

Gita Govinda

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The Gita Govinda
by Jayadeva, translated by Edwin Arnold

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Introduction

The sky is clouded; and the wood resembles
 The sky, thick arched with a black tamala boughs;
 “Oh Radha, Radha! Take this soul that trembles
 In life's deep midnight, to thy Golden house.”
 So Nanda spoke -- and led by Radha's spirit,
 The feet of Krishna found the road aright;
 Wherefore, in bliss which all high hearts inherit,
 Together taste they love's divine delight.

He who wrote these things for thee,
 Of the son of Wassoodee,
 Was the poet Jayadeva,
 Him Saraswati gave ever
 Fancies fair his mind to throng,
 Like pictures palace walls along;
 Ever to his notes of Love
 Lakshmi's mystic dancers move.
 If thy spirit seeks to brood
 On Hari glorious Hari good;
 If it feeds on solemn numbers
 Dim as dreams and soft as slumbers,
 Lend thine ear to Jayadev,
 Lord of all spells that save.
 Umapatidhara's strain

Glows like roses after rain;
 Sharan's stream like song is grand,
 If it is tide ye understand;
 Bard more wise beneath the sun
 Is not found them Govardhun;
 Doyi holds the listener still
 With his slokes of subtle skill;
 But for sweet words suited well
 Jayadeva doth excel.

Hymn to Vishnu

Matsya:

Oh thou that held'st the blessed Veda dry
 When all things else beneath the floods were hurled;
 Strong Fish God! Ark of men! Jai! Hari, jai!
 Hail, Keshav, hail! Thou master of the world!

Kurma:

The round world rested on thy spacious nape;
 Upon thy neck, like a mere mole, it is stood:
 Oh thou that took'st for us the tortoise shape,
 Hail, Keshav, Hail! Ruler of wave and wood!

Varaha:

The world upon thy curving tusk sate sure,
 Like the Moon's dark disk in her crescent pale;
 Oh thou who didst for us assume the boar,
 Immortal Conqueror! Hail, Keshav, hail!

Narasimha:

When thou thy Giant-Foe did seize and rend,
 Fierce, fearful, long, and sharp were fang and nail.
 Thou who Lion and the man didst blend
 Lord of the Universe! Hail, Narsingh, Hail!

Vamana:

Wonderful Dwarf! -- who with a threefold stride
 Cheated king Bali- where thy footsteps fall

Men's sins, O Wamuna! Are set aside:
O keshav, Hail! Thou help and hope of all!

Parushurama:

The sins of this sad earth thou didst assoil,
The anguish of its creatures thou didst heal;
Freed are we from all terrors by thy toil:
Hail Purshuram, hail! Lord of the biting steel!

Rama:

To thee the fell Ten-Headed yielded life.
Thou in dread battle laid'st the monster low!
Ah Rama! Dear to Gods and men that strife;
We praise thee, Master of the Matchless bow!

Krishna:

With clouds for garments glorious thou dost fare,
Veiling thy dazzling majesty and might
As when Yamuna saw thee with the share
A peasant -- yet the King of Day and Night.

Buddha:

Merciful-Hearted! When thou camest as Boodh --
Albeit 'twas written in the Scriptures so --
Thou bad'st our altars be no more imbrued
With blood of victims: Keshav! bending low --

Kalkin:

We praise thee, Wielder of the sweeping sword,
Brilliant as curving comets in the gloom,
Whose edge shall smite the fierce barbarian horde;
Hail to thee, Keshav! Hail, and hear, and come

And fill this song of Jayadev with thee,
And make it wise to teach, strong to redeem,
And sweet to living souls. Thou Mystery!
Thou Light of Life! Thou Dawn beyond the dream!

Fish! That didst outswim the flood;
Tortoise! Whereon earth hath stood;

Boar! Who with thy tusk held'st high
The world, that mortals might not die;
Lion! Who hast giants torn;
Dwarf! Who laugh'dst a king to scorn;
Sole subduer of the Dreaded!
Slayer of the many headed!
Mighty ploughman! Teacher tender
Of thine own the sure defender!
Under all thy ten disguises
Endless praise to thee arises.

Endless praise arises,
O thou God that lies
Rapt, on Kumla's breast
Happiest, holiest, highest!
Planets are thy jewels,
Stars thy forehead-gems,
Set like sapphires gleaming
In Kingliest anadems;
Even the great gold Sun-God,
Blazing through the sky,
Serves thee but for Crest Stone,
Jai, jai,! Hari, jai!
As the Lord of day
After night brings morrow,
Thou Dost Charm Away
Life's long dream of sorrow.
As on Mansa's water
Brood the swans at rest,
So thy laws sit stately
On a holy breast.
O, drinker of the poison!
Ah, high delight of earth!
What light is to the lotus-buds,
What singing is to mirth
Art thou -- art thou that slayest
Madhou and Narak grim;
That ridest on the king of birds,
Making all glories dim.
With eyes like open lotus-flowers
Bright in the morning rain,
Freeing by one swift piteous glance
The spirit from Life's pain:
Of all the three worlds treasure!
Of sin the putter by!

