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Messenger Poems

by Kali·dasa, Dhoyi
& Rupa Go·svamin



Translated by

SIR JAMES MALLINSON

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A sandhi grid is printed on the inside of the back cover

RUPA GO·SVAMIN
THE SWAN MESSENGER

4.1 D UKŪLAṂ BIBHRĀṆO
dalita|haritāla|dyuti|haraṃ,
javā|puṣpa|śreṇī|
ruci|rucira|pād'|âmbu|ja|talaḥ,
tamāla|śyām'|ângo
dara|hasita|līl'|âñcita|mukhaḥ,
par'|ānand'|ābhogaḥ
sphuratu hṛdi me ko 'pi puruṣaḥ!

yadā yāto gopī|
hṛdaya|madano Nanda|sadanān
Mukundo Gāndinyās
tanayam anuvindan Madhu|purīm,
tad" âmāñkṣīc cintā|
sariti *ghana/ghūrṇā/paricayair*
a|gādhāyāṃ vādhā|
maya|payasi Rādhā virahiṇī.

kadā cit khed'|âgniṃ
vighaṭayitum antargatam asau
sah' ālībhir lebhe
taralita|manā Yāmuna|taṭīm.
cirād asyās cittaṃ
paricita|kuṭīr'|âvakalanād
avasthā tastāra
sphuṭam atha suṣupteḥ priya|sakhī.

WEARING A GOSSAMER shawl
 that outshines crushed orpiment,
 the soles of his lotus-feet
 as beautiful as a bouquet of China roses,
 his body as dark as a *tamála* tree,
 his face adorned by a playful half-smile,
 encompassing ultimate bliss,
 may a certain person shine forth in my heart!

When Mukúnda, the god of love
 in the hearts of the shepherd girls,
 went from Nanda's house to Máthura
 following the son of Gándini,
 into the river of despair,
 its painful waters made unfathomable
 by *her increasingly intense agitation : massed clouds and
 whirlpools,*
 plunged the lovesick Radha.

One day, her mind restless,
 she went with her friends
 to Yámuna's banks
 to quench the fire of pain within.
 On seeing after so long
 the hut she knew so well,
 her dear friend, deep sleep,
 spread out across her mind.

tadā niṣpand'āṅgī
 kalita|nalinī|pallava|kulaiḥ,
 pariṇāhāt premṇām
 a|kuśala|śat'āśaṅki|hṛdayaiḥ,
 dṛg|ambho|gambhīrī|
 kṛta|mihira|putrī|laharibhir
 vilīnā dhūlīnām
 upari parivavre parijanaiḥ.

4.5 tatas tāṃ nyast'āṅgīm
 urasi Lalitāyāḥ, kamalinī|
 palāśaiḥ Kālindī|
 salila|śīśirair vījita|tanum,
 parāvṛtta|śvās'ān-
 kura|calita|kanṭhīm kalayatām
 sakhī|sandohānām
 pramada|bhara|śālī dhvanir abhūt.

nidhāy' ānke pañke|
 ruha|dala|viṭaṅkasya Lalitā
 tato Rādhām nīr'ā-
 haraṇa|saraṇau nyasta|caraṇā,
 milantaṃ Kālindī|
 pulina|bhuvi khel'āñcita|gatim
 dadarś' āgre kaṃ cin
 madhura|virutaṃ śveta|garutam.

Then, her body lifeless,
she melted onto the dust.
Her companions,
hearts fearful of
a hundred calamities,
crowded around her
forming a forest of lotus stems,
encircling her with affection
and deepening the swell
of the daughter of the sun*
with their tears.

Then her body was placed
on Lálita's bosom
and fanned with lotus leaves
cooled by Yámuna's water.
A germ of breath returned
and made her throat move,
on seeing which
all her friends
gave a joyful cry.

