Here is a new Clay Sanskrit Library translation of Jaya-deva’s Gita-govinda: Love Songs of Radha and Krishna.

Gita-govinda is a lyrical account of the illicit springtime love affair of Krishna and Radha, a god and goddess manifest on earth as a cowherd and milkmaid for the sake of relishing the sweet miseries and rapturous delights of erotic love. The narrative framing their bucolic songs was composed under royal patronage in northeastern India in the twelfth century. This Sanskrit classic was meant to be performed before an audience of connoisseurs of poetry and the erotic arts who, while sensually engaged in the world, were, at the same time, devoted to Krishna as Lord of the Universe.

At once celebration of the sumptuous vicissitudes of carnal love and of the sublime transports of religious devotion, this great poem is a literary merger and aesthetic reconciliation of those realms of emotion and experience. The Gita-govinda became a vastly popular inspirational hymnal, a defining text of music, literature, and religion. Today, throughout India, Jaya-deva’s songs continue to be sung in fervent devotional adoration of Krishna.

Lee Siegel is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Hawaii. He is the author of numerous scholarly books as well as novels, including Sacred and Profane Love in Indian Traditions, Fires of Love/Waters of Peace: Passion and Renunciation in Indian Traditions, and Love in a Dead Language: A Romance.

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Jaya-deva’s Gita-govinda is a world classic, the songs of a Krishna become the ideal lover, composed in the twelfth century for sophisticated aesthetes whose erotic sentiments and religious sensibilities together served, and were served by, the pleasures of poetry in performance.
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GĪTAGOVINDA
LOVE SONGS OF RĀDHĀ AND KRṢṆA

BY JAYADEVA

TRANSLATED BY
Lee Siegel

WITH A FOREWORD BY SUDIPTA KAVIRAJ

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS
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2009
# CONTENTS

CSL Conventions .......................................................... vii
Foreword ................................................................. xvii
Introduction .............................................................. xxv

## GITA·GOVÍNDA

**LOVE SONGS OF RADHA AND KRISHNA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canto</th>
<th>Song</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canto 1 – Convivial Krishna</td>
<td>Song One</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song Two</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song Three</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song Four</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canto 2 – Carefree Krishna</td>
<td>Song Five</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song Six</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canto 3 – Confounded Krishna</td>
<td>Song Seven</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song Eight</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canto 4 – Captivated Krishna</td>
<td>Song Nine</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song Ten</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canto 5 – Craving Krishna</td>
<td>Song Eleven</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Canto 6 – Coveted Krishna
   Song Twelve
Canto 7 – Cunning Krishna
   Song Thirteen
   Song Fourteen
   Song Fifteen
   Song Sixteen
Canto 8 – Confused Krishna
   Song Seventeen
Canto 9 – Callow Krishna
   Song Eighteen
Canto 10 – Clever Krishna
   Song Nineteen
Canto 11 – Contented Krishna
   Song Twenty
   Song Twenty-one
   Song Twenty-two
Canto 12 – Kindly Krishna
   Song Twenty-three
   Song Twenty-four

Notes
Index
SÂSTHAH SARGAH
SOTKÂNTHA|VAIKUNTHAH
CANTO 6
COVETED KRISHNA
THE GOD WHO RULES
VISHNU’S HEAVEN
6.1 Aṣṭha tāṃ gantum aśaktāṃ
ciram anuraktāṃ latāgrhe dṛṣṭvā
tac|caritaṃ Govinde
manasija|mānde sakhī prāha.

prabandhaḥ 12
(Guṇakari|rāgaṇa rūpaka|tālēna giyate.)