O'er the Ten-Headed Victor!
 Jai Hari! Hari! jai!
 Thou shaker of the mountain!
 Thou Shadow of the storm!
 Thou cloud that onto Lakshmi's face
 comes welcome, white, and warm!
 Oh thou, -- who to great Lakshmi
 Art like the silvery beam
 Which moon-sick chakors feed upon
 By Jumna's silent stream, --
 To thee this hymn ascendeth,
 That Jayadev doth sing,
 Of worship, love, and mystery
 High lord and heavenly King!
 And onto whoso hears it
 Do thou a blessing bring--
 Whose neck is gilt with yellow dust
 From lilies that did cling
 Beneath the breasts of Lakshmi,
 A girdle soft and sweet,
 When in divine embracing
 The lips of Gods did meet;
 And the beating heart above
 Of thee -- Dread Lord of Heaven! --
 She left that stamp of love --
 By such deep sign be given
 Prays Jayadev, the glory
 And the secret and the spells
 Which close-hid in this story
 Unto wise ears he tells.

The Sports of Krishna

Beautiful Radha, Jasmine bosomed Radha,
 All in the Spring-time waited by the wood
 For Krishna fair, Krishna the all-forgetful, --
 Krishna with earthly love's false fire consuming --
 And some one of her maidens sang this song: --

I know where Krishna tarries in these early days of Spring,
 When every wind from warm Malay brings fragrance on its wing;
 Brings fragrance stolen far away from thickets of the clove,
 In Jungles where the bees hum and the Koil flutes her love;
 He dances with the dancers, at the merry morrice one,

All in the budding Spring-time, for 'tis sad to be alone.

I know how Krishna passes these hours of blue and gold,
 When parted lovers sigh to meet and greet and closely hold
 Hand fast in hand; and every branch upon the Valkul-tree
 Droops downward with a hundred blooms, in every bloom a bee;
 He is dancing with the dancers to a laughter-moving tone,
 In the soft awakenings Spring-time, when 'tis hard to live alone.

When Kroona-flowers, that open at a lover's lightest tread,
 Break, and, for shame at what they hear, from white blush and modest red;
 And all the spears on all the boughs of all the Ketuk-glades
 Seem ready darts to pierce the hearts of wandering youths and maids;
 'Tis there thy Krishna dances till the merry drum is done,
 All in the sunny Spring-time, when who can live alone?

Where the breaking forth of blossom on the yellow Keshra-sprays
 Dazzles like Kama's sceptre, whom all the world obeys;
 And Patal-buds fill drowsy bees from pink delicious bowls,
 As Kama's nectared goblet steeps in languor human souls;
 There he dances with the dancers, and of Radha thinketh none,
 All in the warm new Spring-tide, when none will live alone.

Where the breath of waving Madhvi pours incense through the grove,
 And silken Mogras lull the sense with essences of love, --
 The silken-soft pale Mogra, whose perfume fine and faint
 Can melt the coldness of a maid, the sternness of a saint --
 There dances with those dancers thine other self, thine Own;
 all in the languorous Spring-time, when non will live alone.

Where -- as if warm lips torched sealed eyes and waked them -- all in bloom
 Opens upon the mangoes to feel the sunshine come;
 And Atimuktas wind their arms of softest green about,
 Clasp the stems, while calm and clear great Jumna spreadeth out;
 There dances and there laughs thy Love, with damsels many a one,
 In the rosy days of Spring-Time, for he will not live alone.

Mark this song of Jayadev!
 Deep as pearl in ocean-wave
 Lurketh in its lines a wonder
 Which the wise alone will ponder:
 Though it's seemeth of the Earth,
 Heavenly is the music's birth;
 Telling darkly of delights
 In the wood, of wasted nights,

Of witless days, and fruitless love,
And false pleasures of the grove,
And rash passions of the prime,
And those dances of Spring-time;
Time, which seems so subtle-sweet,
Time, which pipes to dancing-feet,
Ah! So softly -- Ah! So sweetly --
That among those wood-maids featly
Krishna cannot choose but dance,
Letting pass life's greater chance.

Yet the winds that sigh so
As they stir the rose
Wake a sigh from Krishna
Wistfuller than those;
All their faint breaths swinging
The creepers to and fro
Pass like rustling arrows
Shot from Kama's bow:
Thus among the dancers
What those Zephyrs bring
Strikes to Krishna's spirit
Like a darted sting.

