

# THE ROLE OF JAIDEV'S 'GEET GOVINDA' IN THE BHAKTI MOVEMENT

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Jaidev or Jaidev Saraswati, the renowned Sanskrit poet, scholar, saint and writer of '*Ratimanjari*' and '*Geet Govinda*', the most melodious verses in the Sanskrit language, has made immense contribution to the Bhakti movement. In this paper is discussed the role of Jaidev in the Bhakti cult with reference to his *Geet Govinda* in general and some of the Ashtapadis (songs in eight stanzas) from this text in particular.

Jaidev belonged both to Bengal and Orissa equally. Kendu Bilva village near Bhuvneshvar is believed to be the birth place of the poet and Laxmansen, the last king of the Sen dynasty of Bengal whose time as ascertained from an inscription was around the year 1116, gave the poet royal patronage and honoured him as the chief jewel of his court. King Rudradev of Orissa made the singing of Geet Govindam compulsory in the temples. Jaidev expressed the desire to spend the final years of his life at his birth place and returned to his village in Orissa towards the end of his life. Thus both West Bengal and Orissa rightfully make their claim on Jaidev.

Jaidev had lost his parents at a very early age but not before they were able to give him formal education in the scriptures. He chose to lead the life of a wandering bard, devoted completely unto the service of God, staying for months together in the shelter of trees surviving on alms. It was nothing short of a miracle that the chief priest of the Jagannath temple in Puri, Bhuvaneshvar offered in alms the hand of his daughter Padmavati consequent upon a dream in which Lord Jagannath bade him to do so. Padmavati would sing and dance to the tunes and beats of Jaidev's compositions. To this 12th Century ascetic, scholar of the Vedas and the Sanskrit scriptures, is attributed introduction of an altogether fresh dimension to the Vaishnav faith. He is known to have revolutionized devotional forms by adding dance, music, love and romance to the erstwhile forms of devotion which underlined negation, penance, solitariness and renouncing the world and worldly comforts.

Geet Govinda is Jaidev's most widely known epic poem composed, in the words from Geet Govinda itself, in "madhur, komal, kant padavali" (melodious, soft, beautiful metered verse) written in 12 sargas or chapters which are sub divided in twenty four khanda or prabandha containing invocations, introductions, prayers, songs and the twenty four Ashtapadis which all put together aggregate to about 275 shlokas or couplets. The verses are spoken by Krishna or Radha or Radha's 'Sakhi' i.e. friend.

Geet Govinda is unique for its technical excellence, for the Taal (rhythm) and Raagas (song form), the use of linguistic and literary forms, Rasas (sentiments) and Alankaras (figures of speech) and for the over-reaching popularity that this work achieved in the poet's lifetime itself. Jaidev has indicated the taal and raag of each ashtapadi alongwith the respective ashtapadi which clearly establishes that Geet Govinda belonged to the category of the performing arts. The ashtapadis are composed in a variety of ragas which are all different, namely, raag Bhairvi, raag Vasant, raag Bhopali, raag Yaman, raag Ahiri, raag Sarang, raag Saveri, raag Kalyani and several other ragas are used in Geet Govinda. The language of the text is neither difficult nor scholarly or bombastic, rather it is sweet, simple, natural and flows with ease. The poet has used a variety of meters whose beauty and melody is further heightened by the use of internal rhyme and alliteration. Use of the prose form is minimal. For the flow and continuity of the events and the storyline the poet has

preferred to use the poetic form. Geet Govinda is a literary marvel which transcending time and space has earned a place of its own on the horizon of world literary heritage like the works of Kalidas or the inimitable Shivtaandav Stotram by Ravana, the scholar.

Jaidev's depiction of the relationship between Radha and Krishna, particularly the character of Radha, is intense and elaborate in this work which is his greatest contribution to the Bhakti movement which was flowering during his time. Jaidev can, in a sense, be credited with the creation of the character of Radha, in the form that she is currently recognized and worshipped by the followers of the Vaishnav sect in Hinduism. Before Jaidev's compositions Radha was a completely insignificant, almost a negligible character in the life of Lord Vishnu. The fleeting mention of her name in the Vishnu Purana and the Mahabharata is a testimony of the fact that the important central position, rather the superior position, which Radha occupies in the "Radhey-Shyam Duo" can be attributed to the immortal verse compositions of Jaidev.