4.5

Then Lálita put Radha
on a bed of heaped lotus leaves
and took a step along the path
to collect water,
when she saw ahead,
coming along Yámuna's bank
with playful gait,
singing sweetly,
a swan.

tad|āloka|stok' |ôc-
 chvasita|hr̥dayā s' |ādaram asau
 praṇāmaṃ śaṃsantī
 laghu laghu samāsādyā sa|vidham,
 dhṛt' |ôtkañṭhā sadyo
 Hari|sadasi saṃdeśa|haraṇe
 varaṃ dūtaṃ mene
 tam ati|lalitaṃ, hanta, Lalitā.

amarṣāt prem' |ēṛṣyāṃ
 sapadi dadhatī Kaṃsa|mathane
 pravṛttā haṃsāya
 svam abhilaṣitaṃ śaṃsitum asau.
 na tasyā doṣo 'yaṃ
 yad iha viha|gaṃ prārthitavatī:
 na kasmin viśrambhaṃ
 diśati Hari|bhakti|praṇayitā.

«pavitreṣu prāyo
 viracayasi toyeṣu vasatiṃ,
 pramodaṃ nālīke
 vahasi, viśad' |ātmā svayam api:
 ato 'haṃ duḥkh' |ārtā
 śaraṇam a|balā tvāṃ gatavatī.
 na bhikṣā sat|pakṣe
 vrajati hi kadā cid viphalatām.

When the anxious Lálita saw him
her spirits lifted a little.

Uttering a respectful greeting,
she hurried up to him
and realized straightaway
that he was the best
—and oh! how lovely—
messenger for taking word
to Krishna's house.

Straightaway she petulantly displayed
her jealousy of Krishna's love
and started to tell the swan
of her own longing.

In such circumstances, she is not to blame
for making a request to a bird:
a yearning for the love of Hari
can make one confide in anyone.

“You mostly make your home in holy waters,
you take delight in lotus flowers
and you are spotlessly white by nature,
so, stricken by sorrow and helpless,
I come to you for refuge:
a request to someone *virtuous* ∴ *with good wings**
is never in vain.

4.10 ciraṃ viśmr̥ty' āsmān
 viraḥa|dahana|jvāla|vikalāḥ,
 kalāvān s'ānandaṃ
 vasati Mathurāyāṃ Madhu|ripuḥ.
 tad etaṃ saṃdeśaṃ
 sva|manasi samādhāya nikhilaṃ,
 bhavān kṣipraṃ tasya
 śravaṇa|padavīm saṅgamayatu!

nirasta|pratyūhaṃ
 bhavatu bhavato vartmani śivaṃ!
 samuttiṣṭha kṣipraṃ
 manasi mudam ādhāya sa|dayam!
 adhastād dhāvanto
 laghu laghu samuttāna|nayanair
 bhavantaṃ vīkṣantaṃ
 kutuka|taralā gopa|śísavaḥ!

kiśor'|ōttamaṃso 'sau
 kaṭhina|matinā dāna|patinā
 yayā ninye tūrṇaṃ
 paśu|pa|yuvatī|jīvita|patiḥ,
 tayā gantavyā te
 nikhila|jagad|eka|prathitayā
 padavyā bhavyānāṃ,
 tilaka, kila Dāśārha|nagarī.

Crippled by the blazing fire of separation, 4.10
 we have been long forgotten by the enemy of Madhu,*
 who lives happily in Máthura, perfectly healthy.
 So, sir, please learn this entire message by heart
 and quickly make it reach his ears.

May your way be free from obstacles and auspicious!
 Rise up at once, bearing joy and pity in your heart!
 Running swiftly below,
 may the cowherds' children,
 frantic with curiosity,
 lift up their eyes to look at you!

