

THE SONGS OF BHANUSINGHA

POETRY

BHANUSINGHA
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I. SPRING HAS COME

Spring has come, ah, spring has come! The bees murmur low among the mango-blossoms, the forest stands newly clothed. Listen, listen, my friend — my heart, my very life, is overwhelmed with a restless joy; all the burning griefs of love have fled far, far away.

Deep within, the spring wind stirs, deep within, the flowers break into bloom; over the arbour of the heart the koels call, unceasing, kuhu, kuhu.

Friend, the heart floats now on a tide of love, melting, bewildered; it seems the whole creation wakes to joy and sings a rapturous, passionate song.

The three worlds stand adorned in the ornaments of spring — so speaks the sorrowing Radha: Where, oh where is my beloved, where is my dearest one, where is he who is the spring of my heart?

Bhanu says: the night grows deep and hushed; the spring wind breathes as if in sighs; the bowered heart, drunk and trembling, is filled, is filled with the fragrance of desire.

II. SHYAMCHANDRA IS NOT HERE

Listen, listen, little one, lay by your garland of flowers — I have wandered bower
after bower, friend, and Shyamchandra is not here.

The flower-clusters sway, the bees go round them humming, and idle Yamuna
flows on singing her soft, sweet song.

The night keeps company with the moon, but this woman keeps company with
longing; the flower-garland has grown heavy — it is her heart that burns beneath
its weight.

Her lips tremble, quivering; she lays her hand in her friend's hand: Why does the
papiya cry so, there, in the house of the bower?

The soft wind stirs and lifts the loosened end of her veil; her startled heart, restless,
searches the forest path.

Gazing toward the empty bower, letting fall her tears, Bhanu sings: the bower is
empty, empty — Shyamchandra is not here!

III. FUTILE, ALL IS FUTILE

The desire of my heart lies buried in my heart, and the garland at my throat has withered. Burning in the poison of separation the nights pass, one by one — and still, still he does not come, the dark one.

I understand now, friend — all was in vain, this love was all in vain. Vain is this my life, my youth, vain, oh vain, is this my body!

Come, friend, let us go home; wipe away these tears; come, friend, let us return to the small tasks of the house. Lay aside the malati-garland, child — for shame, friend, I could die of shame.

Friend, how cruel, how full of grief, is this my tender youth; friend, how cruel a poison love has poured into my life.

My thirsty soul, by day, by night, longs only for the sight of my dark one; my restless life finds no rest, it burns and burns, unquenched.

Friend, I tell you truly — I fear always that I have only dreamed this love of my Shyam.

Even now I keep Madhava close within my heart — that day will come, friend, when he will not speak to me, not look upon my face, and I shall die, drinking down that poison.

Do not fear so vainly, child — Bhanu lays this at thy feet: the love of true hearts is ever new, day after day; it does not break, not in life, not in death.

IV. HOW CRUEL IS THY HEART, SHYAM

Shyam, how hard, how unrelenting is your heart. Keeping only sorrow for her companion, Radha turns the night to morning.

Alone, apart, she sits gazing toward the Yamuna; the tears rain down, no word comes forth, her spirit finds no peace.

In the deep dark of night, the crickets crying on every side, beneath the empty kadamba tree, lying upon the bare earth, her hair undone, she weeps, lost to herself.

Like a startled doe she wakes with a start, forsaking every household task, and gazing into the emptiness, cries out in a voice of sorrow — the flute! it plays, the flute!

Cruel Shyam — how do you live now, so far away, in Mathura? How do you pass the pitiless nights, how do your days go by?

How do you quench your thirst for love? Where now do you play your flute? Where have you cast away your yellow garment? Where is that sidelong, teasing smile?

Now you wear a golden chain about your throat — where did you throw the garland of the forest? You have made empty the lotus-throne of my heart, and set instead a throne of gold!

This grief will remain forever in my heart — Bhanu says: fie, fie, dark one! Come quickly, come to me, you who leave her mad with longing.

