

Gita Govinda Mahakavya of 13th Century Poet Jayadeva

Introduction

Sri Jayadeva was the court poet of King Lakshmanasena who ruled in Bengal in the twelfth century. His mastery of the Sanskrit language was matched by his proficiency in both music and dancing. He was a mystic and a devotee of Sri Krishna.

Jayadeva's only known work, Gita Govindam, embodies the great wealth of his devotion and mystical experience. It is a great poetical masterpiece in twelve cantos of mellifluous verses and songs in Sanskrit, set to music and adapted to representation through dance. The theme of it is the love of Radha and Krishna, symbolizing the longing and striving of the individual, for communion with God, culminating in their blissful union. The language and the imagery expresses the most intense form of love in all its moods and phases.

The First Ashtapadi

The first section sings of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu. The text, transliteration, and translation of it are given below. The Dashavatara Stotra is a hymn to Lord Vishnu. It is the first section in the Gita-Govindam of Sri Jayadeva.

Incarnation is a special manifestation of God for a specific purpose. The scriptures tell us that the incarnations are innumerable. Some of these are described in detail and the others are left to the imagination of the devotee. The general principle is that wherever some thing grand, beautiful, or glorious is seen, it is to be understood as embodying a part of God's glory.

In the Bhagavata, twenty-four incarnations are enumerated and described. These include Kapila, the great Rishi, a founder of the Sankhya school of philosophy, and Rishabha whom the Jains revere as their first prophet. By extending the analogy, all the great sages, whose lives and teachings have reinforced spirituality should be considered as incarnations, descents, or embodiments of God's glory. All incarnations have a common purpose, the protection of the good, the destruction of evil and the establishment of dharma.

Jayadeva enumerates ten of them in his Dashavatara Stotra. They are: (1) Matsya, the Fish; (2) Kurma, the Tortoise; (3) Varaaha, the Boar; (4) Narasimha, the Man-lion; (5) Vaamana, the Dwarf; (6) Parasuraama; (7) Raama; (8) Balaraama; (9) Buddha; and (10) Kalki.

In the Fish incarnation the primary purpose was the recovery of the Vedas, which has been stolen by a demon and hidden in the waters. This required the destruction of the demon. This symbolizes the restoration of true knowledge, subverted by egoism, which has to be destroyed in the process.

The second incarnation is the Tortoise. The gods and demons undertook the Churning of the milk-ocean with the mount Meru as the churn to obtain the nectar of immortality. They found the churn sinking into the ocean and were unable to hold it up. Then God appeared as the great Tortoise on whose back the mountain could rest and allow the process of churning to proceed, bringing up different products, and ultimately, the nectar of immortality.

When we proceed to churn the ocean of experience with the churn of knowledge, in search of reality, we find that knowledge itself requires a base to prove its validity. The attempt to find an ultimate base on which to erect our structure of reasoning can end in an infinite regress, unless it reset on the immovable, all-sufficient, all-sustaining basis of self-evident truth symbolized by the Tortoise form of God.

The third is the Boar. God incarnated this time to lift up the earth, which had been taken away into the regions of darkness, under the waters, by Hiranyaaksha, a demon. The demon was destroyed and the earth was retrieved. In the both Vishnupurana and the Bhagavatha, the Boar form of God is identified with sacrifice. And Sacrifice, in its turn is not different from God himself. This can be understood as illustrating that stability or order, as contrasted with instability or chaos, can be achieved only through sacrifice, which is again based on the absolute.

In the next (fourth), the Man-lion incarnation, the emphasis is on devotion. This guarded the child devotee Prahlada. He was put to endless tortures by his father, Haranyakasipu, a demon, for repeating God's name instead of his own. But Prahlada withstood all the tortures with steadfast devotion. Finally God appeared as Man-lion, of terrible form and killed the demon. This Man-lion incarnation indicates that God is incomprehensible, i.e. He is not limited by our knowledge. It also illustrates that the real devotee alone is truly fearless and even the terrible form has no terror for him.

The dwarf incarnation (fifth) of Vaamana shows us that valor finds fulfillment only in complete surrender to Lord. King Bali, the mighty, vanquished all gods, including Indra, the lord of heaven. But he found his true fulfillment when he surrendered himself completely to Lord. When the might of the ego is thus crushed under the holy foot of God, it is not annihilated but transformed to everlasting blissful existence in the awareness of His presence and protection and ultimate union with Him. The return of King Bali every year to see his kingdom and its subjects, is celebrated as Onam festival in Kerala every year.

Note the gradual change of form. The Divine appears first as aquatic fish, then as the amphibian tortoise, the land animal boar, and the half-animal-half-human Man-lion. Finally emerges the pygmy, Vaamana. This transition for a wonder, anticipates the modern theory of evolution of species.

Next (sixth) is Parashuraama. When the power conferred for protection, grown mighty by its proper exercise, had however degenerated into an oppressive

tyranny, it had to be crushed ruthlessly. The terrible Parashuraama was the appropriate form for this need.

Then, as the seventh incarnation came Sri Raama, perfect in his general dharma as human and in his particular dharma as king. This is a demonstration of how humans can rise to divinity, by unswerving adherence to the law of one's being, one's dharma, in all its details.

In this text, the eighth incarnation is Balaraama, the elder brother of Sri Krishna. We must note that to Jayadeva and all the Vaishnavas, Sri Krishna is not an incarnation; He is Lord Himself. Therefore Krishna is addressed here as Hari and Keshava in each stanza. He is the Entity who appeared in these ten forms.