Following the path celebrated
 as unique throughout the world,
 by which that finest of lads,
 the ruler of the lives of the cowherd maidens,
 was quickly led by the cruel 'lord of generosity,'*
 you must, o foremost among gentlemen,
 go to the city of the Dashárhas.

galad|bāṣp'āśāra|
 pluta|dhavala|gaṇḍā mṛga|dṛśo
 vidūyante yatra
 prabala|Madan'āveśa|vivaśāḥ,
 tvayā vijñātavyā
 Hari|caraṇa|saṅga|praṇayino
 dhruvaṃ sā, cakr'āṅgī|
 Rati|sakha, śat'āṅgasya padavī.

piban jambu|śyāmaṃ
 mihira|duhitur vāri madhuraṃ,
 mṛṇālīr bhuñjāno
 hima|kara|kalā|komala|rucaḥ,
 kṣaṇaṃ hṛṣṭas tiṣṭhan
 niviḍa|viṭape śākhini, sakhe,
 sukkena prasthānaṃ
 racayatu bhavān Vṛṣṇi|nagare.

4.15 balād ākrandantī
 ratha|pathikam Akrūra|militaṃ
 vidūrād ābhīrī|
 tatir anuyayau yena ramaṇam,
 tam ādau panthānaṃ
 racaya. carit'ārthā bhavatu te
 virājantī sarv'ô-
 pari *parama/haṃsa*|sthitir iyam!

O god of love for lady swans,
 you are sure to recognize the roadway
 of those who long for the touch of Hari's feet:
 along it, their pale cheeks bathed
 in a downpour of dripping tears,
 are distraught doe-eyed girls,
 whom possession by Mádana
 has rendered helpless.

Drinking the sweet water,
 as dark as a jujube fruit,
 of the daughter of the sun,
 eating lotus stems
 as beautiful and soft
 as the new moon,
 gladly stopping
 for a moment
 on a tree with dense branches,
 make your way to the city of the Vrishnis*
 in comfort, my friend.

At first, go by the path along which
 crowds of cowherd ladies, wailing loudly,
 followed their lover at a distance
 as he traveled in the chariot with Akrúra.
 May your status be confirmed
 as a great *saint* ∴ *swan*, shining forth over all!

4.15

akasmād asmākaṃ

Harir apaharann aṃśuka|cayaṃ
yam ārūḍho gūḍha|
praṇaya|laharīḥ kandalayitum,
tava śrāntasy' ântaḥ|
sthagita|ravi|bimbaḥ kiśalayaiḥ
kadambaḥ, kādamba,
tvaritam avalambaḥ sa bhavitā.

kirantī lāvaṇyaṃ

diśi diśi, śikhaṇḍa|stabakinī
dadhānā sādhiyāḥ
kanaka|vimala|dyoti|vasanam,
tamāla|śyām'âṅgī,
sarala|muralī|cumbita|mukhī
jagau citraṃ yatra
prakaṭa|param'ânanda|laharī.

tayā bhūyāḥ|krīḍā|

rabhasa|vikasad|ballava|vadhū|
vapur|vallī|bhraśyan|
mṛga|mada|kaṇa|śyāmalikayā
vidhātavyo hallī-
saka|dalita|mallī|latikayā
samantād ullāsas
tava manasi rāsa|sthalikayā.

Before long, o swan,
your perch when you are tired
will be that *kadamba* tree,
its interior hidden by leaves
from the disk of the sun,
which, to make our secret love
flow forth in waves,
Krishna climbed
after suddenly snatching all our clothes.

Beaming loveliness in every direction,
crowned with peacock feathers,
wearing a gorgeous robe
with the spotless brilliance of gold,
his body as dark as a *tamála* tree,
his mouth kissing a flute held level,
the wave of ultimate bliss made manifest
sang a wonderful song upon it.

Dark with the drops of musk
dripping from the tendril-like bodies
of cowherd ladies
bursting with excitement
from their exuberant play,
its jasmine creepers
crushed in the circle dance,
utter joy is sure to be produced in your mind
by the place of the *rasa* dance.

tad|ante vāsantī|
 viracitam anaṅg' |ôtsava|kalā|
 catuḥ|śālam Śaureḥ
 sphurati. na dṛṣau tatra vikireḥ!
 tad|ālok' |ôdbheda|
 pramada|bhara|vismārīta|gati|
 kriye jāte tāvāt
 tvayi, vata, hatā gopa|vanitā.

