

Tracing the Integration of Spiritual and Cultural Elements in Jaya Deva's *Geet Govinda*

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Abstract

Krishna, the avatar of Lord Vishnu, has been a popular figure in Indian literary and cultural tradition across the centuries, whose representation has evolved and transformed through different artistic mediums. Jayadeva, the twelfth-century Sanskrit poet's *Geet Govinda*, celebrates Lord Krishna as the mischievous lover who engages in 'raslilia' with the 'gopis', and eventually submits to Radha in a cosmic sexual union. This paper probes how Jayadeva's engagement with contemporary culture, literary trends and artistic approach would have influenced the delineation of Lord Krishna. This study entails a close reading of the text and an examination of the broader socio-cultural trends that may have affected its production. This article examines how the epic reflects and responds to the cultural context of the age. For this study, the translation of Barbara Stoller Miller Jaya Deva's *Geet Govinda: Love Song of the Dark Lord* (1977) has been used to identify the sociological factors in the backdrop of the Bhakti Movement.

Keywords: Bhakti Movement; Culture; Erotic; Krishna-Radha Cult; Spirituality.

Myth is an idea transmitted over the generations; it communicates a traditional culture-specific understanding of the world, while mythology is a "systematic compilation and classification of myth" which involves its documentation and analyses its "transformation over time and space" to fulfil different "cultural and historical needs (mythopoesis), and speculation on the timeless, universal mythmaking urge" (Patnaik 15). Mythology "is apparently coeval with mankind" and has been propagated across time, space and culture because "two fundamental realisations - of the inevitability of individual death and the endurance of the social order" have combined to constitute the central structuring force of these rites and, thereby, the society (Campbell 19-21). Myth and mythology are at the core

of all religions, and they have been transmitted through oral tradition, art, and literature throughout human existence across various civilisations.

Chinese, Indian, Arabic and the Mediterranean are the “four main cradles of civilisation from which elements of culture have spread to other parts of the world”. Of these four, India has deeply “affected the religious life of most of Asia and has provided very important elements...to other parts of the world” (Basham1). Hindu religion is an integral part of Indian culture and has been enshrined in its scriptures since the Vedic period. The *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the grand epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, are rich sources of Indian history and are among the most ancient records in world literature. Indian religious practices, rites, myths and mythology can be traced to these sacred scriptures: “Religion for the Hindu is an experience or attitude of mind. It is not an idea but a power, not an intellectual proposition but a life conviction. Religion is the consciousness of ultimate reality, not a theory about God.”(ibid.63).

Basham further elaborates that in Hinduism, “Though God is formless, He yet informs and sustains countless forms”. He is “the crown and fulfilment of you and me, of all men and all women, of life and death, of joy and sorrow. No outward form can wholly contain the inward reality, though every form brings out an aspect of it” (ibid.70). “The Hindu tradition acknowledges different forms and representations of the divine, all understood in their relation to the supreme being... most striking evidence of Hindu diversity is the multiplicity of Gods. There are many Gods. And there are many names and forms of each God.” (Many Gods and One, The Pluralism Project). Like Greek mythology, there are multiple Gods in Hinduism. This conception of the Supreme and the Absolute has been expressed through art and literature in multifarious art forms like sculptures, paintings and literature. Lord Vishnu, also called Narayan, is one of the principal deities of Hinduism, who is also worshipped in the avatar of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna.