Sakhi plays a very important role in the growth and development of love in the hearts of Radha and Krishna. The Sakhi conveys to each the sense of deep love and attachment that they have towards the other and also how each is saddened by the separation. Also, the Sakhi through her endearing words inspires the lovers to meet each other. When Radha expresses her anger towards Krishna and accuses him of ignoring her, the Sakhi requests Radha not to be angry.

Jaidev does magic tricks with words. His lines do not consist of sequence of words; they are rather like continuous chains with rings and hooks. A word would often pick the strain from the preceding word, like in

komal-malya, nikar-karambit, unmad-madan,  
vadhujan-janit, saurabh-rabhas

and in many such word pairs and strings of words. These are like movements in a dance taking two steps forward and then one step backwards; again two steps forward and one backwards. The appeal in his poetry is not only auditory but also visual. The abundance of a particular letter or letters makes the written text eye-catching. The poetry is rhythmic as the arrangement of the syllables is in combination of short and long one alternately. There are words in succession beginning with the same sound like in the line :

Maddhukar nikar karambit kokil kujit kunj kutire

There are seven words in a row all of which employ the plosive sound 'K'. There are many such examples of abundance of a particular sound in a line.

Geet Govinda is a work of its own kind. It is matchless in its enticing phraseology. The poetry has a scenic melody. It seems like mother nature with its melodious, lyrical soothing grandeur is at work. The western scholars have termed it variedly as- a pastoral drama, a lyrical drama, the musical mode of the Hindus, Indian opera, a melody poem, and some called it, a melodrama. The success of the poet lies in the fact that the work is philosophical, creative, religious and amorous at the same time. It is an exotic example of an Indian serenade. Many later poets in different languages tried to replicate the content and the melody of Geet Govinda but none could reach anywhere near the appeal, devotion, musicality and perfection of Jaidev. However, Jaidev's Geet Govinda introduced an altogether new genre in Sanskrit poetry, which it may be noted, has always been chhandobaddh (metered) and known for its artistry within the framework of a predetermined meter, rhyme, rhythm and syllabic arrangement.

The poetry of Jaidev has for its subject matter – the divine communion in which the terms of reference are all earthly but the form is sublime and other worldly. The subject is Raas Leela (amorous acts) of Radha-Krishna which encompasses Krishna's amorous display of love towards Radha as well as towards all the gopis (female friends); each gopi is made to feel as close to Krishna's heart as Radha herself. Radha's sadness at her separation from Krishna, Krishna's internal strife and yearning for Radha, love-lorn Radha criticising Krishna for his faithlessness, the account of Radha's feeling of dejection as given by her Sakhi to Krishna, or the Sakhi telling Radha

about the pastimes of Krishna- all have a touch of reality and worldliness. The various dialectics of love like, romance, jealousy, waiting, expectation, eagerness, dejection, hope, anger, pride, accusation, separation, exchanging messages, reunion, joy and ecstasy are all included and given soft and subtle treatment by the poet.

Some of the Ashtapadis deal with related subject matter like description of the happy spring season, the bright moon light, the fragrant breeze, the tree and creeper bowers on the bank of the Yamuna river, the rain and the clouds, the clatter and chirp of the birds, description of the divine dance, the raas-leela and praising the lord in his different incarnations. The effect of Jaidev's poetry is divine while the descriptions are so close to the real world that the reader finds himself lost in the experience and tries to see parallels in his personal life. The reader or the listener often identifies himself with and empathizes with the predicament that the lovers are in. The description at many places is of amorous moves bordering on sensuality which at times is more explicit than implicit.

It is said that the verses of Geet Govinda were produced by Jaidev consequent upon experiencing picturesque visions of the Lord. The poet at the end of the ashtapadis writes,

||Sri Jaidev Bhanitamidamadbhut Keshav Keli Rahasyam||  
(Thus Sri Jaidev has revealed the mystery of the amorous play of the  
Lord's love as it got revealed to him)

The choice of the word 'bhanit' reflects as if what Jaidev spoke were only a resounding of a sound, as if there was an otherness within the poet which expressed itself through him. Was it the voice of the Lord himself? Perhaps 'yes'. The verses here are spoken by JAIDEV, which is one of the names of Lord Vishnu. The lord here is referred to as 'Keshav', an epithet which Krishna acquired when he killed the demon, Keshi. Let us have another look at the same line which with a slight variation in meaning may mean,

" the mystery of the amorous play by the lord, the destroyer of Keshi, has here been thus unfolded by Sri Jaidev, meaning thereby, the God himself."