And as if -- far wandered --
The traveller should hear
The bird of home, the Koil,
With nest-notes rich and clear;
And there should come one moment
A blessed fleeting dream
Of the bees among the mangoes
Beside his native stream;
So flash those sudden yearnings,
That sense of a dearer thing,
The love and lack of Radha
Upon his soul in spring.

Then she, the maid of Radha, spake again;
And pointing far away between the leaves
Guided her lovely Mistress where to look,
And note how Krishna wantoned in the wood
Now with this one, now that; his heart, her prize;
Panting with foolish passions, and his eyes
Beaming with too much love of those fair girls --
Fair, but not so as Radha; and she sang:

See, Lady! How thy Krishna passes these idle hours
Decked forth in fold of woven gold, and crowded with forest flowers;
And scented with sandal, and gay with gems of price --
Rubies to mate his laughing lips, and diamonds like his eyes; --
In the company of damsels, who dance and sing and play,
Lies Krishna, laughing, toying, dreaming his Spring away.

One, with star-blossomed champak wreaths, woos him to rest his head
On the dark pillow of her breast so tenderly outspread;
And o'er his brow with roses blown she fans a fragrance rare,
That falls on the enchanted sense like rain in thirsty air,
While the company of damsels wave many an odorous spray,
And Krishna, laughing, toying, sighs the soft Spring away.

Another, gazing in his face, sits wistfully apart
Searching it with those looks of love that leap from heart to heart;
Her eyes -- afire with shy desire, veiled by their lashes black --
Speak so that Krishna cannot choose but send the message back,
In the company of damsels whose bright eyes in a ring
Shine round him with soft meanings in the merry light of Spring.

The third one of that dazzling band of dwellers in the wood --
Body and bosom panting with the pulse of youthful blood --
Leans over him, as in his eyes lightsome thing to speak;
And then with leaf-soft lip imprints a kiss below his cheek;
A kiss that thrills, and Krishna turns at the silken touch
To give it back -- Ah, Radha! forgetting thee too much.

And one with the arch smile beckons him away from Jumna's banks,
Where the tall bamboos bristle like spears in battle ranks.
And plucks his cloth to make him come into the mango-shade,
Where the fruit is ripe and golden, and the milk and cakes are laid:
Oh! golden-red the mangoes, and glad the feasts of Spring,
And fair the flowers lie upon, and sweet the dancers sing.

Sweetest of all that Temptress who dances for him now
With subtle feet which part and meet in the Rasa measures slow,
To the chime of silver bangles and the beat of rose-leaf hands,
And pipe and lute and cymbal played by the woodland bands;
So that wholly passion-laden-eye, ear, sense, soul o'er come --
Krishna is there as in the forest; his heart forgets its home.

Krishna, made for heavenly things,
'Mid those woodland singers sings;

With those dancers dances featly,
 Gives back soft embraces sweetly;
 Smiles on that one, toys with this,
 Glance for glance, and kiss for kiss;
 Meets the merry damsels fairly,
 Plays the round of folly rarely,
 Lapped in milk-warm Spring-time weather,
 He and those brown girls together.

And this shadowed earthly love
 In the twilight of the grove,
 Dance and song and soft caresses,
 Meeting looks and tangled tresses,
 Jayadev the same hath writ,
 That ye might have gain of it,
 Sagely its deep sense conceiving
 And its inner light believing;
 How that Love -- the mighty Master,
 Lord of all the stars that cluster
 In the sky, swiftest and slowest,
 Lord of highest, Lord of lowest --
 Manifests Himself to mortals,
 Winning them towards the portals
 Of his secret house, the gates
 Of that bright paradise which waits
 The wise in love. Ah, human creatures!
 Even your fantasies are teachers.
 Mighty Love makes sweet in seeming
 Even Krishna's woodland dreaming;
 Mighty Love sways all alike
 From self to selfishness. Oh! Strike
 From your eyes the veil, and see
 What love willeth Him to be
 Who in error, but in grace,
 Sitteth with that Lotus-face,
 And those eyes whose rays of heaven
 Unto phantom-eyes are given;
 Holding fast of foolish mirth
 With these visions of the Earth;
 Leaving Love, and Love imparting;
 Yet with sense of loss upstarting: --

For the cloud that the veils of the fountains
 Underneath the sandal mountains,
 How -- as if the sunshine drew

All its being to the blue --
It takes flight and seeks to rise
High into the purer skies,
High into the snow and frost,
On the shining summits lost!
Ah! And how the Koil's strained
Smites the traveller with pain, --
When the mango blooms in Spring,
And "Kahoo", "Kahoo", they sing --
Pain of pleasure not yet won,
Pain of journeys not yet done
Pain of toiling without gaining,
Pain 'mid gladness of still paining.

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

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