Krishna in Religion, Art and Literature

In the *Cultural History of India* (1999), A.L. Basham remarks that though Hinduism conceives God as infinite and omnipotent, He is projected “in the form of an image so that his simpler worshippers may feel nearer to him” (80). Vaishnavites, the worshippers of Lord Vishnu, believe that “god has in the past taken material form in order to save the world from impending disaster” (ibid.). His incarnations, Lord Rama and Lord Krishna have given the Hindus their most “exuberant and vital mythology, legend

and folklore” (ibid.). Lord Krishna is “a divinity of a rare completeness and catholicity, meeting almost every human need” (ibid.). Bryant (2007) also remarks that Krishna is regarded as an embodiment of the Vedic god Vishnu, recognized in the later Vedic era as the ultimate divinity and, for certain groups, as the original supreme entity himself. Krishna is primarily found within the literary traditions of South Asia. In the Indian consciousness, he is etched in his roles as a child to Mother Yashodha, a lover of Radha, and as the charioteer of Arjuna in the *Mahabharata*. Krishna is a pervasive phenomenon in Hindu religion, and his influence is not limited to religion alone; he can be seen in literature, art, architecture, philosophy, music, and dance. “Krishna’s life has been the subject of numerous Hindu texts, in a variety of styles and languages” (Vemsani). Scholars have done astounding research on Lord Krishna’s multifaceted figure. Bryant (2007) mentions:

As a pan-Indian deity, his worship takes on distinctive forms and unique flavors that today dominate entire regions all over the subcontinent—Radha Krishna of Braj in North India, Jagannath in Orissa to the east, Shrinathji in Rajasthan and Ranchor in Gujarat to the west, Vitobha in Maharashtra in central India, Udupi Krishna in Karnataka and Guruvayor in Kerala in the South, to name but a few (3).

In his essay on *Bhagvatpurana*, Bryant adds that though Krishna is most popular for the *Bhagwad Gita* in the West, the most cherished and popular narratives concerning Krishna are not derived from his profound teachings in the *Bhagavad Gita* or his diplomatic endeavours in the *Mahabharata*. Instead, the stories that have captured the hearts of people across the Indian subcontinent for centuries are those of his youthful mischiefs and adventures, known as *lilas* (games), pastimes, or frolics- during his early years, childhood and teenage life in the Vrindavan forests, also referred to as Braj, amidst the community of cowherds.

P. Banerjee (1978) compiled the depiction of Krishna in different art forms for the National Museum of India, New Delhi, in his book, *The Life of Krishna in Art*. The book presents the life of Krishna as delineated in Indian art. Krishna’s life and teachings have profoundly influenced the Indian populace, rendering the subject a favourite among artists and poets in religious literature. “Krishnaism pervades the whole Indian life, its religion, philosophy and art” (xiii). Popular art forms include *Madhubani* paintings, *pachoi* paintings, *kalamkari* prints, dance, music, temple architecture and sculptures. The inspiration for these productions is the description of Krishna

in the classical literary works in Sanskrit and other regional languages. "The Legend of Krishna has been built through one continuous dialogue between different media, namely texts and carvings, and different linguistic areas, Indo-Aryan and Dravidian" (Schmid).

The earliest existing record of Krishna in Indian classical literature is in the *Rigveda*. Bryant observes, "There is no obvious reference to Krishna in the *Rigveda*, the oldest Indic text, dated to circa 1500 B.C.E., although the name does appear a handful of times in the hymns" (4). *Chandogya Upanishad*, a philosophical text from around the sixth century BCE, carries the first "plausible reference" to the Puranic Krishna. *Ashtadhyayi* of Panini, dated around the fourth century BCE, *Baudayana Dharma Sutra* of Apastambha around the fourth century BCE, and Patanjali's *Kamsavadha*, the killing of Kamsa are some of the earliest known works which centre around Krishna before Ved Vyas's epic the *Mahabharata* in the third century BCE. Literature and other forms of art have drawn inspiration from the legends of these literary pieces, which present Lord Krishna in his various incarnations, from his childhood through to his last days. The most popular themes for folklore and art have been from these tales, which record him as a butter thief child, as one who kills the evil Putana and Kansa or as the divine lover of Radha, as the one who teases the *gopis* and dances with them in *Vrindavan*, and as the guide of Arjuna and the Pandavas in their war against the Kauravaas in Kurukshetra. The *Bhagavad Gita*, which is embedded in the *Mahabharata*, in the form of a sermon to Arjuna in his moment of existential disquiet in the war, has been translated "into 82 languages, and it can safely be said that at least 65 or more of these are foreign languages" (Tathagatananda).

