, Keshava found his arbour bed.
Then on that twilit evening someone went
and to a jewelled and cheerful Rādhā said:

Twentieth Song

To you he offered graceful words
and bowed in reverence to your feet,
and at the border of his thicket bower
awaits you on his loving bed.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

Firm the haunches and the breast
when borne on slowly moving steps:
with tinkling, jewelled anklets come
and mimic the Marāla bird.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

Listen to the bees whose hum
intoxicates the lovelorn girls.
Watch as flocks of cuckoo birds
announce the flower-arrowed one.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

The winds make stir the early leaves,
and thicknesses of creepers urge:
as trunks of elephants now move
in unison those supple thighs.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

The motion of your breasts betrays
the love god trembling in their swell,
and necklaces in his embrace
are pure, clear water in a stream.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

All your girlfriends learn how body
arms for passion's joyful fight,
and as the war-drums shake the girdle
roar their passion shamelessly.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

Artless, clinging to a friend
with a hand of sporting arrows,

go to Hari as your bracelets
tell by tinkling you approach.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

May Jayadeva's shining words
adorn the mind that's drawn to Hari
as will necklaces of pearls
then blossom some beauty's throat.

Innocent Rādhā, you must follow
as Madhu's foe has followed you.

* * *

She will look and speak, remembering words;
and clasp my body eagerly, my friend:
but in the arbour's massy darkness, he,
disturbed in thought, can see his lover come:
swelled up with joy, but trembling, sweat and faint.

So women mischievous, who flit in pleasure
with eyes mascara'd, and tamāla'd ears: their heads
are wreathed with lotuses and musk their breasts.
My friend: how beautiful are lustrous eyes
and limbs invested with the thicket's shade.

The blackest night is thick and beautiful
with gold when saffron wearing lovers meet.
As though the cavernous Tamāla all
around could act as touchstone for the streaks
of loving's probity and find it bright.

Having at the entrance to his thicket
arbour seen a richly jewelled Hari,
the central gem ablaze in pearls, the wealth
of armlet, bracelet, golden girdle string,
to one now bashful so the girlfriend said:

Twenty-first Song

In this charming bower of pleasure,
railing laughter urges love.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

Let on these soft Tamāla leaves
your breasts appear with tumbled pearls.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

For you whose body is a flower
is massed the flowering in this house.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

If fearful of the love god's arrows
here are cool Malaya winds.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

If slow to place your solemn hip
here are creepers soft and thick.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

To manifest the god of love
the bees are humming at the honey.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

Like flocks of singing cuckoos flash
the ruby gemstones of your teeth.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

May meeting Padmāvati be blessed
with happinesses hundreds fold,
so sings the king of poet kings.
Rādhā, enter in to Mādhava.

* * *

Why such agitation? Tired by passion,
he seeks the nectar of your lips, your body's
nearness. At your feet he is a slave
a moment's lifting of your brow has bought.

Delighted are the darting glances
fearfully now given Krishna.
Beautiful, the anklets tinkle
as she gains his hiding place.

Twenty-second Song

On seeing Rādhā's blossoming, his looks
were sea in ecstasy when moon appears.
Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

Far off she saw the pearls on Hari's chest
as foam that rises on the Yamunā.
Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

Dark and soft the body with a saffron robe
as pollen round the dark-blue lotus root.
Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

His loving glances shook his cheeks as will
two wagtails lotus in an autumn pond.
Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

His lotus face had earrings like the sun,
and lips that glittered splendidly with love.
Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

As moon through clouds appeared his flower-strewn
and lofty lunar disc his sandal mark. hair

Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

A long time bristling with the play of love,
a body moonbeam-radiant with its jewels.
Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

May Jayadeva's words adorn those twice
who bow to Hari pondered in their hearts.
Hari's whole becoming spoke his joy
at her now going to the love god's house.

* * *

Boundlessly, as stretching to her ears,
so Rādhā, gazing on her most beloved,
let fall the perspiration of her eyes
in storms of agitation and of joy.

When followers had left the place, their smiles
concealed by hands as she approached the bed,
such love's auspiciousness was in his face,
she found her modesty, ashamed, had fled.