V. SEE, SHYAM COMES

Friend, O friend Radhika, look now, look and see — with gentle step comes
Shyam, singing a gentle song.

Quickly put on your garland of flowers, quickly put on your robe of blue. Beautiful
one, take the vermilion and make bright the parting of your hair.

Companions all, dance, dance, sing the song of meeting; let the restless chime of
anklets fill the sky above the bower.

Friend, light now the darkened chamber with lamps of gold; make sweet the
bower-house, sprinkling it with fragrant water.

Gather jasmine, gather champa, gather bel, gather flowers, little one; string the
yuthi, string the jati, string the garland of bakul.

Thirsty-eyed Bhanusingha gazes down the bower-path — with gentle step comes
Shyam, singing a gentle song.

VI. COME UPON MY HEART

Beloved, come, come upon my heart, smiling softly, speaking honeyed words —
look, look upon my face!

Age after age, how many days went by while you did not come, Shyam; upon this
moonlit, honey-sweet bower you did not play your flute!

You carried away with you the smile of my lips, you carried away the gladness of
my eyes; the bower stands empty, my heart and mind stand empty — where, oh
where is that moon of your face?

Here were my secret, restless tears — where was your smile then? Here was the
silent bank beneath the bamboos — where was your flute then?

Gazing on your face, the sorrow of a hundred ages ended in an instant. The least
trace of your smile drove far away all my pride, all my sorrow.

Blessed, blessed — so Bhanu sings — love knows no shore, no end; all that moves
and does not move in this creation thrills with gladness, brimming with the love of
these two.

VII. IS THAT MY SHYAM?

Listen, friend — the flute is playing. Deep is the night, bright the bower-path, the moon scatters down her smile.

In the southern wind the trees are trembling, the waters of Yamuna stand still; the fragrance of flowers has grown listless, friend, and listless has my heart become.

My spirit melts within me, my feet falter as I walk, shame and doubt have fled far off; my eyes brim with tears, my breast is full, my whole body thrills.

Tell me, friend, tell me — I beg you, friend — is that indeed my Shyam? In the sweet grove does the sweet flute call out my name?

How many ages, friend, did I do penance, how long did I meditate upon the gods, that only now I have found, friend, my jewel Shyam, the life of my life?

O Shyam — hearing, hearing your enchanting flute, uttering, uttering your name, I long to let my body sink into the moonlit waters of Yamuna!

"Come, come swiftly — Shyam waits, trembling; take your friend's hand; the world lies sleeping, there is nothing now to fear — Bhanu will go with you."

VIII. IN THE DEEP FLOWER-BOWER

In the deep flower-bower the gentle, sweet flute plays. Forgetting fear, forgetting
the world's shame, friend, come, come.

On your body the fair blue robe, in your heart a heap of love's own flowers, in your
deer-like eyes a spotless smile — come now into the bower-forest.

The flowers pour down their heavy fragrance, the birds pour down the essence of
their song, the moon pours down her stream of nectar, shining in her pure and
silver light.

Softly, softly hum the bees among ten thousand flowers; bower upon bower,
friend, in heaps and heaps, bakul, yuthi, jati bloom.

See, friend, Shyamaraya — love overflows within his eyes; his sweet face, that
dwelling-place of nectar, puts to shame the very moon.

Come, come, O circle of friends, we shall behold our Govinda; at the lotus-feet of
Shyam Bhanusingha bows in worship.

IX. THE FLUTE HAS COME INTO THE BOWER

The night lies dark, the friend sits startled, the bower-forest stands empty. Stirred by the wind, in this most lonely dwelling, the girl is sick with longing.

In the blue sky the stars are floating, the Yamuna sings her song, the trees murmur, the streams go trickling, the flowering creepers make their bower.

With thirsty eyes toward the forest path the restless girl keeps looking; she cannot see him, turns her eyes away, and strings a garland of wild flowers.

Suddenly Radha looks up, startled, flings the garland far away — "Listen, friend," she says, "the flute is playing — the dark one has come into the bower!"