Mythology allows artists to incorporate legendary tales into their narratives across various forms of expression. We find Krishna's presence in classical Indian dance forms, such as the Odissi dance, Kathak, and Kathakali, in drama, poetry, devotional songs of Mira Bai and Surdas, and in other performing arts. *Geet Govinda*, a song celebrating Krishna as the divine lover, is a masterpiece from the Bhakti Movement that presents the Hindu God as a lover of Radha, in which the physical and the spiritual are beautifully blended into a harmonious whole.

Jaya Deva's *Geet Govinda*

Jaya Deva, best known for *Geet Govinda*, is comparable to Sanskrit poets like Kalidasa and Bahasa. There is some controversy about his place of birth being Orissa, West Bengal, or Bihar. However, what is certain is

the pervasive impact of his love song of Lord Krishna and Radha, which transcends beyond the rigid perception of Godliness and presents him through human actions and desires for his beloved. His "influence on the later poets and scholars all over India through his single work, the *Gita-Govinda*, is almost comparable to that of the great Kalidas himself... Jaya Deva can truly be called "the Last of the Ancients, and the First of the Moderns" in Indian Poetry." (Chatterji 1-2). The theme of physical love transforming into a cosmic union is presented in the "background of Nature in Spring-time mainly, with trees and creepers and flowers, with verdant hills and flowing streams, and with the singing of birds and buzzing of bees" (ibid.50). "The sweetness of diction, the musical beauty of lyrics, the softness of word pictures and above all, the artistic expression of the universal human feelings, depicted in the *Gita Govinda* have a captivating effect on its readers irrespective of caste, creed and colour" (Gan 41).

Jaya Deva sublimates the erotic love song of Krishna and Radha to a spiritual plane. He is one of the prominent voices in the Bhakti Movement, who came into prominence to resist the Islamic onslaught of the Hindu faith and religion. Being a Vaisnava Brahmin, he was honoured as a saint, and his song became a religious work during his lifetime despite its physical overtones. He led the life of an ascetic, wandering Brahmin until he married Padmavati, the daughter of a Brahmin at Puri. She was a dancer, and it is recorded that she danced while he composed the *Geet Govinda*. Barbara Stoker Miller (1977) remarks that though the poem is deceptively simple on the surface, it has a wealth of meaning "in structurally intricate forms and concepts drawn from various levels of Indian literary tradition.... Jaya Deva interwove formal and thematic elements to create a work of high art and religious intensity" (7). Commenting on the ornamentation created through words, rhythm, sounds, rhyme and metre, Miller compares the song to the sculptures of Khajuraho and Bhubaneswar. These elements unify the poem and concentrate its movement into a crescendo towards the end.

It comprises twelve chapters, divided into twenty-four sections, called *Prabandha*, further divided into two sections comprising eight couplets, *Ashtapadi*. In introducing his translation of the work, Holcombe sheds light on its popularity over the centuries. The poem was used in "temple inscriptions, set to music, choreographed for dance, studied as religious text...with frank and tender lyricism, the *Geet Govinda* explores the many aspects of sexual passion, from first awakening through fierce regrets and jealousies to rapture and contentment of bodily possession" (Miller 1).