The son of Nanda in his joy at pressing
Rādhā slowly slowly in his arms
must hold her, look behind, and pray those jutting
breasts do not protrude to pierce his back.

Like Rati Devi in her hoarded beauty
so Rādhā in the lake where love is played:
a sporting Vishnu shook those lifted breasts
as geese the lotuses of Mānasa.

Part Twelve: Very Delighted Krishna

When Rādhā's many friends were gone, he saw
her lower lip so brightly bathed with love,
and on his bed of leaves so bashfully
she looked, her eyes downcast, that Hari said:

Twenty-third Song

Lay on this leafy bed your lotus foot:
in flowering, loving woman, conquer it.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

My hand a lotus to that travelled foot:
as valiant anklet I have followed you.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

Spill nectar from that moon-like face in words
as cloth I take that keeps me from your breasts.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

How fierce and difficult is that embrace
of breasts whose fullness takes the love god's heat.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

Revive your slave with nectar from those lips,
my thoughts are by that fiery body hurt.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

In cuckoo-tortured ears your echoed voice
will lift as girdle gems my long disgrace.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

At last in shame you do not look on one
you maimed so wantonly with futile anger.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

May Jayadeva's words that gladden Krishna
create love's sentiment in men of taste.
At once, now Rādhā, and as closely,
follow Krishna as he's followed you.

* * *

Clasped and brushing through such obstacles
as bristling hair and blinking eyes, of talk
that stops the nectar from the lips, the two
are brought to love's entitlement at this.

Pressed round by arms, by breasts, by fingernails,
by pounding hips, by teeth on lips, his head
pulled down but mad to have the honeyed stream:
how curiously the loved one takes his joy.

Conquering impetuously she falls:
her arms go limp, eyes close, the breasts shake free.
She holds the mount of pleasure motionless,
for such are women in their manly sports.

By morning tired, unloosed, dishevelled, hair
awry, the garlands broken, body clawed,
but still transfixed by his, the love god's arrows,
her look was to his mind a wondrous sight.

Expired the radiance of her hair and lip,
the necklace broken and the girdle lost:
she puts a hand to hide her modesty,
ashamed and artless in her pleasing him.

Ecstatic in her half-closed lids, and bathed
with play of teeth and love-words from her lips:
so warm, the deer-eyed beauty in its tranquil
body breathes a fortune with its kiss.

Rādhā, tired but joyful at the end of sport,
respectfully to Krishna said these words:

Twenty-fourth Song

Anoint with sandal-dewy hands my breasts
and, Krishna, make them worthy with your musk
to be receptacles produced in thought.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

Make more glistening than the massing bees
the eye's collyrium you kissed away
and loose the arrows of the loved one's looks.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

Let the leaping freedom of the deer
return with earrings fastened, that their arc
restrain the splendour in the snaring glance.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

Forever may my presence here before
you rearrange your shaken curls as bees
unlock the shape of spotless lotus flowers.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

Remake with musk the deer-mark of the moon,
and dress, O lotus-faced, that forehead damp
but not as sprinkled as it was with sweat.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

Replace the blossoms fallen in our play
from hair as fly-whisk tossed and in a plume
of love astonishing as peacock's tail.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

Reclothe with jewels and waist-string ornaments
the cave so potent, firm and beautiful
it held the elephant of love in sport.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

Thus Jayadeva's nectar in a heart
compassionate and at the feet of Hari
wards off evil from the Kali age.

In this she spoke to him while Krishna
played delighting in her heart.

* * *

Decorate my breasts and cheeks, arrange
my girdle-string and tangled hair, replace
my rows of bracelets and my jewelled anklets.
He of yellow robe, delighted, did.

Let music skills of Gāndharvas, the thought
that goes with love play and belongs to Vishnu,
true discrimination, which is Krishna's,
purify the sense of Jayadeva.

May poetry of Jayadeva, son
of Bhojadeva and of Rāmādevī,
in his song of Krishna, chief of cowherds,
join the travellers with Parāshara.

APPENDIX

Commentary and Notes

The poem contains twenty-four songs, each written in moric metres based on the number of beats to the line. Each ends with a dedication by Jayadeva. The intervening sections are introduction, narrative and comment written in classical Sanskrit metres, fixed patterns of light and heavy syllables.

