



# Hymns to Jagannatha MADHAVIDASI

● Translations by Subas Pani

**M**adhavi Dasi is considered the first poetess in the Oriya language. She was a contemporary of the famous *Pancha Sakha* poets (five companions) in the 15th-16th centuries. She was born in the Bentapura village in a Karana family and was the sister of Raya Ramananda, a minister in the court of Prataparudra Deva and a companion and favourite disciple of Sri Chaitanya. Sri Chaitanya personally initiated her into the Vaishnava tenets. Being a woman she was not considered a full disciple, but only a half disciple or *Ardha Shishya*. At the instance of her paternal uncle Bhabananda Raya, she had studied several scriptures and classics. She was however not attracted towards the deeper philosophical issues or the complex details of theology. Her chosen path was that of simple devotion and intense passionate longing for the Lord. Her contact with Sri Chaitanya helped her grow in this direction. She is credited with the composition of Vaishnava *Kirtana* or short compositions for ritual group-chanting, hymns, supplications and other devotional songs in Oriya, Bengali and Brajabhasa. Writing in all the three languages was quite a common practice at that time among the Vaishnava saint-poets, who were followers of Sri Chaitanya. Some of her Bengali poems are included in *Pada Kalpataru*. No separate collection of her devotional songs has come to our notice.

## NANDA NANDANA

The darling son of Nanda<sup>1</sup>,  
He is adored by the whole world.  
His body is decorated and worshipped  
With fragrant sandalwood paste.  
The handsome young son of Braja<sup>2</sup>,  
Hari is the sweetest treasure of Niladri<sup>3</sup>.

As he retires for the night,  
The name of Radha, he holds close to his heart  
In tight embrace, full of amorous excitement.  
Thrilled with love's passionate ecstasy,  
He sleeps on the bedspread decorated with ivory.

The tender, sweet verses of *Sri Geetagovinda*<sup>4</sup>  
Bearing the name of Radha<sup>5</sup>,  
Are woven into this *Khandua*<sup>6</sup>.  
This the Lord holds close to his limbs,  
Dallying in luxurious love play,  
Full of tender feelings.

May this *Khandua* ever adorn my head,  
The one on which Radha's name inscribed,  
The same that is Krishna's favourite adobe !  
May my life come to an end  
While my lips with the names  
Of Radha and Krishna are attached !

O Hari, consider Madhavi as your companion  
Be benign and show me compassion !  
Do let me make for my head an ornament,  
Of a few leaves of *Tuls*<sup>7</sup> sanctified by your feet !

Original Oriya hymn "Sri Nanda nandan se jagabandana....."

Source : Ratha Sharma, Sadasiva. Sri Sri Jagannath O Jayadeva (Oriya). Cuttack ;



Kalinga Student's Store, 1984. p. 60. The author of this book mentions that he had discovered this treasure in Sangitasara, from Braja Kishore Mohanty of Benapur.

### SRI HARI

O Lord with Round Eyes<sup>8</sup> !  
Life of the world, Sri Hari !  
I pray to you in desperation,  
Do listen to me with keen attention !

How can I, a wretched woman  
Describe or recount the tales  
Of all those you have rescued  
From many a grave crisis ?

These are certainly material  
For an entire book to fill.  
Ahalya<sup>9</sup>, from her curse, you released.  
Draupadi<sup>10</sup>, from her travails, you rescued.  
The distressed status of the doe you realised,  
From the gravest danger she was saved.  
O Jagannath, Lord of the World !

Fruits tasted by the woman of the forest<sup>11</sup>  
With utmost relish you ate.  
Eating her left-over, on your own  
You offered to her the status of heaven !

You were overwhelmed by the passion  
Of Meera<sup>12</sup> and Karama's<sup>13</sup> simple devotion.  
To them a place in Braja<sup>14</sup> you did assign.

You even freed from earthly misery  
The fallen women like Pingala<sup>15</sup> and Jibanti.  
Deeds like these have kept the flag of your victory,  
Flying high, spreading your fame and eternal glory.

I alone am an accursed woman,  
Unfit to be your servant even.  
With folded hands I make this humble plea  
O Lord, do listen to Madhavi's entreaty !  
Original Oriya hymn "Chaka Nayana he, Jagu  
Jibana Sri Hari....."

Source : Nayak, Khetrabasi. Ed. Sri Jagannath

Padyavali - Volume I (Second Edition)  
Berhampur : Pustak Bhandar, 1980. p.21.

