



## ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

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# ODISSI DANCE IN JAGANNATH CULT AND GITA GOVINDA SEVA

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### ABSTRACT

The essential aspect of Odissi dance form and the regular prayer offerings to Lord Jagannatha of Puri are from Gita Govinda. Jayadev the twelfth century composer of the unparalleled Gita Govinda stands alone as a poet of paramount prominence. As a fervent devotee of Krishna, there is a strong undercurrent of Vaisnava faith (the worship of Vishnu or his associated avatars, principally as Rama and Krishna, as the original and supreme God) and Bhakti in his articulation as he sings of the mystical amours between Krishna and Radha. Gita-Govinda of Poet Jayadev is a great creation depicting the eternal love-story of Radha and Krishna. Conglomeration of Sahitya, Sangita and Kala (literature, music and art) are simultaneously preserved in this Kavya. As enumerated in the scriptures, Sangita consists of Nritya, Gita and Vadya (Dance, Song and Musical Sound). Odissi Dance and Odissi Sangita have intimate and inevitable relationship with Gita-Govinda Kavya.

As Jayadev elaborates the love of this cosmic duo, he creates an aesthetic atmosphere of Sringararasa or erotic-mystical mood that is bliss for the devotees of Krishna. Indeed, the Gitagovinda of Jayadev, divinely adorned and devotionally oriented, is a source of religious inspiration in both medieval and contemporary Vaisnavism.

To the arena of lyric poetry, Poet Jayadev of twelfth-century A.D. has unique contribution in his nectar-showering pen. Jayadev is one among the distinguished poets of Odisha, who has been immortal for his extraordinary and unique Sanskrit work. Born in the village Kenduvilwa on the bank of River Prachi, Jayadev, a great devotee of Lord Jagannatha and the loving husband of Padmavati, composed such a marvelous Kavya that delights the people even in the present age with its literary loveliness and musical splendor.

Among numerous poets it was the 12th century Jayadev who was the definite trendsetter for the whole Bhakti movement. His Song of the Dark Lord or Gita Govinda (also Gita Govinda) has enjoyed phenomenal popularity and influenced all genres of Bhakti art all over the subcontinent.

he most popular gods of the Bhakti worship are Shiva and Krishna, the flute-playing dark, dancing youth who, in fact, is an avatar or incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Jayadev wrote his poetic work, Gita Govinda, structured in 12 poems or cantos, in Sanskrit. It describes the passionate and stormy love life of Krishna and his main beloved, Radha. It is known that Jayadev wrote it to be danced as a kind of offering to Lord Krishna.

Gita Govinda of Jayadev is a musical opera of unparalleled lyrical beauty occupies a premier place in the tradition of Krishna theatre. Gita Govinda written at the end of the 12th century inspired 35 dramatists who composed more than 100 plays between 1600 and 1850. In Vidyapati and Chandidas's devotional songs one can find the influence of Gita Govinda. The performance consisting of dialogues among two or more actors accompanied by songs became popular in Orissa, Mithila (northern Bihar), Bengal, Assam, Bundelkhand and Nepal. Even today, highly acclaimed classical Indian dances like Odissi and Bharatanatyam use the rich lyrical repertoire of Gita Govinda in their performances. Deep emotional involvement with the love-mysticism of Krishna cult forms the hub of the poet's compositions.

Whatever mention Odissi has in caves and treatises, the living tradition of the Odissi dance form has been kept up by the Maharis and the Gotipuas. Mahari are the Devadasis from Odisha. 'Mahan' – 'Nari' or 'Mahari' is - the great one, chosen one for the seva or service to the Lord. The Maharis would sing and dance for the Deity. That was their seva to the Lord. The Maharis performed dance sequences based on the lyrics of the Gita Govinda of poet Jayadev. Before the time of Jayadev, the Maharis performed mainly nritya (pure dance) and abhinaya based on mantras & shlokas

Various reasons are attributed to the discontinuance of the Mahari tradition of dance and the emergence of the Gotipua tradition. Gotipuas are young boys dressed as girls and made to dance. They were taught the dance by the Maharis. The Maharis themselves never performed outside the precincts of the temple. It was always inside the temple. In fact there were two clans of Maharis - the Bhitari gauni Maharis, who would reach the sanctum sanctorum of the temple and Bahari gauni Maharis who would be in the temples but outside the sanctum sanctorum. But once the Gotipuas - these young boys were taught the dance, it stepped out of the precincts of the temples. One of the reasons given for the emergence of Gotipuas is, that the Vaishnavite did not approve of dancing by women. During this period, Vaisnava poets composed innumerable lyrics in dedication to Radha and Krishna. Gotipuas danced to these compositions. Hence even to this day one sees that the Odissi repertoire is full of ashtapadis from Jayadev's Gita Govinda (performed by Maharis) and songs on Radha & Krishna by Odia poets (performed by Gotipua).