Part One: Joyful Krishna

The poem opens by setting the scene. Rādhā is walking home through the forest, on the instructions of Nanda, the chief of the cowherds. She is also being led by thoughts of Krishna, and anticipating the joy of sexual congress with his incarnation as Mādhava. Tamāla trees (*Garcinia morella*), with their fragrant leaves, white blossoms and dark-coloured bark, are associated with night and nocturnal trysts. Mādhava may also be a personification of the sweetness of passion, an attribute of the springtime, a man of Krishna's own Yadu family, an Orissa incarnation of Vishnu, or Shiva. Scholars disagree, and it may be simplest to see Mādhava as some erotic aspect of Krishna.

Three verses of invocation follow. The first refers to Padmāvātī, who is Vishnu's consort, but traditionally also the name of Jayadeva's wife, who may have been a temple dancer. Shrī and Vāsudeva are the epithets of Rādhā and Krishna. In

the second verse, Jayadeva offers his poem to Sarasvatī, the goddess of eloquence. Jayadeva claims in the third his work is more regularly correct than that of his fellow poets Umāpatidhara, Sharana, Dhoyī, Shrutidhara and Govardhana at the court of the last Hindu ruler in Bengal, Maharaja Laksmānāsena (1175–1200).

The First Song is a dedication to Vishnu, who takes the form of Hari (his incarnation as the tawny one) and Keshava (long-haired one, a reference to Krishna but also an incarnation of Vishnu). The eleven verses recall Vishnu's marvellous exploits. Vishnu took the form of a fish to rescue the sacred works of the Vedas from the Hayagrīva, the demon who had stolen them at the end of the past cosmic era. He became a tortoise to support the world, and took the form of a boar to rescue the earth from the sea into which it had been thrown by the demon Hiranyāksha. He also assumed the shape of half lion and half man to kill the demon Hiranyakashipu who had threatened to harm his son for worshipping Vishnu. The demon Bali was outwitted by Vishnu becoming a dwarf, and the same god caused the purifying waters of the Ganges to issue from the place where his toenail broke through the world-egg. Vishnu made himself chieftan of the Bhrgu clan to reinstate the Brahmin priestly class over the Kshatriyas or warrior class: heat declined refers to the burning pain of existence. For his father's honour, Rāma gave up his claim to Kosala's throne for exile in the forest, and then fought Rāvāna and his demonic powers to retrieve his kidnapped wife Sītā.

The Plough-holder is Krishna's brother, Balarāma: wanting to drunkenly disport himself in the Yamunā, he diverted the river by ploughing a vast furrow. Buddha is presented as an incarnation of Vishnu: possibly also a veiled reference to conflicts between Buddhists and Hindus. The comet is an omen of destruction, and the avenging Kalki is to appear on a white horse at the end of the present (Kali) age, perhaps to fight the invading Muslims. The ten heavenly directions refer to Krishna's cosmic power.

A summary of these achievements. The first and second songs may be intended to set Krishna's adventures in the larger context of Vishnu's conquests. Puslastya is the demon god Rāvana.

The Second Song is another hymn to Vishnu, again with references to his achievements and incarnations. Vishnu's consort, the Goddess Lakshmi, sits on a red lotus flower and is called Kamalā. Mānasa is a sacred lake, now located in Tibet, and its geese are symbols of the universal spirit. Krishna is a descendant of the Yanu clan. Vishnu subdued the serpent-demon Kāliya, making it worship him. Madhu stole the Vedas. Naraka kidnapped the celestial maidens, stole the umbrella of Varuna and the earrings of Aditi, taking them to a demon city guarded by Mura. Krishna is commonly called the enemy of Madhu and Mura. Garuda is the sun-bird vehicle of Vishnu. Dūshana was one of the demon king Rāvana's generals killed by Vishnu. In his incarnation as a tortoise, Vishnu dived to the bottom of the sea so Mount Mandara could be used to churn

the nectar of immortality from the ocean. The chakora is a partridge-like bird supposed to subsist on moonlight.

Krishna is identified with Vishnu (the lotus goddess is Vishnu's consort Lakshmi), and a third character, Rādhā's unnamed girlfriend, appears to act as go-between for the lovers.