4.20 mama syād arthānāṃ
 kṣatir iha vilambād yad api te,
 vilokethāḥ sarvaṃ
 tad api Hari|keli|sthalam idam,
 tav' êyaṃ na vyarthā
 bhavatu śucitā. kaḥ sa hi, sakhe,
 guṇo yaś Cāṇūra|
 dviṣi mati|niveśāya na bhavet?

sakṛd|vaṃśī|nāda|
 śravaṇa|milit' |ābhīra|vanitā|
 rahaḥ|krīḍā|sākṣī,
 pratipada|latā|sadma|su|bhagaḥ
 sa dhenūnāṃ bandhūr
 Madhu|mathana|khaṭṭāyita|śīlaḥ,
 kariṣyaty ānandaṃ
 sapadi tava Govardhana|giriḥ.

Nearby stands Krishna's love pavilion,
 fashioned from *mádhavi* creepers.
 You must not cast your eyes upon it—
 the excessive joy that bursts forth on seeing it
 will make you forget
 that you have a journey to make
 and, alas, the cowherd women will die!

But, even though your lingering there
 might thwart my aims,
 you should look all around
 that place where Hari sported
 lest this purity of yours
 go to waste, my friend,
 for what is a virtue if it does not lead
 to the mind's entry into Krishna?

4.20

Witness to the secret love-play
 of cowherd ladies gathered
 on hearing a single strain of the flute,
 delightfully covered in huts made of creepers,
 friend to the cows,
 its rocks made his bed by Krishna,
 Mount Go·várdhana will instantly make you happy.

tam ev' âdriṃ cakr'ân-
 kita|kara|pariṣvaṅga|rasikaṃ
 mahī|cakre śaṅke-
 mahi śikhariṇām śekharatayā.
 a|rātiṃ jñātīnām
 Harihayam yaḥ pari|bhavan
 yath"ârthaṃ svaṃ nāma
 vyadhita bhuvi <go|vardhana iti.>

tamālasya' ālokād
 giri|parisare santi capalāḥ
 pulindyo Govinda|
 smaraṇa|rabhas'ôttapta|vapusaḥ.
 śanais tāpaṃ tāsāṃ
 kṣaṇam apanayan yāsyati bhavān
 avaśyam Kālindī|
 salila|śīśiraiḥ pakṣa|pavanaiḥ.

tad|ante Śrī|kānta|
 smara|samara|ghāṭī|pulakitā
 kadambānām vāṭī
rasika/paripāṭiṃ sphuṭayati.
 tvam āsīnas tasyāṃ
 na yadi parito nandasi, tato
 babhūva vyarthā te
 ghana|rasa|niveśa|vyasanitā.

We believe that mountain,
which delights in the touch
of the hand marked with the discus,
to be the best of all peaks in the world.
Conquering Indra, the enemy of his kin,
he made his name, 'the increaser of cows,'
appropriate on earth.

When they see the *tamála* tree,
the bodies of the skittish tribal ladies
around the mountain overheat
with the ardor of their remembrance of Govínda.
On your way, you must, for a moment,
gently remove their fever
with the breeze from your wings,
cooled by Yámuna's waters.

Nearby is a grove of *kadámba* trees
which, thrilled at the aggressive love-play of Krishna,
is showing the progression of the stages of being a lover.
If, on perching there, you are not overjoyed,
your fondness for *indulging in deep emotions* : *plunging*
into deep water
will have been in vain.