Jaya Deva's musical masterpiece is based on the sensuous love of Krishna and his consort Radha, woven out of "tales of the passionate play/when Krishna loves Sri" (1.2.7-8). The poem starts with an invocation by the poet soon followed by the friends of Radha reporting to her that Krishna is engaged in dance, music, and love with other *gopis*, while Radha waits for him. In the Spring, flowers are in full bloom, the cuckoo sings, and the creepers twine around in a warm embrace around the trees, a time of union for nature, but Radha feels dejected as Krishna plays games of love with other girls. It begins "When springs's mood is rich" (73), and Krishna is engaged in "wondrous mystery...of sexual play in Brindaban's forest" (77). At the outset, the poet states that celebrating his love will "spread Krishna's favours" among the devotees and the readers. Radha misses him while he "kissing mouths of round hipped cowherd girls whets his lust/brilliant smiles flash from the ruby-red buds of his sweet lips" (78). Her heart recalls his memory while he played seductively with her, laughing and teasing her as they indulged in the act of physical union. Despite this, Radha helplessly confides to her *sakhis* that her "perverse heart" only wants Krishna; she asks them to bring her sublime tormenter to revel with her because she has "gone mad waiting for his fickle love to change" (81).

The third part, 'Bewildered Krishna', expresses his regret for his 'wanton' ways that have angered Radha; he is aware of her jealousy and is tortured with the thoughts of her ruby lips and rounded breasts. His mind is in a trance, ruminating on her physical beauty and charms and his love for her. In the following section, on receiving Radhika's message through her friend, Krishna becomes tender upon hearing, "She evokes you in deep meditation to reach your distant form" (87). As her "divine physician", only Krishna can save her with the "elixir" of his body.

The next three parts, from five to seven, describe the lovers and the messages Radha's *sakhis* convey between the two. The eighth part, 'Abashed Krishna', presents a contrite Krishna and an angry Radha who repeats, "Damn you Madhava, Go, Keshav, leave me/Don't plead your lies with me" (106-107). Jaya Deva uses erotic descriptions of his lovemaking through Radha's complaints. She notices Krishna after his "sleepless night of passion"; his lips carry marks of love bites and are as black as his skin with "kissing kohl-blackened eyes" (106-108). There are nail marks on his body after his "battle of love".

In the Ninth part, her friends counsel Radha not to turn her wounded pride on Krishna and to accept his love graciously. He asks for her forgiveness in the tenth part, convincing her that she is the ornament of his

life, the jewel of his existence; he asks her to abandon her baseless pride, to scratch his chest with her nails, bite his lips with her teeth, and even “place your foot on my head” (11). He wins over her with his words:

Fretful Radha don't suspect me!

A rival has no place

When your voluptuous breasts and hips

always occupy my heart (113).

Part eleventh and twelfth celebrate their blissful union; it is about a coming together of their body and soul like other elements of nature in Spring. He awaits her on a “thick bed of red petals” (117). His “deep locked emotions” broke on seeing her face, her “passion rose”, and his “body hair bristled to the art of her sensual playing” (121). On meeting his eyes, “heavy tears of joy/fell like streaming sweat”. The last section of the poem, translated as ‘Ecstatic Krishna’ by Barbara Miller, gives a detailed graphic description of Krishna undressing her. The refrain “Narain is faithful now. Love me Radhika” conveys Krishna’s heightened desire for her.

The repeated sounds, words and phrases, the rhythm and the musicality of the last section are like the climax of a musical piece. Their union is not merely a physical experience and is conveyed through the lines, “Radha launched a bold offensive/above him/and triumphed over her lover/... her chest was heaving/her eyes were closed.../Then he idled after passionate love” (123). Radha became “secure in her power over him” and instructed the joyful “Yadu hero” to deck her with ornaments, garments and flowers. It is a moment of bliss, of total and complete consummation, which can be metaphorically read as a devotee’s surrender to God.

Jaya Deva describes the climax of their union: “His musical skill.../His vision of reality in the /erotic mood/His graceful play in these poems/All show that master poet Jayadeva’s soul/Is in perfect tune with Krishna” (20). By singing the *Geet Govinda*, “blissful men of wisdom” can “purify the world” (22). Through the passion of Radha and Krishna, the poet “creates an atmosphere of erotic mood (*sringara rasa*) that is bliss for the devotees (14). Recalling Krishna’s feet is an elixir “against fevers of this dark time” (19).