Startled, through the deep night, from every distant quarter, the flute plays out its sweet refrain; its voice mingles with the murmuring Yamuna in her rippling, babbling song.

Bhanu says: now listen, Kanu — the thirsty spirit of the gopi shall drink, in joy, the pure nectar of your love.

X. PLAY ON, O ENCHANTING FLUTE

Play on, play on, O enchanting flute. All the day's long burning grief of parting —
destroy it, quench the thirst within my heart.

Heart-piercing flute-song — where did you learn it, Kanu? It strikes, trembling,
faint, its slow and honeyed arrow, deep within.

My breast throbs, restless and afraid, my faint eyes droop and close; memories of
years come back to me, and make my spirit wild.

How many hundred hopes went unfulfilled, beloved, how much happiness took
flight; Lord, how many hundred pangs of love have pierced my heart like arrows.

My heart grows weary, my eyes overflow — how harsh, how sweet, this song. I
long, beloved, to drown my burning soul within the waters of Yamuna.

I long, my lord, to keep your feet here, within my heart's own heart, to gaze upon
your moon-like face that soothes the heart, until my life is done.

I long, in this same moonlight, in this flowering bower's shade, in the spring wind,
to let my soul dissolve into your flute's sweet song.

My soul shall be filled full with your flute-music, and your flute filled full with
Radha. Victory, victory to Madhava, victory, victory to Radha — at thy feet,
Bhanu bows.

XI. IN THE FLOWER-GARDEN

Today, friend, again and again the koel sings, kuhu, kuhu; in the bower-forest,
each to each, the lovers gaze upon one another.

Drunk with the pride of youth, the heart thrills with delight, the languid body
grows faint, as though it were about to swoon.

Today the moon shines sweet and full, maddening to the soul; every bond hangs
loose, and shame itself hangs loose.

Words falter, softly rustling, the beloved trembles, trembles; the body shivers,
broken in the midst of the flower-garden.

The soft wind stirs and stirs, her feet will no more walk, her words falter again and
again, the end of her robe trails on the ground.

The half-blown lotus sways, unsteady in the wind's weight; her eyes, as if melting,
have no wish to look.

The flowers tremble in her loosened hair, falling, drooping on her cheek; scorched
in the fire of sweetness, they slip and fall about her feet.

The flowers shower down from her head, the Yamuna flows on, murmuring, the
moon smiles, brimming with light — and Bhanu could die of joy.

XII. WHAT DREAM DO YOU SEE, MADHAVA?

Shyam, upon your sweet lips what smile is this that blooms? What dream do you
see now, Madhava — who will tell me, who?

As lightning flashes in a cloud of dream, so Radha shines there, smiling. Shyam,
my Shyam — how shall I ever repay this debt I owe to your love?

Bird, why have you begun to sing? My Shyam sleeps, he is mine! Stay, stay a
while, O moon, pour down, pour down your cool light.

O beautiful night, garlanded with stars, do not yet flee away; pitiless sun, why have
you come so soon, kindling the fire of parting?

Bhanu says — the sun indeed is cruel; in his desire for the lotus's blooming he
breaks the union of countless men and women, and casts them into the fire of
separation.

XIII. IN THE ROARING STORM

Friend, in the sky of Shravan the clouds hang thick and dark, in the depth of night.
On the bower-path, friend, how shall I go, a helpless woman?

The wind runs mad, Yamuna rages, again and again the thunder roars. The
lightning flashes, the roadside trees are torn, and my whole body trembles.

Again and again, the rim-jhim, rim-jhim, rim-jhim of the rain falls from the
clustered clouds. Dense and dark, among the tal and tamal trees, the bower lies
wrapped in deepest shadow.

Tell me, friend, in such a storm, in the bower, does my pitiless Krishna still play
his cruel flute, calling, calling sorrowing Radha's name?