4.25 śaran|megha|śreṇī|

prati|bhaṭam Ariṣṭ' |âsura|śiraś
 ciraṃ śuṣkaṃ Vṛndā-
 vana|parisare drakṣyati bhavān,
 yad āroḍhuṃ dūrān
 milati kila Kailāsa|śikhari|
 bhram'|ākrānta|svānto
 Giriśa|su|hṛdaḥ kiñ|kara|gaṇaḥ.

ruvan yāhi svairam:

carama|daśayā cumbita|ruco
 nitambinyo Vṛndā-
 vana|bhuvi, sakhe, santi bahavaḥ.
 parāvartisyante
 tulita|Mura|jin|nūpura|ravāt
 tava dhvānāt tāsām,
 bahir api gatāḥ, kṣipram asavaḥ.

tvam āsīnaḥ śākh'|ân-

tara|milita|caṇḍa|tviṣi sukhaṃ
 dadhīthā Bhāṇḍīre
 kṣaṇam api ghana|śyāmala|rucau,
 tato haṃsaṃ bibhran
 nikhila|nabhasaś cakramiṣayā
 sa vardhiṣṇuṃ Viṣṇuṃ
 kalita|dara|cakram tulayitā.

Looking like a mass of autumn clouds,
you will see the skull of the demon Aríshta,
long since dried up,
on the outskirts of Vrinda-vana.
Indeed, a band of Kubéra's attendants*
has come from afar to climb it,
under the mistaken impression
that it is Mount Kailása.

Call freely as you go, friend:
there are lots of broad-hipped ladies
in the region of Vrinda-vana
whose beauty has been kissed
by a condition approaching death.
At your call,
which is like the sound of Krishna's anklets,
their life-breaths, though departed,
will quickly return.

Perched for just a moment
on cloud-dark Bhandíra,*
the fearsome sun
filtering through his branches,
you will be happy,
and he, bearing a swan,
will look like Vishnu,
conch and discus in hand,
growing larger in his desire
to traverse the entire sky.

tvam aṣṭābhir netrair
 vīgalad|a|mala|prema|salilair
 muhuḥ sikta|stambhām,
 catura, catur|āśya|stuti|bhuvam
 jihīthā vikhyātām.
 sphuṭam iha bhavad|bāndhava|ratham
 praviṣṭam maṃsyante
 vidhim aṭavi|devyas tvayi gate.

udañcan|netr'āmbhaḥ|
 prasara|laharī|picchila|patha|
 skhalat|pāda|nyāsa|
 praṇihita|vilamb'ākula|dhiyaḥ
 Harau yasmin magne
 tvarita|Yamunā|kūla|gamana|
 sprh"ākṣiptā gopyo
 yayur anupadaṃ kām api daśām
 4.30 muhur|lāśya|krīḍā|
 pramada|milad|āhopuruṣikā|
 vikāśena bhraṣṭaiḥ
 phaṇi|maṇi|kulair dhūmala|rucau,
 puras tasmin nīpa|
 drumā|kusuma|kiñjalka|surabhau
 tvayā puṇye peyaṃ
 madhuram udakam Kāliya|hrade.

Its pillars wet with the tears of pure affection
 dripping steadily from his eight eyes,
 you should, o clever one, visit the famous pavilion
 where four-faced Brahma sings songs of praise.
 When you leave, the goddesses of the forest
 will think that the creator,
 whose chariot is your kinsman,
 must have entered within.

When Hari dived into Káliya's pool,
 the cowherd girls were seized by the urge
 to rush to Yámuna's banks.
 Waves of tears welling up and flooding forth
 made the path slippery,
 and when they lost their footing
 the delay made them distraught;
 with every step their condition
 went further beyond words.

The sacred pool has a purple hue
 from the many jewels
 that fell from Káliya's hooded heads
 while Krishna, showing his joy and heroism,
 playfully danced on them over and over again,
 and it is fragrant with the filaments of
 flowers from *kadámba* trees.
 You must drink its sweet water first of all.

4.30



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This anthology presents the MESSENGER POEMS of three Indian poets from the fifth to the sixteenth centuries CE. They range from Kali-dasa's well-loved "The Cloud Messenger" to two much later variations on the theme of separated lovers and the geography that divides them.

क्रे

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