The Third Song celebrates the spring when Hari (Vishnu's incarnation as Krishna) is dancing with his women. The Malaya wind blows from the Western Ghāts, and is (fancifully) said to be impregnated with the fragrance of Sandalwood trees. The red-flowered Bakula (*Minusops elengi*) tree is said only to blossom when sprinkled with nectar from a young woman's mouth. The Kinshuka or flame tree has brilliant crimson flowers. The Keshara is either the Bakula tree, or the safflower (*Crocus sativus*). The Karuna is a citrus tree with small white flowers. The Kataka (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) is a shrub with very fragrant flowers in the shape of long, pointed leaves. The Mādhavī is a creeper (*Gaertnera racemosa*) with white, heavily perfumed flowers. The Atimukta is a type of Jasmine. Brindavan is the wood surrounding the Yamunā (River Jumna), where the story takes place.

The fervour of spring. The friend draws Rādhā's attention to Madhu's enemy (Krishna).

The Fourth Song portrays Krishna as the darling of the cowherdresses.

Krishna (darkened body) with the Vraja women. Krishna spent his youth in the Vraja region, the area around Agra and

Mathurā. Kalma is the god of love.

Stanza 47 has been omitted from the translation as out of place and/or of doubtful authenticity. It runs:

Thus came Rādhā drawn to Krishna,
coy and dancing, clasped him to her breast
and kissed him. Let that nectared, honest face
now reign and fascinate and be with us.

Part Two: Careless Krishna

Rādhā is piqued that Krishna shows her no special attention and resolves to ignore him.

The Fifth Song finds Rādhā attracted to Krishna. The Kadamba (*Stephegyne* genus) has deep red flowers that open in autumn for a day only.

The Sixth Song sees Rādhā find Krishna in his forest hut and submit to him, though knowing her lovemaking may not secure his affections. Krishna is called the enemy of Keshi (an evil spirit) and of Madhu (see above).

Rādhā reflects that she was happy to be noticed by Krishna, but now regrets giving herself. Govinda means chief of the cowherds, i.e. Krishna. Gita Govinda is therefore ‘The Song of Krishna as Chief of the Cowherds’.

Part Three: Bewildered Krishna

Krishna (identified as Madhu’s enemy and Mādhava) leaves his women and reproaches himself for treating Rādhā so cavalierly. Kamsa is Krishna’s cousin, the king who tried to kill the boy to forestall the prophecy that he would die at Krishna’s

hand.

The Seventh Song portrays Krishna repenting of his hasty actions. Jayadeva's native village is taken to be Tindubilva in West Bengal, or the Purī district of Orissa.

Krishna remembers Rādhā's charms.

Stanza 16 has been omitted from the translation for the previous reasons. It runs:

Unseen the earring tossing on my neck
for girls immovable at my soft flute,
in song as sweet as moon of Rādhā's face:
may long such happy glances give them peace.

Part Four: Tender Krishna

Krishna hears of Rādhā's distress from the go-between.

The Eighth Song portrays Rādhā with tearful self-reproaches. Serrated tears refers to Rāhu whose teeth devour the moon in eclipses.

Rādhā is as terrified as a deer pursued by forest fires or the tiger. The Ninth Song further shows Rādhā's distress and failing confidence.

Rādhā's need for Krishna's care.

Part Five: Desiring, Lotus-Eyed Krishna

Krishna asks the go-between to call Rādhā to him.

The Tenth Song depicts Krishna's longing.

Krishna is waiting for Rādhā by the Jumna River.

In the Eleventh Song the go-between urges Rādhā to

hasten to Krishna.

Krishna imagines Rādhā coming to him.

Part Six: Indolent Krishna

The go-between speaks to Krishna.

The Twelfth Song describes Rādhā's longing for Krishna.

Rādhā imagines Krishna present.

Part Seven: Cunning Krishna

Rādhā and Krishna both wait in Brindavan forest.

In the Thirteenth Song Rādhā tells of her disappointment at not meeting Krishna.

She decides he has found someone else. In the Fourteenth Song, Rādhā imagines Krishna with his latest conquest.

Rādhā has no peace of mind.