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Friend, adorn me now with a necklace of pearls, set the ornament upon my parting.
Bind up my loosened, trembling hair with a garland of malati.

Open the door swiftly, friend, let go of every fear and shame — my heart, like a
bird, beats wildly within the cage of my ribs.

Do not go out in this deep night, child, to the side of the dark young one — it
thunders again and again, you will be sorely afraid — so speaks Bhanu, your
servant.

XIV. REST HERE, BELOVED

The rain pours down, the thunderclouds roar, the lightning flashes terribly — how, despite all this, do you come to the bower night after night, my Madhava?

When the lightning flashes again and again, my lord, when the thunderbolt falls, remembering that it is you out there, beloved, I am filled with fear.

Your clothes are drenched, Madhava, the rain falls again and again — I am only a small, humble girl — why should you trouble your body so, for my sake?

Sit, sit, my lord, upon this bed of flowers, stretch out your feet before me — I will wipe your wet feet with care, loosening the mass of my hair.

Your body is weary, O beauty of Braj — rest it upon my breast; I will wrap your limbs in a thrilled embrace with the tender stems of my arms.

Bhanu says: O daughter of Vrishabhanu, my dark one, my ocean of love — for your sake, for love's own sake, I will bear gladly every burning pain.

XV. THE SULKING AND THE PEACE

Madhava, speak no tender words to me, do not so much as breathe love's name.
Knowing me a simple, trusting girl, do not, Shyam, deceive me so.

Deceiver — why do you speak falsely, why do you say you love me? I marked you
well from the very start — I will never trust you again.

Upon the leaking boat of your false love I cast my heart, my very soul, and I have
drowned, drowned in a fearsome sea — now nowhere is there rescue for me.

Madhava — did my harsh words find their way into your heart? Madhava, why
have you clouded your face? Forgive, forgive my bitter speech!

I will never again speak an unkind word, you are the life of my life. Too cruelly
have I wounded your heart, loosing these arrows of harsh words.

Now the quarrel is over — Bhanu smiles, watching this play of love; sometimes
proud and sulking, sometimes tender, this girl who is an ocean of love.

XVI. THE PARTING AT MATHURA

Friend, O friend — when pitiless Madhava was to go at last to Mathura, proud Radha made a hard, hard vow: she would not weep, she would not stand in his way — hard of heart, friend, smiling, smiling, she would bid her Shyam farewell.

With slow, soft steps came Madhava; Radha turned her eyes upon his face, and gazed, and gazed — friend, moment upon moment, softly, softly, gazed and gazed, while in her eyes, drop by drop, a stream of tears welled up.

Gently smiling, he sat down beside her, Shyam spoke, so soft, so sweetly — and the vow broke, and the pride broke, her voice choked, her restless spirit overwhelmed; sobbing, crying aloud, Radha wept, half her broken words escaping her —

spreading her arms about his feet, she said: Shyam — my Shyam — stay, stay, beloved, stay with me; every moment, every moment, stay, my lord — without you, Madhava, my love, my friend, who else is there for me!

She fell upon the ground, clasping his feet, laid her face upon his feet, sobbing, sobbing, weeping so long that the night turned into dawn.

Madhava sat, and smiled so soft and sweet, spoke many words of gentle comfort, and took the girl's hand in his own.

Friend, O friend — tell me, friend, of all the sorrow that Radha bore, did cruel Shyam, in his own heart, feel even half of it?

Smiling, smiling, he drew near her, gave her much comfort and consoling, then smiling, smiling, turned, looked back once more, and went away, far, far away.

Now, upon the road to Mathura, while here Radha weeps and weeps, did the least particle of pain touch him, did the least hindrance stay his feet?

Raining down his own tears, Bhanu says: how sorrowful a thing is life, my brother. For laughter there are many companions to be found; for weeping, there is none.

XVII. THAT IS NOT MY SHYAM

Friend, again and again I warned you — do not go to Mathura's abode. Forgetting the sorrow of love, there our Shyam now takes his royal pleasure.

