

## Use and Application of Gita Govinda in Odissi Dance

\*Manoranjan Pradhan

Reader, Odissi Dance Department, Utkal University of Culture  
Corresponding Author: Manoranjan Pradhan

---

**Abstract** The essential aspect of Odissi dance form and the regular prayer offerings to Lord Jagannatha of Puri are from Gita Govinda. Jayadeva the twelfth century composer of the unparalleled Gitagovinda (Song of the Cowherd) stands alone as a poet of paramount prominence. As a fervent devotee of Krishna, there is a strong undercurrent of Vaishnava faith (the worship of Vishnu or his associated avatars, principally as Rama and Krishna, as the original and supreme God) and Bhakti (loving devotion) in his articulation as he sings of the mystical amours between Krishna and Radha. As Jayadeva elaborates the love of this cosmic duo, he creates an aesthetic atmosphere of Srīngararasa or erotic-mystical mood that is bliss for the devotees of Krishna. Indeed, the Gitagovinda of Jayadeva, divinely adorned and devotionally oriented, is a source of religious inspiration in both medieval and contemporary Vaishnavism. Gitagovinda matchless musical style in later years gained prominence in the name of Odissi style of music. This main objective of research paper is to assess the use of Gita Govinda in Odissi Dance.

**Keywords:** Odissi, Dance, Jayadeva, Gitagovinda, Jagannath

---

Date of Submission: 14-07-2017

Date of acceptance: 28-07-2017

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

The living tradition of the Odissi dance form has been kept up by the Maharis and the Gotipuas. Mahari are the Devadasis from Orissa. '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 nrutya (pure dance) and abhinaya based on mantras & shlokas. This research paper is a theoretical one, where mainly secondary information produced by different authors and scholars has been used. The prime hypothesis of the present study is to examine the use and application of Gitagovinda in Odissi dance. To obtain necessary information related publications have been explored by the researcher as secondary source which has been mentioned in the reference section. The main objectives of this research paper are as follows:

1. To find out the past records of Odissi Dance and its relation with Jagannath Cult.
- 3-To examine the Contribution of Poet Jayadeva to Odissi dance through his historic Gita Govinda.
- 4-To analysis the impacts of Gita Govinda on Odissi dance trends and its different aspects.

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, Vaishnava 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. The Odissi dance of Odisha is one of the six acknowledged classical dance forms of India. Like all other Indian classical dances, it also has its initiation in religion and philosophy with an origin in the temples of Odisha. It is the dance of the Maharis, who are the Devadasis. These Devadasis used to perform it in front of the Lord Jagannath. However, after Maharis Traditions, there was the emergence and evolution of Gotipua tradition.

Gotipua were the young boys who were trained by the Maharis and these boys then perform the dancing after disguising themselves as girls. These were the boys who took this form of dance to the outside world. With a charming and colorful music encompassing several streams unfurls many vistas of an array of dance forms and musical styles. The figures of musicians carved on ancient temple walls speak of Odisha's rich musical heritage.

Odissi Dance and Odissi Sangita have intimate and inevitable relationship with Gita-Govinda Kavya. Regarding own lyric poem. In both written and oral discourse of recent times the term "Odissi" as used to describe music and dance is generally attributed to Kalicharan Pattanayak, a poet, dramatist, and performer who became central to the "cultural revival" movements of twentieth-century Odisha.

As Jayadeva has himself revealed as "*Padmavati Charana Chakrovorty*" and also mentioned this friend Parasara and others (*Parasavedi Bandhu barge*) it can be told, probably he was the composer and with Padmavati, his wife, they were a dancing couple. Most probably Parasara, his friends and other accompanists

were there to perform dance and music recital before lords in the temples and kings in the court, it needs further examination and documentation.

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. As we see in Orissa all the temples, Shaivite, Vaishnavite along with Shakta temples patronized this tradition which is documented in temples of Bhubaneswar, Kakatpur and Jajpur. One Sadhu Pradhan Jayadeva was also honored at the Sri Lingaraj temple of Bhubaneswar. During this period, lot of learned scholars started writing imitating Sri Gita Govinda", which were by some research scholars were branded as "Counterfeits of Gita Govinda". We may use the euphemism as imitations of Gita Govinda. All these imitations vied with original one, but in spite of their masterly qualities failed to surpass kavi-raj Sri Jayadev's master piece. The writers of these imitations included no less than the Gajapati king who wrote Abhinaba Gita Govinda also. There from its enviable position of every day rendering before Lord Jagannath continues. To put to an end to this controversy king Prataprudra deva of Suryavamsa issued a proclamation engraved in Jay Bijoya Dwara that original Gita Govinda only will be recited during temple rituals in the rights.