The Radha-Krishna Cult

Jaya Deva “hailed from the Kenduli village in the Prachi valley between Bhubaneswar and Puri. The composition was probably performed first ...in 1142 AD during the reign of Chodagangadeva, the founder of the great Ganga Empire on the east coast of India.” (Pani 1). “Jaya Deva sang not only the swan-song of the age which was passing away, but he also sang in the advent of a new age in Indian literature—the “Vernacular” Age” (Chatterji 2). *Geet Govinda*, an offering to Lord Jagannath at Puri in Odissa, glorifies the essence of “Jagannatha Consciousness - the path of simple surrender” (Pani1), which Sri Chaitanya later propagated as the ‘*Gopi Bhava*’ or the ‘*Radha Bhava*’. It is still sung and performed at the temple, even after eight hundred years. It is a “colossal work in the field of Vaishnava literature” containing an amalgamation of aesthetics and philosophy (Thankur 57). As a lyrical poem, its melodic nature has a “soothing effect”, and its philosophic dimension connotes the blending of the soul with the oversoul. “Its subject is not only the adoration of Lord Krishna and Radha; instead, it is an allegory that uncovers the way through which an individual can obtain salvation by surrendering one’s soul to the Supreme Lord” (ibid.58). This aspect of Vaishnavism was further promoted by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu in medieval Bengal through the Bhakti Movement, in which saint poets used “Legend and Romance as an aid to the Hindu revival” (Chatterji 29).

Radha was introduced in the Krishna narrative from the 10 Century AD, revitalising the ancient legend. The resurgence of this legend was facilitated by the founding of numerous cults around this era, specifically during the New Indo-Aryan period, which is estimated to span from the 10th to the 18th century A.D (Bhal 27). In Swami Sivananda’s translation of *Narada Bhakti Sutra* (1957), Bhakti is defined as “devotion to the supreme love of God” (20). It is “love for love’s sake. The devotee wants God and God alone. There is no selfish expectation here. There is no fear also. Therefore, it is called “Param Prem Rupa” (ibid.). The Bhakti Movement was a “pan-Indian uprising of a people’s culture against feudalism. This movement had its roots in some very significant processes of change in the 11th and 12th centuries, when various castes came into being and regional languages, and their literature evolved” (Pandey & Tyagi129).

The written works from this era were more intimately connected with the cultural and societal norms of their contemporary times rather than the age-old traditions of Indian heritage. Some of the key elements of Bhakti Poetry in Jaya Deva’s composition are portrayed through Radha’s intense

devotional love for Krishna, her separation, yearning, and eventual re-union, indicating the devotee's desire for spiritual connection with the Supreme one through the complete surrender of the self. The musicality of the divine love song, with its rhythmical verses and melody, reflects the Bhakti Movement's emphasis on singing and chanting as a form of worship. Radha's devotion to Krishna exemplifies the idea of profound, overpowering love for the divine, which is sublime and ecstatic. The frank eroticism of the poem is often perceived as an allegory of the love of the human soul for God (Miller ix).

The first translation of the poem into English was done by Sir William Jones in 1792. It was also translated into European languages, apart from regional Indian languages. Edwin Arnold translated the poem as *The Indian Song of Songs* in 1875. In his preface, he states that the poem is a:

Sanskrit idyll, or little pastoral drama, in which -under the form of Krishna, ...the human soul is displayed in its relations alternately with earthly and celestial beauty. Krishna -at once human and divine-is first seen attracted by the pleasures of the senses ... and wasting his affections upon the delights of their illusory world. Radha, the spirit of intellectual and moral beauty, comes to free him from this error by enkindling in his heart a desire for her own surpassing loveliness of form and character and under the parable of a human passion...the gradual emancipation of Krishna from sensuous distractions, and his union with Radha in a high and spiritualised happiness, are portrayed (Arnold v-vi).