Shame on you, proud one, shame on your tongue — whose name have you dared to speak? Tell me, friend — is the lord of Mathura truly our own Shyam?

That Shyam belongs to wealth, to the city of Mathura, to kingship and honour; he does not belong to love, he does not belong to the women of Braj — this I tell you for certain.

When you go to greet that new-made king, take care lest he think it an insult; like a plucked flower you will wither on the ground, in an instant you will lose your life.

Forgotten, forgotten — all is forgotten, the happy fellowship of Vrindavan; in the new city, friend, a new lover brings forth new and ever newer delights.

Bhanu says — O you who are sick with longing, hold this fast within your heart: foolish girl, you have not understood, even now, the true nature of our Shyam's love.

XVIII. WHEN I AM NO MORE

When I am here no longer, friend, in this secluded, spring-time bower, a night will
come, clear and still;

when, thirsting for our meeting, friend, in hope of me, my Shyam will come, when
Radha will cry "Radha! Radha!" with the flute lifted, breathless, to his lips;

when all the gopis will come running, and I will not be there to come; when all the
gopis will wake, startled, and I will not be there to wake —

then will he look, in hope of me, distracted, down the bower-path, my Shyam?
Wandering from wood to wood, will he call out the name of "Radha! Radha!"

No, Yamuna — that one Shyam is only mine, and yet my Shyam has a hundred,
hundred lovers; when I am gone, a hundred, hundred Radhas will remain there,
still, about his feet.

Then, friend Yamuna, when I go into the grove, what is there left for me to leave
behind? For my sake, here, in this Vrindavan, tell me, friend — who will weep?

Bhanu says, softly: stay proud a while yet, come into the forest, O woman of Braj
— you will meet Shyam's trembling tenderness, his eyes raining down their tears.

XIX. O DEATH

O Death, you are like my own Shyam. Your colour is the colour of clouds, your matted hair like storm-cloud locks, your hand red as the lotus, your lip red as the lotus, and your embrace, that dissolves all pain, grants the nectar that is death. You are like my own Shyam.

O Death, Shyam is your other name! When my pitiless Madhava forgot me forever, you alone did not turn away from me; restless, my heart is torn and broken, both my eyes flow on, endlessly flowing.

You are my Madhava, you are my only companion, you alone can end my sorrow
— Death, come, oh come to me.

Take me into your arms, calling my name; my eyes will come to you, rejoicing; weeping, weeping upon your breast, my whole body will fill with sleep.

You will not forget me, you will not leave me, you will never break my heart, as he did; you will keep me in your heart, every day, every hour — your love has no equal.

From far away you play your flute, calling, calling without end, Radha, Radha,
Radha —

The day is ending now; I will come to you; I will let this burning grief of parting be quenched, at last, in you.

XX. WHOM WILL YOU CALL YOUR OWN?

Whom will you call your own! In my heart you wake, every moment; upon my eyes you make your throne; your reddened eyes, with the very core of my soul, are never parted, not for a single instant. Whom will you call your own!

My heart, a lotus, trembles at your feet, my two eyes overflow, brimming; my body, filled with love, thrills and melts, longing only to be lost in you. Whom will you call your own!

The sound of your flute is nectar and poison both, it tears the heart, it steals the heart away; its restless cry fills all the world, and my restless soul overflows. Whom will you call your own!

Seeing your smile, the sweet season comes running, hearing your flute, the koels sing, like bewildered bees the three worlds come, to touch the pair of your lotus feet. Whom will you call your own!

The cowherd girls, their youth in blossom, Yamuna herself athrill, the garden budding, upon the blue water the wind moves, quiet and slow, and in an instant loses heart and soul. Whom will you call your own!

My thirsty eyes wander over your face, at your soft touch Radha trembles; filling my heart with the jewel of love, I take my very life and lay it at your feet. Whom will you call your own!

"Who are you, who are you" — all men ask; day after day I wipe away my tears; Bhanu begs — let every doubt dissolve, let my life be spent here, at your feet. Whom will you call your own!