<sup>1</sup>Krishna-Jagannatha. Krishna was the son of Devaki and Vasudeva but grew up in the house of Nanda and Yasoda. Soon after he was born, Krishna was carried to the house of Nanda and exchanged with a new born daughter of the latter.

<sup>2</sup>Krishna, with whom the poetess fully identifies Jagannatha, was the darling of the entire Gopa Land or Braja Pura. He was therefore, in more sense than one, the son of the entire cowherd community of Braja.

<sup>3</sup>Here the reference is more directly to Lord Jagannatha, the Lord of the Blue Hills or the Blue Region.

<sup>4</sup>This refers to the elaborate evening ritual of *Bada Simhara Vesha* and the *Bada Simhara Dhupa* in Srimandira everyday. The *Geetagovinda Khandua*, colourful tie and dye silk textile of Orissa with words of Jayadeva's immortal composition, *Sri Geetagovinda* woven into it, cover the deities during this ceremony. See details given in introduction.

<sup>5</sup>The entire text of *Sri Geetagovinda* is woven into several pieces of the *Khandua*, but the most popular of these is the following stanza. '*kamsarirapi Samasara vasana abaddha srinkhalam/ Radham adhaya hridaye tatyaja brajasundaribhih.*' This can be roughly translated as follows. 'The enemy of kamsa, i.e. Krishna, too got himself entangled in the worldly bonds and cogitating on Radha in his heart, he abandoned the beauties of Braja.'

<sup>6</sup>*Khandua* is a special silk textile, as explained earlier.

<sup>7</sup>Tulasi, the holy basil plant and a favourite of Vishnu-Krishna-Jagannatha....



<sup>8</sup>The poetess uses the appellation 'Chaka Nayana', a variant of the appellation 'Chaka Dola', both meaning round eyes. Lord Jagannatha is so called because of his perfectly circular eyes, a distinguishing feature of his iconography and one of the greatest attractions for devotees. Subhadra and Balabhadra, however have elongated eyes more closely resembling the human form.

<sup>9</sup>Ahalya had been turned into a stone statue on account of a curse of her husband, the sage Gautama, after Indra, taking the disguise of her husband, seduced her. In his incarnation as Rama, the Lord released her from her curse by placing his feet on the statue and restored her to her former state and caused her reconciliation with her husband. She is considered one of the five chastest women and remembered as such.

<sup>10</sup>The daughter of king Drupada, Draupadi was married to the five Pandava brothers. She had been offered as a wager by Yudhisthira, the eldest, in a game of dice with Duryodhana in the court of the Kurus, after he had lost everything else. After Yudhisthira lost her as the final wager, Duryodhana ordered his brother Dussashana, to forcibly disrobe her in the open court. No one protested and no one came forward to the rescue of Draupadi. She called out Lord Krishna in desperation. The Lord heard her prayers and gave her an unending stream of cloth and her honour was saved. Draupadi is also called Panchali, as she was a princess of the Panchala kingdom.

<sup>11</sup>This refers to a well-known episode of Ramayana when Lord Rama, during his exile in the forest, showed his compassion to a Savari or tribal woman. Lost in a

trance in getting her dearest Lord and eager to offer him only the sweetest fruits, she tasted each one before offering them to him. The Lord accepted the gift of her simple devotion and ate these left over fruits with relish, fulfilling the wishes of his devotee.

<sup>12</sup>Meera Bai, a saint poetess of Rajasthan, accepted Krishna as her husband. Her life was full of many trials, in all of which she was miraculously saved. She composed many hymns in praise of Lord Krishna, which are immensely popular throughout India.

<sup>13</sup>Karama Bai was a great devotee of Lord Jagannatha. She loved him with the tender affections of a mother and the Lord accepted food from her in disguise everyday. Even today, a special pot of rice is offered to the Lord in her name in the Srimandira.

<sup>14</sup>Here the reference is to the Nitya Braja or the eternal abode of Lord Krishna or heaven.

<sup>15</sup>Pingala was a prostitute. Once a rich customer had promised to visit her in the night. Pingala, made up in her best, anxiously waited for him for the whole night but he never turned up. She suddenly became conscious of the Lord and developed *vairagya*, disinterest in worldly affairs. She then became an ascetic. She became known for her piety and virtuous deeds in spite of her lowly profession.



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