In the Fifteenth Song, Rādhā torments herself with further imaginings.

She decides Krishna will not come.

In the Sixteenth Song, Rādhā is pictured as responding to Krishna's lovemaking. The land-borne lotus may be the hibiscus.

Rādhā is still despondent.

Part Eight: Abashed Krishna

An exhausted Krishna appears to court Rādhā.

In the Seventeenth Song, Rādhā rejects Krishna in all his incarnations (Hari, Keshava, Mādhava). Trying to kill him, the

demoness Putana offered Krishna her breast to suckle, but the

infant was immune to such poison and sucked out the life from her.

Rādhā feels shamed and heartbroken.

Part Nine: Languishing Krishna

The girlfriend tries to persuade Rādhā.

In the Eighteenth Song the girlfriend speaks appreciatively of Krishna.

She scolds Rādhā for her intransigence.

Part Ten: Four-Armed Krishna

Krishna comes to persuade Rādhā. In the Nineteenth Song, Krishna praises Rādhā's qualities.

Krishna tells her she need fear no competition. Durga is the fearsome warrior goddess, the mother of Ganesha, Sarasvatī and Lakshmi. The Madūka is a pale spring flower whose flowers and leaves are distilled to make an intoxicating drink.

Stanza 16 has been omitted from the translation for the usual reasons. It runs:

When Kamsa's elephant he came to fight,
in that rounded forehead Hari saw
the breast of Rādhā—so recoiling and
confused that Kamsa cried out victory!

Part Eleven: Blissful Krishna

Keshava (Krishna) goes to wait for Rādhā.

The Twentieth Song sees the go-between urge Rādhā to go to Krishna.

The Marāla is a goose or flamingo with an attractive gait.

Krishna speaks with the go-between, who reports back to Rādhā. The Twenty-first Song describes Krishna's love-bower.

Rādhā goes to meet Krishna.

The Twenty-second Song describes the mutual attraction between Rādhā and Krishna. Rati Devi is the consort of the love god.

Rādhā embraces Krishna.

Stanza 35 has been omitted from the translation for the usual reasons. It runs:

By victory honoured with Mandāra flowers,
the red there splashed as blood for having crushed
the elephant Kuvalayāpīda,
may the arm of Mura's conqueror prevail.

Part Twelve: Very Delighted Krishna

Krishna speaks to Rādhā. The Twenty-third Song gives Krishna's grateful words to Rādhā.

Their love-making. The Twenty-fourth Song gives Rādhā's gratified words to Krishna.

Krishna helps Rādhā to dress again. Dedicatory remarks. The Gāndharvas are heavenly musicians and Parāshara may be a friend who accompanied Jayadeva on various pilgrimages.

Stanzas 26, 27, 29, 31 and 32 have been omitted from the translation for the usual reasons. They run:

26. Honouring the daughter of the ocean,
through the images reflected in
the hooded serpent's hundred jewelled eyes
he sees: may Hari keep you in his care.

27. Infatuated, Shiva, at your choice
would drink the poison of the milky ocean.
So Hari's words, unclothing, seeing Rādhā's
breasts: and thus may keep you in his care.

29. Let holy men examining at length
the labour in such aspirants accept
their true devotion and their errors pass
that so a first impression long remain.

31. More than vintage or the Mango, nectar,
milk and sweetness at the lover's lip:
the cleverness of Jayadeva brings
the best and essence of erotic love.

The above draws heavily on the work of Lee Siegel, and to some extent of Barbara Stollés Miller. Both provide much fuller information than these brief notes, and are warmly recommended.