Paśyati diśi diśi rahasi bhavantam
tad|adhara|madhura|madhūni pibantam;
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|grhe. dhruvapadām [xii.1]

tvad|abhisaraṇa|rabhasena valanti
patati padāni kiyanti calanti;
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|grhe. [xii.2]

vihita|viṣada|bisa|kisalaya|valaya
jīvati param iha tava rati|kalaya;
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|grhe. [xii.3]

6.5 muhur avalokita|maṇḍana|līlā
«Madhu|ripur aham,» iti bhāvana|sīlā,
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|grhe. [xii.4]
In her ivy bower, Radha had been so persistently impassioned that she was too weak to go to Krishna; Seeing her in such a sorry state, Radha’s friend went to him—he too languishing in love—to tell him of her condition:

Song Twelve

In her solitude, she fancies that she sees you everywhere—
You sip the honey from her lips as though you’re really there;
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.  Refrain

Eagerly she rushed out to tryst with you,
But stumbled and fell after just a step or two;
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.

Although she’s made a bracelet of lotus stem and leaf,
Only your artful lovemaking can redeem her from her grief;
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.

Gazing at her ornaments, toying with what is true,
“I am Krishna,” she declares, pretending she is you;
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.
«tvaritam upaiti na katham abhisāram
Harir?» iti vadati sakhīṃ anuvāram;
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|gṛhe. [xii.5]

śliśyati, cumbati jala|dharā|kalpam
«Harir upagata,» iti timirām an|alpam;
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|gṛhe. [xii.6]

bhavati vilambini vigalīta|lajjā
vilapati rodīti vāsaka|sajjā;
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|gṛhe. [xii.7]

śrī|Jayadeva|kaver idam uditam
rasikaljanaṃ tanutām atimuditam;
nātha Hare, sīdāti Rādhā vāsa|gṛhe. [xii.8]
“Why doesn’t Krishna come to me right now?”
She asks me, her friend, as if I’d know somehow.
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.

“Krishna has arrived,” she then cries aloud,
Hugging and kissing the darkness, nothing but a cloud;
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.

She moans, she weeps, her composure melts away;
She’s ready to receive you, and yet you still delay;
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.

May connoisseurs of poetry enjoy aesthetic bliss
When, listening to my poetry, they hear a song like this.
   Radha woefully awaits you, Lord Krishna,
   in her hideaway.

“Her skin bristles, hysterical, she moans and babbles,
   befuddled and depressed;
All because of you, cheater that you are,
The doe-eyed girl is out of her mind
   with extravagant passion,
entranced in meditation on you,
and drowning in an ocean of love.”
«aṅgeṣv ābharaṇaṁ karoti bahuṣaḥ,
patre ’pi saṃcārīṇi
prāptaṁ tvāṁ parisāṅkate, vitanute
śayyāṁ, ciraṁ dhyāyati;
ity ākalpa|vikalpa|talpa|racaṇā|
saṅkalpa|līlā|śata|
vyaśakt” âpi vinā tvayā varā|tanur
n’āisā niśāṁ nesyaṭi.»

«kiṁ viśrāmyasi ḵṛṣṇa|bhogi|bhavane
bhāṇḍira|bhūmī|ruhi,
bhrātar, yāsi na dṛṣṭī|gocaram itaḥ
s’ānanda|Nand’|āspadam?»
Rādhāyā vacanaṁ tad|adhvaga|mukhān
Nand’|āntike gopato
Govindasya jayanti sāyam atithi|
prāsastyal|garbhā girah.
“She has adorned herself, and every time a leaf rustles, imagining you’ve come, she spreads out the bedding, and thinks only of you; Despite hundreds of such games of make-believe, putting on jewels and preparing your bed, this lovely girl won’t survive the night without you.”

“Why are you resting beneath that banyan tree, my brother?” Radha asked a traveler.

“It’s full of blacksnakes. Why not go to Nanda’s comfortable home? You can see it from here.”

Radha’s speech, repeated by that traveler in Nanda’s presence that evening, contained a secret message for Krishna:

(“The banyan tree is an abode for Krishna the lover. Why not go to that place of delightful delight?”)

Glory to the words concealed in the greetings of a guest!
Lee Siegel is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Hawaii. He is the author of numerous scholarly books as well as novels, including Sacred and Profane Love in Indian Traditions, Fires of Love/Waters of Peace: Passion and Renunciation in Indian Traditions, and Love in a Dead Language: A Romance.

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