

**THE INDIAN SONG OF SONGS.  
FROM THE SANSKRIT OF THE  
GĪTA GOVINDA OF JAYADEVA.  
WITH OTHER ORIENTAL POEMS**

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The Indian Song of Songs. From the Sanskrit of the GīTa Govinda of Jayadeva. With Other Oriental Poems by Edwin Arnold

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**EDWIN ARNOLD**

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THE  
INDIAN SONG OF SONGS.

FROM THE SANSKRIT OF THE *GĪTA GOVINDA*  
OF JAYADEVA.

With other Oriental Poems.

BY

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*TO*  
*MY MANY HINDOO FRIENDS*  
*IN TOKEN OF*  
*AFFECTIONATE RECOLLECTION.*

## P R E F A C E.

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BEAUTIFUL flowers please, whatever their name and country; and so far as any brightness or fragrance may have been preserved from the Aryan original in this paraphrase, it will no doubt be recognised by the reader of intelligence. Yet being so exotic, the poem demands a word or two of introduction.

The "Gita Govinda," then, or "Song of Govind," is a Sanskrit idyll, or little pastoral drama, in which—under the form of KRISHNA, an incarnation of the god Vishnoo—the human soul is displayed in its relations alternately with earthly and celestial beauty. Krishna—at once human and divine—is first seen attracted by the pleasures of the senses (personified by the shepherdesses in the wood), and wasting his affections upon the delights of their illusory world. RADHA, the spirit of intellectual and moral beauty, comes to free him

from this error by enkindling in his heart a desire for her own surpassing loveliness of form and character ; and under the parable of a human passion—too glowingly depicted by the Indian poet for exact transcription—the gradual emancipation of Krishna from sensuous distractions, and his union with Radha in a high and spiritualised happiness, are portrayed. This general interpretation, at any rate, though disputed by certain authorities, is maintained by Jones, Lassen, and others ; and has been followed, not without occasional difficulty, in the subjoined version.

Lassen thus writes in his Latin *prolegomena*: “To speak my opinion in one word, Krishna is here the divinely-given soul manifested in humanity. . . . The recollection of this celestial origin abides deep in the mind, and even when it seems to slumber—drugged as it were by the fair shows of the world, the pleasures of visible things, and the intoxication of the senses—it now and again awakes, . . . full of yearning to recover the sweet serenity of its pristine condition. Then the soul begins to discriminate and to perceive that the love, which was its inmost principle, has been lavished on empty and futile objects ; it grows a-wearied of things sensual, false, and unenduring ; it longs to fix its affec-



tion on that which shall be stable, and the source of true and eternal delight. Krishna—to use the imagery of this poem—thrones Radha in his heart, as the sole and only one who can really satisfy his aspirations. . . .

“Radha is supreme in beauty, with a loveliness which is at once celestial, and yet enshrined in earthly mould. Her charms lift the mind to heavenly contemplations, and the God of Love, Kama, borrows his best weapons from them. She is forgiving and pitiful even towards her erring and lingering lover; she would meet him in returning if she could; she grieves more than she blames; and once reconciled, is beyond measure tender. . . . The remedy for the illusions of sense—*sandra*—is placed by all Hindoo philosophers in the understanding of true existence, and Radha, in my judgment, represents this remedy—being the personified contemplation of the divine beauty and goodness. . . . Such contemplation flies from and disowns the mind possessed by sensual objects, but goes to meet and gladly inhabits that which consecrates itself, as Krishna's does, to the higher love. . . . It bewails its separation from the soul, as that which was its natural dwelling-place before the changeful shows of mortal life banished it; and this is the mystery of mutual attraction between the mind

and mental beauty, that the memory of the divine happiness does not die, but is revived by the recognition of truth, and returns to the perception of what things in love are worthless, and what are real and worthy. The affection of Radha is jealous, and grants not the full sight of her charms, until the soul of its own accord abandons its preoccupations, and becomes filled with the desire of the true love. But upon the soul thus returning she lavishes her utmost tenderness; whereof to be the recipient is to have all wishes fulfilled and nothing lacking—to be *tripta*—‘well-contented.’ Such, in my opinion, is the recondite significance of this poem, hidden under imagery but too luxuriant. The Indian poet seems, indeed, to have spent rather more labour in depicting the phases of earthly passion than of that intellectual yearning by which the mind is lifted to the contemplation of divine things; . . . but the fable of the loves of Govinda and Radha existing from antiquity, and being universally accepted, philosophy had to affix its doctrines to the story in such a way as that the vulgar amours of those popular deities might present themselves in a nobler aspect.”

Nothing in the way of exposition needs to be added to these words.

The great variety of measure in the original has been indicated by frequently varying the metre of this paraphrase, without meanwhile attempting to imitate the many very fanciful alliterations, assonances, and recurring choruses; of which last, however, two examples have been introduced. The "Gita Govinda," with these *refrains* and the musical accompaniments named and prescribed by the directions embodied in the text, must have been a species of Oriental opera. This raises the difficult and little-studied subject of ancient Hindoo music, upon which a passing word or two may not appear impertinent. Sir William Jones says, "When I first read the songs of Jayadeva, who has prefixed to each the name of the mode in which it was to be sung, I had hopes of procuring the original music; but the Pundits of the South referred me to those of the West, and the Brahmans of the West would have sent me to those of the North, while they of Nepal and Caahmere declared that they had no ancient music, but imagined that the notes of the "Gita Govinda" must exist, if anywhere, where the poet was born" (Sir W. Jones, vol. i. p. 440).

Now the reason why this illustrious scholar could not find the score of the "Gita," was that music was always