ADDENDUM I. WHO WILL UNDERSTAND LOVE?

Friend — who will understand love? This dark tale of my heart's grief, if I should speak it, who will hear?

Radhika's deepest, innermost pain — who will understand it, friend? Who will understand why Radha weeps, in what sorrow, day and night?

Do not, friend, spread abroad my shame — I do not accept this shame; I would give up everything, only to win one word of love from Shyam.

I beg you, friend, a hundred, hundred times — do not speak ill of Shyam. My modesty, my honour, my very family, these I myself have cast at his feet.

Friend — the wicked folk of Vrindavan do not understand love; why then do they spread these lying slanders abroad, in my Shyam's name?

I am that shameful Radha, friend — do not hate me in your heart; and never come, friend, into my darkened house.

Bhanu says now — no one will understand, friend, this matter of the heart's own depths; tell your sorrow to Shyam in secret, and lay your head against the tree, and bear it.

ADDENDUM II. I AM A POOR WOMAN

I am, friend, a poor woman! From my birth I have only loved, and shed the water
of my eyes.

I have no beauty, I have no virtue at all, a sorrowing woman of the cowherd caste;
I know nothing of graceful arts, nothing of the pride of youth.

A helpless woman, with so small a heart, I know only how to love; one moment,
one single glimpse of Shyam, I count as riches beyond measure.

When I see, friend, upon the bower-path, the print of Shyam's own feet, a hundred,
hundred times I kiss the dust, as though, poor as I am, I had found a jewel.

Cruel fate — in this life of sorrow, what more should I ask of you? Born to
misfortune, and to neglect, I hope for little —

from far away I will watch his beauty, from far away I will hear his flute; staying
far, far off, I will gladly look upon Shyam's enchanting smile.

O Radha, Shyam's beloved! Friend! May you live happy forever! In your happiness
I will not weep, friend, unfortunate, virtueless as I am.

In my own sorrow, friend, I will weep alone, and wipe away my tears in secret. No
one will ever know in what grief my body and soul are burning.

Bhanusingha says: listen, dark one — this sorrowing, helpless girl — with the
sharpest arrow of your neglect, do not, do not wound her.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTES

On the text itself. *Bhānusiṃha Ṭhākurer Padāvalī* ("The Verses of Bhanusingha Thakur") is not, properly speaking, medieval devotional poetry at all — it is one of literature's most charming hoaxes. Tagore wrote these poems as a boy of sixteen, in a deliberately archaic, artificial literary dialect called **Brajabuli** (a hybrid of Maithili and Bengali long used by the great Vaishnava poets such as Vidyapati and Chandidas to sing of Radha and Krishna), and published them under the pseudonym "Bhanusingha," presenting them as though newly recovered old manuscripts. A number of readers were briefly taken in. Knowing this reframes the recurring signature-line — "ভানু কহে," "ভানুসিংহ ভনয়ে" ("Bhanu says," "so sings Bhanusingha") — that closes almost every poem: it is the *bhaṇitā*, the poet's-name convention the genre required, but it is also Tagore, at sixteen, quietly signing his own disguise.

Brajabuli. Because this is an invented "old" language rather than the Bengali Tagore actually spoke day to day, the original already asks its Bengali reader to hear something faintly foreign and antique — roughly what Middle English or Spenserian diction does for a modern English reader. I have tried to gesture at this with a register borrowed from Tagore's own English self-translations in *Gitanjali* — spare and devotional, occasionally rising to "thee/thou/thy" at moments of direct address or prayer — without tipping into full pastiche or forcing the end-rhyme that Brajabuli has but that rarely survives translation gracefully.

কুঞ্জ (kuñja) — "bower." The flowering grove where Radha and Krishna meet is the sequence's central stage, closer to a consecrated space than an ordinary garden. I render it as "bower," occasionally "grove," but no single English word carries its mingled eroticism and sanctity — in the Vaishnava imagination the kunja is where the human and the divine meet as lovers.