Arnold's interpretation, also given by other European scholars, echoes the Western tradition of Dante's love for Beatrice immortalized in *The Divine Comedy*. However, the mysticism in Jaya Deva's love epic is not of souls meeting in heaven but of lovers uniting physically. The love song is a:

Celebration of the love-frolic of Radha and Krishna. Krishna is the universal creative dancer, and Radha is the controlling energy. Jaya Deva, however, portrays Radha as the lover of the cosmic form and soul of Krishna. The purpose of creation is the dynamic equilibrium of love, and love is the open dance of Radha and Krishna in creative union" (Gan 43).

There are frequent references to Padmavati, Jaya Deva's wife, in the poem. She was a dancer, a *devdasi*, who danced in the temple in homage to Lord Vishnu's avatar Lord Jagannath. The poem is revelatory about

the “long-continued tradition of Devadasi or the temple damsel prevalent in the temples of Orissa... The Devadasi system was of great antiquity.” (ibid.43). The devotional romantic poetry “was the first of its kind to be included in the ritual service of Lord Jagannath as an essential component of worship...The singing of the Geet Govinda along with the accompaniment of music and lovely dance of the devadasi in the Srimandira was the most fascinating daily service of Lord Jagannath, which had attracted many devotees from all parts of India” (Tripathy 46)

Jaya Deva’s poem uses the ‘*shringara rasa*’, one of the nine *rasa*’s that Bhamuni outlines in *Natyashastra*. “Bharata very emphatically states in the *Rasadhyaya* of *Natyashastra* that “na hi Rasad rite kaschid arthah pravartate” no meaningful idea is conveyed if the “*Rasa*” is not evoked. The very core of the Bharata’s *Natya* theory is the creation of “*Rasa*” (*The Rasa Theory of Bharata – Indian Aesthetics and Fine Arts*). Jaya Deva’s love song evokes the mood of love, yearning, physical joy, sexual union and ecstasy through the magic of his words, images, music and rhythm. The poet also evokes the ‘*adhabhuta rasa*’, a sense of wonder, by invoking Krishna’s tenfold forms at the poem’s beginning, “You take the tenfold cosmic form Krishna/Triumph Hari, Lord of the World. /Homage to you Krishna/In your ten incarnate forms” (Miller 71).

Sunniti Chatterjee quotes Nabha Dass, the Hindu saint, theologian and author of the *Bhaktamal* in the 16th century, to indicate Jaya Deva’s pan-Indian presence and exalted place in literature. Dass is quoted in translation as saying that *Geet Govinda* “is the repository of Erotics, of Poetry, of the Nine Sentiments, and of the Pleasant Art of Love. For him who studies (signs) his eight-versed songs, his wisdom is increased... The poet Jaya Deva is the emperor among poets. While other poets are rulers of small states” (Chatterjee 43). At one plane, the poem is a simple tale of the love of Radha and Krishna as cowherds, “but the poem also celebrates nature’s regeneration through sexual congress, the interplay of the human and the divine, and the profound mystery of erotic experience” (Holcombe1). The aesthetic experience of the poem becomes a religious one, “a state of total absorption in devotion to and enjoyment of Krishna” (ibid.3).

Vaishnavites have deep faith in God Vishnu, particularly in his incarnation Krishna. “They looked upon the yearning of the human soul for a vision of and then for final rest with the Godhead, through the figure or allegory of the self-forgetting abandonment of love of the Gopis of Vrindavan, with Radha at their head, for Sri Krishna as the handsome young God who is the World’s Desire, the Purushottama or the only Supreme

Male in the Universe, to whom the love of Humanity as the Bride of God is drawn” (Chatterjee 54). The popular use of Radha as Krishna’s consort in the Bhakti poetry helped humanise divine love and make it less esoteric through their representation as cowherds indulged in human acts of love, jealousy, and reconciliation.