Fidelity to the Text

The Gita Govinda employs twelve different quantitative metres in lines that are generally longer than anything that will hold together in English. An example is stanza 18 in Part Five, written in the Sārdūlavikrīdita (- - - x x - x - x x x -, - - x - - x -)

metre repeated in each of the two lines. The Sanskrit and its word-for-word renderings are:

AzleshAd anu cumbanAd anu nakho-lekhAd anu svAntaja-
embracing then kissing then claw stroke then heart-born

prodbohdAd anu sambhramAd anu ratArambhAd anu prItayoH |
rousing then excited then sexual_foreplay then bliss

anyArtham gatayor bhramAn militayoH sambhAshaNair jAnator
other_purpose coming_and_going wandering meeting conversing know

dampatyor iha ko na ko na tamasi vrIDA- vimizro rasaH||
husband_and_wife here what no what no in_darkness bashful mixed taste

Do the couple discover their identities only after having sex together, or simply have sexual pleasures on their minds when searching for a partner? The first seems an unlikely state of affairs, but is the interpretation of many translators:

Lee Siegel

From an embrace, then from a kiss, then from scratching with their nails, then from love's rousing, then from shaking about [in coition], then from sexual exertion, both are pleased—when a husband and wife who have gone to an affair with another [lover] come-together by mistake and [then] recognize [each other] by their speech there, in the darkness, their pleasure is mixed with embarrassment, isn't it? isn't it?

Desiraju Hanumanta Rao

In these dark nights libertine couples start meandering in still darker bowers for their cherished lovers, but unwittingly one meets

one's own wife/husband, and then their escapade firstly starts with hugging, next with kissing, next with nail scratching, next highly excited by excitement and desire they enter into foreplay, and then step by step they culminate it into their conjugal bliss... after that when they converse, he comes to know that she is his wife, and she comes to know likewise... and caught unawares, they mix that bliss in shame and depart shamefully, nil desperandum... and in such passional nights, aesthetic pleasure seeking is null and void - Really?

Barbara Stollés Miller leaves matters a little vague, but adds her own clarity elsewhere:

Two lovers meeting in darkness
Embrace and kiss
And claw as desire rises
To dizzying heights of love.
When familiar voices reveal
That they ventured into the dark
To betray each other,
The mood is mixed with shame.

I have inclined to the second interpretation, supposing that Jayadeva is not being outlandishly humorous but only observing the sexual desire in both men and women:

How many, through the dark on some affair,
impelled by passion and in pleasure keen
to clasp and kiss and claw their bodies, find
then bashfully it is their spouse they greet.

Much hangs on the word *rasaH*, which means taste, juice, the essence of, mood or pleasure. And how do we interpret

vrIDA, which can mean shame, embarrassment or abashed, words which carry very different connotations in English? Sanskrit poetry is often ambiguous on key points, and interpreters are obliged to make their own judgements. Since other words in the text also have alternative readings and shades of meaning, there is no one definitive rendering, even in a prose sense. Rao and Siegel, for example, interpret *gatayor* as coition, whereas I read it simply as moving about.

A scholarly work—to the extent that Sanskrit scholars need a translation anyway—will probably much prefer something like the Siegel rendering. Something literary, which captures the grace and feeling of the original, is a more demanding proposition. It first needs a suitable form, since it is only within such a form that our reading skills and experience operate. Miller has used what is essentially prose, though set out as free verse. I have used an iambic with line run-on and various devices to give metrical coherence to the bare meaning. Secondly, a literary rendering will need to subordinate the word choice to whatever mood or feelings we think the stanza is evoking, the *rasa* of Sanskrit poetics. That in turn requires an understanding of what each stanza does in the narrative, and an appreciation of the rules of *kāvya*, which were stricter and more conventional than ours. Thirdly comes the decision of what words to leave out. Certainly not what is crucial to the meaning, but nor should we add words that a prose meaning would demand. Poetry is very much an imaginative recreation, where gaps become richer by being filled by material supplied

by the readers' understandings of the poem as a whole, and what the stanza shape and poetic devices are guiding them towards. Jayadeva leaves many gaps in this stanza, which echo the distracted nature of the lovers, but also highlight their surprise (ko na ko na) at the end of the stanza.

Metrical Issues

The above is an extreme example, but does illustrate the problems all stanzas present to some degree, particularly in the songs, where the grammar is simplified. What I have done is first condense possible meanings to what could be accommodated in the stanza form, and then employ the traditional devices of English verse to explore and then create an acceptable meaning in and through the responses we expect of poetry, trying to ensure those responses were appropriate to the Sanskrit mood (*rasa*).