বিরহ (viraha) — "separation," "longing." A technical term of Vaishnava aesthetics (*viraha-bhāva*): not ordinary sadness, but the exalted, almost disciplined suffering of love-in-absence, which the tradition often prizes even above the joy of union, since longing is where devotion is refined. I have translated it variously as "longing," "parting-grief," or "sorrow" by context, but the reader should hear something closer to a spiritual practice than to grief in the everyday sense.

মান (māna) — the lover's proud sulk. Poems XV and XVI turn on this convention: Radha's anger and wounded pride toward Krishna are themselves understood as an expression — perhaps the purest expression — of her love, and the breaking of that pride (as in XVI, when her vow "not to weep" collapses) is one of the genre's great set-pieces. English has no single word for this blend of jealousy, wounded dignity, and love; I translate around it as "pride," "sulking," or "vow," rather than force one term to do all its work.

সখি (sakhi) — "friend." Nearly every poem is addressed to a *sakhi*, a female confidante among Radha's companions. "Friend" is the natural English word, but it understates the intimacy of the convention — the *sakhi* is at once confessor, chorus, and the reader's own point of entry into Radha's private grief.

The many names for Krishna. He is called, almost line to line, Shyam ("the dark one"), Kala (also "dark one," more familiar in tone), Kanu, Madhava, Govinda, and simply "the beloved." Rather than flatten all of these to a single English name, I have kept the variation, since it is part of the music of the original and part of how the poems shift Krishna between cosmic god (Govinda) and errant village boy (Kanu), sometimes within the same stanza.

যমুনা (Yamuna). The river running through nearly every poem is not mere scenery; she is confidante, mirror, and — in Poem XVIII — someone Radha addresses directly, almost as another *sakhi*, asking what she is to leave in her keeping.

মথুরা (Mathura) — the departure. Poems XVI–XVIII turn on the moment the pastoral world of Vrindavan breaks open: Krishna leaves for the city of Mathura to take up kingship, and the sequence's register shifts from erotic union toward elegy. "That Shyam belongs to wealth, to Mathura-city ... not to love, not to the women of Braj" (XVII) is the bitterest line in the whole cycle, and I have tried to let its flatness stand rather than soften it.

Poem XIX — Death as Shyam. "মরণ রে, তুঁহু মম শ্যামসমান" ("O Death, you are like my own Shyam") is the sequence's most startling image: the beloved identified with death itself, as the only figure left capable of ending Radha's suffering. This fusion of the erotic, the devotional, and the mortal is entirely at home in Vaishnava thought, where union with Krishna and release from worldly existence are often figured as one and the same thing — but rendered too plainly in English it can collapse into mere morbidity. I have kept the address tender rather than

despairing, Death invited the way a lover is invited, because that — and not gloom — is the poem's own tone.

Poem XX's refrain — "কো তুঁহ বোলবি মোয়।" This line will not settle into a single translation. Read one way, it asks "what will you call me" — what name, what claim. Read another, it asks "who are you to me now," or "whom will you call your own." The archaic grammar leaves the ambiguity open even to a Bengali reader. I chose "Whom will you call your own!" to preserve the poem's central anxiety — Radha as one among Krishna's countless lovers, unsure whether she has any singular claim on him at all — but any English version necessarily forecloses readings the Brajabuli leaves standing open.

On rhyme and metre. The originals are metrical and often rhymed, with the chiming, incantatory music typical of padavali verse — short refrain-lines, alliteration, repeated openings such as "সাধ যায়" ("desire arises") or "কো তুঁহ" ("who are you"). English rhyme tends to make this sound sing-song rather than devotional, so, following Tagore's own practice when he later translated his Bengali verse into the English of *Gitanjali*, I have chosen free verse that keeps the original's *breath* — short line, longer line, short line — rather than its end-rhyme, trusting that repeated phrases like "come, come" or "whom will you call your own" carry some of the music that rhyme carried in Brajabuli.