The Bhakti Movement played a key role in challenging the feudal system, and it was instrumental in bringing vernacular languages to the prominence of the poets. It also marked a resurgence of Hinduism when Islam and Buddhism became popular. As against the belief of Islam that mankind is unable to see and visualize the attributes of God, Bhakti and Vaishnavism believe in the physical form of Krishna and other Gods. Krishna’s beautiful description, dark skin, ornaments and playfulness with the *Gopis*, and love for Radha is at the heart of *Geet Govinda*. The poem’s last section, ‘Ecstatic Krishna’, explicitly accounts for the consummation of the divine lovers. Miller translates the Sanskrit lines as:

Displaying her passion
In loveplay as the battle began,
She launched a bold offensive
Above him
And triumphed over her lover.
Her hips were still,
Her vine like arm was slack,
Her chest was heaving, her eyes were closed. (123)

Such a description of the gods is rare in literature. Despite its eroticism, the underlying implication of the mingling of the human with the divine in the poem is never lost sight of through the poet’s constant reminder that chanting the song of Krishna’s love will bless the singer. *Geetgovinda* ends with “Bhojdevi’s heir, Ramadevi’s son, Jayadeva/Expresses the power of poetry.../Let the poem be in voice/ Of devotees like Parashara (125). “Thanks to his having been a most charming singer of the frankly earthly and erotic love of Krishna and Rādhā sublimated to a mystic and spiritual plane, Jayadeva most easily came to be regarded (at least among certain sections of the Indian people) as an inspired poet who revealed to us this divine love in a mundane garb” (Chatterji 2)

Biswarup Das (1978) offers insights into the Radha Krishna cult in Orissa. He opines, “The worship of Radha-Krishna image is very wide and

popular all over India in our time. The popularity of this cult appears to date from the advent of the great reformer Chaitanya" (539). In Jaya Deva's age, Vaishnavism faced challenges from Shaivism, Buddhism and Islam in Orissa. But the Radha Krishna cult helped in resurrecting the Vaishnava faith and practice. Das remarks that Tantrik Buddhism in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries promoted esoteric practices like the *Sahajayana*. It encouraged "propitiating the propensities of human beings, viz, sex, hunger and the like" (ibid. 541). Its followers practised satisfying physical needs for salvation. Sex was seen as a medium for sublimating the self. "Sex symbolism was commonly used in Tantrik rites and ceremonies. The common people could not understand the mystical elements in Sahajayana and resorted to vulgar practices" (ibid.). The love of Krishna and Radha became a cult, and sexuality acquired legitimacy as a means for attaining 'siddhi'. Along with other poets like Vidyapati and Baru Chandidas, Jaya Deva also promoted Vaishnavism through his recitals. Gradually, "the activities of Sahajiya Vaishnavas had degraded Krishna and Radha to the position of a lover and a beloved in the estimation of common people" (ibid. 542). Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, the leading saint of the Bhakti cult, revived the spiritual dimension of the love of Krishna and Radha in the sixteenth century.

Conclusion

"The Bhakti movement was born, blossomed, and ultimately declined in response to specific historical, social, economic, and political situations that prevailed in medieval India between the seventh and the seventeenth centuries of CE." (Pillai 50). It was a spiritual reaction against Brahmanical orthodoxy, Buddhism, the growing influence of Islam and the disintegrating feudal structure of the society. It democratized religious experience, promoted personal devotion (bhakti) instead of rituals or caste distinctions and encouraged the vernacular languages. Manager Pandey notes that Bhakti poetry, free from a courtly atmosphere, expressed people's culture. "Cultural awareness, ideologies, and sensibilities expressed in the Bhakti Movement and its literature are more closely related to the culture and society of its own time than to the ancient traditions of Indian culture and literature" (129). Bhakti philosophy is pre-eminently about "human relations and emotions that evolve in this life and the world. The age of bhakti is the age of emotions. Therefore, Bhakti poets become "enthralled by the splendour of life in this world and make human feelings the bed-rock of devotion" (136).