In a prose sense, the resulting translation is reasonably close to the original—closer than Miller's, terser than Siegel's—but necessarily compressed or attenuated in places, though not usually to the extent illustrated in the example above. The guidelines adopted were: 1. to render one Sanskrit line by two (and occasionally three) English lines if the content demanded it, 2. use an octosyllabic line where possible for the songs, and a pentameter for the other sections, and 3. aim for a musical rendering but not consciously employ rhyme or pararhyme.

What appears is a metrical prose making heavy use of assonance and verse cadences that carries the sense across the

stanza in a way permitted by the free word order of the Sanskrit.

There are many other ways of proceeding, and Siegel quotes (pp 236-8) previous renderings of Verse 49 in Part One:

The 'Victorian idyll' approach of Edwin Arnold (*India Poetry*, London, 1881, 20-1):

But may He guide us all to glory high
Who laughed when Radha glided, hidden, by,
And all among those damsels free and bold
Touched Krishna with a soft mouth, kind and cold;
And like the others, leaning on his breast,
Unlike the others, left there Love's unrest;
And like the others, joining in his song;
Unlike the others, made him silent long.

The free verse renderings of George Keyt (*Sri Jayadeva's Gita Govinda: The Loves of Krsna and Radha*, Bombay 1940):

May smiling captivating Hari protect you, whom Radha, blinded by
love,
Violently kissed as she made as if singing a song of welcome saying,
'Your face is nectar, excellent,' ardently clasping his bosom
In the presence of the fair-browed herd-girls dazed in the sport of
love!

The theosophical approach of Duncan Greenlee (*The Song of Divine Love*, Madras, 1962) with its language of Christian mysticism:

This mystic Dance gives rapture, bliss untold,
And overwhelms the Gopi devotees
With dainty eyebrows. Radha, set aflame

By madness of desire, with sudden cry:
'Ah, Love, how sweet! Your honeyed mouth
Is filled with nectar!' hurls herself upon
His bosom, and with burning thirst assails
Those smiling lips with fiery kiss of love.
O crafty Radha! You pretend to praise
His song; what sweets of ecstasy you steal!
May this delightful Hari by his smile
Of flowing grace protect you from all harm!

The 'cosmic consciousness' of Monika Varma (*The Gita Govinda of Jayadeva*, Calcutta, 1968) that aims at the inherent meaning:

Even in the sight of the distracted lovers,
the infatuated Srimati, blinded by love,
forgetting and throwing aside all modesty,
holds close to her, her Madhava.
Pretending to be chanting words of worship,
Kesava whispers: Immortal nectar lies in your mouth;
and then drinks deeply, clinging lip to lip.
Satisfied, Kesava smiles,
and may that smile lighten the burden
of all your griefs, and sorrowed days.

Lee Siegel's rendering is more literal:

In the presence of the cowherd's beautifully-browed-women who were carried away by whirling about with a great amount of joy/jumping in the rasa (dance), Hari was passionately kissed by Radha who was blind with love, having ardently embraced his breast, having said, 'Wonderful! your mouth/voice consists of nectar!', under the pretext of praising his song, may Hari, ravishing

with his smile, protect you!

To complete the comparison, here is Baraba Stollés Miller's rendering of an adjacent verse (I.44: she excludes the I.49 verse, probably as inauthentic):

He hugs one, he kisses another, he caresses another dark beauty.
He stares at one's suggestive smiles, he mimics a willful girl.
Hari revels here as the crowd of charming girls.

Which I render similarly as:

One by one he takes and kisses
these most beautiful of girls.
Another even, all-surpassing,
smiles and beckons: off he goes.

The rendering in this translation of I.49 is in unrhymed pentameters:

And so love-blinded Rādhā, drawn to Krishna,
coy and dancing: clasped him to her breast
and kissed him. Let that brimming nectar, honest
face now smile, excite and rule in me.

The Sanskrit is:

rAso ollAsa bhareNa vibhrama bhRtam AbhIra vAma bhruvAm
dance merry abundant whirling supporting cowherd coy eyebrow

abhyarNam parirabhya nirbharam uraH premAndhayA rAdhaya
close hugged ardently breast by_love_blinded by_Rādhā

sAdhu tvad vadanam sudhA mayam iti vyAhRtya gIta
honest your face nectar abounding thus spoken song

vyAjAd utkaTa cumbita smita manohari hariH pAtu vaH
appear excitedly kissed smiles heart_stealing Hari rule_over cause

Readers will make their own choices, but I have tried for a plain rendering, one that makes minimal departures from the prose sense but is still musical, concise and moving.

