

Krsna and Radha (Myths of the Divine Pair)

Krsna and Radha are known to be the two legendary lovers; their story is believed to be the epitome of true love for devotees. Krsna is depicted as the charismatic and irresistible deity who enchants the *gopis* (cowherd girls) with his flute playing. Radha is the *gopi* whom he finds himself most fascinated by (Seth 59). This mutual fascination of each other turns in to a mythic love story which is infamous in Hinduism. Many influential texts have been written to explain this complex relationship. The content differs depending on the author and their interpretation of the *Bhagavata Purana* [Hindu Puranic text focusing on Krsna]. The most influential text is the poem, *Gitagovinda* by Jayadeva which focuses on Radha's jealousy of the other *gopis* (Majumdar 193). Candidasa is another poet who has written many poems on Krsna and Radha, but his focus is on the obstacles faced by the two lovers (Majumdar 197). *Krsna Kirtana*, by Ananta Badu Candidasa, is known for its malign and atypical accounts of Krsna (Majumdar 201). It depicts a very distinctive story in which Krsna is depicted as being malevolent. Rupa Gosvamin's *Vidagdhamadhava* is a powerful play which enacts the tale of how these two lovers secretly meet while overcoming hurdles (Wulff 45). Krsna and Radha's relationship also has devotional components generally those between God and devotee. Radha's affiliation with Krsna gives her more prominence from worshippers (Hawley & Wulff 70).

Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*

Gitagovinda deals with the bond between the two beloveds over a period of approximately twenty four hours (Majumdar 195). The poem starts with Radha being distressed by her separation from Krsna. She goes on an anxious search for him during a spring night. When she finally finds him, she sees him mingling with the other *gopis*. Krsna acknowledges Radha and her beauty by giving her recognition over the others. Although he pays her attention, she still feels neglected and insignificant. Radha leaves the setting discontented but not angry. Radha's love for Krsna is portrayed as being so strong that

although his actions were unjust, she cannot be angry at him. In a state full of sorrow, she confides in a friend and asks to find a plan that would allow her to unite with her beau. On the other end of the line, Krsna finds himself feeling remorseful over what he has done. He starts to imagine Radha moving in front of him and begs her for forgiveness, promising never to neglect her again (Majumdar 193-194).

Radha's friend notifies Krsna of her condition and Krsna tells her to console Radha and to tell her that he is also feeling the pain of separation. This message is delivered to Radha and she waits impatiently for him to come meet her. As time passes, and Krsna does not show up, Radha begins to suspect that he might have forgotten about her and gone to another mate (Majumdar 194). "She, therefore, prays that her life may be taken away by the five arrows of Cupid"; the night passes with these thoughts running through Radha's mind (Majumdar 194). At the crack of dawn, Krsna finally appears and falls at her feet but she does not accept his apology, thinking he has been unfaithful. She tells him to go back to the lady whom he spent the night with. When Krsna leaves, Radha regrets her actions. Krsna and Radha's mutual friend plays matchmaker again and advise her to accept Krsna (Majumdar 194). Krsna comes to meet Radha again and he assures her that "she is his ornament, and she is his very life" (Majumdar 194). "He assures her that no other woman has got any place in his heart. He goes so far as to suggest that Radha should place her feet on his head and thus alleviate the pain he is suffering from" (Majumdar 194). A reunion of the pair ends the renowned poem.

Candidasa's Poems

The various works of Candidasa depict Radha having blind love for Krsna, to the extent that his affiliation with the other *gopis* do not affect her to the degree that they did to Jayadeva's Radha.

Although she is married, she does not care if her acts are ethical or unethical :

"Dearest! Thou art my life. To Thee have I surrendered my body and mind, my life and my honour. Immersing my limbs and my thoughts in thy love have I consecrated at thy feet. Thou are my lord. Thou are my

destiny. Nothing else appeals to me. People call me fallen, I do not grieve at it. To put on for thee the necklace of bad name is my greatest happiness. Loyal or disloyal, thou knowest all. I know not good or evil. At thy feet, says Candidasa, sin and virtue are both the same think” (Majumdar 197)

In one of his poems, *Candidaser Padavali*, Radha’s unconditional love for her mate is illustrated through the morning union of the two. Krsna arrives to meet Radha “with marks of teeth and nails of the lady with whom he spent the night” (Majumdar 197). Radha does not scold him in any way; rather, she shows him compassion and offers to look after him. This selfless act puts Krsna to humiliation and he is mesmerized by her (Majumdar 197).

Multiple poems by Candidasa are dedicated to the various disguises taken by Krsna while trying to meet Radha in secrecy. Krsna takes on the disguise of “a magician, a peddler woman, a female barber, a nun, a garlandmaker and a physician to a hoodwink the inmates of the family of Radha’s husband” (Majumdar 197). The latter disguise is so successful that even Radha fails to unfold it.

