

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Love Song of the Dark Lord

Review Author: Nenita O. Escasa

Philippine Studies vol. 28, no. 2 (1980) 244–247

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

what they consider to be their doctrine. This has often been noted before but it is a point that cannot be overstressed in the whole matter of interreligious dialogue. This same rule might provide the best answer to some of the questions raised in Panel three (especially pp. 88-89) on the Muslims and the state; for example, "given the fact that the orthodox Muslim view of the state is completely antipathetic to the modern national state, can Muslims reconcile their faith with modernity?" Or again, how should one define the term "Islamic state"? All definitions would seem to imply something of Ibn Khaldun's distinction between the secular state and the Islamic state: "the former rests alone on human reason and promotes the material welfare of its citizens in this world only, the latter promotes not only their material but also their spiritual welfare" (p. 88). Finally, since Western political philosophy supposes a participation by the people, civilly united, in God's sovereignty, and since orthodox Islam rejects such participation by a human agency as polytheism, is it possible for an Islamic state to be a democracy? Can the will of the people ever be the determining force of an Islamic government?

Two pages summarizing the results of the workshop emphasize the value of interdisciplinary consultation and deplore the emphasis on quantitative data to the neglect of ideology and theory. A tentative bibliography of some twenty pages lists recent publications, dissertations, and even work-in-progress.

The book is remarkably free of typographical errors, but the footnotes seem to have been omitted after Dr. Troll's paper (p. 45).

If the work is regarded as the preface describes it, that is, as a sketch with no pretensions to comprehensiveness, it has succeeded in its aim to stimulate discussion and reflection on some of the problems that Islam faces in rapidly changing world.

Thomas J. O'Shaughnessy, S.J.

LOVE SONG OF THE DARK LORD (Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*). Edited and translated by Barbara Stoler Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1977. 225 pages.

One who reads poetry for pleasure might be intimidated by this volume, for such is the scholarship and textual criticism involved that one might not discover that: (1) the poem itself covers only about sixty pages, and (2) one can appreciate the richness of Jayadeva's imagery and the unique flavor and texture of his lines without plodding through his biography (interesting though it might be) or going through the various books of poems that inspired him (helpful though that might be). All twenty-four songs contained in twelve parts of the *Gitagovinda* may well be enjoyed by the ordinary lover of poetry without losing sight of the great boon to the serious reader contained in the

mass of information provided in the introduction and textual criticism. Suffice it to know that Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda* concentrates on Krishna's spring-time passion for the cowherdess Radha, and that such is the power and beauty of this dramatic lyric poem that eight centuries have not diminished the joy with which devotees in the whole Indian subcontinent sing Jayadeva's erotic yet religious lines.

The introduction states that the *Gitagovinda* is deceptively simple in its surface beauty, hiding a wealth of meaning embedded in structurally intricate forms and concepts drawn from various levels of Indian literary tradition. But lines such as:

Winds from sandalwood mountains
Blow now toward Himalayan peaks,
Longing to plunge in the snows
After weeks of writhing
In the hot bellies of ground snakes.
Melodious voices of cuckoos
Raise their joyful sound
When they spy the buds
On tips of smooth mango branches.

can be enjoyed for their pure esthetic appeal, exotic imagery, and sensuous vocabulary.

In the first part, entitled "Joyful Krishna," the poet Jayadeva sings of the greatness of Krishna and the ten incarnate forms he takes: Fish, Tortoise, Boar, Man-lion, Dwarf, axman Priest, the prince Rama, the plowman Balarama, the enlightened Buddha, and the avenger Kalki. But even as the song of praise has graphic realism,

You raise your sword like a fiery meteor
Slashing barbarian hordes to death,

the sensuous, caressing quality of the images:

The earth clings to the tip of your tusk
Like a speck of dust caught on the crescent moon
You take form as the Boar, Krishna.
Nails on your soft lotus hand are wondrous claws
Tearing the gold-robed body of black bee Hiranyakasipu.
You take form as the Man-lion, Krishna.

shimmer through and contrast pleasurably with the less adorned lines like:

Where the world rests on your vast back,
Thick scars show the weight of bearing earth.
You take form as the Tortoise, Krishna.

The second song ends with a mixture of gentleness and violence:

As he rests in Sri's embrace,

On the soft slope of her breast,
 The saffroned chest of Madhu's killer
 Is stained with red marks of passion
 And sweat from fatigue of tumultuous loving,
 May his broad chest bring you pleasure too!