Moreover, it is beyond human powers to unfold that which God has preserved as a mystery or a secret. The first Sarga contains an Ashtapadi which is a prayer in praise of the God with the 'dhrupada' i.e.refrain 'Jai, Jaidev Hare'. Here the mention of Jaidev is undoubtedly a reference to the God.

The very first introductory couplet of Geet Govinda sets the tone of the text which establishes the relationship of love between Radha and Krishna in which Radha occupies the higher pedestal. The opening verse means –

"It is evening time but the sky being overcast with clouds has darkened it further. Krishna has to go through a forest area with abundance of the dark and thick 'Tamaal' (Bay leaf trees) trees. So, Nanda (Krishna's adoptive father) instructs Radha to accompany Krishna and take him home because he is afraid of darkness."

Thus right from the beginning it is Radha who takes charge of Krishna. In Bhagvat Purana Radha does not occupy any significant place in the life of the lord. There are sufficient references to Rukmini and Satyabhama, the two wives of Krishna whereas there exists only a passing reference to the gopis. Jaidev has conferred a very lofty status to Radha, who is not simply a consort or a beloved but is an embodiment of Krishna himself as Krishna's alterego, who more often than not, is greater than Krishna, precedes Krishna and lends a sense of completion to Krishna. Here, Radha is the Geet Govinda, Radha is the divine song, Radha is the murali, Radha is the immortal perennial music and the constant strain of the lord, the creator. Radha is the creation incarnate. Radha is the ramya (loveliness), Radha is the graamyaa (countryside girl), Radha is bhakti (devotion), Radha is rati (love). Radha signifies the pristine vernal beauty and purity. The relation between the two is comparable to that of breath with air.

The lovingly playful moves and gestures which express the mental state of the duo are subtle enough to appeal to the sensitive ear but never so crudely detailed as to stimulate any wanton desire. The restraint changes the potentially erotic subject matter into an aesthetically religious experience. In the 11th Ashtapadi, standing by the bank of the river Yamuna, Krishna is waiting for Radha, who comes and embraces him; the metaphor employed here is of "dark black clouds and a streak of lightening". In another description the embrace is compared to "the thrilling experience of a flower-laden mango tree which is embraced by the jasmine creeper." The Radha-Krishna union is symbolic of the ultimate union in which the self or the ego completely dissolve in the medium of love and both become ONE and flow with fluidity. The jeevatva (human element) and the brahmatva (supreme godly element) diffuse in each other. It is interesting to note that the distinctions melt in such a way that it cannot, for sure, be said which one is the superior matter.

In yet another example from the text- sitting together under a secluded tree bower, Radha suggests to Krishna to adorn and decorate her. Krishna happily starts doing her hair and makeup and ornamentation. Here the image that comes to the mind is of a devotee adorning the idol of the deity. And there can't be an argument about the fact that the deity is superior to the devotee. Based on our experience, study and understanding of religion we would say that Krishna, of course, is the Brahma, the superior, the progenitor of all creation and some critics did take up this position. But here it is Jaidev's own stand which is of greater importance. To help us understand Jaidev's view there goes a story: Jaidev while composing a verse got stuck as the vision which had floated before his eyes was of Radha's foot on the Lord's head. His wife Padmavati suggested that he should take a break, go to the river for bath, eat his food and complete the verse afterwards. He kept aside the manuscript and went out of the house but returned soon saying that the second part of the couplet has clicked to him so he would rather first complete the verse. He then ate the food and lay down to take rest. Padmavati served food for herself on the same plate and as she was settling down to have food she saw Jaidev returning from the river after bath. Jaidev was surprised to see Padmavati eating without first serving food to him. Padmavati turned towards the cot only to find that there was nobody there. The whole episode was soon clear to both Jaidev and Padmavati that it was lord Jagannath who had himself come to complete the verse. Jaidev grabbed the manuscript to read how the verse was completed and to his surprise he found that it contained a scenic description in verse of the vision he had seen but was hesitant of translating it into words. The verse describing the scene in which the foot of Radha was on the head of Krishna, the Lord himself wrote. The verse clearly established the supremacy of Radha in the relationship of Radha-Madhav.

