



Photos by Bhaktra Harshad Marathe

Srimati Nalini Pattnaik writing words from *Gīta-govinda* on *tulasī* leaves to be offered to Lord Jagannath.

Jagannath and Gita-govinda Today

Unlike the *devadāsī-sevā*, many of the practices instituted by the early *Gaṅgā* and *Sūrya-vaṃśa* kings survived the storms of the centuries, and today *Gīta-govinda* is still being offered to Lord Jagannath in several of the ways ordered in the original commands.

Among them, the recital of *Gīta-govinda* dates back to the time of Jayadev Goswami, who was chanting his poetry daily in the Sri Mandir.²³ Following this tradition, the function of the *Gīta-govinda-sevaka-panḍit* in recent times is to sing Jayadev's transcendental lyrics in the morning, during the *candana-lāgi* when the deities are decorated with sandalwood paste.

There is also a ceremony conducted regularly to induct new *sevakas* into their services in the Sri Mandir.²⁴ During this ceremony Gajapati Maharaja ties a *mahā-prasāda* sari from Lord Jagannath, the red silk *gīta-govinda-khaṇḍua*, on the heads of the new *sevakas*.

Although tradition holds that in the lifetime of Sri Jayadev these saris used to be brought from the weavers of Kenduli by the Prachi River, now they are made in a village called Nuapatna in the Tigiria Block of Cuttack district. The *sevā* of offering *gīta-govinda-khaṇḍua* to the Lord of Nilagiri every night has been continuing unbroken since the poet's times.

Another occasion when the *gīta-govinda-khaṇḍua* is offered to Jagannath is the *Nava-kalevara* ceremony. After the *sevakas* find the four *dārus* from which the forms of the new deities of Jagannath, Baladev, Subhadra and Sudarshan are to be fashioned, the transcendental logs are wrapped in this special cloth. The *nabhi brahmas*,²⁵ are also covered with a sari containing the words of *Śrī Gīta-govinda*.

The main daily function of the cloth embroidered with the transcendental verses of *Śrī Gīta-govinda* remains to garment the Lord of the universe at the time of the *baḍa-śṛṅgāra-veśa*, when he retires for his night rest, as well as to attire him during the *anavasara* period in the *aṅsara-ghara* while he is "sick". In contrast with some of the luxurious, richly-ornamented outfits that he wears at various times of the day, at the time of the *baḍa-śṛṅgāra-veśa*, Shyamasundar Jagannath is decorated with simple *tulasī* leaves and fragrant flowers. In the Puri temple it is considered that when Lord Jagannath wears this dress, the *gopīs* of Vraja come to see him. The *sevaka* rendering the service of covering Lord Jagannath with the *gīta-govinda-khaṇḍua* is known as the *Cāṅgaḍā-mekāpa*, who is in charge of supplying Jagannath's cloths from the Lord's dressing-room.

At the time of the *baḍa-śṛṅgāra-veśa* there is another *sevā*

offered to Jagannath which is connected to *Śrī Gīta-govinda*. A devoted lady named Nalini Patnaik daily performs the service of writing words from Sri Jayadev's *Gīta-govinda* on *tulasī* leaves. These special *tulasī* leaves are then made into small garlands. When they wrap the Lord in the *gīta-govinda-khaṇḍua* for the night, they place garlands of these *tulasī* leaves on different parts of Lord Chakadola's transcendental body, tied to various flower decorations that adorn the Lord. Some *tulasī* leaves with the words from *Śrī Gīta-govinda* written on them are also attached to the heart of Shyamasundar Jagannath with sandalwood paste.

The Lord's Love for Gīta-govinda

The above-described services and pastimes are ample demonstration of the love that the Lord of Niladri feels for Jayadev Goswami's transcendental poems. And Jagannath is not the only one in Puri who is attached to *Śrī Gīta-govinda*. Countless devotees — among them, many of the kings of Puri — have taken pleasure in these enchanting verses since their composition in the 12th century.

Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, who is considered by many devotees in Orissa and Bengal to be non-different from Lord Jagannath, also had great affection for the Vraja songs of Sri Jayadev. In the last twelve years of his pastimes, Sri Gaura was deeply absorbed in the mood of Srimati Radharani. It is described in *Cc. ādi* 13.41-2, *madhya* 10.113-5, and *antya* 17.62 that the songs that Mahaprabhu was constantly relishing at this time were those of Chandi Das, Vidyapati, and Jayadev Goswami. Sri Krishnadas Kaviraj explains that it was during Sri Chaitanya's stay in Puri that he fulfilled his three innermost desires in the Gambhira, where the songs of *Śrī Gīta-govinda* brought him *paramānanda*, supreme pleasure (*Cc. madhya* 2.78).

Why is *Śrī Gīta-govinda* so irresistibly attractive for both Mahaprabhu and Lord Jagannath?

In his purport to *Śrī Caitanya-caritāmṛta* (*ādi* 13.42), Srila Prabhupada says that Jayadev Goswami's incomparable poetry "is full of transcendental mellow feelings of separation". *Kṛṣṇa-viraha-vidhura-rūpa* Sri Chaitanya, the personification of the feelings of separation from Krishna, cherishes the Vrindavan love songs of the saint-poet Jayadev, for they alleviate his suffering. Shyamasundar Jagannath, who is *rādhā-viraha-vidhura-rūpa*, the embodiment of Krishna's pain when he is parted from Sri Radha, feels in a similar way. The Lord of Nilachal, yearning after the topmost *gopī*, and *bhakta-rūpa* Sri Chaitanya, longing to see Gopinath, the Lord of his life — two forms of separation, seeking to ease their sorrow.

In the absence of the Vrindavan forest and Govardhan Hill, this is how Jagannath is surviving — by appeasing his feverish feelings through listening to the poignant songs of *Śrī Gīta-govinda*, as if they were brought to him by the cooling



Jagannath wearing the *gīta-govinda-khaṇḍua*

breezes from the bank of the Yamuna. He treasures the words of *Śrī Gīta-govinda* inscribed on *tulasī* leaves and attached to his heart, where eternally engraved are unforgettable memories — immovable pictures of Vraja; and he is wrapped up — even while residing in the lavish temple of Lakshmi Devi — in the charming mood of Vrindavan in the folds of the *gīta-govinda-khaṇḍua*, as if they were the tender embrace of his beloved devotees, the *gopī* damsels of Vraja.

Notes



1 In his purport to *Cc. ādi* 13.42, His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada has cautioned against premature reading of the intimate topics of *Śrī Gīta-govinda*: "For critical students of mundane poetry and literary men without God consciousness who are after bodily sense gratification, there is no need to read such a high standard of transcendental literature." Srila Thakur Bhaktivinode (*Sajjana-toṣaṇī* 7.2) similarly points out: "*Gīta-govinda* is a special poetry book, full of transcendental mellows of devotional service, and it describes the exalted pastimes of the Supreme Brahman. There is no other such book in the world. Since the ordinary readers cannot realize the conjugal mellows of the Supreme Lord, and since they are fond of material enjoyment, their study of *Śrī Gīta-govinda* is not perfect."

2 This appellation is contained in a wall inscription written in 1499 by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu's dear associate Maharaja Prataparudra on the Jaya Vijaya doorway inside the Sri Mandir.

3 Madhava Patnaik is an associate of Sri Chaitanya that is mentioned