

# GEETA GOPALA

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The great classic, *Geeta Govinda* has inspired many imitations in Sanskrit and also in the regional languages. Many of them are exact copies despite different central characters. But a few at least present their own variations, while following the basic form of the *Geeta Govinda*.

One such work is *Geeta Gopala* in Kannada and which belongs to the 17th century. The author of the *Geeta Gopala* is Chickadevaraja Wodeyar one of the illustrious figures of the Mysore royal family. He ruled the state between 1673 and 1704 A.D. Those 31 years of his rule are cherished as a golden age in respect of the allround development of the state and particularly in the spheres of literature and arts. Chickadevaraja not only extended the territories of Mysore and consolidated the frontiers covering a good part of the Mysore state as it was till recently but also vast areas of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. He established peaceful conditions in this area; reorganised and streamlined the administration, introduced the postal system and above all improved the financial position of the state.

Chickadevaraja has been hailed as *Apratimavira* in all the records and inscriptions. He was the recipient of honours even from the Mogul emperor Aurangzeb. He was also alluded to as *Navakoti Narayana* because of his stringent measures to increase the financial resources of the state. It is said that he never partook of the *theertham* (holy water) after the mid-day puja and also lunch until a prescribed sum was deposited in the Royal treasury and the fact reported to him.

Consequently the state was in a sound financial position. But according to Col. Wilks, these severe economic measures were also subjects of ridicule and taunting songs in circulation in the territories of Tanjore and Madurai, whose rulers were Chickadevaraja's rivals. Shahaji of Tanjore was his contemporary and rival.

Chickadevaraja was no doubt economical in other respects. When it came to encouragement to and patronage of literature and arts, he was very

liberal. Himself a veena player and a writer, Chickadevaraja was responsible for a large output of creative products in literature under his aegis. The literary output consisted not only of works of Kannada but also Sanskrit and Telugu. Chickadevaraja was always surrounded by a galaxy of eminent men of letters. Apart from the king, a writer himself, other eminent literateurs of his court were — Tirumalarya — his minister, Singararya, brother of Tirumalarya and the author of the earliest extant drama in Kannada — *Mitravinda Govinda*, written at the instance of his patron and presented at the Royal court; Chickupadhyaya another minister and prolific writer with more than 40 works to his credit. Besides these there were others like Timmakavi, Mallikarjuna, Shadaksharadeva, Bhattakalanka and ladies like Honnamma, and Singaramma. And their literary output covered a wide range of *kavya* (poetry), *itihasa* (history), *alamkara* (rhetorics), *vyakarana* (grammar), *purana* (mythology), *stotra*, *pada* (songs) — both devotional and *sringara*.

But the notable feature of the works produced under his patronage, is the heavy tilt towards Vaishnavism especially the Visistadvaita school and the King's deep devotion to Vishnu and especially Krishna. The Mysore rulers are generally Saivites and this inclination of Chickadevaraja towards Vishnu was mainly due to the influence of his ministers Tirumalarya and Chickupadhyaya who were his boyhood friends.

*Geeta Gopala* is no doubt inspired by *Geeta Govinda* and featured identical sentiments too. But it is different in many respects. *Geeta Govinda* is called an *Ashtapadi* because of the 8 sections in each song. But *Geeta Gopala* is a *Saptapadi*. The word *Saptapadi* here is used in more than one sense. *Geeta Gopala* consists of two parts. Each part consists of seven sections and each section consists of seven songs thus earning the appellation *Saptapadi*. While the first part of *Geeta Gopala* features the romance of Krishna and Gopis the second part describes the *Prapatti* (Suppliance) and the ways of attaining salvation.

The seven sections in the first part of *Geeta Gopala* are designated as follows :

1. *Prabodhika Saptapadi*
2. *Prathamamanuraga Saptapadi*
3. *Viraha Saptapadi*
4. *Virahodreka Saptapadi*
5. *Pranayakalaha Saptapadi*
6. *Roopaka Tala Saptapadi*
7. *Mangala Saptapadi*

Starting from the charm of the child Krishna, the *Saptapadis* gradually unfold the seductive charm of the youth Krishna captivating the hearts of the gopis

their despondence, nay ere : Their feelings are mostly conveyed through *duti vakya* or through a third person.

The second part of *Geeta Gopala* consists of the following *Saptapadis*:

1. *Guruparampara Saptapadi*
2. *Nambugeya Saptapadi*
3. *Anyapadesa Saptapadi*
4. *Mahima Saptapadi*
5. *Upaya Saptapadi*
6. *Phala Saptapadi*
7. *Murtidhyana Saptapadi*

In these *Saptapadis* the author enunciates the step by step road to salvation, through the good graces of the Guru; propitiation of his chosen deity and finally the prapatti or the abject surrender to the Lord. Both the parts of *Geeta Gopala* evoke the grandeur, rich imagery of the Lord. The beauty of the work is intensified by literary excellences like *sabdalamkara*, *upama* etc.

While all the *Saptapadis* except two, consist of seven songs each the last two *Saptapadis* feature one song each but with seven sections in each of them. In all, there are 83 songs in *Geeta Gopala* and all of them are composed in Kannada, except one, which is in Telugu. The language of the songs is highly lyrical and with a minimum influence of Sanskrit.