Jaidev's Geet Govinda has profound influence on Vishnu devotees. In the worship it is the name of Radha which precedes the name of Krishna. Geet Govinda is a very popular composition for students of music, for dance performers, actors, lyricists and music composers. The poetry inspired numerous musical compositions for classical dance and songs. It inspired diverse schools of painting, particularly Mewar, Madhubani, Nepalese, Assamese and Kangra schools of paintings. Some of his compositions have found place in Guru Granth Saheb also. Guru Nanak Dev was immensely impressed and influenced by Jaidev whom he considered the Guru and included his vani i.e. some of his verses in Guru Granth Saheb, the holy book of the Sikhs. Geet Govinda started a tradition of devotional dance in temples which till date is continuing. Jaidev sang his Ashtapadis in the lanes and by-lanes and spent all his life composing devotional poetry. Through temple inscriptions, it has been known that Jaidev had got his formal education in fine arts – composing poetry, music and dance. The Tribhanga (Banke-Behari) posture of Krishna with flute became the popular signature posture because of the description given by Jaidev in his verses. Jaidev became literally and figuratively the creator of the creator.

The picture of Radha, the character of Radha, the flute playing lover and numerous other depictions of Krishna are the creations of Jaidev. The lyrical depiction of the life of Lord Krishna and the dance enactments from Geet Govinda attained such popularity in his life time itself that the temples used to have separate dancing halls particularly for the Odyssey performances on the

Ashtapadis. Bharatanatyam and Carnatic dance and music would also base their performances on Jaidev's compositions. By the 15th century singing and dance performance on Geet Govinda became mandatory in temples. Geet Govinda became the only prescribed text for temple singing and dancing. No other song or devotional hymn was allowed in Jagannath temple of Puri by the orders of the king. In the early 16th century, while on a pilgrimage to Puri, Chaitnya Mahaprabhu, the mystic saint derived such joy from hearing Geet Govinda that he settled there. The poem had been widely disseminated to the north, west and south by the 16th century. There are at least 40 commentaries on Geet Govinda. The 24 Ashtapadis deal with different moods and scenes of the divine past-times or Leelas. The endearing verses are written pre-dominantly in Shringara rasa, making use of the different taals like -adi taal, jhap taal etc. and each one is set to a different raag.

As an illustration, the gist of the 4th ashtapadi is given here:

The ashtapadi is set to raag ramapriya in aditaal. Each pad (foot) brings in front of the eyes a picturesque image. The situational background is that-- Radha's Sakhi while searching for Krishna found that he was joyfully engaged in the amorous dance with the beautiful gopis. The gopis were eager to embrace Krishna. The Sakhi goes to Radha and describes the scene of this Raas Kreedha or the Keli Kala. The Sakhi tells Radha that Krishna dressed in yellow clothes, wearing a garland of forest flowers, adorning sandalwood paste on his blue forehead, with the ear rings dangling and kissing his smiling cheeks is engrossed in the raas surrounded by a group of beautiful women who are charmed by the brilliance of his face. The next image that the Sakhi draws is of One heavy bosomed Gopi embracing Krishna and singing some melody at a high note. Another Gopi was so much enchanted by the lotus face of the Lord that she fixed her gaze on him and Krishna also threw sidelong glances towards her from his wandering eyes. One heavy bottomed Gopi on the pretext of whispering a secret in his ear approached too close to his cheek and finding an opportunity planted a light kiss on Krishna's cheek which tickled him. Another Gopi lightly pulled the upper garment of Krishna making a gesture to suggest that they move towards the beautiful groves by the bank of the river Yamuna. Yet another Gopi who was singing a song to the tunes of the flute and was dancing expertly while giving taal to the flute music by clapping her hands was appreciated by Krishna for her song and deft movements. Krishna is embracing one Gopi, kissing another, smiling at yet another, encouraging passionate caress and is thus lost in the 'Leela'. He would also sometimes mimic the Gopis. This mystery of the divine dance sequence is unfolded by none other than the Lord himself. Jaidev prays that may this auspicious Leela taking place in the forests of Vrindavan and the wonderful and astounding song of Sri Jaidev augment the good luck and the name and fame of all readers, viewers and listeners.

This paper too ends here with these words of benevolence and good wishes.

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