A close rendering of metrical form is not possible. Sanskrit is a quantitative language, and none of its intricate metrical forms can be echoed in English. Repeated attempts to render the simpler Latin metres in English verse have all been failures: the centuries of effort, sometimes by gifted poets, should indicate that it cannot be done.

Traditionally, classical Sanskrit poetry (*kāvya*) is not rhymed, but Jayadeva made important innovations in his songs. He rhymed line endings, and also built them on a moric verse principle. In place of fixed patterns of light and heavy syllables usual in *kāvya*, moric verse is organized on the number of beats to the line, a light syllable counting as one beat and a heavy syllable as two, the units being further organized into four-beat *ganas*, which had their own patterns. I have experimented with rhyme for the songs (see approaches in the Eighteenth Song), but its addition seems to over-regiment the lines, breaking the fluid nature of a rendering where the sense is allowed to run through the stanza as a whole.

Sanskrit prosody is immensely complicated, but further discussion is academic, since the metres are not reproduced in this translation. Details on metrical and other issues can be found in Barbara Stollés Miller's superb work of Sanskrit scholarship, however, and the book should be read by anyone seriously interested in the Gita Govinda (but note the paperback edition lacks the Sanskrit text). Miller went to heroic lengths to find the appropriate words for her translation—studying the metrical intricacies of Sanskrit verse, recording the verse recited, sung and danced to, learning the Indian flute, discussing interpretations with Indian scholars and referring her efforts to Sanskrit authorities—but the result to my mind was not a literary success. Verse-writing and scholarship are different skills, and, though Miller's is the standard version to which many students are directed, her rendering lacks the grace, charm and beauty of the original. The diction is an uncomfortable mixture of the elevated and the pedestrian, and the characters do not come alive.

Translation is an individual act of homage, which collaboration can often hinder: 'the camel is a horse designed by a committee' problem. The second of Miller's difficulties may have been the 'free verse' practised by academia, essentially a truncated prose lacking resources for lyricism and extended harmony. True free verse is an exacting medium, as contemporary poetry is apt to show, but when written professionally, with an acute ear for the individual properties

of words, can indeed generate compelling and beautiful sequences that have an idiomatic naturalness of phrasing. In a Sanskrit translation, however, where words had already been selected for the many levels of prose meaning they could represent, that first selection largely ruled out the possibility that words would also cohere in satisfying patterns. Both criteria need to work together, at that deeper level of creation, where verse writing becomes a method of exploring ever more subtle shades of meaning. Poetry in all styles can be rewritten and improved, but free verse makes the task more difficult, as whole lines and stanzas have to be recast afresh. In contrast, traditional forms hold lines ‘steady’ in the metre while changes are made to individual words and phrases. No doubt the conventional iambic of this translation will seem less natural than today’s free verse, but classical Sanskrit verse was not in the slightest natural, contemporary or idiomatic.

References and Further Reading

The literature on Gita Govinda is fascinating, but immense: probably greater than any Sanskrit scholar could now encompass in a lifetime of reading. A guide to that material and extensive bibliographies can be found in the first two works listed below, which also explore dimensions of the poem far beyond this simple translation. The Rao translation is freely available on the Internet, and through vocabularies and commentaries gives the general reader an excellent sense of

how the Sanskrit verse is built up. Renderings can be checked in the online dictionary.

Love Song of the Dark Lord, Jayadeva's Gitagovinda. Barbara Stollés Miller. ed. and trans. (Princeton Univ. Press, 1977 & 1997).

Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions as Exemplified in the Gitagovinda of Jayadeva (OUP, 1978).

Gita Govinda: Word for Word transliteration. Desiraju Hanumanta Rao. 2003. http://www.geocities.com/giirvaani/gg/title_gg.htm.

Cologne Digital Sanskrit Lexicon (from Monier-Williams' 'Sanskrit-English Dictionary'):

<http://webapps.uni-koeln.de/tamil/>