In Candidasa’s work, the pain Krsna feels from the distance between Radha and himself is also exemplified. At one point, he is so upset that he declares to Radha’s grandmother that he would welcome death if it would end his torment. He goes as far as to asking her to cremate his dead body near the route which Radha takes while drawing water in the morning and afternoon (Majumdar 198).

Ananta Badu Candidasa’s *Krsna-Kirtana*

This text is regarded as being one of the most controversial poems recounting the chronicles of the duo. “Nowhere else in the whole range on Indian literature has Krsna been vilified so much as in this poem” (Majumdar 201). Radha is revealed to be around the age of eleven in this poem while Krsna who is her senior by two or three years is portrayed as a young boy around the age of fourteen (Majumdar 202).

Krsna hears about Radha's beauty from her aunt and orders her "to play the part of a procuress" (Majumdar 202). When Radha is approached with the fiendish proposal, she slaps her aunt. This news is brought back to Krsna and they both devise a plan to take vengeance. The poem describes this plan in detail, which involves Krsna enacting a role of a toll officer under a tree. He intends to seize Radha's milk products, jewellery, and all her other belongings. He plans to charm her so she falls in love with him and then snub her off as if he has nothing to do with her. This scheme is carried out and Krsna succeeds in his exploits (Majumdar 203).

After this incident, Radha refuses to go out to sell milk again but her aunt convinces her to do so by taking another path. While on her way, she sees Krsna on a boat and is forced to accept Krsna's offer to float to her destination. Halfway, the boat starts to leak and Krsna advises "her to throw off all her milk and even her apparels so that the burden on the boat might become light" (Majumdar 203). Taking full advantage of the situation, he also demands that Radha kiss him so he gets the strength to carry on. Considering the circumstances, Radha obeys his wicked commands, causing further distress upon Radha. Krsna drowns the boat and starts to take advantage of her in the water. Not allowing him to take further advantage from her, Radha orders him to return her ornaments and he agrees. Realizing that she has a bit of control over him, she asks him to "carry her goods on his shoulders" (Majumdar 203). This is seen as being a demeaning work for Krsna and Radha's purpose to put Krsna to shame is accomplished. However, Krsna agrees to all her commands "on condition of getting physical enjoyment" (Majumdar 204).

Ananta Badu Candidasa's interpretation of Krsna and his intimate relationship is very different from those of other poets. Krsna "has been depicted throughout the book as a gross sensualist, spiteful in nature and boastful of his prowess" (Majumdar 205). The events in *Krsna Kirtana* are more based on

the vision of the author rather than being in compliance with the events from the *Bhagavata Purana* (Majumdar 201).

Rupa Gosvamin's *Vidagdhamadhava*

In this play, Gosvamin brings to life the “love of Radha and Krsna from its first awakening to the first meeting of the couple” (Majumdar 212). Radha is married to Abhimanyu who spends most of his time out of town. Radha is left at home with his blind mother, Jatila. This allows the two lovers, Krsna and Radha, to meet. Abhimanyu's mother is suspicious of Radha's relationship with Krsna who she refers to as the “snake toward young women” (Wulff 45).

At one point of the play, Abhimanyu starts to suspect Radha to the point that he decides to take his wife and mother with him. Finding this unbearable, “Krsna dressed himself as the goddess Gauri and placed himself in her temple, where Radha came to meet him” (Majumdar 212). During the couple's union in the temple, Abhimanyu and his mother, Jatila suddenly appear. Abhimanyu and Jatila are told by the other individuals present at the temple that Gauri was so impressed by Radha's devotion that she appeared in human form while she was asking for a “boon” (Majumdar 212). This makes Abhimanyu curious as to what exactly Radha was asking for. Krsna then appears as Durga and says that “Radha was praying for the aversion of a terrible calamity which was going to overtake her husband” (Majumdar 212). Krsna elaborates stating that Abhimanyu's boss has plans to kill him. This leaves the mother and son awfully concerned; Krsna then offers them a solution which involves Radha staying at their hometown and worshipping Durga. Fearing Abhimanyu's life, Jatila and her son agree to the condition (Majumdar 212). This incident is one of the many cunning ways Krsna keeps Radha close to himself.

Devotional Aspects of Krsna and Radha

Krsna is depicted as the god figure while Radha is portrayed as being the soul (Seth 59). Through Radha's devotion to Krsna, "she becomes the mediator of his grace (*prasada*) and compassion (*krpa*)" (Hawley & Wulff 69). Krsna sends his love to his devotees through Radha and thus she is also worshipped alongside Krsna. In the *Brahmavaivarta* [One of the eighteen major Puranas], Krsna states that he will not grant *moksa* (liberation) to anyone who does not honor Radha because her worship is more satisfying to him than his own (Hawley & Wulff 69). Radha is also depicted as being an ideal devotee. The intensity of her undying love is seen as a model for followers. In many poems by various poets, including those mentioned above, Radha declares that she would choose death over separation from Krsna (Hawley & Wulff 29). Radha (devotee) is completely dedicated and attached to Krsna (God)

References and Further Recommended Reading

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