Thus Sri Jayadev's Gita Govinda was rendered by Brahmin Sebayats and female Devadasis known as "Bhitari Geyeni" and "Samprada". Some Mahari performed dance near the inner threshold known as 'Kalahaat Dwara'. This was going on without any interruption for 200 years. Performance of Gita Govinda and Mahari Dance influenced other temples to start such tradition.

In the Jagannath Temple of Puri the dancing girls were appointed for the essential ritual service of the deity. All the female attendants of the temple are known as Mahari Devadasis. They are again divided into several groups according to their services. The dancing girls are known as Nachuni and the others are Bhitari Gauni and the Gaudasani those whose duty is to fan the lord.

The Mahari Devadasis are forbidden to enjoy the company of men. They are to dance for ceremonies and festivals connected with Lord Jagannath. After the initiation they are always to adorn themselves with the mark of tilak. Here the dance is expressional and the songs used for accompanying the dance are taken from Gita Govinda alone.

Thus Gita Govinda finds in eternal bond with the temple recital of music and dance.

Gita Govinda's matchless musical style in later years gained prominence in the name of Odissi style of music. Gitagovinda being closely related with Puri temple and as because its songs were beautifully performed through the enactment of Padmavati, these songs became much popular in a short span of time. As these composed songs were performed in the Puri temple and elsewhere so in this way Odissi music and the Odissi form of dance also developed.

In the subsequent period, this form of dance had become very popular and its around development was possible. Its far-fetched

impact has been found in the splendid sculpture which adorns the outside structure of Konark temple's Nrutyasala Nata Mandap. Several beautiful stone sculptures of traditional dancers, musicians and instrumentalists are found engraved in the Khandagiri and Udayagiri caves of Odisha which were built during the beginning period of first century. The Purusottameswar temple built during the middle period of the century beautiful stone-sculptures of Lord Shiva and Lord Ganesh is dancing postures along with the sculptures of beautiful women dancers can be sighted in the Parsurameswar temple which was made during the middle period of the century. If we compare these sculptures with those found in the Konark temple then we can easily notice the changes within it. This is actually a total transformation. The traditional Tribhanga and Chouka posture of Odissi dance form can be clearly sighted in the groups of sculptures found in Konark temple. The sculptures of Konark temple are truly the grammar of Odissi dance. This transformation was due to the strong impact of South-India witnessed during the period of King Chodaganga Dev and its development and propagation were due to the composing of Sri Gitagovinda and its enactment. Every service or seva prevalent in the temple is a tradition or custom or ritual. It is said that Lord Sri Jagannath is extremely fond of Gitagovinda and every night before sleep the deity likes to listen the melodious songs of Gitagovinda and also used to watch its dance drama performance. It has been mentioned in this stone inscription that the 'Devadasis' women would only be trained with the Gitagovinda and would perform their dance and should never perform any other form of music or dance in the temple.

Gitagovinda dance, which is performed even now with proper Avinaya, matching with the subject and sentiments of the song, belonged to the family of traditional Odissi form. Its verses as well as songs guide, place, time, sing and sequence with the progress of the plot. Gitagovinda is also recited before the deities in many temples in their daily rituals whether they may be Saiba, Shakta or Vaisnava. Sri Gitagovinda has been adopted in every household in their morning and evening prayer before their family deity. It is also sing by people of other states.

A truly immortal work of art, Gitagovinda is the perfect embodiment of Keats' famous words "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." Even today the influence of Gitagovinda is quite powerful on the culture of Odisha. Notably, Odissi dance, now enjoying great revival, derives many themes from Jayadev's songs and the famous Dasavataara song is a part of the repertoire of every Odissi dance.

The Gita Govinda was composed specifically for dance performance during the worship of Lord Jagannatha. The composition is so deftly made so that it could be sung to the beats of a dancer's foot movements. Jayadev's "Gita-Govinda", the bible of an Odissi dancer, written in the 12th century, has stupendous influence on Odissi dance.

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