— apt preparation for the expertly woven images of passion and pain liberally strewn in the twenty-four songs. Radha wanders "like a flowering creeper in the forest wilderness" seeking her lost lover Krishna and

The god of love increased her ordeal
 Tormenting her with fevered thoughts,
 And her friend sang to heighten the mood.

Radha longs for Krishna and sings:

His sandalpaste browmark outshines the moon in mass of clouds.
 His cruel heart is a hard door bruising circles of swelling breasts.

Even when an ecstatic Krishna is finally reunited with Radha, he exults:
 Leave lotus footprints on my bed of tender shoots, loving Radha!
 Let my place be ravaged by your tender feet!

Narayana is faithful now. Love me, Radhika!

.....

Offer your lips' nectar to revive a dying slave, Radha!
 His obsessed mind and listless body burn in love's desolation.

To which Radha responds:

Fix flowers in shining hair loosened by loveplay, Krishna!
 Make a flywhisk outshining peacock plumage to be the banner of Love.

While the ordinary lover of poetry may drown himself in such sensuous, lush imagery, the serious scholar and teacher will find Ms. Miller's translation an invaluable aid in furthering his knowledge of Indian poetry. Aside from tracing the sources of the poem and providing a list of variant readings, this edition also contains a background on the poet and analyses of the poem's structure and symbolism. The cloth edition also includes a Sanskrit glossary and a critical edition of the Sanskrit text.

In the Philippines where the inflow of Oriental literature lags far behind that of the Occidental, Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda* in expert translation should be among the top priority acquisitions of school libraries and scholars of Asian studies. This unique work which has been called the most beautiful lyric poem of classical Sanskrit literature deserves nothing less. But most of all, let the poem's concluding lines express its own excuse for being:

His musical skill, his meditation on Vishnu,
 His vision of reality in the erotic mood,
 His graceful play in these poems,
 All show that master-poet Jayadeva's soul
 Is in perfect tune with Krishna —

Let blissful men of wisdom purify the world
By singing his *Gitagovinda*.

Bhojadeva's heir, Ramadevi's son, Jayadeva,
Expresses the power of poetry
In the *Gitagovinda*.

Nenita O. Escasa

Contributors

JOSE S. ARCILLA, S.J., author of *An Introduction to Philippine History*, recently finished his doctorate in history at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. ELLIOTT C. ARENSMEYER is assistant professor of history at Somerset County College, New Jersey. She completed her Ph.D. at the University of Hawaii with a dissertation on the Chinese coolie labor trade between 1850 and 1874. ADOLFO N. DACANAY, S.J. is currently doing his juniorate studies in the Society of Jesus. NENITA O. ESCASA is assistant professor of the Department of Pilipino, Ateneo de Manila University, and has translated works in Southeast Asian literature. DOREEN G. FERNANDEZ, chairman of the Department of English, Ateneo de Manila, and of the Ateneo University Press Board, recently published *The Iloilo Zarzuela: 1903-1930*. VITALIANO R. GOROSPE, S.J., chairman of the Department of Theology at the same university, has written extensively on ethical questions. GERALD W. HEALY, S.J. is a professor of moral theology and canon law at Loyola School of Theology. He is a frequent contributor to *Philippine Studies* on moral issues. FLORENTINO H. HORNEADO holds a Ph. D. in literature from the University of Santo Tomas and is chairman of the Department of Pilipino, Ateneo de Manila. He is book review editor of *Philippine Studies*. ANTONIO B. LAMBINO, S.J. is president and dean of the Loyola School of Theology. WILLIAM J. MALLEY, S.J., former professor of church history and dogmatic theology at Loyola School of Theology, is presently teaching in the Department of Religious Studies, Xavier University. THOMAS O' SHAUGHNESSY, S.J., librarian and assistant spiritual director of San Jose Seminary, is also professor of Islamics at the East Asian Pastoral Institute and Loyola School of Theology. CARLOS QUIRINO is a historian, an authority on Philippine cartography, and author of several biographies of Filipino leaders. GEORGINA A. REYES was an International Fellow at Brandeis University, from which she received an M.A. in English and American Literature in 1970. WILLIAM HENRY SCOTT is professorial lecturer of history at the University of the Philippines and currently teaching at St. Andrew's Theological Seminary. He is well-known for his scholarly writings on the mountain peoples of Northern Luzon.