Jayadeva - A Devotee and a Poet

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Every year on Akshay Trutiya, Oriyas celebrate the birthday of the great Sanskrit poet Jayadeva, the man who wrote 'Geetagovinda' in the twelfth century. Oriyas assert that the village Kenduvilva in Puri is the birthplace of the poet. On Akshay Trutiya day, which falls on the poet's birth day, a two-day procession is taken from Bhubaneswar to Kenduvilva, the poet's birthplace. Sri Jayadeva, the celebrated Poet of Gita-Govinda, was born in the village Kenduvilva Sasang or Kenduli Sasang in Balipatna P.S. in Khurda district, a part of the earlier Puri district. He was most likely born in the first part of 12th Century A.D. during the reign of Cholaganga Deva. Kenduli Sasang close to the river Prachi, which was then inhabited mostly by Brahmans. The presiding Deity in the village is Ambika and there is a Nrsingha temple as well. Chandra Dutta, a Maithili poet, wrote 'Bhaktimala' (14th century) where he mentioned Jayadeva's birthplace as "Kenduvilva Sasana": 'Sasana', a Brahmin settlement, is an important part of Orissa's history and the village, apart from having a number of 'kendu' and 'vilva' trees, is located in an area where Madhaba-worship is prevalent. Yet another book, 'Vaishnava Lillamrta' by Madhaba Patnaik written in 1535, clearly mentions that the poet was born in Orissa near Puri. He spent most of his life at Puri. Padmavati was the temple dancer at the Puri Jagannath temple, and Jayadeva married her and settled down there to serve the Lord and Padmavati simultaneously. This tradition of Devadasi Dance is being continued at Lord Jagannath Temple to this day.

The Gitagovinda kavya is a lyrical poem, dramatizing the love sports of Krishna and Radha on the surface and conveying simultaneously the deep ethos of devotion of the individual soul, its pining for God realization and finally attaining the consummation in service of God. This Bhava is similar in both god realization and eroticism and the cloak fits in well. Since. The Gitagovinda was composed specifically for dance performance during the night worship of Lord Jagannatha, the composition is so deftly made as to be sung to the beats of a dancer's foot movements. The poem became so popular that within a century or so, it spread to all corners of the country from east to south, west and north and was adapted to dance, music, painting and temple worship. The Gitagovinda consists of twelve chapters, further divided into twenty-four songs. Each song consists of eight couplets, it is called Ashtapadi.

The first song has four introductory verses, followed by eleven ashtapadi that describe the
purpose of the ten avataras of Vishnu, and at the end, prostrations are offered for unhindered completion of the work. This is followed by another ashtapadi where the hero of the work is hailed. In the third song the spring season is described with its multifarious features like pleasant smelling and cool winds, and sweet sounds of the bees, and cuckoos, thinking of Krishna, being led by her maiden friend to the bowers where Krishna can be found. In this hope Radha follows her friend.

In the fourth song, the poet describes the delightful dance of Krishna with all gopis in the dark forest of Vrndavana. All the gopis surround him, embracing him with joy and caress him passionately and he praises them hugging one, kissing another passionately, glancing at another and smiling with other maiden in love. Jayadeva says that in reality, Krishna was bestowing bliss on everyone.

In the eleventh song, the poet describes the vipralambha srngara. Krishna, the God of Love is waiting for Radha on the bank of river Yamuna. The poet compares the embrace of Radha and Krishna with the lightning and the black cloud, and with white crane and dark cloud.

In the twelfth song, the poet describes the pain and distress of Radha on the separation of impertinent Krishna. Seeing the condition of Radha sitting in her bower, unable to move, filled by passion, and setting her mind on Krishna all the time, the sakhi goes to Krishna to tell the state of madness of Radha, who sees him everywhere, before her mind’s eye, and she is alive just with the only memory of her lover. The sakhi requests him to go quickly to meet Radha, who is waiting fully decked for the arrival of Krishna.

The Life of Sri Jayadeva

The presence of Jayadeva and his description as Kurmapataka Pravara establishes that he had close lineage with the dancing families of Kurmapataka, who had come to Orissa during the period of Chodaganga Deva. The two inscriptions at Madhukeswar temple and the one at Simhachal temple were discovered, read and interpreted by Dr. Satyanarayan Rajaguru, the famous historian and linguist of Orissa. Read with the inscription at Lingaraj temple, it leads to the conclusion that Jayadeva had been a member of the teaching faculty of the school at Srikurmapataka. After his childhood education, he must have gone to Srikurmapataka and gained experience in composition of poetry and music and in dancing. He perhaps came back to Orissa along with the group, and performed all those in the Puri temple which were taught at Srikurmapataka.

Jayadeva must have gone for higher education in Sanskrit literature and music to Kurmapataka, and after his education, he must have become a tutor there. That is why the two titles Kurmapataka Pravara and Sadhu Pradhan have been mentioned with reference to him in the Lingaraj Temple inscription. Read together, the three inscriptions indicate the fact of close association of Jayadeva to the family of Komi Nayaka and to the institution at Kurmapataka. Prachi valley witnessed the rise and spread of Jainism, Buddhism, Saivism, Saktism, Sun cult and Vaisnavism. Kenduvilva and many other villages nearby are full of religious monuments dedicated to these different cults. Numerous temples were erected by Bhaumas, Somavanshis and the Gangas in the Prachi valley. Village Kenduli Sasan has rich relics of brick and stone temples and sculptures of Saiva, Vaisnava and Sakt cults as well as Buddhism belonging to the period between 9th and 13th Century A.D. In Prachi Valley, whether the temple has a Sakta or Saiva deity,
Gita–Govinda is recited on festive occasions, symbolizing the influence of Vaisnavism over Saktism and the immense popularity of the text of Gita-Govinda. The copper plate grant of Nrsingha Deva, the 4th which was recovered from a tank near the Nrsingha temple of Kenduli village, was originally issued from Varanasi Katak in A.D. 1383. It refers to the establishment of Narasinghpur Sasān donated to one Mahapatra Narahari Das Praharaj, who was the minister of Narasingha Deva. This Sasān is located very close to Kenduvilva on Prachi valley. This grant also contains the names of Olatapura and Attahaspura Sasān adjacent to Kenduli, established by Attahasdeva, the youngest son of Cholaganga Deva.