In this socio-cultural backdrop, *Geetgovinda* emerged as one of the key me-

dieval works that carry imprints of the socio-cultural consciousness. As a Vaishnavite, Jaya Deva celebrated the *saguna* form of Lord Krishna as the penitent divine lover of Radha. The Krishna Radha cult had become popular during this period, before which "Radha was one of the most obscure figures in early Indian Literature" (Miller 26). In *Geet Govinda*, she is "neither a wife nor a playmate but an intense, solitary, proud female who complements and reflects Krishna's passion. She is Krishna's partner in secret and exclusive love, contrasted in the poem with the circular *rasa* dance Krishna performs" with the gopis (ibid.). Her relationship with Krishna culminates in their union and mutual victory.

The construction of the Jagannath Temple at Puri in the twelfth century by the Ganga Emperor made the song a household name, as the royal patrons decreed that it should be performed and sung each day at the temple (Malla 115). Though it became integral to the Jagannath cult, it also encountered resistance from certain religious sects, such as the Nimbraka Sampradaya, Vallabha Sampradaya and Gaudiya Vaishnava traditions, which did not approve of the eroticism of the Radha Krishna love song. But the ecstatic mysticism of the song enthralled the imagination of the devotees, and Vaishnavism received an impetus because of the impact of Jaya Deva's *Geet Govinda*. Malla writes, "Many new ideas and ideation entered into the fold of Jagannath Consciousness after the emergence of great poet Jayadeva. His work also popularised Jagannath worship in every nook and corner of Orissa" (115).

The delineation of Krishna in *Geet Govinda* differs remarkably from his early projections in art, literature, and folklore. As the cosmic lover in the love epic, he is diametrically opposite to the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. It focuses on the divine cowherd episodes that emphasise his *raas lila* and love for Radha, making his representation different from other incarnations of Vishnu. Jaya Deva uses specific epithets to refer to Krishna. Miller (1977) speculates that the poets consciously avoided 'Bhagvata', 'Vasudeva', and 'Paarth', as used by Vyas in the *Mahabharata*, to distinguish the Krishna he worshipped from the orthodox Bhagavata cult. (18). The deliberate use of epithets like 'Keshav', 'Hari', and 'Madhav' is intended to concentrate on Krishna's romantic and physical dimension. Apart from *Mahabharata*, *Harivamsha* and the *Puranas*, particularly Books X and XI of the *Bhagavata Purana*, are the ancient sources of Krishna lore. But it was only under the influence of Bhakti poetry that Krishna became popular in art and literature as the lover of Radha.

Jaya Deva's composition uses the classical framework of Sanskrit pros-

ody. However, its songs and chant-like repetitions accompanied by music and dance made the work accessible to the masses. The practice of *devadasis* in the temple who sang and danced in adoration of Lord Vishnu at the Jagannath temple in Puri also explains its cultural relevance in the social context. Holcombe observes, "Jayadeva brought the song into classical Sanskrit verse and developed the association with a beauty not easily matched in English" (3). The poem captures the intense pleasure of physical love elevating into the profound joy that the artists feel while performing it or the audience experiences while seeing it performed. "Indian theologians see 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." (ibid.).

The aesthetic experience of the poem gets transformed into a religious one through total absorption in God's devotion and enjoyment of Krishna. Jaya Deva's focus in the poem is not mundane sexuality but that sublime experience which is a source of everlasting bliss. *Geet Govinda* still captivates the readers and the audience, drawing them into a space where the physical and the spiritual are blended. It is still performed at the Jagannath temple at Puri during the *Badasinghara* or the last ritual of the day, before the Gods retire. Odissi dancers perform the *ashtapadis* in cultural programs, and it is commonly sung in spiritual gatherings throughout India.

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