Gita Govinda finds in eternal bond with the temple recital of music and dance. Till today, Gita Govinda enjoys its coveted position despite various other musical composition and innovative approaches. It was a different story that the Odissi Dance, resurged out of the temples aided by Raya Ramananda, when he wanted to stage his drama "Jagannath Ballava" outside temple in Puri and invited the Devadasis to participate in it. This innovation also attracted objection and only after lot of royal support he could manage to get a temple girl called Mukta Devadasis to perform dance outside Sri Jagannath temple. Some opined that Raya Ramanda Managet got her from other temple. However, Sri Gita Govinda remains to inspire.

Various informations have been published regarding the period or year when Gitagovinda was composed. From the secondary data sources of those published informations and on the basis of these articles it has been proved that it was composed in the period of 12th century. Along with this, by studying the informations regarding 'Rahasa-Nrutya'(Devotional form of Dance) and Gitagovinda( epic) mentioned in the book Baishnav Leelamruta, it can be said that in 1142 when Sri Mandira temple was established then Kamarnab was declared as the prince of Puri and during that period Gita Govinda was first performed on the temple campus of Sri Mandira.

The auspicious Sri Mandira temple which is considered as one of the tallest and beautiful temples of Odisha contains amazing and beautiful sculptures of Kalinga-Odisha art form in its temple structure. For many years its stone sculpted structure had been covered with a thick coated lime. In the recent past when a team of archaeological survey of India conducted the renovation work of the temple, the thick lime coating was excavated off the structure and thus the splendid art and sculpture of this temple walls was discovered. In this way the vast religious and cultural development which occurred during the reign of King Chodaganga Dev came to the limelight. One may well ask the question what was the situation of both poetry and literature as also the position of the dance prior to this. Not many literary works survive of the Shaivite tradition of Odisha that belong to the eighth to the eleventh centuries. The real history begins with the composition of the greatest work of Sanskrit poetry, namely the *Gita Govinda*. There is no doubt that the impact of the *Gita Govinda* was not only instantaneous but deep and powerful in Odisha. It is significant to remember that the composition of the *Gita Govinda* was almost contemporary with the construction of the Jagannath temple. Wherever it was written, soon after its composition, there appeared commentaries, transcriptions, translations and imitations of the Gita Govinda in Odisha.

The using of word 'Nachuni' meaning- temple-dancer mentioned by Madhav Pattanayak indicates about Padmavati, a women dancer belonging to Sani community who used to dance Before Lord Sri Jagannath, attune of the Gitagovinda devotional songs as a mark of reverence.

The Gitagovinda recital formed an integral part of the temple ritual and temple dancers called Mahari were retained by the temple in its service. The tradition of Mahari dance slowly crossed the temple precincts and was carried on by Matha and other religious establishments. The dance began to spread with Radha Krishna Bhakti engulfing the society of the time. Since women dancers were not available because of the social taboo, boy dancers were employed by Matha to perform the Gitagovinda dance and other Radha Krishna thematic dances before the public. Such dance performances were necessary to entertain the people and arouse their religious curiosity. The Gita Govinda was composed specifically for dance performance during the worship of Lord Jagannath. The composition is so deftly made so that it could be sung to the beats of a dancer's foot movements. It is the central theme for many classical dance traditions like- Odissi; Mohiniattam; Bharatanatyam; Kathak; and Manipuri. Odissi is based on the popular devotion to Lord Krishna and the verses of the Sanskrit play Gita Govinda are used to depict the love and devotion to God.

**REFERENCES**

- [1] Sri Gita-Govinda by Kaviraj Sri Jayadeva. Edited by: Pandit Neelamani Mishra, Grantha Mandir, Cuttack-2, Orissa, 1995.
- [2] Sri-Jayadeba-kruta Gîta-Govinda Oriya Translation & Edited By: Susil Kumar Das, Avahana Communications, Lingaraj Vihar, Pokhariput, Bhubaneswar-751020, Orissa, 2010.
- [3] Natyashastra of Bharata Muni Vidya Vilas Press, Varanasi, 1929.
- [4] Pani, Dr. Subas: Sampurna Geetagevinda, Sri Geetagevinda Pratisthana, Puducherry, 2014.
- [5] Patnaik, Dhirendranath: Odissi Dance, Odisha Sangeet Natak Academi, Bhubaneswar, 1971.
- [6] Patnaik, Kavichandra Kalicharan: SREE GEETAGEVINDA, Tithi Books, Cuttack, 2007.
- [7] Raya, Bidyutlata: Jaganntha cult: origin, rituals, festivals, religion, and philosophy. Michigan: Kant Publications, 1998.
- [8] Siegel, Lee: Sacred and Profane Dimensions of Love in Indian Traditions as Exemplified in the Gitagevinda of Jayadeva. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978.
- [9] Tripathy, A.K.: The Gitagevinda of Sri Jayadev, Publication Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt.of India, 2006.
- [10] Odissi – The Dance Divine, by Ranjana Gauhar and Dushyant Parasher. Published by Niyogi Books, 2007.

IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) is UGC approved Journal with Sl. No. 5070, Journal no. 49323.

Manoranjan Pradhan. "Use and Application of Gita Govinda in Odissi Dance." IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS) 22.8 (2017): 14-17.