Chickadevaraja has availed almost all the time honoured *ragas* of Karnatak tradition in this work and also a few *desiya ragas*. A study of the *ragas* used by him is itself interesting especially in the historical perspective. Chickadevaraja represents an age of transition from the old music as described in the *Sangita Sudha* and the *Chaturdandi Prakasika* to the modern versions. The *ragas* used by Chickadevaraja are :- *Kambhodi*, *Yerakala*, *Kambhodi*, *Nati*, *Bhoopali*, *Malavi*, *Malavasri*, *Malahari*, *Mangalakaisiki*, *Bahuli*, *Narayani*, *Devagandhari*, *Mukhari*, (Indu) *Ghantarava*, *Kannada Goula*, *Mohana*, *Kedaragoula*, *Huseni*, *Khabi*, *Bhairavi*, *Kalyani*, *Kuranji*, *Sankarabharanam*, *Sri*, *Pantuvrali* and *Madhumadhavi*.

The *talas* used are among the *suladi sapta talas* like *dhruva*, *mathya* etc. Apart from these 83 songs, *Geeta Gopala* which is described as a *Maha Prabandha* consists of verse forms like *kandapadya*, *layagrahi vritta* and also prose forms like *vachana*. While the songs in the first part are preceded by *kandapadya* as an overture giving the synopsis of the theme of the songs to follow, the second half features songs with *vachana* as overture.

*Geeta Gopala* starts with two verses (*kanda padya*) invoking the blessings of Gopala on the author, that is Chickadevaraja. The idea behind the *Prabandha* is described in three verses in *Champakamala* metre. Next the

author avers that because the only road to salvation as declared by sages like Parasara and Vyasa is in the constant listening to the songs in praise of Hari, he has chosen to sing the incidents in the life of Krishna and Gopis and thus extoll the virtues and divine qualities of the Lord, in the first half of the *prabandha*; the way to moksha or salvation in the second through *prapatti*.

And how has Chickadevaraja done this? Like a Physician administering medicine mixed in milk to a patient who is fond of only milk, Chickadevaraja has shown to the world at large the road to salvation through music (songs) because the world readily responds to music. Thus he composed this *Geya-prabandha* in Kannada the language of the people and called it *Geeta Gopala*.

The *prabandha* proper starts with a benedictory song, which describes the important episodes from the life of Krishna. This introductory song is called *Jayamalika* or *Todayamangalam* in all the musical features and starts with the words 'Jaya Jaya'. But Chickadevaraja has substituted equivalent Kannada words that easily lend themselves for singing. After a few verses describing the beauty and valour of the Lord, the first of these *Saptapadis* called *Prabodhika Saptapadi* starts with the adoring mother Yashoda gently awakening the child Krishna with coddling words. All the songs are highly lyrical and contain interesting imagery and similies. The first song itself runs like this with similies that could occur to only mothers.

*Awake my darling Gopala entreats the fond mother Yashoda*  
*It is already dawn in the east and your playmates are already here*  
*Awake my dear child, awake darling, the embodiment of all prosperity*  
*You are the precious jewel among the children*  
*You are as cool as the morning breeze and as lustrous as the full moon.*  
*I shall caress your beautiful curls; apply the enchanting tilaka to your*  
*forehead; decorate your features*  
*My little Lion awake*  
*My precious Ruby, the fortune of my eyes; the beacon of our family;*  
*the divine fruit bestowed on this fortunate earth My tiny toddler,*  
*give me the joy of listening to the sound of the golden anklet and*  
*ankle bells while you toddle along.*  
*Oh! The treasure of our family awake; my golden doll; my bundle of*  
*fresh fragrant flowers; Oh! my precious possession; I cover you*  
*with Pitambara and intensify the lustre of your body.*  
*Oh! my little Elephant, awake darling awake!*

The next *Saptapadi* is named *Prathamamanuraga Saptapadi*. Here the plays and pranks of an adolescent Krishna are colourfully described. The beauty of Krishna, the fascinating quality of his flute music are vividly described here. The *gopis* are first stirred by the music of the flute, become restless and later they experience the pangs of love for the player himself.

In the next, *Viraha Saptapadi* the feelings of the *gopis*, *Viraha* or the pangs of separation from the Lord are described in colourful detail. They discuss with each other, their surging feelings prompt them to recall the enchanting form of Krishna.

The next section aptly called *Virahodreka Saptapadi* carries this further. The surging passions are vividly described with interesting similies. They remonstrate with their maids to convey their burning love to the Lord.

In the next we find the *gopis* in an angry and quarrelsome mood and rightly designated as *Pranayakalaha Saptapadi*. Even the arrival of the Lord is not consoling in effect. They loudly lament, tease and taunt the Lord. But ultimately seek solace in his company.

*Rupaka Tala Saptapadi* is the next section and aptly so because all the songs in this section are set in *Rupaka Tala*. Here the *gopis* gushingly describe the ecstasies experienced in the company of the Lord. Even the subtlest feeling is tellingly expressed. The first part is rounded off with *Mangala Saptapadi* containing the benedictory songs.

The next half or part is devoted mainly to *prapatti* that is the easy way for a *prapanna* to attain salvation by abjectly surrendering to the Lord. Here too we come across many songs highly lyrical and with interesting descriptions and similies.

Though the story develops indirectly, that is through *dutivakya*, the *Saptapadis* from 2 to 5 contain beautiful songs, tellingly expressed sentiments and ideal for dance and *abhinaya*. The overall structure of *Geeta Gopala* suggests that it was perhaps recited or sung as a *geyanataka*. With such rich imagery incorporated in the *padas* or songs and evoking varied shades of sentiments the possibility of *Geeta Gopala* being enacted in the Royal court is not ruled out especially when we find that the court had many *rajanartakis* and also had dramatic shows staged. But the indirectness in the development of the plot certainly makes demands upon the dancers to give a convincing interpretation.