**Jayadeva’s Introduction of Radha and Madhava**

To quote Dr. Harish Chandra Das, "While discussing about the historical background of Jayadeva it will perhaps not be out of place to glance through how he introduced Radha and Madhava and dasavatara cult in the most popular manner breaking the stylized tradition. From this point of view, Gita-Govinda is virtually a historical text unfurling the historical truth through his poetic narration. The cult of Madhava, which is historically proved to be in existence in Orissa from seventh or eighth century A.D., gained great momentum from the time of Jayadeva.

The first epigraphical evidence of Madhava found in the copper plate grant of Madhavaraja of the Sailodbhava dynasty, where the scribe has particularized the epithet of Chakrayudha Madhava. The image of Nilamadhava installed by the Bhanja monarch at Gandharadi (ninth century A.D.) comes next in order of chronology. The image of Santosa Madhava recorded in the copper plate grant of Indravarman Codaganga, Madhava in the pillar inscriptions of Rellivalasa at Srikakulam, and numerous Madhava sculptures and temples in Prachi Valley are clear revelations of the long continued tradition of Madhava worship in Orissa with wide distribution in Prachi Valley, the birth place of Jayadeva, who in the course of his wanderings and as a devout worshipper of Madhava infused exuberantly in his Gita-Govinda the lucid description of Madhava, his Deity of love and admiration."

Sri Jayadeva introduced the cult of Radha and Krishna through his Gita-Govinda and due to the influence of Srimad Bhagavata and Gita-Govinda, the composite figure of Krishna and Vishnu as Gopinath became very popular in Orissa. When Vaisnavism became the state religion of Orissa the composite sculpture of Krishna and Vishnu with upper two hands in the pose of playing the flute, standing in the tribhanga pose associated with Astagopi and cattle, which is the characteristic feature of Krishna, indicates the amalgamation of two cults. The long continued tradition of Dasavatara had a deep imprint language, which would be put to music and dance. To quote Dr. Harish Chandra Das again, "That the concept of ten incarnations of Visnu was widely prevalent in Orissa since seventh century A.D. is substantiated by literary and archaeological evidences. In this connection mention may be made of Varaha worship referred to in the copper plate of Dharmaraja of the Sailodbhava dynasty and other individual and collective images particularly in coastal Orissa, which speak in short to the prevalence of dasavatara worship in Orissa before the advent of Jayadeva. Jayadeva in his composition (dasakrtikrte) has shown the greatness of Lord Visnu in his ten incarnations individually."
It was Sri Jayadeva, who institutionalised the Devadasi system introduced from the time of the Somavansi Kings. Devadasi or Maharis were women dedicated to the Deity in the temple for performance of dance and music. Jayadeva worshipped Madhava at Niali. He was an expert in the Shastras and Puranas, music and dance. He was a saint poet who composed the Gita-Govinda in the temple of Jagannatha at Puri and his wife Padmavati danced to the tunes of Gita-Govinda before Lord Jagannath.

Chaitanya and Panchasakha were going on Sankirtan trips to different parts of Orissa for a number of years. One such annual trip started from the Ananta Vasudeva temple of Bhubaneswar and ended at Puri, touching Balakati-Kenduli-Niali, Madhav, Adaspur, Kakatpur and Konark. Madhav Patnaik has described as to how Sri Chaitanya and Panchasakha were dancing in Sankirtan and singing Gita-Govinda at Kenduli village, which was the birth place of Jayadeva.

This book was discovered and compiled from three Palm leaf manuscripts collected in Orissa from three places in the early 1980s. Gita-Govinda of Sri Jayadev, therefore, is accepted as a historical text in addition to its great literary and religious significance. Sri Jayadev initially highlighted and systematised the traditional cults but also introduced his own ideologies, poetic imagery and music. Both Cholaganga Deva and his son Kamarnav were disciples of Ramanuja and devotees of Sri Jagannath and his consort Laxmi. Jayadeva was influenced by Ramanuja's ideology of Jagannath and Laxmi. In Gita-Govinda, Krishna tells Radha that formerly she as Laxmi chose him as her consort on the seashore on the occasion of Samudra Manthana. As a result of this incident, Siva swallowed poison out of despair. Gita-Govinda was composed before 1150 A.D. and Gita-Govinda dance drama was enacted in the Puri temple during the rein of Cholaganga Deva and Kamarnavadeva. The earliest reference to Jayadeva outside Orissa was made by poet Chandabaradai, the Court poet of Prithviraj Chauhan who was defeated and killed in 1192 A.D. by Md. Ghori in the battle of Tirori.

The next earliest reference is found in an inscription of Raja Sarangadev in the year 1201 A.D. Therefore, it is established that Gita-Govinda, because of its regular performance in the Sri Jagannath temple of Puri, assumed popularity throughout India within a brief period of 30-40 years of its composition. It combined the best in the rich traditions of philosophy, literature, music and dance in Kalinga and Utkal.

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