Buddha the ninth incarnation is the embodiment of compassion. When a section of people were steeped in ignorance and the scripture had become inaccessible to them, when most of those who had access to such knowledge were concerned more with the form such as sacrifice, rather than the actual spirit of their teaching, there was then, an all-round spiritual poverty. The consequent misery of the people stirred God's compassion and He appeared as Buddha to show people the way out of misery. He also condemned animal sacrifice during performance of a Yagna.

The last (tenth) incarnation is yet to be witnessed by us as Kalki to be born in this Kali-yuga, as the mighty warrior, to be born in a pious family, to rid the world of the oppression of its unrighteous rulers.

Thus, while the general purpose of protecting the good, destroying evil and establishing the law is common to all the incarnations, it is possible to see an emphasis on a particular aspect in each incarnation.

Can we say, then, that each incarnation was a manifestation suitable for a particular time and the conditions that prevailed then? This would be only partially true, since conditions that evoked the different manifestations have never ceased totally. It would be better to understand them as embodiments of an eternal message; an eternal response of God in His unlimited compassion, to the eternal need of His creatures, in infinite variety of their moods, temperaments and abilities, for help and guidance in their struggle for communion with Him.

जयदेव-विरचित दशावतार स्तोत्राः

Hymns of the ten incarnations – written by Jayadeva

This Dashavatara stotra is the very first section in the Gita-Govindam, a composition of the famous poet Sri Jayadeva.

प्रलय पयोधिजले धृतवनसि वेदम्
विहितवहित्र चरित्र मखेदम्
केशवा-धृत मीन शरीर
जय जगदीश हरे ॥१॥

Oh Lord, in the form of a Fish! In the flood of dissolution you have held up the revealed knowledge of the Vedas, like a boat, without effort. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

क्षितिरति-विपुलतरे तव तिस्टति पृष्ठे
धरणि धरणकिन चक्रगरिष्ठे
केशवा-धृत कच्छप रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥२॥

Oh Lord, in the form of the Tortoise! On the ample expanse of your back, calloused by the burden of the earth that it bears, securely stands the world. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

वसति दशनशिखरे धरणि तव लग्न
शशिनि कलन्क कलेव निमग्न
केशवा-धृत शुकर रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥३॥

Oh Lord, in the form of the Boar! The world rests in peace on the tip of your tusk, like the dark marking on the disc of the moon. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

तव कर कमलवरे नखमद्भुत-शृणां
दलित हिरण्यकशिपु वरभृंगम्
केशवा-धृत नरहरि रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥४॥

Oh Lord, in the form of Man-lion! In your hand of lotus-like beauty, are the finger nails with their wonderful tips, which have torn asunder the most powerful demon Hiranyakashipu as if he was a huge insect. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

चलयसि विक्रमणे बलिमद्भुत वामन
पदनख नीर जनित जनपावन
केशवा-धृत वामन रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥५॥

Oh Lord, in the form of the Dwarf! By planting your feet you have cheated Bali, the mighty. Ganga, the river, which sanctifies the world, has come out of your toenails. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

क्षत्रियरुधिरमये जगदपगत पापम्
स्नपयसि पयसि समितभवतापम्
केशवा-धृत भृगुपति रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥६॥

Oh Lord, in the form of the Lord of the Bhrigus, you have bathed the world in the blood of the tyrannous rulers, thus cleansing it of sin and destroying the misery of its relative existence. Hail! Hari, God of the universe, Victory to Thee!

वितरसि दिक्षु रणे दिक्पतिकमनीयम्
दशमुख मौलि बलिम् रमणीयम्
केशवा-धृत राम शरीर
जय जगदीश हरे ॥७॥

Oh Lord, in the body of Sri Rama! You have made a beautiful offering of the ten heads of the demon Ravana in battle to the guardians of the cardinal directions. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

वहसि वपुशि विशदे वसनम् जलदाभम्
हलहतिभिति-मिलित-यमुनाभम्
केशवा-धृत हलधर रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥८॥

Oh Lord, in the form of the Balaraama, the bearer of the plough! You wear on your immaculate body a garment of the color of the cloud, blue like the Yamuna, darkened by the fear of being dragged by your plough. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

निन्दसि यज्जविधे रहह स्मृतिजातम्
सदय हृदय दर्शित पशुघातम्
केशवा-धृत बुद्ध शरीर
जय जगदीश हरे ॥९॥

Oh Lord, in the body of Buddha, the enlightened one! Out of Compassion o your heart you have condemned the ritualistic part of the Yagnas ordaining the killing of animals. Hail! Hari, God of the world, Victory to Thee!

म्लेच्छ निवाह निधाने कलयसि कर वालम्
धूमकेतुमिव किमपि करालम्
केशवा-धृत कल्कि शरीर
जय जगदीश हरे ॥१०॥

Oh Lord, in the form of the Kalki! For the destruction of the wicked, you carry a meteor-like sword in your hand, trailing a train of disaster to them. Hail! Hari, God of the World, Victory to Thee!

श्री जयदेवकवेरिदमुदितमुदरम्
शृणु सुभदम् सुखदम् भवसारम्
केशवा-धृत दशविध रूप
जय जगदीश हरे ॥११॥

Oh Lord, who took ten forms! Please listen to this song of jayadeva. It bestows goodness and joy; it is the essence of life. Hail! Hari, God of the world, victory to Thee!

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